


PASSION FODDER

■ *"Woke up this morning/America walking on my face/Fat clothes, slot machines and students/Las Vegas airport all over the place/Closing in like machine gun buzz saws/hog hounds hot on the chase/Waves of assault of base Americans/the slowest lane in the human race/But I still think I had to come home, here." —"Little Wolf"*





(l-r) Paskow, Lionel, Benedictine, Theo, Sean.

ERIC MULET

The Fuel Within The Fodder

■ BY STACEY SANNER

Passion Fodder's American creator / lead singer / songwriter Theo Hakola woke up one morning and, after living more than ten years in Paris, found himself back home in the United States, living in Los Angeles. After being back for a year, he feels more certain the move was necessary, but he's still ambivalent about his country.

"The hate that I feel for things that are wrong in this country is inspired by the love I feel for this country and my strong feeling about this country is based on the fact that I'm an American," he said in a phone conversation from his L.A. home. "I may have lived

most of my adult life abroad, but I lived my first 18 years in Spokane, Washington, and that's about as American as you can get. I like our system. What I'm sorry about is what we've made of it."

Moving to Europe for ten years, though, had less to do with how he felt about America and more to do with the excitement he had previously experienced as a foreigner when, in 1973 at age 19, Hakola decided to go to Spain and England to finish the political history degree he had begun at Antioch College in Ohio. When he later returned to the States and got settled in New York City, he knew he wanted "to go back and be a foreigner somewhere else." "Just going to buy bread is kind of an adventure when you're in a for-

eign country," he explained. He moved to France and spent 10 years there before coming back to L.A. in 1989.

Getting into music, which he did in France, in 1980 with his first band *Orchestre Rouge*, came after a long, varied list of previous professions which have included: an assembly line worker in a Barcelona shop making doll's eyes; a translator at various universities; a lecturer on the Spanish Civil War; a member of the U.S. Committee for a Democratic Spain, for which he helped lobby against American support of Spanish dictator Franco; a journalist on European arts for various European and American publications; sound and light technician at NYC's *Tramps* club; a DJ/programmer/producer for Paris radio stations; and an actor in the role of Alaskawolf Joe in Hans Peter Clous' French production of Brecht/Weil's *Mahagonny*.

After delving into so many fields, music initially appeared just another dabble for Hakola. He is surprised it

took off. So are his parents. "My mother and father might have liked to see me go on and get a Ph.D. in history and become a college professor and work in the ivory tower," he said. "I never saw myself as a singer when I first started. Even when I started singing, I didn't quite see myself going on stage — and forget about making records," he said. "[But] working with the first band, *Orchestre Rouge*, the better it got the more I realized we should be playing live. When we did, we really started cooking and having an effect on audiences, and it kind of became logical to look for a recording contract."

The result of his efforts was two well-received *Orchestre Rouge* recordings on RCA-France. Though popular in Europe, the band split up in 1983 and Hakola turned to acting for a year, thereby earning enough money to produce a solo, four-song EP, *PASSION FODDER DE THEO HAKOLA*, which was distributed through Celluloid in 1984. He gradually developed *Passion*

Fodder into a band by hiring bassist Pascal Humbert, guitarist Lionel Dollet, drummer Jean Yves Tola, and violinist Benedicte Villain. "It started as my baby, but it's become a band," Hakola said.

Since signing to Beggar's Banquet — who are "people who really and truly care about music" according to Hakola — making Passion Fodder work internationally meant coming to L.A. and transporting his four French bandmates with him. "None of them had lived outside of where they're from. They're adjusting quite well, better than I had hoped. L.A. is just as exotic and strange a place [as] New York and Paris," he said. "We're often just finding things funny and laughing about them — not necessarily critically laughing, not saying what assholes these Americans are — just pointing out things and finding them sort of intriguing."

Hakola's band members got their first "big dose of America" a few years ago when the Paris-based Passion Fodder crossed the Atlantic to tour as opener for Peter Murphy. "Benedicte Villain took her first airplane of her life to come and do that tour," he said. "It was a kick to see it through these French people's eyes. For me it was a



Opening for another band, however, wasn't Hakola's favorite thing to do. "I don't feel like we're on the same wave length musically as Peter Murphy, so I thought the same for Peter Murphy's audience. But it turned out well and went beyond what I expected. From the very beginning people were extremely attentive. Our concert at the Fillmore in San Francisco opening for Murphy was still for me one of the best concerts of my life, including ones where 500 or 1,000 people are showing up to see us and they know all the songs."

The tour was also America's first real dose of Passion Fodder's eclectic blend of music that's been described as everything from "fake-a-billy cow-punk" or "punkabilly," to "country manifesto, rock waltz, punk bottleneck, and chamber anarchy," sunk in a "swampdog drawl." It sounds like a cowboy's approach to British punk and stylistically falls somewhere between the Violent Femmes and Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds.

One listen to the well-crafted lyrics from the current release, *WOKE UP THIS MORNING* and previous albums *SOFT WORDS FROM A HARD MOUTH*, *FAT TUESDAY*, and *LOVE, WALTZES AND ANARCHY*, reveals that Passion Fodder is a platform for an uncompromisingly opinionated intellectual who has a strong dislike for, among other things, Chilean dictator Pinochet, Bertolt Brecht's womanizing, America's treatment of American Indians, right-to-lifers, organized relig-



PASSION FODDER'S Theo Hakola

ion, Oliver North, and the state of the States. In "Happy New Year" from *WOKE UP*, he sings of his disgust that "bible-blind and brainless is the eternal vogue," and that, with its religious fundamentalism, the U.S. "looks a lot like Iran."

On the Murphy tour, Hakola demonstrated his opinions by periodically ripping up Gideon Bibles and throwing the pieces into the audience. Some audiences were amused; others, like the one in Orange County, California, what he calls "Reagan country," weren't. "It was after that concert that I got a message from people saying they were following the tour and they had bought our CD and would I please kindly not tear up anymore Bibles and then quoted the Bible to indicate why I shouldn't. It was sort of like a Marxist trying to convince a rabid capitalist that they shouldn't be a rabid capitalist by quoting the *Communist Manifesto*."

"So I did it again at the San Juan Capistrano gig just because of this message. I was collecting them [the bibles] from hotel rooms where they were placed by Gideons. I thought it was important not to leave them in the rooms after they had been placed there. I just

thought it was one more nail in the coffin that is my lovely country and that it is my duty as an American citizen to take them away so nobody else has to feel that they're being surrounded by Bibles."

Even while he's pontificating, Hakola is soft spoken, charming and polite. He can talk forever about what he knows, especially about history and politics, and readily admits what he doesn't know anything about, like John Donne's poetry, for example. For all his intellectual loftiness, his writing is equally influenced by his own life experiences. Like many songwriters he writes about love and relationships, but he also delves into unexpected personal subjects like his asthma: "Why do I have this here curse?/This asthma affliction'll only rest in the hearse"; and his dreams: "Through a window in the kitchen I saw an ex-lover/stretched across the greasy grey sink/Her head was unattached and making love to my mother/They held me with their eyes and implored me not to think...I met the woman of my dreams in a supermarket aisle/We spent forever looking for a place to kiss/But when I ripped back my scalp and showed her the candes-

cent grey pile/her singing love choked and tightened up to a hiss."

"The thing that's strange about my dreams is I can't understand why they all go back to my youth. So many go back to Spokane. I might dream about Passion Fodder, but it will be in ridiculous situations. The concert for example will be in the park where I used to play baseball when I was eight years old or something, and my mother will be involved. This business of my mother and my ex-lover's head, that is *garross*. My mother said, 'How could you do that?'"

The fact that he can and does gives Passion Fodder's music an emotional depth and offers so vast an array of subjects for the lyricist, there may be no end to his musical creativity — unless he decides to change course again and put music on the shelf next to all his other discarded professions. With four albums, his relocation to L.A. and a European/American tour underway, it appears his commitment to music will stick, but one can't be too sure. He's just finished writing a novel based on the Zorro legend and is looking for a publisher. ●

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