

JAPAN'S LITE

Samurai spirit lives on in their duelling guitars

BY KERNAN ANDREWS

The spirit of the Samurai warrior and the Japanese world view of wabi sabi looms large over Japanese post-rockers LITE. It's what accounts for the extraordinary tension and release in their pulverising, guitar driven, music.

LITE - Nobuyuki Takeda (guitar), Kozo Kusumoto (guitar), Jun Izawa (bass), and Akinori Yamamoto (drums) - will play the Róisín Dubh on Friday October 10 at 9pm.

Through albums such as Filmlets and this year's Phantasia, LITE have risen to the very top of the post-rock genre. Their machine gun-like guitar riffs, pulsating grooves, and complex interchanges between the musicians are breathtaking, while the rhythms are so tight it makes the security at Fort Knox look slack.

All the way from Tokyo

The band were formed in Tokyo in 2003 by

four friends who
knew each
other from
school
and

college.

"Kozo is my childhood friend," Nobuyuki Takeda tells me. "Akinori was a friend of a friend when we were high school students. Akinori and I formed a band when we were 16. Then Kozo joined us. A few years later our original bassist left. Akinori knew Jun from his college and asked him to join us on bass."

Japan has had a fertile post-rock/math-rock scene since the late 1980s so it is not surprising the members of the newly formed band would gravitate towards instrumental music.

"When we formed the band, we wanted to play four-beat dance music that was psychedelic!" Nobuyuki says. "And I used to sing vocals, but we used the vocals as an instrument - no lyrics, just melody. I found that it wasn't working out and didn't match the songs too well. So we stopped the vocals. It became instrumental rock."

As with other bands in the genre - Redneck Manifesto, God Is An Astronaut, Battles - LITE dislike the meaningless labels of 'post-rock' and 'math-rock' and prefer just to be known as 'instrumental rock'.

"I don't think anybody can explain what post rock is!" he says. "We just play our music."

It is possible to detect the influences of Iron Maiden, King Crimson era Robert Fripp, Yes' Steve Howe, Metallica, and jazz in the music of LITE.

"I have a lot of favourite guitarists," Nobuyuki reveals. "Many guitarists and lots of music has influenced me. I like mixing it and I'm always more concerned with trying to make something original."

When it came to choosing the band's name, Japan's premier export - it's cars - were the main inspiration.

"When we had to decide on a band name, we thought it should be a simple word," says Nobuyuki, "but they say simple is usually the most difficult! We couldn't come up with a good idea. But one day we found that our ex-bassist's father had a car called LITEAce (made by Toyota, similar to HiAce). We liked that LITE sound. And also we found LITE sometimes means 'light'. We liked it more and more. So that's how we got the name."

The samurai spirit

If there is a symbol of Japan that is greater than engineering it is the Samurai, the warrior-nobility class, which dominated Japanese society from the mediaeval period to the mid 19th century. The legacy of the Samurai era is important to the Japanese people and forms a key part of their identity.

"As you know for a samurai, to lose means to die," explains Nobuyuki. "That's why the Samurai is so manly and their spirit is so tough. Today's Japanese people think it's cool. They always want to be like them. I think that's why Japanese people work so hard."

Japanese artists and musicians often draw on Samurai discipline and endeavour when composing and creating. Nobuyuki explains this as the wabi sabi spirit.

Wabi sabi is a Japanese world view or aesthetic centred on the acceptance of transience. It is the art of finding beauty in imperfection and profundity in nature, and of accepting the natural cycle of growth, decay, and death. It reveres authenticity and the gradual stripping away of all inessentials.

"All Japanese people at any time love the wabi sabi spirit," says Nobuyuki. "Samurai love it as well. We like our music to be full of tension and release and I think that comes from the wabi sabi spirit. We play intensely when we want the audience to go crazy. We also love to play as tight as we can. So we sometimes play quietly."

Wabi sabi will undoubtedly play a role in the future evolution of LITE's music.

"I think I want to do something different, but I don't know if it will be more funky or tight," says Nobuyuki. "None of us know that yet. We love to make our songs however we want and to be constantly improving is our motivation."

The Japanese rock scene is arguably one of the most exciting in the world - containing

as it does LITE, Acid Mothers Temple, Z, and 54-71 - all of whom show a commitment to experimentation and taking an avant-garde approach to heavy rock.

"Japan is not such a big country so it's easy to get to know each band on the underground scene," Nobuyuki says. "Because we play instrumental rock we can fit into any bill and play with any other band, be it avant-garde, punk rock, or pop music. It's nice for us because we get to see and be influenced by so many different bands."

At their Róisín Dubh show, Japanese hardcore/experimental band 54-71 will be opening for LITE - something Nobuyuki finds very exciting.

"It's our first time to tour overseas with 54-71," he says. "They are my heroes. I'm so excited about it. At the same time, I'm looking forward to see the audience's reaction to them."

Tickets are available from the Róisín Dubh and Zhivago. Go to <http://lite-web.com>



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