



>> MUSIC

Fantastic Voyage

Indie sister act CocoRosie make beguiling music-and tell stories that may or may not be true.

by Doree Shafrir



I'd been listening to CocoRosie's second album *Noah's Ark* (just released on Touch and Go) for a couple of weeks before meeting its creators, Bianca and Sierra Casady, in the backyard of a coffee shop on a sunny day in Williamsburg.

Based on the album-the follow-up to last year's *La Maison de Mon Rêve*, reportedly recorded in the bathtub of Sierra's tiny apartment in the Montmartre section of Paris, the result of an unlikely collaboration between two sisters who hadn't seen each other in years-I half-expected them to be possessed of a younger Miss Havisham air, or at least to be dressed in some kind of period costume.

Instead Sierra-who trained to be an opera singer-is wearing a wife-beater, a black Yankees cap cocked to one side, white Nikes and tight bleached denim shorts, her long black hair tied back in a ponytail. And Bianca's in a tank top and baggy jeans, with unevenly cut hair that's been dyed half-blond.

But first: the album. It sounds like it arose in the dead of night from a long-forgotten mausoleum. It's all done mostly in Sierra's creeping, creepy voice, accompanied by, among others, Bianca's ex-boyfriend Devendra Banhart, Antony of Antony and the Johnsons, and French MCs. It was recorded mostly while on tour in support of their first album, in hotel rooms, studios, airports, cars, barns in the south of France and apartments in Brooklyn.

Noah's Ark-released, like *La Maison de Mon Rêve*, on Touch and Go, which signed the sisters sight unseen after hearing a CD-R of *La Maison*-tells stories. There are the stories of naked lust on "Honey or Tar," of the pain of love on "Tekno Love Song," of growing up in a tough Brooklyn neighborhood on "South 2nd," of the emptiness that is the American dream on the gospel-inspired "Armageddon."

"We've been inspired lately by heavily apocalyptic imagery and themes," Bianca says. "The return of Christ-heavy-duty stuff. It's more about the end of the spirit of the individual and the denial of materialistic goals."

She seems to be referring to "Armageddon," on which Sierra sings, "What I should do with my life/ How I should spend my time/ I'll be a stock broker and get me a wife/ Have the diamonds cut/ Have the diamonds."

This idealist point of view can sometimes clash with Bianca's latest project, a record label called

VoodooEROS. "Starting a label has gotten me a little business-y," she says.

VoodooEROS' first release *The Enlightened Family* is a compilation of what she calls "lost songs" by artists such as Banhart, Vashti Bunyan, Diane Cluck and the sisters' side projects, the heavy-metal band Metallic Falcons and a band called Island Folk Lore.

It's tempting to label CocoRosie or Metallic Falcons or VoodooEROS simply strange for the sake of being strange. But they're not just gimmicks or attempts to be noticed amid the pop culture din. Bianca says their music is "like an unaware child," that it comes from what could be called a pure place.

And indeed, when she says she and her sister don't connect themselves musically to other music, it's clear they've stumbled upon something that defines itself-without gimmickry and without labeling.

"People try to create categories for everything," Bianca says. "Music is so conservative. They wouldn't be saying we were freakish, eccentric, psychedelic if we were artists. We feel more like artists-it's semantics."

Their music is part of an artistic world they've created for themselves. And in order to make music, they have to transport themselves to a different place-together.

"We have a vision," Bianca says. "We go into a meditative place, a place in which the song is taking place. It's a specific environment for us. It's very experimental. Most of the time we're doing something for the very first time-we're living inside that song."

While making both *La Maison* and *Noah's Ark*, they'd dress up in costumes, drink whiskey and tea, and surround themselves with old objects to help them get to that place, though Bianca says they're needing objects less and less to get the creative process going.

Still, tea seems especially important. "We're connoisseurs of things," Bianca says. "We're really into tea and cookies. Strong tea, just fatalistically strong tea. Tea is drug."

"A drug?" I ask, wondering if they're using tea as a euphemism for, say, crack.

"No, tea is drug," Bianca says emphatically. "Really strong gunpowder green tea. It just works for us. We're not into the downer vibe. We like to be up. Tea does it for us. And you don't crash as hard."

"The chocolate cookies here are the best in the world," Sierra says, her eyes opening wide.

From there we somehow get into a discussion about how Sierra quit her last job as a pedicab driver because she "got a really bad rash" and how her butt always falls asleep on airplanes, to which Bianca responds that she loves airplanes and that watching movies is her favorite thing to do on a plane.

"We like movies like *Miss Congeniality*," she says.

"*Miss Congeniality 2* is the most lesbian flick of the year," Sierra says solemnly.

"For a while I was into the worst movies ever made," Bianca says. "I've recently traced all my gay tendencies to *Wayne's World*. I saw myself as Wayne and Garth."

"Movies try to teach us to objectify beautiful women," Sierra says.

"*Wayne's World* was a breakthrough with my sexuality," Bianca says. "We're moving to Aurora [Illinois, where *Wayne's World* takes place]." She sees my look of incredulity. "And we do what we say we're going to do. And make terrible heavy metal. We've just gotta get rid of Sierra's boyfriend. Boyfriends mess all of that up. The boyfriend doesn't fit in the picture."

In some ways Bianca and Sierra are confirming the stories about them, the ones that have created an impossibly romantic, almost mystical air around them, which is only enhanced by what they emphatically say are the falsehoods that have made their way into several articles. There was the piece that said they had different mothers-not true, they say. Sierra was linked romantically to one of the members of labelmates TV on the Radio-again, not true.

But I can't help but wonder what's real and what's manufactured. "We don't make fabulous tales up," Bianca says. But the image they've created to show the world never reveals too much, and raises more questions than it answers-such as when Sierra refuses to tell me how old she is. "That's the one question she doesn't want us to answer," Bianca says. (Other articles have put her at 24, Bianca at 22.)

In the end, though, it doesn't matter. They'll keep on making their beautifully bizarre music-Bianca says their next album will be "taking it a lot further"-which is ultimately the point, truth be damned.

Still, their label Touch and Go might want to give their next album a close listen. "They're really incredible. They'd be behind us whatever we do," Bianca says. "Sometimes we think of sending them a trick album-like an album of farting. But that seems too mean." Or maybe it doesn't.