

meg lee chin



"Don't believe what you read," goes the old adage, but in an era where the music business tends to promote sanitized rebellion and surgically-enhanced flesh over quality sounds or fresh ideas, it's often even harder to believe what you're hearing. It's a rare thing indeed to find someone who believes in staying true to their own artistic impulses, which is why London-based electronics whiz Meg Lee Chin comes across as such an exhilarating blast of fresh air. Best known for her involvement with industrial supergroup Pigface, Meg's been praised by the *Los Angeles Times* for her "star potential... her forceful, clear voice and an unaffectedly dynamic presence," while the *Chicago Tribune* has noted that her singing has "enough attitude to make Courtney Love envious." Now, the fiercely independent singer makes a striking solo debut with *Piece and Love*, released on Invisible Records.

Recorded in the living room of her London flat then assembled and mixed by producer Martin Atkins, *Piece and Love* is a dark and uncompromising record, drawing heavily upon the anger and frustration that Meg has felt since her first years on this planet. "So many people in rock and roll try to come across as such rebels and malcontents," she says, "But if anything, I'd be very pleased if I could just be normal. I became a singer because I have an overwhelming desire to express a lot of the pain that goes on in this world, and to express how cynical I am as a result of it. I'm not proud of it, but I am generally more of a social malcontent than most people, and that's really colored by my early background."

The youngest daughter of a US Air Force electronics engineer and his Taiwanese wife, Meg spent part of her childhood living a gilded-cage existence in the middle of a Taipei slum. "Don't ask me what our house was doing amid this sea of bamboo huts," she laughs, "But the Air Force put us there until we found more permanent accommodations. You could walk out on the balcony of my playroom and see this whole shanty town; you'd get all the little barefoot kids looking up at me, going 'Oh, that rich little princess in the castle, how lucky!'" For security reasons, young Meg was only allowed out of the house to attend school and ballet lessons; as a result, her record player became her closest companion. "Music started off, for me, as a form of escape; unless I was in school, I literally had nothing to do or no kids to play with. My sisters and my mum were always out shopping, my dad was always at work, and we had this Taiwanese maid who wasn't too terribly concerned about me. So during my early years, I really didn't do much except listen to classical music and dance around."

Returning to America did little to lessen Meg's sense of dislocation, and her interest in music and ballet soon took a backseat to her newfound talent for petty crime. "Living in the middle of two cultures is really weird," she laughs. "When I lived in America, I was 'you chink,' while when I lived in Taiwan I was 'you rich white bitch.' Probably the only time I did belong was when I was hanging out with my juvenile delinquent friends in Massachusetts, but my folks moved us to California from Massachusetts because I just kept getting arrested. I wasn't your most stable teenager!" Meg's life finally took a positive turn when a high school guidance counselor suggested that she might be better off in San Francisco. While studying video production and experimental art at San Francisco State University, Meg began to rekindle her interest in music. "My first gig was in a redneck pub. I got up and screamed this old Del Shannon song called 'Runaway' at the top of my lungs. The reaction was almost totally hostile, but it didn't matter; somehow, I got it into my head that I could be a really good singer."

Felix Natural, Meg's first band, didn't last long. "At the time, everyone was wearing black and chains and being all Gothic; I deliberately came out onstage wearing a Doris Day dress, nylon stockings and secretary pumps, and drinking a glass of milk. Everyone was mortified; the guitarist and drummer quit the band the next day!" Utilizing experience gained during her stint

as the college cafe's sound engineer, Meg subsequently produced the first demo of school chums **Faith No More** on her four-track portastudio. After the breakup of her next project, **Teknofear**, Meg headed for London; she spent six months busking in the subway before forming **Crunch**, an all-girl rock band she now laughingly describes as "something like a grunge Spice Girls, except we had better songs and played our own instruments." Though **Crunch** had the distinction of becoming the first Western rock band to play in the Ukraine after the dissolution of the Soviet Republic, the group made little impression at home. "Our manager had this brilliant idea that we would never play live; we were just holed up in the recording studio the entire time. The good thing was that I learned a lot about engineering during that period."

Soon after **Crunch** disintegrated, Meg found herself flying to Wisconsin to audition for another group. "I got a call from some friends who managed a new band called **Garbage**. They said, 'There's this great band with Butch Vig; they're looking for someone to front the band, and you'd be perfect for it.' Mind you, this was a year before they found Shirley." Though she got on well with Vig and his cohorts, Meg quickly realized that she wouldn't be comfortable fronting their group. "Nothing against those guys, because I respect them enormously, but they wanted each inflection and syllable I sang to match up with their guide vocals, and it became quite obvious that I was coming from a different place entirely."

Happily, Meg soon found an outlet for her impressive vocal abilities in **Pigface**, the anarchic industrial project led by drummer Martin Atkins (**PIL**, **Killing Joke**, **Ministry**). "**Pigface** is the best band ever," Meg insists. "They're just totally spontaneous; I did four or five tours with them because I loved it so much. **Pigface** tours only happened about once every eighteen months, so the rest of the time I spent in my flat in London, working on demos and teaching myself audio engineering." With Atkins' encouragement, *Piece and Love* gradually began to take shape in Meg's living room. "The whole album was recorded on my computer," she says. "I used a sampler, a guitar, a bass, an analogue valve pre-amp, my Tannoy monitors, and my Pro-Mix One mixing desk. Martin took all the basic tracks that I recorded, and he chopped them and added his bits, like that really great bass sound on 'Heavy Scene.'"

Rightfully proud of her engineering skills, Meg has little patience for those who believe that women are inherently challenged when it comes to recording technology. "I'm trying not to go into the sexism thing," she says, "But let's be honest - I'm five-foot-two and I look like a little girl, so nobody ever takes me seriously at first. I'm not blaming anyone; I've seen myself on video before, talking about technical shit, and I think, 'Who does that little know-it-all think she is?' But I built my first radio from a little kit when I was ten; I used to always hang around my dad's workshop going, 'What's this do?' So technical things are not a problem for me. Martin's literally the only one who's let me be myself - I don't think any other record company would have let me release stuff I've done in my own living room. I don't think there's ever been anyone in the music business who's really given me a chance like this."

A diehard adherent of the do-it-yourself ethos, Meg believes that the rise of affordable home-recording technology and internet-based distribution systems may well signal an end to the days of big-budget, over-the-top productions. "I think there are going to be a lot of people who'll hear *Piece and Love* and go, 'Fuck! That little squirt did her own album?' It might not have the expensive sheen you'd get from the studios that cost a million pounds a day, but I'm a pretty good songwriter, and I think that definitely comes through. I like to think I've got fairly good taste - and that's something that's very rare, nowadays!"

Meg Lee Chin's debut album, *Piece and Love*, will be released on September 28, 1999 by Invisible Records.



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