

The Hard Quartet...

... is a band. But what is a band? A band, perhaps, can be thought of as a body, a *corpus*, in which physically discrete lifeforms comprise a chimera that shrieks with one voice. In this particular band, which is one of millions in the world today, four players selflessly merge, become musical, and emit rock 'n' roll that is familiar but new, warm but icy, melodic but Sphinx-like in its seductive and subtle riddles... essentially, The Hard Quartet has leveled, cultivated, and made lush an entirely new steppe in the ecosystem of guitar-bass-drums-voice agriculture.

But we should now introduce the men of the HQ because after that, since you know your shit, you'll be all: "Him? Him too? And, oh my god, him? Wait, not just them but also him?" and you'll, rightfully, expect an album that musos and casuals alike will proclaim a "landmark." So, check it out: Let's do this alphabetically according to last name, which is the most democratic method.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Hard Quartet is:

Emmett Kelly, a songwriter, guitarist, and vocalist best known for his work in The Cairo Gang and The Double, as well as in the company of artists such as Bonnie "Prince" Billy, Ty Segall, Rob Mazurek, and many more.

Stephen Malkmus, a songwriter, guitarist, and vocalist best known for his work with Pavement, the Jicks, Silver Jews, Straw Dogs, and eponymously.

Matt Sweeney, a songwriter, guitarist, and vocalist best known for his work with Chavez, Superwolf, Super-wolves, and in the company of a panoply of artists from Guided by Voices and Cat Power to Johnny Cash and Neil Diamond.

Jim White, a drummer and songwriter best known for his work with Dirty Three, Xylouris White, eponymous-ly, and with such stalwarts as Guy Picciotto, Cat Power, Bill Callahan and Venom P Stinger.

Do you see? Four Titans, basically. And here they are, now, today, starting a band—a band which they've gone ahead and named The Hard Quartet, for Christ's sake—which is a bulletproof, effortless amalgam of their completely distinct and completely broken-mold utterances.

Perhaps, on the streets and the messageboards, you've heard rumors and mutterings about the death of rock. Maybe you've read a critical essay about it in an academic journal. We implore you to reject this crackpot theory propagated by unbelievers and philistines who haven't listened to Danny & the Juniors once in their lives. The Hard Quartet, through its very existence and onward via its dedication to electrified reels, hymns, paeans, and rave-ups, is mathematical, empirical proof that human beings slashing at strings, pounding at skins, and opening their mouths to intone tuneful, mythic messages is here to stay. It will never die; we'll dig it to the end.

What follows is a selection of musings, aphorisms, and slogans of the HQ clergymen. Perhaps you'll want to fold it up and keep it in your pocket for easy reference in times of rudderlessness. Think of it as a sort of *Meditations* for the soon-to-be faithful, an Aurelius for the audiophile, a peek through the stubborn skull into the pink bumps and grooves of the pulsating brain shared by Emmett, Stephen, Matt, and Jim—also known, from this day until the sun goes out, as The Hard Quartet.

“I like the idea of us reaching for something in the ether.” — E.K.

“We’re all jazzed.” — S.M.

“Remember when bands were kind of a thing?” — J.W.

“I had this whole fucking idea. This is all my shit. (Just kidding.)” — M.S.

“There are older vibes: getting older, it’s less about having to prove yourself.” — S.M.

“I have ancient history—well, going back to the nineties—with Steve and Jim. And then more recently Emmett made a really big impression on me as far as changing the way I think about playing.” — M.S.

“There’s this thing where I’ll have a story in my head when I have an intention, and I can hear it in the drums. It doesn’t matter if I tell anyone—even the people I’m playing with. You don’t even have to be particularly conscious of it yourself. But if you have an intention, something happens to the sound. It’s really weird.” — J.W.

“Leave yourself behind and go into something where you’re actually listening to others and trying to come up with a solution to whatever kind of esoteric thing you are attempting to do in your life. You know what I mean?” — E.K.

“Look, Emmett’s dad was Peter Green’s best friend. Emmett grew up in the Valley, but his parents met in a rock ‘n roll circus in Amsterdam. Emmett was the lead singer of a progressive rock band in Japan. These are things that should be known about Emmett.” — M.S.

“It’s funny how the little memories stay connected.” — J.W.

“The way Jim plays really affected the way I hear things. He has this way of making everything sound good. All of a sudden, you really pay attention to everything else that’s going on because of what Jim is doing.” — M.S.

“‘Hard’ in this context means kind of real, like survivors, like a diamond that can’t be broken, just honed down. But then it’s sort of funny because there’s a lot of sensitive vibes on the record. It’s not actually so hard.” — S.M.

“I’ve listened to all three of these people a lot over the years. Playing with them now just feels natural. Maybe ‘natural’ in this situation means it’s not a struggle.” — J.W.

“We’re in a collaboration where somebody says, here’s an idea, and you actually trust them. You say, ‘Okay, you wouldn’t steer me wrong.’” — E.K.

“This just seems like a really good band for us all to be in for the foreseeable future. We’ll go until the wheels fall off. I can’t think of three better guys than these three guys. There’s something sweet and solid about the vibe.” — M.S.

“It’s a trusting environment, where everyone’s down to be like, ‘Let’s all throw our stuff into the pot and make something greater than what we can do on our own.’” — E.K.

“In the songs, I mean, there’s improv and solos, but they’re pretty tight, and it’s all pretty song-y. The songs don’t go on that long. I think we all knew, without saying it, that that could be good.” — S.M.

“Steve comes up with these unbelievably catchy and unusual riff-y things that are kind of British folky and progressive. He’s really, really good at it. I’m like, god, I would never think of that.” — M.S.

“We come from such different places and we’ve have such different career histories, but I think that now we’re all in a similar place, which is kind of strange to acknowledge.” — E.K.

“One of the fun things here is everybody’s really hyped to play bass.” — M.S.

“I’ve always really gravitated towards improvisation as being a philosophical music where it’s the only thing that really levels the playing field is when you are letting your mind automatically operate, and it determines whether or not you’re a sensitive person.” — E.K.

“You plant a little seed and have it grow. You put things in the ground, put fertilizer in there, and pick the part of the garden you want to put it in.” — S.M.