

Passion Pit interview

By Aoife McDonnell on Thursday, 12 March 2009



ELECTROPOP
US Band
Passion Pit
With hit song
Sleepyhead
sampling
Mary O'Hara's
Óró Mo Bháidín

For **Passion Pit** main man Michael Angelakos, life in 2009 has become something of a blur. Since being tipped in many quarters as one of the bands to watch out for this year, they've released debut EP 'Chunk Of Change', found themselves on a continually expanding tour and readied their first full length release 'Manners'. There was time however to talk to State about self-loathing, pop music and Irish folk music....

'Chunk of Change' was recorded as a Valentine's Day gift for your girlfriend – but it's not as romantic as it sounds, is it?

"Eh...no actually. Most people just ask the first part of that question. It's actually very self-loathing. Very critical of myself and the relationship I was in. It wasn't a bunch of love songs. It was more like an apology letter and that's kinda how I write or think. That's what's funny about it. The way it's been reviewed or seen it's very face value. I think it's pretty painful album from my point of view [but] that's just because I know where it's coming from."

People are trying to define what genre you fit into. How would you define yourselves?

"It's just pop music. That's all it is. We use electronic elements, we use a lot of rock elements. We use a whole bunch of keyboards but it doesn't sound like electrics. It sounds like we use keyboards as guitar players would use keyboards. It's natural [to try label us]. We disagree with it usually. When someone says we sound like MGMT or Hot Chip we're like 'No we don't'. We look like Hot Chip maybe, similar crowd as MGMT. Postal Service is the closest but that never happens."

You formed as a group in 2007 and since then there has been an MTV campaign, PSP advert, serious critical acclaim from all the big players like BBC, Pitchfork and, of course, ourselves at State. All that in such a short space of time. Have you had time to absorb it? Has it all sunk in yet?

"I stop and think about it, we are in a different country, selling out shows, it's still so unusual. The fact that people are even talking about us. You don't go into this and try to be famous. I didn't even want to release Chunk of

Change. It really, really wasn't meant to be anything close to this. The fact that Frenchkiss came in, Columbia and Excel and other labels we were talking to...everything that's come with it, it's very humbling. It really is. And we know it 'cause we just came from nothing. You start playing some shows and people were listening."

You have used a sample from Mary O'Hara Óró Mo Bháidín on 'Sleepyhead'. How did you come across her work?

"I'm big fan of 70 singer/songwriters and just general folk artists. Mary O'Hara was part of the revival over seas and also in the American 70s folk scene. When I came across her traditional folk stuff and I was absolutely blown away. Everything on the record is, it's like 25 tracks, everything is just utter perfect folk music in Gaelic. I was like 'Oh my god, this would be so perfect for me to sample right now. I need to sample this.' I cut it up, worked with it and I finally figured out a way to do it. I never thought I'd have to deal with copyright stuff y'know, the issues that come with another artists publishing. It's a traditional song, she didn't write the song, but I used her actual recording of it. I was a huge fan, a really big fan. I loved her voice. I loved her work with harp so I wanted to integrate it into a song.

Sleepyhead has been very popular in the UK and used in the teen **drama series "Skins"** on **Channel 4**, and in July **Channel 5** used it to advertise their film season. Canada and the US have also picked it up. Is has had over 10 million downloads on the web. It has various mixes available and it is all over YouTube. It's quite bizarre but does get into your head after a few listens!. Someone has put a track comparing Mary's and Passion Pit's versions on YouTube, a kind of verse by verse alternation/analysis.

Do you find copyright issues prohibitive when it comes to developing new material?

"Now I know how it all works, it's not a big deal. Hiphop artists do it all the time. Our legal team has dealt with it. It's just kinda like 'whatever'. You do what you have to do. If we have to sample, we do. If we don't we don't. We don't at all on the new record."

We hear the new album won't feature any of the songs from Chunk of Change. Sleepyhead' is on it but that's because this album is going to reach a bigger audience and we think it's a beautiful song. We're proud of it as a single but we're not promoting it as a single on this record. In fact, it's behind everything because it's kinda done. It's just included in the collection on songs and thematically it works perfectly.

How does song writing process work now?

"Everything has happen so quick. We actually haven't had any practice since August. We've probably played

Sleepy Head [Mary O'Hara/Michael Angelakos](#)

five times as many shows – no way more than that – about 10 more shows than we've practiced. We haven't sat down and be like "Hey guys, we've nothing to do for two weeks, let's try something new" it's more like "our show is tomorrow night – shit. Go! We have two hours. How should we do it? I dunno, just do it". That's the hardest part with all this ascension."

What should we expect from the album?

"We worked hard on this collectively. We have something that properly presents us to the world. It's been really hard living off *Chunk of Change* and if *Chunk of Change* has done this well, then we are really excited about this. It's so much better. It's so much like what we are. It'll be exciting to finally be able to say 'This is *Passion Pit*'."

Passion Pit is an American [electronic](#) band from [Cambridge, Massachusetts](#). Formed in 2007, the group consists of Michael Angelakos (lead vocals/keyboards), Ian Hultquist (keyboards/guitar), Ayad Al Adhamy (synth/[samples](#)), Jeff Apruzzese (bass) and Nate Donmoyer (drums)