

Bio Information: **GUAPO**

Title: **FIVE SUNS** (Cuneiform Rune 184)

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FILE UNDER: ROCK

Guapo is a British trio that plays an intense, emotive and sometimes harrowing music that straddles the boundaries of progressive, noise, minimalism and avant-rock. Indeed, their sound has been compared to such artists as **Magma**, **Boredoms**, **King Crimson**, **Univers Zero**, **This Heat**, **Ruins**, **Sun Ra** and **Terry Riley**. *Five Suns* is the band's fifth album, and its first on Cuneiform. The main body of the record consists of a single piece of music, "Five Suns," clocking in at 46 minutes. *Five Suns* is Guapo's most apocalyptic and dynamically accomplished work to date, bringing a new sense of sonic and spatial awareness to the band's trademark sensibilities of complex song structures, harmonic atonality and percussive mantras.

Active since 1994, Guapo's original formation was rooted in a post-punk, avant-hardcore approach. With a line-up consisting of **Matt Thompson** (guitar, vocals), **Dave Smith** (drums) and **Roger Macoustra** (bass), Guapo released several 7" singles on its own label, **Power Tool**, before releasing its first full-length album, *Towers Open Fire*, in 1997. Around this time, Guapo embarked on an intensive period of touring throughout mainland Europe, playing on a regular basis in France, the Balkans, Italy and many other countries. Afterwards, the band slimmed down to the core duo of Thompson and Smith for the release of *Hirohito* (1998) on the French label **Pandemonium Records**. By now, Guapo's music had taken on a far more experimental hue, incorporating electronics, sampling and turntables into the rock palette to create a wild collage of densely woven noise that still left room for quieter, more contemplative pieces. This approach was continued, albeit with more conventional instrumentation, on the collaborative improvised album *Death Seed*, recorded with touring partners **Ruins** and **Caroline Kraabel** and **John Edwards** (of the saxophone / double bass duo **Shock Exchange**).

The band spent a large part of 1999 and 2000 building its own recording and rehearsal studio complex, **Zed One Studios**, in conjunction with their long-term producer **Pete Lyons**. The first recording to come out of Zed One was *Great Sage, Equal Of Heaven* (2001), released on San Francisco label **tumult** and again featuring significant contributions from Kraabel and Edwards. The album garnered much critical praise, from *The Wire* ("*...sipping from the same dark chalice that intoxicated Lark's Tongues era King Crimson...Guapo move between reference and reappraisal with an ease that recalls the Sun City Girls' excursions into Eastern-tinged psychedelia*"), the *Sound Projector* ("*Guapo come on like all the hellhounds of Magma, Eskaton and Ruins were after them, driving them to some kind of world music hell...this succeeds where so many pretenders falter...on a par with Magma's Kohntarkosz or Univers Zero's Ceux du Dehors*") and others.

Late 2001 saw the band expand back to a trio – the band's current line-up - with the addition of keyboardist **Daniel O'Sullivan**; O'Sullivan leads an ensemble, **Doktor Miasma**, that Thompson and Smith had been playing in. Guapo's current line-up consists of **Matt Thompson** (bass, guitar, electronics), **Dave Smith** (drums, percussion) and **Daniel O'Sullivan** (keyboards, guitar, electronics). The first recording that this trio released was *The Ducks and Drakes of Guapo and Cerberus Shoal* (2003). A drone-based piece which included **Suvi Streatfield's** contributions on cello, it was recorded as a split CD with *Cerberus Shoal*, part of a series on North East Indie done by that Portland, Oregon band, featuring wildly diverse collaborators (including **Alvarius B** from **Sun City Girls**). *The Wire* praised the band's progression: "*Like some gigantic alien animal that has been prodded from slumber, their music stretches out to reveal an enormous and unimaginably complex musical monster that just keeps growing*".

The *Five Suns* recordings make use of vintage equipment such as Fender Rhodes, mellotron, Moogs and gongs to create a colour-saturated patchwork of epic, primordial beauty. The new instrumentation has allowed for an opening out of the sound into more ambitious vistas, where progressive influences are turned on their head by both the infusion of hardcore rock energy and the use of hypnotic, trance-like repetition. Over the course of 46 minutes the manic jazz-inflected drumming, brooding zeuhl bass and pointillist keyboards maintain a relentless driving momentum while deftly negotiating the ebb and flow of what is, in effect, a single piece of music.

Guapo has continued to tour, playing with bands such as **Circle**, **Melvins**, **Kid 606**, **Oxbow** and **Tomahawk**. The band's intense live show continues to progress and expand, as the influences heard on the records are thrown into the air and reassembled as an incendiary mixture of plate-spinning dexterity, telepathic instrumental interplay and extreme avant-noise. The concert performances can in fact be seen as a microcosm of the recorded output of Guapo, which continues to develop in unexpected directions and blend seemingly disparate influences into a cohesive whole.