

01. Piranha
02. Tora Tora Tora
03. Pixies
04. Peekaboo
05. Nuts & Bolts
06. Hideaway Tokyo
07. Grab Your Nets
08. Solar Energy
09. Gypsy
10. Wandering Eye

If you enter a certain house in Boston and walk down to the basement, you will come upon reels and reels of magnetic tape, a slew of tape decks, a grab bag of microphones, compressors, samplers, keyboards, a theremin, countless pedals, and a minimum of fifty different guitars. You will also find Holden Lewis, Jeremy Mendicino, and Bobby Landry – which is to say, you will find Pretty & Nice in their lair.

It isn't easy to have a name that contains descriptors. Nouns are simple, almost too easy, as they imply nothing outside of an entity. When adjectives are involved, an ambiguity remains..... These are concerns that likely did not weigh heavily on Lewis' mind when he started the band in 2004 in Burlington, VT. From there, he crossed paths with Mendicino, who recorded Pretty & Nice's first record, *Pink & Blue*. After a stint of touring in the next year, Lewis and Mendicino decided to move to a more metropolitan New England hub called Boston, Massachusetts. Once they had set up camp, they recruited Landry to sit dutifully behind (and sometimes stand dutifully atop) the drums.

Pink & Blue, an album both tidy and disjointed, full of quick riffs and falsetto, gave way to *Blue & Blue*, the unstoppable remix EP. Then, this past spring, they returned to their basement studio to record their most cohesive effort to date, *Get Young*. With sharper teeth and armed with their arsenal of petulant pop pills, they emerged months later to reveal 10 tracks – each one mysteriously bursting in the mouth and opening the floodlights on your investigation, not unlike the sensations brought on biting into a York Peppermint Patty or the worm of a tequila bottle. One might feel hasty enough to swallow these things whole, but watch out! These are jagged pills that are worth savoring, and might get stuck if swallowed in a gluttonous lust.

"Piranha," for one, is a ravenous number that recalls the blistered pop audacity of early XTC, relentlessly tickling your feet like an unstoppable mechanical licking dog. "Tora Tora Tora" has the last laugh in pop, jerking it's listener around by the neck while they cackle hysterically; like Devo at 11 on a runaway pop train. This is the giddy nature of most of the album – imagine if Elvis Costello was genetically spliced with an Andy Kaufman type of prankster... Perhaps Giddy & Nice might seem like a better name for this group, but, you haven't seen them in bathing suits.

And just when you think you have your head wrapped around this record, they throw you a curve ball like "Solar Energy." Equally irreverent in its ambitions and unpredictable in its rewards, the song braves its electronic drum sound to reveal an emotional interior which passes by in a flash. That's just their style – a band with hooks too clever to hang, and a future too bright for its own tan. Just remember to take your time with this. If you're looking for a match, gluttony will get you nowhere fast with one who is pretty and nice.

As relentless as it is irreverent, *Get Young* is a one-two punch, a collection of brash anthems without an aural snag to be found. Listen in and wait as the pop walls begin to crumble.....

Tazer rock

The rapid rise of Pretty & Nice

⌚ On a recent Wednesday night, in a house tucked away on a side street where Lower Allston gives way to Brighton, a group of kids are listening to Neil Diamond's *Moods* and assembling chicken tacos in a kitchen tidy enough to make Martha Stewart blush. Oh, and when these four chefs aren't cooking up tacos, they're playing in the loudest, most aggressive band signed to the new Sub Pop imprint Hardly Art. Indeed, they're just taking a break from recording an album in the basement.

There's a lot about Pretty & Nice that's surprising. The band have stormed not only onto the local scene but also into national indie-dom's consciousness, getting nods from high-profile Web rags like Pitchfork and Paper Thin Walls. They've played a small handful of local shows since singers/guitarists Holden Lewis and Jeremy Mendicino moved to Boston from Burlington, Vermont, last May (they found bassist Andy Contois and drummer Bobby Landry through the Internet within a week of arriving in town), but they're already gearing up for their third national tour, which kicks off upstairs at the Middle East March 5. (It was their first tour, last summer, less than two months after the current incarnation came together, that—through a serendipitous chain of events involving a show in Dayton and members of the defunct band Brainiac and their

offshoot, Enon—led to the Hardly Art deal.)

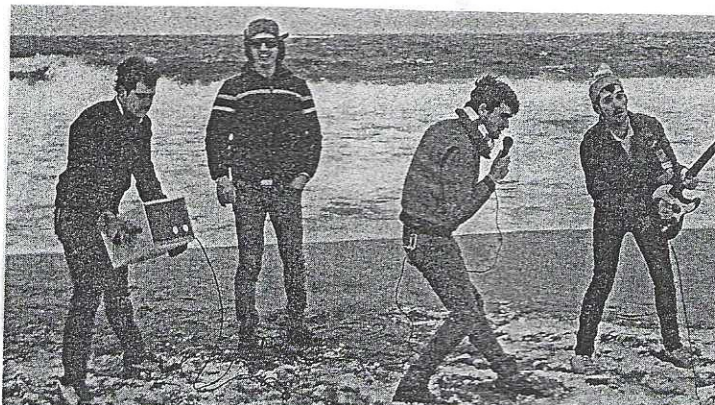
Then there's the band's sound: spiny guitars, early-'80s-British-new-wave melodies (think Elvis Costello, the English Beat, Squeeze), spry punk-rock rhythms going head to head with fizzing analog synths and drum loops. Someone dubbed it "tazer rock," a tag the band seem to dig. "We normally describe ourselves in the simple sense as a pop band, because we're writing pop songs," says

Lewis. "We're just treating them differently."

The Pretty & Nice name dates back to 2004, when Lewis started writing music at home in Vermont between semesters at BU. He was playing with a rotating cast of musicians when he met Mendicino. "I saw a picture on the Internet of a tape machine, and Jeremy was mixing next to it. I was like, 'Oh, he's recording to tape. I oughtta send him an e-mail because we should do that.'"

Mendicino engineered, produced, and played on what became P&N's debut, *Pink & Blue*, which was followed by a "gay dance remix album" called *Blue & Blue*, a collection of commissioned remixes of four P&B songs plus two new tunes. It soon became obvious that Lewis and Mendicino were more serious about playing music than the rest of the band, and that it was time to get out of the "limiting" confines of Burlington.

They found a big place in Brighton, and



HARDLY ART Pretty & Nice are the first local band to be signed to the new Sub Pop imprint.

CELLARS BY STARLIGHT

BY WILL SPITZ

Mendicino—who grew up in a "hippy hippie house," the son of a "playwright and audio enthusiast" and a singer who once put out a children's liturgical album on Epic—turned the basement into a bona fide studio, replete with all manner of recording equipment, amps, and keyboards ranging from a Realistic "Rap-Master" to a vintage Yamaha DX7. They proudly note that the basement is home to 44 guitars.

Since December, they've been holed up working on their Hardly Art debut, which they plan on finishing by June and releasing by early fall. They're keeping other specifics close to the vest, declining to reveal the working title or any of the subject matter. They do offer to play the basic tracks of one song, "Piranha," but only after I agree to turn off my digital recorder. Mendicino cues up the tape, and as soon as the drums and guitars blast forth, all four members are a flurry

of air drumming and strumming. Even in its half-finished state, the song sounds more sophisticated than anything on *Pink & Blue* or *Blue & Blue*—"darker and happier at the same time," is how Lewis puts it. That description elicits a sniff from Mendicino, but it's right on—an impossibly poppy major-key chorus is subverted by a dissonant and downright abrasive verse. No vocals have been recorded yet, but Mendicino and Lewis sing along for the entire song, visibly thrilled about what they're in the midst of creating. ☉

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single file: Guest Editors: Enon

PRETTY AND NICE - "Busy Bees"
from *Pink And Blue* (self-released)
Power Indie Rock // Out Now

★9.0

They are a new Boston band. They have a pop sensibility similar to old Wrens or even older, fast XTC. Super tight and a great drummer! This song makes me think of a punkier Pixies, too. It's got lots of tight stop/starts. I hate to use all of these bands as reference points, but it's better than just using adjectives. I think in their case, it's a decent starting point for those who are deaf of them. It boasts the lyric "I need a gun that tells time." I'm not sure what that lyric means to them, but I like it. - JOHN SCHMERSAL



PERFORMERmag



Pretty & Nice —*Pink & Blue*
Produced by J Mendicino & Pretty & Nice
Recorded & mixed by J Mendicino at Charles Eller Studios
Mastered at New Alliance East by Nick Zampiatello

Does anyone remember the Test Icicles? They were one of NME's electro-dance-punk darlings from a couple of years back, with a record that almost lived up to their hype. But they were ultimately a one trick pony and it's tough to remember even one of their hooks.

Pink & Blue, Pretty & Nice's first full-length, hits a spot that the Icicles' record (whatever it was called) only tickled, while simultaneously delivering on more fronts than that forgotten British act even attempted. These guys not only play the dance punk thing—with guitars more angular than a cubist painting and sweet digital beats complimenting their actual drummer—but they even know how to write other kinds of songs as well, with appealing melodies and tight, fat-free arrangements. For instance, the band is good enough at snotty pop songs to successfully ape the Buzzcocks on tracks like "Lazy Lazy Bumblebee" and "Georgia Belle." As if to drive the likeness home, both tracks are sung in inexplicably thick British accents.

OK, to amend an earlier statement: it's unclear how far fake British accents fly with the Brits. Also, while the lo-fi tinniness of *Pink & Blue* certainly has its appeal, there are a surprising number of smart studio flourishes here—from the finger snaps and hand claps in "Bumblebee" to the tinkling piano underneath the Man Man-ish singalong of album closer "Sea Legs"—but these guys will need to acquire slicker production before NME hails them the next gods of dance punk. Suffice it to say that if energetic post-punk quirk-pop is your thing, the strengths underlying every track on this debut make Pretty & Nice one of the most promising acts in our beloved Northeast. (Self-released)

For local band *Pretty & Nice*, signing to Sub Pop imprint *Hardly Art* came as something of a shock. "Our initial reaction was skepticism," says guitarist/vocalist Jeremy Mendicino. "We tried to blow holes through [*Hardly Art's* proposal] for like a month."

The band, who describes their sound as "convoluted pop" and takes admitted cues from the likes of XTC and Elvis Costello, first heard from the label just a few months ago. "We started talking to the A&R guy around September; he bought one of our records one

day and the next he bought the other one. We didn't know anything about who he was," says vocalist/guitarist Holden Lewis. "Eventually it came up that he was the head of A&R for Sub Pop. He told us someone would come out to see one of our shows, but anyone ever did."

The last few years have seen a steady stream of tours, and other activity for the band and their newfound status as label-mates with such artists as Arthur & Yu and

Le Loup doesn't seem to have changed much—they're performing at the upcoming South by Southwest festival and are currently in the midst of recording their *Hardly Art* debut. The band's staying mum on the recording process, which is taking place in the band's Brighton basement: "We're finally starting to get somewhere with the recording, but we still work on it every night," says Mendicino. "The label gave us three months in the original contract. We asked for six. We're using those six." Adds Lewis: "You can quote him on that."

Looking past South by Southwest and their new album, the future seems about as open and exciting as you might expect from a band in P&N's situation. There are rumblings of eventually touring Japan and the United Kingdom (not to mention a seemingly inevitable full-scale tour of the US), plus all the other awesome, mysterious shit that probably comes along when Sub Pop is underwriting you. It's been a promising couple of months for Pretty & Nice, but they seem like they're taking it in stride. "As much as it seemed slow and casual, it happened very quickly," says Mendicino. He deadpans: "We're important." ☒



At high tide, the boys found out that electricity travels rather well through salt water.

Weirdo Riffers

Snotty poppers Pretty & Nice are at least one of those things

story by Mike Powell

[illegible]

The band's self-released debut, *2010: A Live And Blue*—many titles!—gifs and bawls, new, riddles—in a burst of XTC and Squeeze to turn swimming and blue, pretty and discontent. The band's go-and-go kind a piece in its routine. "Lay Low Burmese" shows an old "I don't wanna be no soldier, wanna be around in bed and think about nothing is a lot of it to be so much," Hodder magnificently affecting a fake British accent—"saw-oh-oh-oh," while on "Blue Boss," they do their best Mission O Burma impression, Hodder pining for total nonsense—"a gun who talks to 'em like his heart would burst if he didn't."

The group's self-assured pop has earned nice comparisons and tangible support, including shared stages with Jon, whose frontman, John Schmersal, has championed *Pink And Blue*. And like any tidy, contemporary rock band trying to make a dent, they've released a "gay dance remix" EP—the ponderous *Blue And Blue* ("The world is a gay club," adds guitarist Jeremy Mendicino, "if you want it to be")—and have a table full of handsome T-shirts. "Handsome like a purple giant," says Mendicino. "We definitely sold T-shirts to a bunch of 18-year-olds from Philly on the Jersey Shore. They'd never even heard of us. And we swore we'd include all of their names in a song. Which we will do—if we ever find the list of their names."



PRETTY & NICE

¹⁴ "Pink & Blue" - self-released - (CD)

Pretty & Nice is a band that has deftly blended the minimalist yet harmonic sounds of the whole indie wave along with surf rock and power-pop. There's wit in the lyrics and on the guitars trotting a sonic sea of fuzz. They're pretty hard and fast with "Fortress," a left maneuver of the first board but follows up with "Bumblebee," and then brings a bit of a melon "Hey Hey Come On." And those are really the tracks. The rest of the CD follows the format of three tracks, and it all seems like an incredibly right. For people who like to be on indie-coming bands, Pretty & Nice are sure to sweet indie cred, that is until they explode into an embrace (Pretty & Nice, 150 Dorset St., South Burlington, VT 05403)

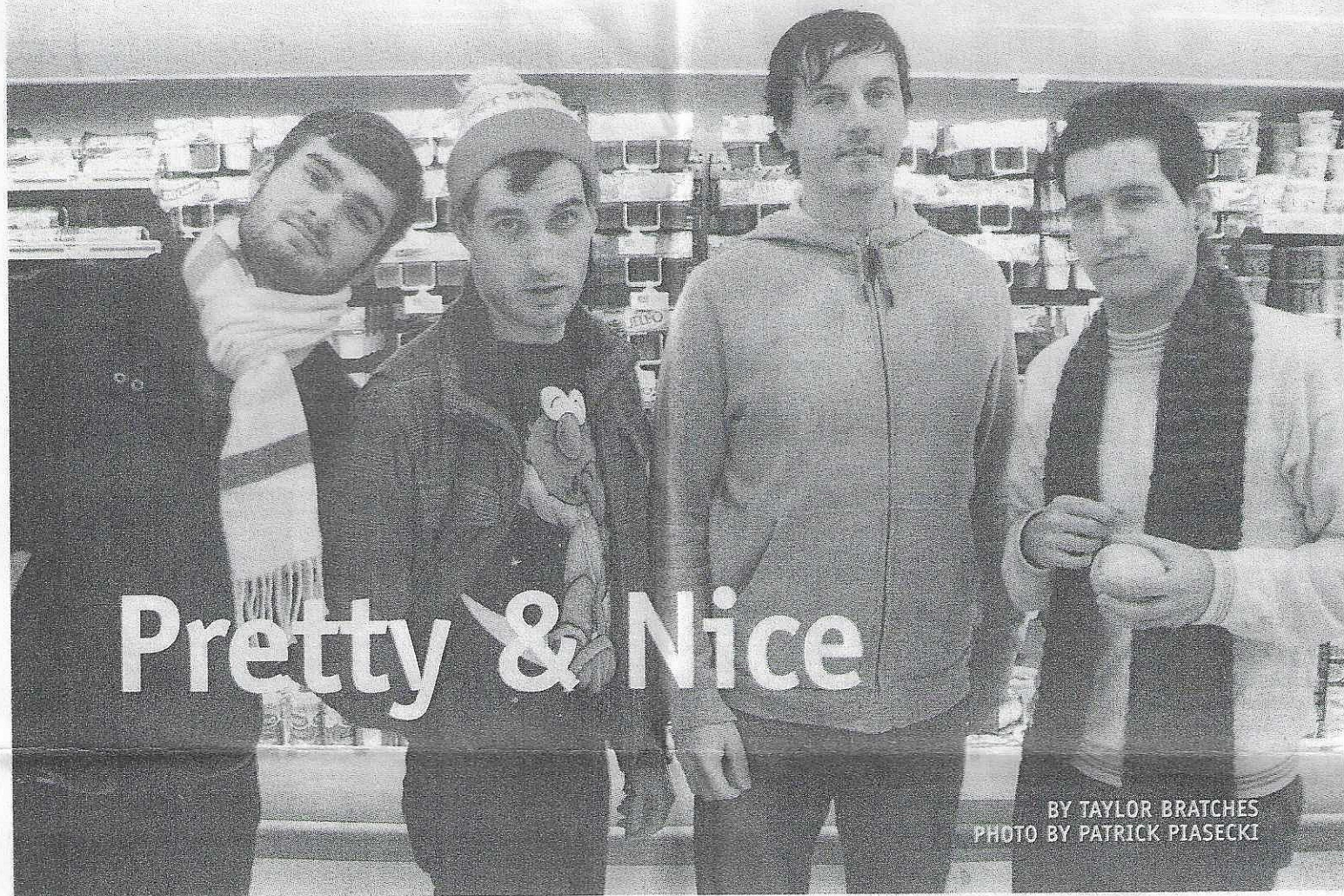
THE BOSTON phoenix

MP3 of the Week

PRETTY AND NICE. "GRAB YOUR NETS"

Pretty and Nice: no and no, actually — ugly and raucous is more like it — but they've got "Your New Favourite Band" written all over 'ern. This Boston-via-Vermont foursome infuse thrill-crazed power pop with the mad-noisy, chimp-like energy of juvie-hardened teenage degenerates. Their sound is all action — trebly downstrokes, wobbly sci-fi synths, a clobbering rhythm section that sounds about to run off the rails but never does — and their songs are as subtle as a felony. "Holden," the singer, sports a fake-Brit accent and frequently veers into a yawlpy falsetto that can make him seem (like that other Holden?) a Modish cynic one second, a wild-eyed, basement-punk naff the next. Grab the MP3 at thePhoenix.com/onthedownload, then catch the band January 26 at O'Brien's.

Verbood



Pretty & Nice

BY TAYLOR BRATCHES
PHOTO BY PATRICK PIASECKI

THE QUINTET COMPRISED OF JEREMY MENDICINO, HOLDEN LEWIS, Andy Contois and Bobby Landry don't just record at their home in lower Allston, they live in their studio — a house full of cables, guitars, and amps. It's the home base for their excellent indie rock band Pretty & Nice. They've known this house as home only for a few months, having moved from Vermont to Boston in May 2007. In fact, Pretty & Nice as it exists now has been together only since their move last Spring, and most of their recorded material is the product of the long-lasting collaboration between guitarist/vocalist/producer Mendicino and guitarist/vocalist Lewis. Prior to Boston, Pretty & Nice was more of a project — a pulsing pop organism of revolving members and more-or-less momentary collaborations.

"The band formed over the past three years or so — or has been around and went through lots of different variations, lots of different people," explains Lewis. The band had already released their debut full-length, 2006's *Pink And Blue*, before joining forces with drummer Landry and bassist Contois. Landry and Contois linked up with Pretty & Nice having already pursued their own musical endeavors — Landry was a member of the post-hardcore/experimental outfit Sparrows Swarm & Sing and Contois was primarily involved in jazz and metal projects. Yet, despite diverging musical influences, the now-solidified collective has no reservations about creating their tour-de-force of angular pop. While some believe their sound is an amalgamation of Dischord-style dance punk (as in the late Q And Not U) and dance-infused Euro post-punk (The Futureheads or self-proclaimed "New Ravers" Klaxons), the members of Pretty & Nice believe they are playing pop, plain and simple. And this assertion is difficult to dispute — their melodies are so catchy, their hooks so good, and their vocals so enticing that they border on irony. Scratch that — Pretty & Nice would argue their sound is brimming with irony, or as they call it, "post-irony." Mendicino elaborates: "We realize all

that has come before us, and so every decision we make depends on everything that we have already consumed and digested. 'Post-irony' is based on an established boredom of what we've already enjoyed."

Lewis adds, "We're serious in the sense that we want to make good things, but you can't make a pop song without being ironic, because just the notion of writing a pop song today is ironic."

Of course, it is a feat for any artist to detangle himself from his myriad influences: Elvis Costello, XTC and Ex-Models among others. As Jeremy suggests, the process of creating art in some way acknowledges past experience and history, even if by refutation or sublimation — or at least through subconscious rendering. Thus, the punk rumblings are there, despite the band's ardent pop mentality.

Pretty & Nice's clear sense of direction has undeniably worked for them, having successfully put out two well-received releases, their full-length and a recent EP entitled *Blue & Blue*. The latter takes their sound to a new, hyper-dancetastic domain, as it is one part new material, three parts remixes of songs from *Pink & Blue*.

"We [contacted] a few artists who were obsessed with their work, and then put all the songs up on a server so they could choose what they wanted," explains Mendicino. The result is a collection of club-ready remixes that are tactfully remodeled and/or deconstructed, still fitting in with the band's definitive direction and sound. With Pretty & Nice now in full swing, the future looks promising.

"We're talking with some people about the next album being on a label. We're really excited."

In the spirit of celebration and irony, Mendicino starts singing Christmas carols and passes around sugar cookies stamped into the amper-sand symbol. We all join in, basking in the beauty of kitsch. ☺
www.myspace.com/prettyandnice