# GOOD THROB

*Good Throb is a London-based band that formed in 2010. Interview by Pat Daintith. Photos by Paco Mus.*

**MRR: Okay, introduce yourselves.**
BB: My name's Bryony and I play guitar.
L-Hard: My name's Louis and I play drums.
KY Ellie: My name's Ellie and I sing.
Ash Tray: My name's Ash and I play bass.

**MRR: Has Good Throb changed the way you play music, or your approaches to songwriting?**
BB: I'd only really sung in bands prior to this—I was in a band with Louis called the Sceptres for four years. That was always more about taking fully formed songs and finding space for my voice. Making Good Throb songs is more of a patchworking of different ideas and it's opened my eyes to alternative ways of writing songs, how to deconstruct songs and put those elements together in new ways.

**MRR: So you all write together?**
L-Hard: Yeah we're really collaborative. Someone might come to practice with an idea but that's more likely to be a theme or a story than a riff.

**MRR: Having been the main songwriter in Love Triangle and Shitty Limits, was it hard to give that up?**
L-Hard: I really wanted to for this band, yeah. I don't like being the main songwriter, I like the idea of songs not belonging to anyone. Other people in this band come up with stuff I wouldn't think of. Plus, in other bands I'm in, the people usually bringing the ideas are kind of "hot shit" on their instruments, whereas with this one because no one is like that, there's an eagerness to feed off each other, which is refreshing for me.
BB: I feel like process is weirdly almost taboo, it's a thing people don't really discuss much, so there's little in the way of intra-band learning or method-swapping, and there's often an assumption that everyone does things the same way. It's only when I mention to someone that we fairly regularly write songs around stupid catchphrases or tour jokes, most recently like "Mummy I'm Ugly," that I realise maybe it's unusual to build a little perverse universe out of one fairly obtuse concept, rather than say, coming to practice with a riff that took you a week to write.
Ash: It's more likely to be a certain bit we might have heard on a record, or something dumb we've seen somewhere that inspires a theme. Then deciding together how that should make the song sound. I don't think we ever try to make things sound like "us," it'll more just be like, oh let's write a stupid Oi! number, or a song that sounds like being pissed off on the tube.
L-Hard: It's interesting how Ash and Ellie have gone the other way because this was their first band.
Ellie: I'd always wanted to be in bands, though, and had been going to gigs from a really young age. I'd ask other people to be in bands and they'd kind of dismiss it and fob me off because they didn't want some weird girl! It has been a way in for me. It does suck that it's really difficult to get into making bands, unless you have friends with the same ideas who are willing and have instruments. I did suspect our songwriting process was different, and the other three bands I'm in have demonstrated that; it's a different thing when you have the basis of a song handed to you already. Good Throb is special!
L-Hard: The flipside is the frustration if nothing comes to us. I mean, we have had that conversation where we agree to at least try to bring something pre-prepared

instead of being pissed off when our collaborative songs come out sounding shit, ha!
Ash: The process we have is super brilliant, admittedly it can be a bit tricky sometimes if we can't come up with something we agree on in the small space of practice time—but it's always cool to know that when we do start piecing ideas together we're gonna have something that none of us imagined the song to sound like anyway—and that has mostly turned out to be a really cool thing.
Ellie: We really never had any pre-conceived ideas of what we'd sound like, which is possibly part of this whole thing. We do reference bands or sounds in practice, but there's really no like "oh, Good Throb will be this type of punk".
BB: The only parameters were that everyone would do something in this band they had never done before. I'd had a guitar for several years but Louis pretty much locked me in my garage and made me get over my frustration with this very stripped down version of the Weirdos "Life of Crime" cover he kind of arranged for me. It was super exciting.
L-Hard: I started playing drums in No at the same time, so it was new to me.

**MRR: You've obviously got musical interests external to punk, do they inform your ideas about progression as a band?**
BB: I certainly feel playing guitar that every new song we write sits at the very limit of my technical ability at that point. Which is fun when you return to play an old song, which was at one point really fucking hard to play, and they feel easy! Obviously, even if I could, there are unlikely to be any epic finger-tapping solos in a Good Throb song, but certain elements of how we sound have progressed and maybe got a little more complex as we've got better at playing together.
L-Hard: We've never really talked about trying to "progress" though.
Ash: I think we generally avoid bigger picture thinking. We mostly hear something or have an idea for the sounds we want to make for a new song, then work out something similar (if not simpler).
L-Hard: I mean, we did try that reggaeton beat song...
Ellie: I vetoed that.
BB: Much to my sadness.
L-Hard: And the one that sounded like Bow Wow Wow that Ellie hated.
BB: Once again... much to my sadness ha ha!
L-Hard: None of that's about ability though.
Ellie: We do all listen to genres external to punk, but from a lyrical perspective there is something freeing about dedication to the simplest possible way of expressing something. The songs we wrote first, like "Bag" for example is a really fucking simple idea: You're behind a cash desk asking "Would you like a bag?" repeating that over and over until you brain yourself on the till...

**MRR: I saw an interview with Mike Watt and D. Boon. Mike Watt was saying he preferred more suggestive, ambiguous lyrics, whereas D. Boon said he preferred more didactic, politically persuasive lyrics. Which side would you fall on?**
Ash: It has to depend on the song. Some things we say directly, others we joke about, but that's because those are things we find stupid. They are to be laughed at.
L-hard: The fact that we write together firing ideas and lyrics off each other results in things that are distilled and clear. I like both approaches and lots of bands that do both, and songs that are thought provoking in an unclear, dreamy way.
BB: I like lyrics and songs that leave space for the listener. For example, the song "Bag" could just as easily be about the issue of "affective labour" and the turn towards being expected to pretend like you enjoy work. Grinning through gritted teeth being a political act and what not. It's cool to have lots of layers. With regards to that Minutemen debate, it's probably easier to find some intrinsic value of a personal opinion delivered directly with anger or clarity or realness, than it is to write something allegorical or a metaphor and have it come out sounding not totally corny; but I can enjoy either if done well. I mean, I like Ellie's lyrics precisely because they are also pretty funny, so it returns to that thing of a serious proposition delivered with humour, or style, I guess. Maybe humour, or at least sarcasm isn't that common in punk at the moment, I don't know?
L-Hard: Hey have you seen Hard Skin?
Bryony: Ha! Yeah, maybe we are Hard Skin's illegitimate children.
Ellie: I think we see humour in it because we're constantly joking about each other's arseholes in practice. I'm not sure if I'm didactic or not, because the lyrics are all personal or shared experiences within the band, although they do also feed into broader ideas. I'm quite a crude person, which is why I guess it comes out in crude ways.

**MRR: Do you ever get irritated by being described as an "all-girl band" or as I read in a review "a naïve rock act?" I mean, you're not Rush, but you're not the Shaggs either.**
Ash: I wish we were Rush.
Bryony: I wish we were the Shaggs! This issue is interesting...
Ash: I think it's totally boring.
L-Hard: I think it's amazing. I think it's amazing that a bunch of people in their mid-to-late twenties with a bunch of musical history and education behind them could be described as naïve. Maybe that means we've pulled something off. I think we try to pretend like we're stupid, we talk about being "bad," but there's a self-awareness to it.
Ash: If you come away from listening to our band thinking about whether or not we can play "right" you have missed the point. Also to publicly comment on the ability (and note we're talking about ability not style) of any band is kind of gross and suggests a lurking asshole to me. There was also that time we got described as Riot Grrrl on a flyer. Riot Grrrl's fine, but it's not us. Why didn't they just say we were a punk band?
BB: For me it's always a balancing act between "why can't we just be a punk band?" i.e. judged on our own merits, and then simultaneously really valuing the community of punk women that exists; as a global thing and then also as a local thing, of just being excited to hear there's a new band in London with a woman in it and wanting to support them, because it is still so male-dominated here.
Ash: There's definitely no malice to it, but it's lazy and thoughtless.
BB: I guess I find this interesting more than annoying because I enjoy thinking about the space women occupy in music-making, punk and elsewhere, although it is separate to our "project" with Good Throb, as it were. I'm always curious as to what informs, or doesn't inform the thinking behind, say, someone conflating all girl bands with Riot Grrrl. It's interesting to trace backlash to these assumptions, means and the effect it has, the distancing from what was obviously an important moment for women's punk history. It's interesting to me personally but not a thing we obsess over as a band.
Ash: When people say, "Hey girls I totally loved how you can't really play," I definitely love throwing back, "Actually I think I play really well" 'cause I do. If anything about the way we play suggests that we're looking for a pat on the head then it's something I'm blissfully unaware of.
BB: The naïveté thing does get to me though. The line between lack of ability as a badge of pride and then you know, three years later thinking you played a great set with no fuck ups, and some dude comes up and says, "it's so cool that you're barely holding it together..." Like, where do I go to take the test that stops people congratulating me for getting through the set?
BB: I remember when we played in Edinburgh and someone shouted out at the very end "That was terrible!"

**MRR: Was there a reason you all moved here to London from other places?**
BB: I moved here in 2008 before Good Throb began, because I'd been on the dole in Brighton after graduating, and wanted to get more involved in putting on gigs and doing stuff in the big bad city.
L-Hard: Ash and I moved from Reading, about half an hour outside of London. My friendship pool there had dried up.
Ash: We were getting the train to London three times a week, left alone in Reading just clinging to each other.
L-Hard: It was just a pain in the arse not to be here.
Ellie: I also moved here before we started. It's just a really good thing that we're a band and all here in London now!
Ash: It is really nice to be nearer to everyone and everything.

**MRR: Standard question, list your other bands.**
L-Hard: No! None! I will not say. My favourite colour is gold.
BB: Louis is in the Love Triangle, No, and Personnel for the avoidance of doubt. I also play drums in a band called Semi. I shout

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in Dregs and sing in the Forces Sweethearts and play bass with Ben in a band called Croup.
Ellie: I'm singing in Family Outing which I'm really into, it's more hardcore and very different to Good Throb. I'm playing bass in a thing called Yeast Extract, and have started on guitar recently with a nameless band. I picked up my first ever axe from the boot of somebody's Dad's car in Slough the other day! I'm excited about it.
Ash: I sing in Frau and play bass also in Personnel with Louis.

**MRR: What band or musical event did you first see or hear that made you want to be in a band?**
L-Hard: New Kids on the Block. Unfortunately I never saw them.
Ellie: Operation Ivy, Rancid, the Distillers! Some of my friends are still into that stuff, but that made me realise what I was into.
Ash: I grew up doing Spice Girls dance routines; girl power. I had teenage attempts to be in bands, I took guitar lessons and played drums but always felt like as a girl, even having guy friends who played, I'd always be given the cold shoulder. Maybe it's shit that it took Louis to encourage me to do Good Throb, like being told no by boys and then yes by boys... Making bands with women and now consciously wanting and finding all girls to play with in Frau is all very much on my own terms, and at 25 I feel like it took long enough, but is so worth the wait as its so much fun. Worth saying though in Personnel, I'm the only girl and that's also incredibly fun—not all my musical stuff is to do with exorcising demons, I definitely mostly play because I always just wanted to be in a punk band.
BB: I was similar to Ellie, getting into punk through those *Punk-o-Rama* compilations and weird abstractions that made my first conception of punk seem, bizarrely, like something that only happened in America! I suffered with that sort of imposter syndrome and as a result went the extra mile with voracious consumption of back catalogues to try and get over this intense fear of being called out as some kind of fraud. Coming up through the hardcore scene at the time in South Wales, women being in bands really felt like it was not on the table as an option at all. I moved to Brighton but still didn't do a band until I was 21, and I'd been going to shows since I was fifteen. I'd made a friend called Maya-Victoria who was a hardcore kid who'd got more into this avant-garde noise type scene, she sort of tricked me into being in a band by making out it was some like, performance art project, and so not subject to the insanely high standards I'd set, or rather had been set for me. That was an all-girl band called Back Stabbath. She had to almost literally drag me to the practice. It broke that spell that I could never do it, and pretty much blew my mind.
Ellie: I had fantasies as a drunk fourteen-year-old, singing songs in my head, hanging around town with nowhere to go except Woolworths. So glad I have an outlet for that now.
BB: The plus point of being a comparatively late starter does mean I don't have a back catalogue of heinous ska bands to hide.
Ash: It is funny how the bands you're exposed to as a kid, going to shows seeing only boys in bands, how much deeper into punk you have to get to realise there have always been women in punk bands, and that what you're doing isn't anything new, it's just hidden away from you.
L-Hard: I really feel there's been a sea change for this in the last couple of years, like it's getting a lot more even-handed with girls and guys, but that could be the kinds of gigs we play with this band compared to others. Saying that, when we toured the country with Good Throb last year, I did feel weird noticing how you guys would often be the only women at the gig we were playing.
Ash: I remember the Sceptres being the only band I saw with a girl in it and finding Bryony super inspirational. I thought she was the bravest person ever.
BB: Thanks Ash! I agree that the gender balance in bands in London is starting to get a little bit better, I felt noticeably more isolated playing a few years back. I dunno, if when Good Throb plays we might be in any way helping anyone to feel like they can make a band and not give a shit about any preconceived notions of how it "should" be, then that's pretty cool.

*Second pressings of the first two Good Throb singles available soon via Play Pinball and Accidental Guest Recordings respectively, and Muscle Horse Records in the UK/EU.*
*goodthrob.bandcamp.com / goodthrob.tumblr.com*