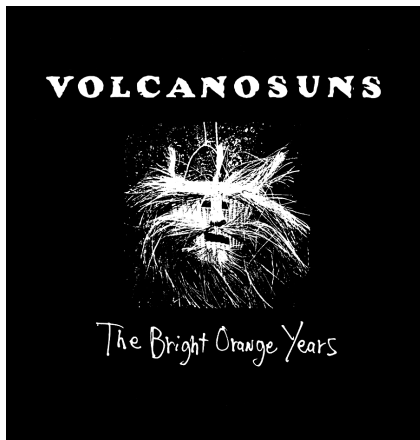


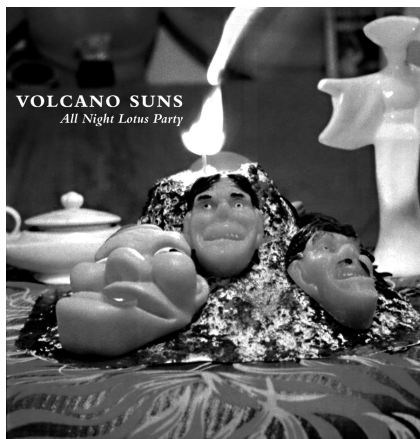
# VOLCANO SUNS



MRG336

*The Bright Orange Years*

Release date: January 27, 2009



MRG337

*All Night Lotus Party*

Release date: January 27, 2009

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Peter Prescott's exuberant bellow led the Volcano Suns, the first and most significant band to emerge from the ashes of Boston's Mission Of Burma. Though he wrote the fewest compositions of Burma's three songwriters, the drummer-vocalist became incredibly prolific in his new band, leading it through four line-ups, seven albums and the three defining record labels of the 1980s: Homestead, Touch & Go and SST. Through all of these changes, Prescott's pounding swamp rhythms and open chord structures made *The Suns* instantly identifiable and, to some extent, of their era. But unlike the Northwestern and Midwestern bands whose sound signature they sometimes shared, the *Volcano Suns'* rich vocal harmonies and sardonic armchair philosophizing were all their own. *The Suns* celebrated the oddity and diversity of human society.

Amazingly enough, you are holding the first CD issues of the *Volcano Suns'* first two albums, released on Homestead in 1985 and 1986. Fully remastered, they are the best of the band's career and contain all the recordings by the band's second line-up, featuring Jon Williams on guitar and Jeff Weigand on bass. Williams and Weigand brought a grungy, hyper midrange wash of guitar and a trebly, Rickenbacker semi-hollow 4008 bassline — a much tougher and more wiry foundation for Prescott's vocal roar.

The first album, *The Bright Orange Years*, is so chock full of catchy songs that it could be any other band's greatest hits album. The opening track, "Jak," is an addictive head-nodder from its opening bassline to its chiming chords and lyrics, an ingenious string of aphorisms and sayings cobbled into a song that comments on the existence of aphorisms and sayings: "If you're led around by the nose, you'll never get to see how the garden grows, and if you go forth with a shovel and a hoe, you'll never stop to smell the roses/18 things at once, you spread yourself so thin, you could not find a basket to put all your eggs in..." all leading to the enthusiastic chorus: "Jak of all trades and master of none, how can a person get anything done, if you can fool yourself you can fool anyone, jak jak jak jak jak jak..." —it's tempting to think that Prescott wrote this song about himself, the songwriter-drummer-singer-guitarist.

But "Jak" leads into the even catchier and more urgent "Descent into Hell" ("I should have known that it would not always be this way—trapped at the crest of a hill!") the Neu!-ish instrumental "Truth is stranger than Fishing," the mournful, definitive ballad "Balancing Act," anthem after anthem like "Promise Me" and "The Mouth That Roared" ("Why do people do this to themselves — I

don't know!!") This issue adds classic 7"—only tracks like "Sea Cruise" (featuring backing vocals from the ladies of Salem 66),"Greasy Spine" (featuring a thumping bassline, gospel shouting, Fripp-ish guitar tone and a singalong chant) and "Tree Stomp," plus unreleased tracks and radio sessions.

By contrast, *All Night Lotus Party* is a heavier and darker record, its creepy candle-lit cover photo reminiscent of contemporary pot- and acid-tinged contemporaries like the Butthole Surfers. The guitars are more distorted, the production more bass-heavy, the songs both slower and faster, in the case of "Blown Stack" and "Engines," almost post-core. On the opening track, "White Elephant," Williams's rippling high-low recalls Steve Albini's *Big Black*, but the contrasting melody is pure Prescott. Two of the songs, "Room With A View" and "Four Letters," are absolute classics, Prescott removing his mask momentarily to sing earnestly and unsarcastically about ambitions thwarted and the failure to connect. If they had only recorded these two songs, the *Volcano Suns* would still be one of the most moving, interesting, powerful American bands of the 1980s.

Why weren't the *Volcano Suns* huge from the get-go? Both these albums are irresistible rock documents of a band at its vigorous, pulsating best. This was the era when hardcore was hardening into a parody and the good bands were breaking up or going metal; when Sonic Youth and *Big Black* were bringing a darker, harder sound to the underground; when West Coast bands like *Tex & The Horseheads* were debuting the awful genre of "cowpunk." The hardcore riff in the breakdown to "The Mouth That Roared," or lyrics in "Cornfield" like "Where would we be now without a dead horse and a broken-down plow, we'd be working all the windblown day, out in a cornfield where there ain't no way to make hay" fooled people into believing *The Suns* were trying to channel those respective vibes. But while *The Suns* were happy to borrow motifs from classic rock there was nothing in them that wasn't urban or Bostonian, and "Cornfields" is a metaphor for people stuck in a rut: "I should have pulled you out, I should have pulled you out of the way," is the anthemic chorus. Compared to a contemporary band like the *Replacements*, hyped at the time, there was too much going on at once—then, as now, there's no room in the cultural zeitgeist for artists who straddle genres and fail to fit into an obvious niche. Here's an opportunity to make up for that neglect.

—Patrick Amory