

'Saint-Etienne - Kid Loco... collaboration or the art of disaster'

Benicassim – summer 2002 – Nicholas Cendrowicz



“Could you get me some lighter fuel?”

I didn't know what to reply. I am about to interview Kid Loco, and the request seems so totally out of the ordinary.

“You see, we're stuck inside the festival site, and we need some lighter fuel. Could you find some for me?”

I find it. I'm at Benicassim, maybe the best festival in the whole of Europe. It's almost a confidential event, centred around pop music – in the noble sense of the term. All the participating artists are specifically chosen, selected by the organisers. The lucky artists love to come. Good weather is almost guaranteed. Kid Loco is playing for the first time in Benicassim. As if that wasn't enough, Saint Etienne, Kid's musical comrades, are also here. This gives me a unique opportunity to ask Kid Loco about his affinities with Saint Etienne, but also to corner Saint Etienne to ask them what they think of Le Kid.

Backstage at Benicassim, with Kid Loco. He has his lighter fuel, and seems relieved. I ask him why he likes working with Saint Etienne so much.

“I played with them in London four years ago. The venue was full. We got onstage, and our computers didn't work. There was a bug. So I said “shit”, and we left the stage. I rebooted everything: the bug was still there. We stopped, and I ended up playing a single song with my acoustic guitar.

I was alone in the stairway, in tears, and telling myself that I was pissed off, that computers suck and I want to destroy them – long live the guitar instead. Saint Etienne got onstage, and their manager came by to take me by the arm. “Come and see”, he said. I didn't want to, but he dragged me over. Saint Etienne were playing ‘4:35 in the Morning’, but they were playing my version, my remix of the track. They made me feel warm inside, and very proud.

You have worked with them a lot...

“They're great to work with. The first time they asked me to work with them was shortly after my first album. It was one of the first remixes that I'd been asked to do. I chose a track (‘4:35 in the Morning’). Then they asked me a second remix. They gave me a track that sounded fantastic (‘Mr. Donut’).

I finally met them in Paris, where they were DJ-ing (with Sarah as their bodyguard). I played them the remixes, and they were very enthusiastic about them. What is more, I love Sarah's voice. I love girls' voices in general, and in particular ethereal voices like hers.”

“I was asked to do a song (the cover of ‘The Man I Love’) for the ‘Red Hot and Groove’ compilation, but the proposal I had was to work with the singer of the Cranberries. Instead, I did it with Sarah. It was the first time I'd been into the studio with her. I did a simple play-back, and in 3 takes it was in the bag. It was magnificent.”

"I went on tour to the USA with Saint Etienne (the Good Humor' tour). Their manager stole my weed, and I broke my arm in the staircase running after him. So I have a sort of 'love – hate – accident' relationship with them. For example, the only time I had to cancel a DJ set was because of the Eurostar which never left and it had to be with them in London. Also, the only live gig I had to cancel was on tour with them. Their manager thinks I bring bad luck."

Saint Etienne confirm: they like working Kid Loco.

Sarah : *"We like him a lot. But we're a bit nervous about him. It seems like he's cursed – we call him 'Kid Broke-o': he went on tour with us and all sorts of things happened."*

Nevertheless, Kid Loco continues to work with Saint Etienne. He remixed a track from their new album: 'Stop and Think It Over'.

"It won't come out on the album itself. And it's not really a remix – they gave me a demo version, and I redid it with Tim Keegan, of Departure Lounge. The girls sing the chorus: "Could you be my lover", and he replies "yes – maybe". So I did a duet out of it, it's very very poppy."

I have the impression that both groups share the same vision. You both create your own universe, an imaginary world very different from our often sad reality, and painting a very detailed picture.

Kid : *"We have a vision of pop music that we like. It's very pure. It's not pop music in the base sense of the term: it's easy to access, you don't need to think. I chose to be a fan of rock, but I could fall in love with a pop song, tell myself "I like that" or "I don't like that". And I can't even explain why. I'm a huge fan of Adam and the Ants, but I couldn't ever explain why. I like a girl with a rock attitude. That's also what I like with Saint Etienne: the two guys have a very poppy vision, and then there is Sarah, the singer, who has a completely gripping delivery."*

Sarah adds that Kid Loco is very filmic in what he does. It's true that both have a very visual approach to music, Saint Etienne with a very evocative style. It's not surprising that Saint Etienne confess that they would like to do more cinema projects.

As for Kid Loco, he makes albums as if they were stories or script. He is the director of the record. And "Kill Your Darlings" is a record that tells a story.

"All my records are concept albums; they tell a story. A record without a story is a dull disc, a collection of tracks, a 'best of' record. That's boring. This is a love story with drugs"

Of course, one of the responsibilities of the director is to choose his cast. You specifically chose some artists to work on this record. Why?

"Because they were around a that moment. Since I was with Tim, I told him "Tim, you sing". Another group, Quinn, asked me for some remixes, so I asked the singer, Louise, to sing. If Saint Etienne had asked me for a remix the week before, it would have been Sarah singing on my record. In fact, I very much hope to work with Sarah again. It's easier to work like that – very spontaneously. It's boring to have to plan ahead: I'll take that singer because he's number 1, that one is number 18 in this market, and in Greece I'll take that Greek singer..."

Sarah, would you have sung on Kid Loco's album ?

"That's really sweet. But it would have been a disaster – the studio would have burnt down, with the master tapes..."

I'm trying to dig deeper to find out the parallels between the two artists, and another is their imagination. **Who are the artists (and this is a completely hypothetical question) with whom you'd like to work if you could?**

Kid Loco : *"I have loads of idols, people that I've loved since I was small. Patti Smith, Primal Scream, The Rolling Stones, The Beatles, AC/DC, Andy Weatherall. It's possible to work with anyone, but is it worth it? It has to be done naturally, otherwise it won't happen. It's easier if people ask. I wanted to do a track with Patti Smith, and I wrote to her. I never received a reply. Should I wait for two years?*

The best group in the world is the Clash. I saw them when I was 13. And later, I met Mick Jones. It was all planned. I turned around and he was behind me. And I didn't want to see him: he was short guy with awful hair, stuffed with drugs and completely stoned. That's not Mick Jones: Mick Jones is on stage and he looks beautiful.

Not wanting to meet your idols for fear that they'll disappoint you: isn't that the characteristic of a true fan? It is certainly a fear shared with Saint Etienne:

Pete : *"I'm a bit jealous of Starsailor, who've worked with Phil Spector. Even if it must be a terrifying experience!"*

Bob : *"I would have wanted to work with producers like Phil Spector or Joe Meek, if it was 30 or 40 years ago. But it's sometimes disappointing to meet your heroes. Especially if they are nutters!"*

Pete : *"I wanted to work with Wes Anderson, the film director".*

Sarah : *"Or Vincent Gallo even if he must be a bit mad".*

Then they're off: their concerts await. The Spanish crowd laps it up: Kid Loco plays mainly songs from 'Kill Your Darlings', but renders them more organic and warm for an open-air festival. Tim Keegan (who's also here with his group, Departure Lounge) adds his voice and his trusty acoustic guitar. Kid himself is out of control. He seems everywhere at once and can't stand still.

And at the end, I learn what he wants with the lighter fuel. He's recreating the famous scene at Monterrey by Jimi Hendrix. He sprays the drumkit (and not his guitar, like Jimi did) and sets it alight. It's an unforgettable spectacle, both respectful of its history but also twisting it and modernising it. It's an update (but with a pinch of humour and a sprig of irony) of a timeless image.

In short, it's a perfect Kid Loco moment.