

## HEAP IT ON

Caribou's Dan Snaith creates sunny '60s pop with lots of layers and "kids' toys"

Judging by his latest effort, Dan Snaith presumably works in a recording studio made entirely of glass, what with the amount of sunlight that shines through in his music. As Caribou, Snaith began working on material in early 2006 for his finest album yet, an expertly arranged "sunshine pop" and electronic opus called *Andorra* (Merge, 2007).

Snaith's album under the Manitoba moniker, *Up in Flames* (Domino, 2003), cleared a well-lit path to crates of worn Beach Boys LPs, as did (to a lesser extent) the electronic and shoegaze qualities of the 2001 *Start Breaking My Heart* (Leaf). And on his first foray as Caribou, *Milk of Human Kindness* (Domino, 2005), the line blurring Snaith's machine and the organic elements of *Flames* grew even more difficult

to discern. That line has almost vanished in *Andorra's* wealth of summery, late-'60s pop bliss. The effort's vocal harmonies are multiplied four times over, while tape loops and twinkling, jangly guitar licks trickle in overtop the album's many drum tracks.

"In the past, I'd always built tracks out of loops that I'd either sampled off records or played myself," Snaith says. "This time, I really 'wrote' the songs in a much more traditional sense. I was fascinated by writing music that developed very melodically and harmonically. I found that a lot of the time, the easiest way for me to write melodies is to sing them overtop of me playing bass. It leaves a lot of space where I can fill in the harmonic structure in my head and add it later."

*Andorra's* space indulgence is nowhere more apparent than it is on "Sandy." Freeway and Jay-Z's "Big Spender" aside, Snaith's "Sandy" nicks summer-jam status, defying trunk-rattling convention with drum-circle rhythms and wandering orchestral surges. Like a

Grass Roots or Mamas and The Papas single, "Sandy's" chorus is bare at first; the fleshy verse elements drop out so that all its jubillance is in Snaith's vocals alone. Then the chorus reappears with bright backing flourishes—sampled harp, live brass and colorful Mellotron-esque swirls from a Yamaha PSS-480 keyboard tweaked with flanger and delay.


"The sonics and tape-loop sounds are from a Boss Dr. Sample SP-303, which I used for a lot of things," Snaith explains of "Sandy." He also fiddled with the SP-303 for an onslaught of echo effects on "After Hours," a psychedelic Summer of Love send-up that's loaded with loops from a flute bought in Beijing, as well as a guitar run into a wah pedal and then to the sampler. The coda of dense vocal harmonies on "After Hours" is Snaith's; he's the only vocalist on *Andorra* outside of "She's the One," which features Jeremy Greenspan of Junior Boys.

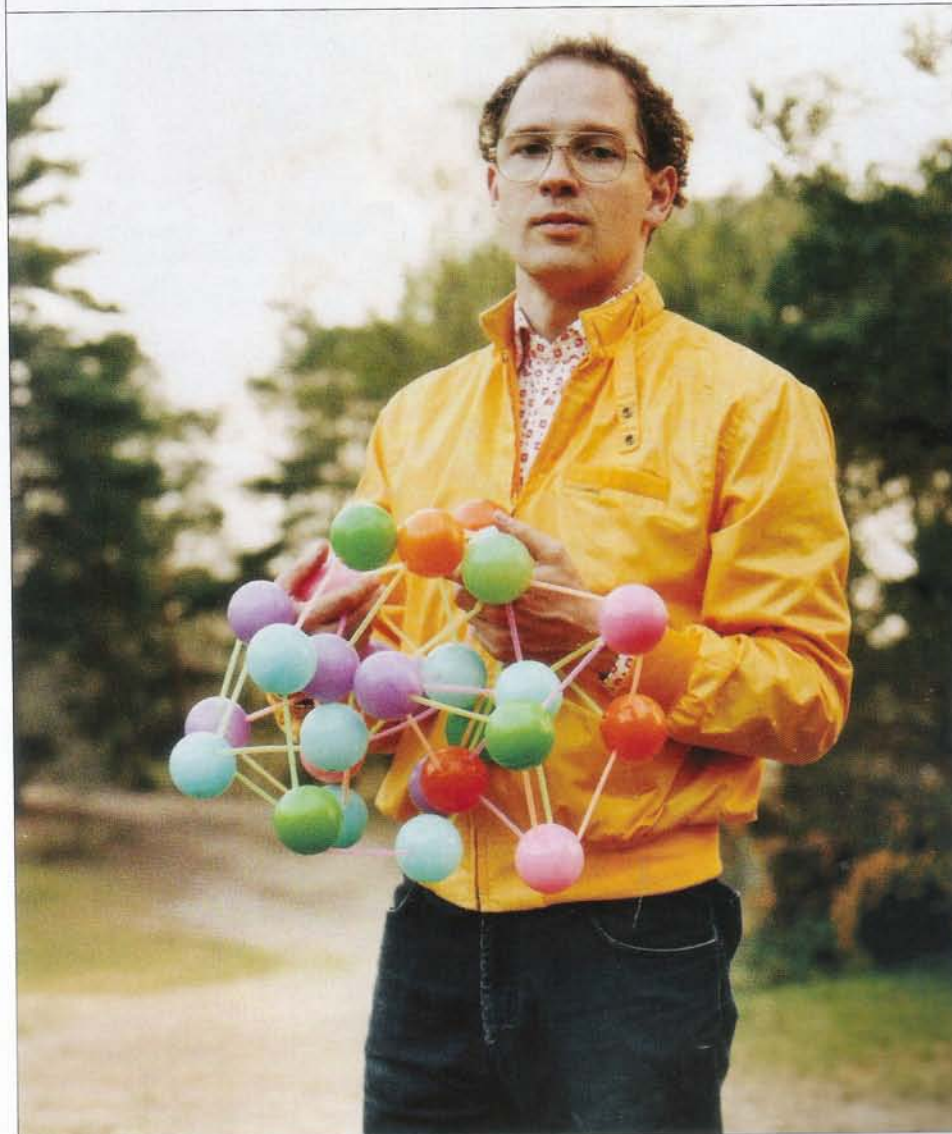
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voice, and that makes the vocals sound richer and thicker," Snaith says. "There's also a lot of doing takes in pairs and then panning them either hard-left and -right or somewhere intermediate. I just mess around, EQing and putting reverbs on the vocal takes so that you get a nice blend and mixture of voices, even though it's all my singing in those instances."

Although he added an Oktava condenser mic to the mix, Snaith's equipment is a raggedy bunch. The PSS-480 keyboard ("It's a kid's keyboard, really, but it's one of the things I use most often," he says) doesn't quite fetch \$40 on eBay these days. He does all his sequencing on the first version of Sony Acid because he declined to update it, using what he calls "a shitty Sound Blaster soundcard and speakers that had a rip in the right tweeter." And he regularly implements a late-1970s synth called the Jen SX-1000: "Again, I think it's pretty much designed as a kid's toy. It was the first synthesizer to be sold at Woolworths, which is a family department store in the UK." But *Andorra's* beauty is definitely in its arrangements and sun-washed songwriting, not in the equipment that amplifies it.

"There are some sounds that are very characteristic of a certain piece of equipment, but the musical world is enormous," Snaith explains. "With the most basic gear, you can do almost anything if you're inventive and you put your mind to it." 



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