



Crystal Antlers

Tentacles

(Touch and Go)
US release date: 7 April 2009
UK release date: 6 April 2009

by **Jeremy Ohmes**

In the hyper-hyped, blog-buzzed world of modern indie rock, bands can't be content to strike only while the iron is hot—they have to thwack that ballyhoo while it's just warming up, too. Take it from Crystal Antlers.

The Long Beach, California, sextet started building a locust-sized buzz even with only a self-released EP to its name. They toured incessantly, criss-crossing the country in their veggie-powered schoolbus on the F Yeah Tour with the likes of Dan Deacon, Matt & Kim, and Monotonix. They spun heads with their spazzed-out, stage-antic-stuffed live shows, and they rendered listeners blissfully confused with their strange concoction of psychedelic-garage-drone-prog rock—a self-possessed tsunami of sound that was sorted and tamed by Mars Volta producer Ikie Owens. By the time Touch and Go Records re-released their self-titled EP last October, Crystal Antlers had already sold 5,000 records—just by word of mouth. The iron was closer to hot, the buzz was closer to a 17-year cicada swarm, and the blogs were already speculating about their full-length.

Now, a mere six months later, Crystal Antlers have 13 new songs and an express-delivered debut long-player, ready to capitalize on their crescendoing hype. As quick as the band recorded and released the album, though, *Tentacles* doesn't sound the least bit rushed. If anything, the album sounds more confident and controlled than the EP, even when the songs run off the rails—which they often do. Frenetically drum-filled, feedback-drenched songs like "Dust", "Time Erased", and "Your Spears" careen around time signatures and ricochet between algorithmic math rock and arpeggio-heavy prog, while staying as cool, calm, and collected as a pilot crash-landing a plane into the Hudson. The title track, amidst screeching psych-saturated guitars, whiplash drums, and frenzied pleas from the singer, sounds surprisingly self-assured even as it tries to shed some of its screamo skin. And on a song like "Memorized", as hyperactive drum patterns punctuate each measure and the singer sandpapers his voice across a quasi-chorus, the group's signature Farfisa organ descends down a spiral staircase of arpeggios, seemingly aimless yet more peripatetic than lost.

Part of the reason for Crystal Antlers' poise and effortless control of chaos might simply be the amazing chemistry they possess as a band—six musicians with six instruments from six different musical backgrounds playing what occasionally sounds like six different songs at the same time not only seems like the devil's setup, but also a recipe for a muddy and muddled-up disaster. Yet the Antlers are able to channel all those ideas and influences into a caulk-tight, mongrel sound that stays on its leash and never sounds congested. But perhaps the main reason the Antlers display such mystifying composure is that the group produced *Tentacles* themselves. And from the psych-blues-soul of "Andrew" to the seven-minute free jazz sound collage of "Several Tongues", you can hear the care in every strangled note, crucified chord, and schizophrenic time signature... all painstakingly laid out in a squall of uncategorizable sound and attitude. It's safe to say Crystal Antlers have struck the iron while it's hot, and while there's no one else out there who sounds even remotely like them.

RATING: 7

— 23 April 2009

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