

THE CHATS

‘GET FUCKED’ ALBUM BIOGRAPHY

Hands down the world’s greatest post-millennial punk-rock group, The Chats have skipped past the unimaginable banana skin of COVID-19 to emerge tougher, faster, funnier, more riotous – even better for 2022!

The trio, originally formed in Australia’s self-explanatory resort Sunshine Coast, are a once-in-a-generation band who reconnect popular music with its roots in ultra-raw rock ‘n’ roll, inject their own fresh perspective, and have duly made an instantaneous connection with their youthful peers right across the globe.

Most people know them for their 2017 breakthrough banger, ‘Smoko’, but that has proved to be just the party-starter, merely the entrée to a high-volume, full-throttle world where intoxication, excitement and laughter rule supreme – the kind of kinetic thrills which have all but drained out of contemporary pop/rock.

As the 2020’s dawned, The Chats were building enviable momentum right across Europe, North America and their homeland, ready for the arrival of their full-length debut, ‘High Risk Behaviour’. Replete with further rowdy classics including ‘Pub Feed’ and ‘Identity Theft’, the album dropped just as the pandemic struck, and The Chats have duly been through the same frustrating two years of broken dreams and shredded itineraries as every other combo.

Undeterred and now stocked to overflowing with frustration and fury, they strike back with a second long-player called ‘GET FUCKED’ – an incendiary, hyper-adrenalized blitz from punk heaven, showcasing a rockin’ new guitarist, and an electrifying all-killer-no-filler 13 tracks which perfectly capture the band’s explosive energy. It is, quite simply, another laugh-out-loud, pogo-through-the-floorboards stroke of motherfucking genius.

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Recently relocated from ‘Sunny Coast’ to equally scorchio Brisbane, Eamon Sandwith, the unforgettable orange-mullet-framed face of that ‘Smoko’ video, has a remarkably positive – indeed, ‘sunny’ – outlook on the career upheavals that ensued from COVID’s lockdown nightmare.

“We were lucky enough that ‘High Risk Behaviour’ came out at the start of that whole first wave back in March ’20, so we had something to ride it out on,” he says with a not-arsed shrug. “I mean, we didn’t get to tour it, which was a bit of a bummer, but we weren’t too worried about, like, ‘Oh, what are we going to do?’ It was actually great to have that year or so to step back and be like, ‘Alright, what’s our next move?’ Otherwise, who knows, we could’ve just had a bloody Oasis moment and self-destructed!”

There was one minor wobble with the unforeseen departure of founding guitarist ‘Pricey’, but they quickly replaced him with a buddy of theirs called Josh Hardy.

“The new bloke, Josh – he fucking rips, man! He’s been a good friend of ours for years. His band The Unknowns were the first band around on the Sunny Coast that were our age – before we’d even formed The Chats, like maybe seven years ago, when we were like 15. They would play these little pub gigs, and we would go along, and we became friends through that. In the early days, they were a full-on rockabilly band, and Josh had the quiff and everything. He’d comb his hair back and stuff, and we just thought he was the fucking coolest guy ever.

“He already had that background in DIY music, and he’s quite an accomplished songwriter himself, so after Pricey left, me and Matt [Boggis, drummer] had a conversation, like, ‘If we can’t get Josh, we might just not carry on’. Luckily, he was willing to join, and we got right into it, writing songs and stuff. We were like, this is unreal – so good!”

The freshly-minted line-up broke in their new recruit via a bunch of shows in Oz between lockdowns, and duly cut ‘GET FUCKED’.

"We've been pretty lucky here in Queensland," says Eamon. "In the first wave, we were locked up for two months. Our state premier here, she was pretty good at keeping everyone safe, but without too many long lockdowns, whereas Melbourne, down south, had the longest lockdown in the world. So we were able to hang out and jam and stuff. We got to play a few shows here and there, which was great for Josh to settle into the band, rather than just going straight in to record."

Sometime in '21, Sandwith, Boggis and Hardy decamped to a mate's place for a songwriting spree. "Our friend Glen has got a bar in Southport called Vinny's Dive Bar. It's about an hour and a half south of us on the Gold Coast, and still in Queensland. We wanted to get away from Brisbane, and were even considering finding an Air B&B someplace, where we could set up a drum kit and some amps and just hang out a bit and write songs for a few days."

"But we asked Glen because he's already got a drum kit and some amps at his venue. We were like, 'Is it cool if we just come in during the day before you open, and we can just hang out and practice and whatever?' He was like, 'Yeah sweet, guys, no worries.' So we went down, and – I don't know how to put this – Southport it's probably a lower socio-economic kind of area. Okay, it's a total fucking shit hole!"

The mood of street deprivation directly inspired a couple of songs, including 'Southport Superman', about a junkie they saw blazing along the street for his fix at a pace fit to break the land speed record, and 'Paid Late', where Eamon imagines a backstory that might explain "an ATM we saw there that'd had the absolute shit beaten out of it."

In that whole process, reckons Eamon, The Chats "got tighter and faster, compared with the early stuff when we were 16 or whatever, which is quite slow. Put it this way, we're certainly not bringing out any acoustic guitars or anything".

Once they'd worked up a rollicking batch of new tunes, they had actually planned to record again in Geelong, near Melbourne, with Billy Gardner, who produced 'High Risk Behaviour', but due to pandemic border closures, they nailed it instead in six days at Brisbane's Hunting Ground facility – "a twenty-minute walk from my house" – with Cody McWaters, who'd worked on a single for Eamon's other band, Headlice.

"They weren't like hardcore working days," Eamon reveals, "we would start at 11 and finish at 4, and in the middle of that we'd go to the pub for lunch for two hours, and have a few beers. Then we'd go, 'Oh shit, we better go back and do some recording!' Our work etiquette wasn't great. If we'd only booked two days, we probably would've done it in that, but because we had a week, we were like, 'Let's treat it like a holiday!'"

Consequently, 'GET FUCKED', while tackling umpteen eminently relatable beefs ranging from surfer-dude racism to the usual dire impecuniness, feels like a classic high-velocity punk-rock party album like they just don't make 'em anymore – think early Ramones, think MDC's debut, think invite your mates over and rock hard all weekend...

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'Smoko' was just the gateway drug for a life of Chats dependence. Rather like The White Stripes' 'Seven Nation Army', it started routinely enough, as the lead track on The Chats' second EP, 'Get This In Ya!!', but since October '17, when singer/bassist Eamon posted an accompanying video – which cost them just \$5, for the sauced-up hotdog snarfed on camera – it's accrued a staggering 16 million YouTube views and counting, as well as enthusiastic props from Iggy Pop, Josh Homme and Dave Grohl, all of whom The Chats have since supported.

All musicians slave away for a lifetime trying to write a song a fraction as connective, but for anyone who's delved deeper, maybe even ventured out to a Chats show, the brilliant 'Smoko' – about the frustrations caused by the worker's right to cigarette breaks, which is actually ring-fenced in their native Australia's union law – was merely an introduction to Eamon Sandwith's brilliant and ever-lurid way with song.

Steeped in punk culture, but also possessed of an innate instinct for what's rockin' which no amount of background reading in Sniffin' Glue or Maximum Rock & Roll can teach you, Eamon writes from the hip about his immediate environment. His repertoire thus far includes at least three entries about Queensland's unforgiving climate ('Stinker', 'Temperature', 'Heatstroke'), two about zero-budget food options ('Pub Feed', 'Dine N' Dash') and one where a kid buying drugs on the internet gets caught wanking at his keyboard, "like the dude in *Black Mirror" ('Identity Theft').

This time, says the man himself, "I made an effort not to write about COVID itself, because you never know how long it's going to go on for. I don't want our songs to be immediately dated. There's so much discourse about it online, everybody's got something to say, it's almost better just having nothing to say."

Instead, there are quintessentially Sandwithian observations on the ever-rising cost of a packet of cigarettes: 'The Price Of Smokes' actually dates back to 'Get This In Ya!!' days (hence its slightly less frenzied tempo), when Eamon actually worked on a supermarket tobacco counter, and fielded innumerable complaints daily from disgruntled cig addicts. 'Ticket Inspector', meanwhile, revisits the theme of 2017's 'Bus Money', unfurling a mini-drama around the day a penniless Eamon, perhaps a little mystifyingly, bought himself an under-14's train ticket ("it was cheaper," he reasons) and duly got busted for it.

In the tradition of grotesque characters like the reactionary club doorman from 'Keep The Grubs Out', 'GET FUCKED' opens with '6L GTR', a swingeing takedown of a speed-crazed status-symbol driver – a critique piqued when Eamon spotted the titular licence plate in an airport carpark. "I don't even know if the car itself was actually a six-litre GTR or anything," he chuckles. "To be honest with you, I don't even know what a car like that would look like! I can't drive! That was the thing, we were just trying to get into this dude's head. We were like, 'When he's fangin' it in his car, what's in his head? What does he do?' It was a fun exercise."

After the immortal chorus of "I need a big flash fancy car, just need a six-litre GTR", Sandwith instinctively broke into a quote from David Lee Roth's purring dropdown rap from Van Halen's 'Panama' – most apposite! – but unfortunately Roth never replied to their clearance request so they had to axe it.

Elsewhere, 'Emperor Of The Beach' takes an on-the-nose swipe at Australia's similarly pumped-up surfer culture, where territorial pride readily spills over into vicious racism. Eamon says the track was inspired by the vibe in Sunshine Coast, "which is very 'locals only'. There's these macho dudes, they've always got the shirts off, like, 'this is my beach, these are my waves'", but he also references the Bra Boys, a surf gang in Sydney in the 1990's, who "would beat up immigrants, because the beach was only for white people."

Other tracks, like 'Struck By Lightning', came about in a more musical way: for that one, Sandwith was at the drumkit, battering out a beat, jammed out the words "struck by lightning" to it off the top of his head, then wrote the rest of the lyrics around that idea. 'Panic Attack' happened in a similar way, the phrase being at the forefront of Eamon's mind as he's had a couple of them in an occasionally pressurized, hungover state.

But, as per title, GET FUCKED is chiefly an album about carefree kicks, and having a laugh. Take 'I've Been Drunk In Every Pub In Brisbane', for instance, which is an entirely unironic celebration of Eamon's first year or two in his new home city. "Brisbane is quite a bit hotter than the rest of the country," he says, "so it's one of those places where it's more acceptable to start drinking earlier. I reckon there would be 900 or so pubs that you would have to hit, and I have actually been to a good chunk of them, but if you were go to all of them, it would be hard to even remember which ones you'd been to, and which ones you hadn't, especially if you'd got fucking pissed."

The album concludes with two compositions from rookie Chat, Josh Hardy, namely the loping rockabilly of Getting Better, and high-velocity hidden track Piss Rash, which, brilliantly, documents an amigo's acquisition of "a rash on his liver from drinking too much. Our mate's cool about it, though, he was telling us over a beer."

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The more you listen to it, the more you realise that there was only one plausible title for this second Chats album. Expressing both its broadsides against bigotry and its heedless hedonism, 'GET FUCKED' was christened, Eamon reveals, when "we were just sitting around and discussing titles, and I kind of said it half jokingly, and Matt was like, 'That is the best title I've ever heard!' I was like, 'It's a bit silly, isn't it?' but eventually it just grew on us over time. There's a lot of boardroom meetings, clipboards and manila folders, all about this stuff. Spreadsheets, and that.

"We just thought how funny would it be, if you were a kid seeing it on the album cover. I remember going to K-Mart and seeing the Green Day 'Dookie' CD, and being like, 'Aw man, this is the craziest album cover I've ever seen!' Imagine being a kid and just seeing a CD that says, 'Get Fucked'!"

True to The Chats' DIY roots, 'GET FUCKED' will be self-released in late summer, by which time they will have caught up with much of the unfinished business, touring wise, which had accumulated in unfulfilled appointments from the 'High Risk Behaviour' campaign. Now with two full albums' worth of all-new road-ready hyper-melodic punk-rock-'n'-roll bangers up their sleeve, these dates whipped up all the pogo-party euphoria necessary to kill off COVID-19 for keeps.

After all the incarceration and boredom, The Chats are in peak match fitness to deliver the excitement we all crave for the months ahead.

"I don't know if it's just the passing of trends or whatever, but I don't see or hear heaps of that energy, or that fun loving music any more around the place. I feel like people need to not take themselves and their art so seriously, and just kind of have fun with it. Maybe that's really shallow of me, but that's just the way I feel."

For that attitude alone, Eamon and the boys deserve a standing ovation. For 'GET FUCKED', we're talking knighthoods all round...

Andrew Perry
London, April 2022

'Get Fucked' track-listing:

01. 6 LTR GTR
02. Struck By Lightning
03. Boggo Road
04. Southport Superman
05. Panic Attack
06. Ticket Inspector
07. The Price of Smokes
08. Dead on Site
09. Paid Late
10. I've Been Drunk In Every Pub In Brisbane
11. Out On The Street
12. Emperor of the Beach
13. Getting Better

The Chats are:

Eamon Sandwith – bass/vocals
Josh Hardy – guitar
Matthew Boggis - drums

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