

# These Boots Were Made For Walking...

**T**he Boots is the solo project of Matt Ward who is the artist on Bristol in England. Music career has begun at very young age, does most of musical instruments, the peculiar outlook on the world has evolved in

his long career. Which ties everything together rather nicely, really. For this is a summer 2003 extract from a magazine published by the Japanese label, Sunday Tuning, upon their releasing of The Boots' debut single, 'Yellow Shades'. And that act, together with two ST bands from the mother country - The Known and Nightteller - are about to play three West Country dates, together with a night apiece in Cardiff and London.

Both Japanese troupes are duos plying the kind of dreamy, multi-layered pop any kind of discerning listener would just love to float away on come the end of a bad day. Or, indeed, a good one. Gig attendance is, therefore, heartily recommended. The Boots, meanwhile, mix up trashy rock, piano-based laments and sped-up Velvet riffs, threaded together with a charming wonkiness. And all initially motivated by a desire to give former schoolmates the finger. "At 14 I was in the school band," says Ward, "but they chucked me out because I didn't have the right image. I think I was too geeky - Guns N' Roses were hot at the time, and they were looking for rock stars. I thought, 'I'll show them', bought a four-track, learnt drums and bass, as well as keyboards and guitar, and started writing."

**Role models are listed,** musicians that he doesn't "try to emulate, but kind of absorbs the essence of". Axl Rose isn't among them. "People like Wayne Coyne from The Flaming Lips, I love The Beatles like crazy, Ride, Blur. I don't think I could write a straightforward middle-of-the-road song - there's always got to be a spanner in the works, whether lyrically or musically. And I like humour being in there. I love The Flaming Lips because they're so playful - the lead singer is 45 years old, and he's making music that makes me feel like a teenager. That's what I want to do, and help people escape from the realities of life. But there are other times when I can be deadly romantic."

... primarily across Japan. Julian Owen tells the tale of how one band personifies the extraordinary links between Bristol and the Far East.

Sunday Tuning finest (clockwise): The Boots, The Known and Nightteller.



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Meanwhile, on the other side of the world... Four years back, Hiroki Ikedo, of The Known and Sunday Tuning, spotted a link to The Boots on the website of another of his Bristol favourites, Jesse Morningstar. Already bound for this fair city to study, he contacted his new-found liking and arranged to meet for coffee on arrival. "I asked whether he'd release some of my songs," says Ward. "And he said 'No, no, I think you're too big for us.' I said 'Don't worry about that...' He insisted on paying for my demos, and then gave me a whole range of stuff he'd accept nothing for. We chatted about what the Japanese music scene was like, and I asked 'Why do you like Bristol music?'. He came up with so many bands I couldn't believe it, ones that just don't get talked about anymore, crucial bands in the 70s and 80s."

Today, emailing from Kyoto, Ikedo insists he has far too many favourites to list. He does, though, mention the likes of The Bloody Marys, The Brilliant Corners and Saturnines. More recently, he's been enjoying Aspects and Numbskullz, Minotaur Shock, The Liftmen, Kid Carpet ("well known in Japan"), The Boots, of course ("I'm surprised at his great ideas usually") and, especially, Stoloff & Hopkinson's 'Document Enclosed'. "One of my best ten records that I've listened ever. The Known must be influenced by them very much. Alex [Stoloff] is a perfect man who has gentle heart and creative skills."

The relationship was cemented with a tour of Japan by Ward, Stoloff and Greg Edwards. Though The Boots had been largely a bedroom operation, Ward was able to trial his live show at the first Venn fest. An artist called Matt Wand had pulled out and, brilliantly, someone was needed to fit the projected backdrop at The Cube. Armed with Casio backing tracks, a guitar, and inspiration from Kid Carpet, he pulled it off. "It was pretty ropy, but I

put a lot of passion into it to compensate for missing people, got by, and that really fired me up for more solo gigs."

And so to an extraordinary six dates of wonderment, Ward recalls: "People approached afterwards saying 'I'm a fan of The Boots, can you sign this record?'. One gig in particular went completely off the scale. It was in an industrial town in the middle of nowhere called Okayama, and I think they'd been looking forward to seeing the Western bands. It was the most amazing thing. At times they were jumping onstage, trying to hug me and shake my hand as I was playing. It was just awesome."

Today, Ward wants The Boots to be more of a collaborative venture, and gigs as a three-piece. Following the imminent live dates, the album. And, initially, a Japanese release. "I'm going to dip my toe into the shallow end of a big pool and use it as a testing ground to gauge the response. I see Japan as a far-away land where I can experiment. It's less pressured, and will hopefully be the start of building a name."

**THE SUNDAY TUNING TOUR** COMES TO BRISTOL'S JOE PUBLIC'S ON WED 26, BATH'S PORTER CELLAR BAR ON FRI 28, AND BRISTOL'S MR WOLF'S ON SUN 30 JULY. TURN TO THE MUSIC LISTINGS PFI, OR GO VISIT [WWW.MYSPACE.COM/THEBOOTS](http://WWW.MYSPACE.COM/THEBOOTS) OR [WWW.MYSPACE.COM/SUNDAYTUNING](http://WWW.MYSPACE.COM/SUNDAYTUNING)



## Big In Japan

● Matt Ward's Kyotan accord (as detailed in the main feature) is not the only example of Bristol-Japanese relations bearing rich fruit round these parts: a micro-festival featuring psych-prog behemoths - not to mention regular West Country patrons - Acid Mothers Temple and Mono is planned for later this year at The Croft. However, just like driving in Tokyo, what may appear to be one-way traffic is anything but. Bristol bands to match domestic popularity with success in the Japanese market include Mark Stewart's Pop Group, much of whose back catalogue (including all-hailed post-punk touchstone 'Y') is only available on ultra-expensive import from Asia's most westernised country Massive Attack, meanwhile, fly out after their Westonbirt Arboretum gig at the end of this month to play at the stratosphere-sized Summer Sonic Festival in Tokyo and Osaka. Land Of The 'Risingson', anyone? (No thanks - Abstruse Music Puns Ed.) More interesting is the fact that Bristol's ever-fertile musical underbelly commonly finds cult status on Japanese soil too. Tokyo-based record shop/label Angel's Egg has developed a rapacious thirst to disseminate all things Brizzle, and regularly consorts with familiar leftfield denizens such as Jesse Morningstar and ex-Oil

Experts man Alex Stoloff. "I met the couple who run the shop when they were honeymooning in Bristol about seven years ago," recalls Stoloff. "They heard some of the Stoloff & Hopkinson stuff [a collaboration with a pre-computer Dave Hopkinson] and decided they wanted to release it. But they were in touch with people like Jesse and Chris Powell - the 'old guard' of Bristol underground music, I guess - way before that."

Stoloff toured Japan with his solo project - conceived over here on a semi-serious whim, he insists - last year. "There's a big difference in the way Japanese audiences react. They are a lot more respectful to the music, and really receptive to interaction. There seems to be this natural bond between performer and crowd that you don't really get in the UK."

Others in Venue territory to have experienced this communion are masterful subterranean jazz-folkers Crescent (whose only tour of living memory was around Japan in spring 2004) and Gravenhurst, who played the Asagiri Jam Festival last year. Meanwhile, another Tokyo label, Duotone Records, regularly releases exclusive output from Knowledge Of Bugs, François and others. For Japan, citadel of subculture, it seems lo-fi Bristol music is manna from heaven. (John Stevens)

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