

# Holy Merde?

## Nous Non Plus

words by Susan Michals, photo by Robert Todd Williamson





**W**hen your video's been banned by YouTube, does that mean you've truly arrived? That's exactly what happened to faux French band Nous Non Plus a couple of years back. Their song "One Night In Paris" showcases lead singer Jean-Luc Retard apathetically screwing a woman who looks like Paris Hilton while smoking and singing the raison d'être of the vapid hotel heiress. The band was informed -- by automated message -- that their homage to the perennial Kitson queen was no longer welcome, having been flagged obviously by members of Paris' fan club for inappropriate content. "It was complete and utter bullshit," stammers Retard in a mixture of broken faux French and Echo Parkian dialect. "It was not even 'er I was banging."

Made up mostly of non-French people, the band met in New York back in the très chic '90's. "We played our favorite songs by the beeg ones, pour le '60's - Gainsbourg, Bardot, Dutronc - tu comprend? Then we started to get kind of good, and said 'no more imitation'. We decide to be le real fake French band." They moved quickly from doing covers of these pop icons into creating their own quasi-faux sound, thus becoming Nous Non Plus. Much like the aforementioned retro French icons, (remember Plastic Bertrand?) NNP chose to go with alter egos, mostly to protect their own privacy from being stalked online by overzealous fans. "Bertrand? That was not his real name...I don't think - who would name their babee 'plastique'? These singers - their sensibilities were very funny; filled with double entendres and sex. Ooh la la - we love sex! So we chose the sexy names - they role off ze tongue like Nutella."

Collectively they are: Lead singer Céline Dijon, Jean-Luc, chanteuse Bonnie Day, guitarist Cal d'Homage, percussionist Professeur Harry Covert, Mars Chevrolet on keyboards, and trumpet genius François Hardonne. Together, just like a ripe, rich Brie, Nous Non Plus is oozing with the delectable sounds of all things French.

In real life, Jean-Luc Retard is writer/lyricist Dan Crane. He is also Bjorn Turoque, air guitarist extraordinaire recently seen in the now cult documentary, *Air Guitar Nation*. Whether using invisible instruments or the real thing, Crane feels their songs transcend language barriers and share the commonality all musicians

crave - groovy tunes. "As a songwriter, it's very liberating writing songs in English that become completely different in another language. Things that we would never say in our own language - you put them in French and they sound beautiful and enigmatic." It is really only Céline (aka Verena Wiesendanger) who speaks French. The band is currently in the studio working on their forthcoming album, due sometime this fall. Recently Crane/Retard wrote a melody where at the end of the chorus the band would go "Clap Clap", which was to be the original title of the song. "Céline thought that sounded stupid, and instead called it "Clack Clack" which in French means snap snap, or a slap in the face." From there, Dijon went off and wrote the lyrics for the song en français. "So we're doing the recording, and she finishes singing the song and I asked her what the song was now actually about. She said it's about this freak who can't stop snapping his fingers. Since everyone in his town makes fun of him, he decides to chop off his hands. It's a freaky topic, but in French, it sounds beautiful."

The band has done a bit of touring as of late, ending up in locations straight out of *Spinal Tap*. Recently their song "Lawnmower Man" - an ode to that wondrous facet of gardening - was picked up for a Mobitel commercial...in Slovenia. "We were performing our last gig in the capital, Ljubljana. One of our encore songs is "99 Luft Balloons" because Céline speaks German too. [This time around] she said we shouldn't play this; it's in German and these people were really young, and they won't get it. We got through the first couple of chords and everyone just went crazy - that's when we really won them over. Our shows are really fun; people dance, and have a great time and that's much more satisfying to look out into the audience and see them getting into it, then when they're just staring at our shoes." The band plans to go back to Slovenia later this year, after the album is finished. In the meantime, they'll be playing stateside in numerous locations.

And by the way - in case you're wondering, Nous Non Plus translates as We Neither or Us No More. We say: Tout va bien! (So far, so good). **h**

For more on NNP, go to [www.nousnonplus.com](http://www.nousnonplus.com)

Their next show is June 20th at Bordello, downtown Los Angeles.