

"Obviously we'd been invited as stylish men," begins bassist Gerry. "It was quite an interesting set up. We were standing backstage and there were all these models popping up all over the place, semi-dressed. Aye, so it was a good experience!" As to what led them to this opportunity, Gerry seems endearingly oblivious. However, this dalliance with 'fame' appears to be a solitary affair. "We've not been asked to launch any cars or electronic products," he laughs. "That'll maybe come in the future. It's amazing the people who make their money like that though. That awful guy Johnny Borrell, he got like £100,000 to launch an iPhone or something and he didn't even invite the rest of his band - he just went along himself to play solo so he could pocket all the money. What a miserable shite!"

Thankfully the Phantoms have spent the year avoiding such pratfalls. When asked to recap on their highlights of 2009, the conversation invariably leads to tales of local culinary delights and opportune moments of al fresco swimming around Europe rather than any industry hob-nobbing. "The woman who was putting on one of our Switzerland gigs owned this ice cream shop and it was all made from fresh unpasteurised milk straight from the cows, so we just ate ice cream all day then went swimming in the Rhine," reminisces keyboardist Andy Wake. "She heard some of the band members were big Celtic fans and when we got out of the river at the other end she was waiting with Celtic Football Club towels. That's a little bit of hospitality that you just don't get in the UK."

Guitarist Duncan Marquiss attests to the extra attention they've received this year. "It's nice for anyone just to notice that we're even around," he admits. "When we recorded *Checkmate Savage* we thought, 'well, it's not bad', but we didn't have any expectations



of anyone else liking it or it being reviewed even. In terms of pressure, that only comes from ourselves and the pressure to do as much with the band as we can. Time and money constraints are a challenge. We're probably a lot more tired than we were last year."

Andy agrees with this summation of their slow-burning ascent and highlights the benefits it has brought the band. "The venues we're playing are getting slightly bigger," he says, "but it's not been an overnight thing like you hear with some bands due to their music being based on something that's very current. We try to make forward-thinking music that's not routed in any kind of style that's synonymous with 'right now'. Hopefully that means we'll last a bit longer than these bands who become an overnight,

flavour-of-the-month."

With *Checkmate Savage* almost two years old to the band, that forward-thinking is now being put to good use on their follow-up album, tentatively pencilled in for a March 2010 release. However, at the moment it remains entirely in demo form and Gerry concedes that the band may need someone to lay down a few deadlines. "I actually want the label to put a bit of pressure on us, to say you need to have this in by a certain time," he states. "I think we'd work well under a bit of pressure, just to get our heads down and go for it." Duncan attempts to sum up what their rough sketches are so far approximating. "On the one hand, the material seems more kind of 'poppy' but then it also seems a lot weirder," he contemplates. "That would be an interesting thing - if we could go in both directions

at once."

Gerry, however, balks at the prospect of limiting their palette to one slogan to their music. "It's not as if we approach it like 'right, what style can we do now?'" he states. "Although, we were listening to a bit of techno the other night and started discussing whether we should do a full-on techno song at some point. But we don't say 'let's try and write a genre-hopping, twelve-minute odyssey'. They just usually come out that way - for better or worse."

For better, we say. Definitely for the better.

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Dave Kerr