

Music Review

Title: *Nutters with Attitude*

Artist: Various, for Mad Pride

Produced: 2001

Cost: £4.50 UK & EU (incl. Postage)/£5 international plus 30% for airmail

<http://www.activedistribution.org/index.php>

or ACTIVE DISTRIBUTION, BM ACTIVE, LONDON, WC1N 3XX, UK

Reviewer: Lizzie Walker, postgraduate student, Centre for Disability Studies, Leeds University

The compilation *Nutters with Attitude* was a charity CD for Mad Pride, “A pressure group committed to improving the civil liberties and social standing of psychiatric patients” (liner notes). While embracing Swain and French’s “affirmative model”, Mad Pride remains contentious, recently criticised for “Misplaced Pride” (Allen, 2006). The unifying theme of the CD is one of challenging conventional boundaries, both social and musical: “Contrasting styles and genres will clash and blend, on stage and from the audience, to cut through the alienated cultural constraints imposed by ‘sanity’” (Mad Pride, 2002).

While a variety of musical genres including punk, country and folk, are present here, the ethos of punk (demonstrated by the challenging of convention; creative expression driven by the marginalised; the immediacy of the delivery and the music stripped down to bare elements) pervades most tracks and the artwork. Countering the assertion that disability culture can only be produced by disabled people, an inclusive approach has been taken here: “Though not all of these musicians are mad, most of them are. In any case ... they are all people who [*sic*] we respect.” (liner notes). The CD was aimed at a wide audience, but found more success with users/survivors of psychiatric services. It would also be accessible to other disabled thinkers and subversives. The professional quality makes it an exciting and thought-provoking CD for a modest price.

Several themes emerge from the lyrics, including a focus on relationships. Mark Perry’s Alternative T.V. performs “Communication Failure” but he also joins The Long Decline, here with “Beat it Boys (You’re Really Jerks),” a song juxtaposing the complexity of socialising with the accessibility of masturbation. The Arlenes mix love and psychiatry in “Dr Love.” The Fish Brothers’ “I Wonder (What You Look Like With No Clothes On),” while musically conventional, is lyrically a pertinent love song for the cultural “other”:

“Well you’ve seen me down the pub when I am plastered,
And you can smell that I’m not often in the bath.
And you’ve seen it when they’ve called me a fat bastard.
And if you saw me nude would you just laugh?”

The “oppositional habitus” (Crossley, 1999) of service users appears in the adversarial stance of several tracks. The CD starts with the Skinny Millionaires’ “Jack Shit,” an impassioned rejection of medical epistemology’s ‘professional decider/knowers’, “cos you don’t know - Jack Shit.” The Ceramic Hobs’ “Make Mine a Large One,” later a Mad Pride video, “accused local Freemasons ... of murdering a young boy in a real case where a decapitated torso was found in a bin” (Sienko, 2004). (A man labelled with schizophrenia was convicted of this crime – an easy target for a quick conviction?)

The counter-cultural approach embodies madness as cultural “other,” taking on “stranger” identity. Alienation can be viewed in several tracks, including the wistful tones of Eddie Murray’s “I Wish I Was Back Home in Derry.” The Astronauts describe an altered state in “Robot Ways,” and explore suicide as a transformative process. Gertrude’s “Getting and Spending” encapsulates consumerism, echoing Bauman’s view of outsiders as “flawed consumers.”

The CD provides for a kind of snapshot of our culture. Mad culture suffers from a lack of continuity, as the tragic loss of Pete Shaughnessy, Mad Pride co-founder, demonstrated; people get involved, work too hard and get ill or die. Due to this, our cultural artifacts are rare and especially precious.

References

- Allen, C. (2006). Misplaced pride. *The Guardian*, 09/27/2006. Retrieved May 26, 2007, from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/story/0,,1881476,00.html>
- Bauman, Z. (1998). *Work, consumerism and the new poor*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Crossley, N. (1999). Fish, field, habitus and madness: the first wave mental health users movement in Great Britain. *British Journal of Sociology*, 50(1), 647–670.
- Dellar, R., Lesley, E., Watson, B., & Curtis, T. (2000). *Mad Pride: A celebration of mad culture*. London: Spare Change Books.
- Goffman, E. (1961). *Asylums: Essays on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates*. New York: Doubleday.
- Mad Pride. (2002, November). *MAD PRIDE AT THE BULL AND GATE: DOWN WITH THE MENTAL HEALTH BILL!* Retrieved May 26, 2007 from, www.zyra.org.uk/madprid1.htm
- Sienko, C. (2004). Ceramic hobs: President Massey is home safe and well [electronic version]. *Blastitude #17*, November 2004.
- Swain, J., & French, S. (2000). Towards an affirmative model of disability. *Disability and Society*, 15(7), 569–582.