

# MINOR VICTORIES

Stuart Braithwaite, Rachel Goswell, Justin Lockey & James Lockey

A happy accident? A fated coming together of like minds? Something beyond and outside their control? Minor Victories birth and progress has contained elements of all of this and more, both for those on the inside and us lot, looking in through the window.

The 'facts' are this. Justin Lockey, currently guitarist with Editors but polymath of film, photography and music comes towards the end of the mammoth touring schedule for the band's fourth album, 'The Weight Of Your Love' and finds an itch to make something against that he has been engaged with in his day job that needs scratching. His vision is of an extreme noise EP topped off by a delicate female voice. Serendipity comes calling in the shape of a shared management relationship with Slowdive's Rachel Goswell. Her musical appetite fully restored with the fated reunion of her original band, tracks are shared and two songs take shape. The two have never met.

Perhaps another guitarist might be good on one or two tracks? Names are suggested, Rachel mentions that she has seen a fair amount of Mogwai's Stuart Braithwaite on Slowdive's summer trips around the world's fields and they have become good friends. This is agreed as a very good idea by the pair. Stuart listens and adds guitars. Stuart has never met Justin. He's in. He has some other ideas that perhaps might be added to the collection of tracks?

Justin and Rachel meet briefly at Latitude. For literally minutes. I can confirm this. I was there. They meet again and properly at Crear in Northern Scotland with Editors starting recording of fifth studio album, 'In Dream', to which Rachel contributes vocals. Justin has still not met Stuart. The first song Justin plays through the PA at Crear whilst setting up is an early version of 'Out To Sea'.

Lulls and stops follow as the individual's other band's stuff gets in the way. Rachel phones Justin after a night out and asks the question outright, 'are we finishing this stuff or what?'. Justin plays the stuff to his brother James, former member of BEF, bass player, partner in film makers Hand Held Cine Club. James likes the stuff. He has a few things on his hard drive. Perhaps they could be added? The EP grows into something indefinably bigger. James has never met Rachel or Stuart.

James journeys to Glasgow to work on his tracks with Stuart and engineer Tony Doogan at Mogwai's Castle of Doom Studio. James is understandably apprehensive, he's staying at Stuart's house and, remember, he's never met him. In two days the pair lay down tracks so quickly that the second day sees them looking for parts to record. Stuart plays drums on some tracks, James plays everything on 'Cogs', Stuart and James have now met but Stuart has still not met Justin.

Justin sits in Newcastle at the centre of an increasing spider's web of recordings and additional people contributing, James from Twilight Sad on 'Scattered Ashes', Mark Kozelek on his lyric 'For You Always', editing and re-editing, Skyping and sending and the extreme noise EP becomes an album that starts to feature all the contributor's various tastes. Justin hardly picks up his guitar, his role has mutated to something between orchestrator and engineer, adding the strings and orchestral washes, the clicks and the ambient noise that swell these already vast tracks into something beyond the original vision of any of the contributors. The virtual geography of the band now spans the country from Exeter to Glasgow and across the Atlantic.

Justin finally meets Stuart. Stuart is in Newcastle at a gig. He mentions the project to a friend who points out that Justin's house is around the corner. Drinks are arranged, bonds are quickly forged. James has still never met Rachel.

Over the course of six months this bunch of virtual and real mates, this band that has never actually all been in the same room at the same time swap ideas and songs, fragments and finished recordings through broadband connections. Layers are added and taken away, Rachel receives tranches of instrumentals to add lyrics and vocals and works with partner Steve Clarke, another addition to the cast, to create finished songs.

So, is this a band or not? Bands hang out and play in rehearsal rooms don't they?

**'It's a band'**, all four insist individually (naturally) on Skype. More so, the album is a product of that very process. As Justin sagely notes, *'people don't realise how many band don't talk to each other'* in marked contrast to this wired network with a process which Rachel explains as *'this real excitement about what we are doing, emails and texts flying in all day from everyone'*. James points to the whole recording period as being *'weirdly, lacking in any stress, things just happened'* and all remark that the lack of fixed sessions and schedules meant that they could contribute at their own pace in their own time and on their own terms. Rachel goes so far as to suggest that her vocals would not have been as they are were that conventional route have been followed, citing a set up that allowed her *'a freedom to be more expressive'*. Stuart talks of *'the space to add'* to the music free of immediate opinions. Freedom is a word that all use, that sense that anything was possible and all ideas would be considered. Humility is a word that those looking in might add, a gathering of talented individuals prepared to step back from their own individual egos to allow the whole to prosper.

Stuart in an aside suggests that *'it's quite a miracle that people with such busy lives found time to make this record'* and yet Minor Victories, the album, is a record that all four, with their vast experience of making records, describe as lacking in pressure. According to Justin, that's for a very simple reason, *'we don't have to prove to people we're a good band, the standard of the music meant that we aren't dragging anyone along for the ride. At the start, and all the way through, we were doing it for the fuck of it, to make something we know is good'*.

That spirit, the real essence of what Minor Victories are about, a twist on the 'anyone can do it' ethic of punk towards 'you can do anything' means that Minor Victories are far more than one album of songs. The films that began with a 90 second short last year featuring a Doncaster TV repairman grooving in his shop will continue to define the band, helmed by Justin and James. Further shorts will add to the approach. According to James, actors will be *'local and not pros'*, locations will be in his home town of Doncaster, a further non-conventional addition to the project, the aim being *'to shoot things that are normally not seen, to use something that is normal to me in a way that makes it remarkable'*.

Soon the project that became a band that have never been together in the same room becomes a public reality and the album that started life as an EP will be available for all to hear. For the band this is as much of a surprise as it may be for those waiting to hear it. Stuart still marvels that it has happened, saying *'starting a band where some of the people have never met each other is something I've never heard of'*, James wonders how *'I've made a record with people I'd never have imagined I would have the chance to work with'* whilst Rachel describes it as *'the most exciting thing I've done to date'*. As for Justin, whose itch began the whole process, he still hasn't quite worked out what his little noise EP has become but is beginning to think that *'we've stealthily made the record I always have wanted to make without me actually realising it'*.

And, in case you are still wondering, James finally met Rachel in London recently. I can confirm this. I was there.

the result...

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