



## ONE-MAN-BAND MAN

NORWAY'S **BJØRN TORSKE** LETS LOOSE WITH AN ECLECTIC ALBUM, AND AN EYE-OPENING LIVE SHOW TO MATCH.

WORDS JESSE SERWER  
PHOTOS BJORNAR HALAND

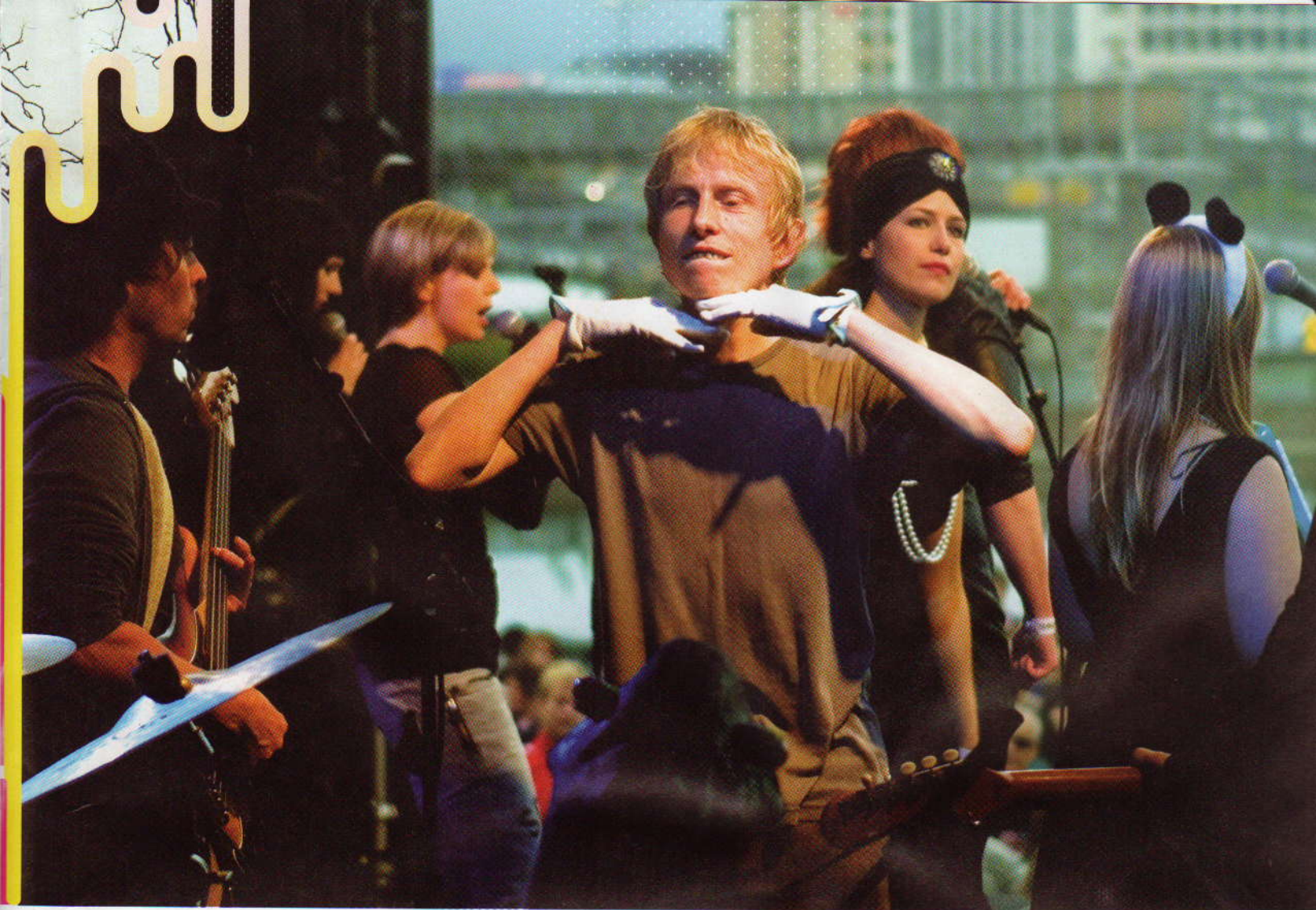
It's difficult to describe exactly what transpired during Bjørn Torske's set at Oslo's Oya Festival this past August but it surely can't be reduced to "Beardo disco" or any term one might apply to the 36-year-old Norseman's solitary studio recordings.

Joined on stage by a circus-like entourage of 13 musicians and vocalists, a white-gloved Torske led the way through a maze of four-on-the-floor organic house, slinky funk, and haunting dub while a costumed chorus (consisting of a flapper, a goth, a bad-ass biker chick, and a melodica-playing mouse-girl) topped select tracks with operatic imbroglis. When he wasn't operating one of several machines, Torske paced restlessly between the various performers, appearing more like an affable athletic coach than a conductor as he whispered directions into their ears and, often, engaged them in entire conversations while the rest of the band played on.

"When I'd ask someone to stop, they might say, 'No, let me continue another-eight bars and see what happens,'" Torske explains, a month later, during a phone call from his studio in Bergen, Norway's second largest city. "While the songs were all rehearsed, we'd have discussions [during the show] to see what direction they'd take. It was all people I know, who have the same passion for doing stuff like that—we'd only had one rehearsal with the entire band. The day before, we all went to a studio in Oslo and had this barbecue out in the park with this really great chef that barbecued meat and vegetables."

The advent of the unit, dubbed the Bjørn Torske Big Band (a stripped-down version of which plays on "Dubet," the b-side to Torske's 2006 Smalltown Supersound single "Ny Lugg"), reflects Torske's desire to shed the digital box for warm organic vibes.

"More and more, my music has become about instrumentation and organic sounds, and not just machines," says Torske, a godfather of sorts in Norway's electronic music scene. His 15-year career has seen him hopscotch from house to techno to



darkwave disco. "I'll use pots and pans and shakers, whatever's lying around and makes an interesting sound."

Released in July to universally positive reviews, his third album, *Feil Knapp*, traverses icy space disco, minimalist techno, deep house, and category-defying electronic experimentation; but it's during sprawling, live-sounding dub tracks like "Spelunker" (in which high-pitched 8-bit videogame sounds are manipulated in a fashion that resembles Augustus Pablo's melodica) and the tribal-sounding opening dirge, "Hemmelig Orkester," where the record (whose title translates to "wrong button") truly finds its pocket.

"I've been buying a lot of experimental music from different time periods and Folkways records, like Inuit and African field recordings, stuff that's even more roots than what we recognize as roots music today," Torske says. "That's maybe the whole explanation [behind the album's eclectic sound]." Also factoring into the equation

was time; *Feil Knapp* is Torske's first album in over five years. While he has been active as a remixer (most notably reworking "Eple" by fellow Bergenites Röyksopp), he has kept a relatively low profile during the recent Norwegian disco explosion that he helped foreshadow with singles like 2000's "Disco Members" (Telle).

"I always want a certain sound for an album but even though it never comes out the way I thought it would, I still have to follow whatever comes," Torske explains. "So there's always a fear lurking, 'Am I going to be happy with this?' I'm also not very patient—I'll do tracks halfway, then come back later and see if it's still got the right [feel]. It's confusing but I try to feed off the confusion to do interesting combinations."

For his next full-length project, Torske hopes to bring his Big Band (the core of which includes key members from the Norwegian electronic scene including Per Martinsen of Mental Overdrive and Smalltown Supersound labelmate Jorgan "Sir

Dupermann" Traeen) into the studio for a semi-live recording.

"I want to do a proper multi-track recording, but with an audience," Torske says. "When you have people in front of you, you have to go all the way. I want to get a little tension in it, I want that risk."

In the meantime, Torske, who has never toured, is working on establishing a three-man live-performance unit so he can take his show out on the road.

"I'm bored of doing solo stuff and I don't feel that mixing tracks and putting on effects does justice to the word 'live,'" Torske says. "But having 17 people on stage is not exactly practical for getting a string of gigs."

**Bjørn Torske's *Feil Knapp* (Smalltown Supersound) is out now. For more on the Oya Festival, check [www.xlr8r.com/112extras](http://www.xlr8r.com/112extras). [www.myspace.com/bjortorske](http://www.myspace.com/bjortorske),**