

STREET SCENE

The Faint promises to leave a lasting impression



I wanna dance with Todd Baechle. I'm sure he's a much better dancer than I am. There are some things you just know.

Todd Baechle is the somber-voice singer and synth-player of Omaha, Nebraska's post-modern rock revivalists, The Faint. On the first listen to *Dance Macabre*, the latest by The Faint, I know Baechle and his bandmates were no strangers to the dance floor.

But when I called the fluffy-blond musician last week, he didn't sound like he was in the mood to chat — nevermind dance. He answered his cell phone while traveling somewhere near Jacksonville, Fla., and all I could hear were the rumbles of his bandmates — his brother Clarke Baechle (drums), Jacob Theile (synthesizer), Joel Petersen (bass) and Mike Dupper (guitar) — who all must've been in that van too long. It makes it hard to hold a conversation, still we managed. And I learned all about this band I've just started to admire, though they've been around for quite some time.

Faint memories

"We started playing together in 1994, basically it was the same band with some different members," said Baechle simply. "In 1997 we decided to call ourselves The Faint. It took a while for us to agree on a name."

You see, the band didn't want to limit itself by offering up the word moniker. They sought a name that would describe the music, but not completely define it. After all, a lot has changed in the past seven years.

"When we first started out, we played in a folk setting where we would sit down," said Baechle. "It was like low-fi folk music... Our sound has just kind of evolved over the years."

Don't expect to unwrap a copy of *Dance Macabre*, and hear anything remotely folk-like. These days the band sound more like a morsel hybrid of 80s synth-heroes like Thomas Dolby or Duran Duran drenched in modern electronica.

"We just got tired of the indie guitar sound," said Baechle. While lead guitars are still paramount, its the synthesizer that's stealing



The Faint

everyone's attention. The instrument has become increasingly more prevalent in The Faint's music and is probably the reason the band earns so many comparisons to counterparts of 80s New Wave. But the ME decade never sounded quite like this.

Well aware of references to that retro-inspired, future-minded sound, Baechle admits he doesn't think "anybody likes to be labeled."

Popularity aside

"We try not to consider really what's popular," he said. "We want to kind of think of things for ourselves. We really try to make what we want to."

And so, punk rock mentality lives. But the world surrounding this band sounds so much darker these days, as *Dance Macabre* comes across more like a collection of grim fables than mindless disco hits. There is no real explanation for it, but the CD seems appropriately timed at this, the start of the spookiest full season.

"Well, we had been touring a lot on the last album, *Blank-Wave Arcade*. For a couple of years we'd been playing these songs. We were trying to move forward and be more interesting with our electronics. It turned out a little bit darker. We still wanted it to be fun to play, fun to watch and fun to dance to."

And from the spacy start, *Agenda Suicide*, to the somber *Ballad of a Paralyzed Citizen* that ends the record (and my only complaint is that it isn't nearly long enough), *Dance Macabre* is easily danceable and fiercely unforgettable.

"We hope people will come out and dance with us," invited Baechle.

All I can think is... me first!

The Faint gets high-tech with fancy lights and moody fog, 8 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 14, Magic Stick, Detroit. Tickets \$8-\$10 for this 18 and older show. Call (248) 645-6666.

Stephanie Angelyn Casola writes about popular music for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers. Call her at (734) 953-2130 or e-mail casola@oe.home.com.

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