



Bio information: **GUAPO** (DAVID J. SMITH / KAVUS TORABI / EMMETT ELVIN / JAMES SEDWARDS)

Title: **OBSCURE KNOWLEDGE** (Cuneiform Rune 404) Format: CD / LP / DIGITAL

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FILE UNDER: AVANT ROCK Avant Progressive

Revered UK Experimental Rock Act Guapo Celebrate Two Decades In The Game With *Obscure Knowledge*, an Explosive New Continuous-Track Album Inspired By The Birth Of Psychedelia

2015 marks the 20th anniversary of avant rock ensemble **Guapo**'s debut release (the *Hell Is Other People* EP on **Power Tool Records**), and the band celebrates this milestone by proving – with the release on **26th May 2015** of *Obscure Knowledge*, its 10th album and 3rd release on **Cuneiform** – exactly how far it has come since then.

While Guapo started out in the mid 90s as a heavy, London-based duo (**Dave Smith** - drums; **Matt Thompson** - bass) playing post-hardcore noise-rock in the style of the **Jesus Lizard** and **Shellac**, it has expanded significantly (in more ways than one) since. Skillfully incorporating more styles of music into their sound than there is room to list here, Guapo has become one of Europe's most highly respected modern psychedelic/ experimental/ progressive rock bands.

The band today remains centered around elemental, mold-breaking drummer Dave Smith, but the line-up that recorded *Obscure Knowledge* is that of a four piece group that also features **Kavus Torabi** - guitar; **Emmett Elvin** - keyboards and synthesizers; **James Sedwards** - bass).

After the epic scope of 2013's *History Of The Visitation*, its previous Cuneiform release, the band had planned to challenge expectations by recording an album of short tracks. However, their extremely organic way of working redirected their music otherwise.

Kavus Torabi explains: "We rehearse and write every week - the way that bands used to. It was never the idea to do an album which was just one long song... if anything we wanted a change because the last few Guapo albums have been long pieces. We were thinking of doing an album full of short songs but then they kept on joining onto one another. We'd be ten or 15 minutes into a piece and thinking, "Wouldn't it be good if that section came next?" or "Wouldn't it be good if that theme came back in here but a bit different." And the next thing you know we've got one long piece...."

A single 43 minute long track, *Obscure Knowledge* is a dynamic, fluid beast that takes the listener on a scenic journey through jazz fusion, New York minimalism, twisted funk, celestial drone, avant metal and many other less-easy-to-classify realms before depositing them somewhere completely afresh... and no doubt eager to repeat the trip as soon as possible. The work is indexed into 3 sections on the CD, to give listeners the opportunity to easily access and upload their favorite sections.

Smith, who is also a sculptor as well as drummer, looks after the aesthetic considerations of Guapo and is keen to provide a backstory for their albums. (2013's *History Of The Visitation* was loosely based on the Russian science fiction novel *Roadside Picnic* - the novel that influenced **Tarkovsky's Stalker** - in as much as the book's narrative helped shape the structure of the music.) This album had a working title of *Phanerothyme*, after the title that **Aldous Huxley** suggested to **Humphry Osmond** in 1957 to name the newly synthesized mind-opening drugs such as **LSD** before the psychiatrist instead settled on the word '**psychedelic**'. When they found out that Norwegian space rock band **Motorpsycho** had released an album with that title in 2001, they delved back into Aldous Huxley's writings and came up with *Obscure Knowledge*.

Dave Smith explains: "The title of the piece of music and album is derived from the psychoactive rituals of various **Native American** tribes people who are said to "tap into obscure knowledge" when performing certain rituals and rites of passage. The phrase also appears in Aldous Huxley's *Doors Of Perception*: '**In the final stage of egolessness there is an "obscure knowledge" that all is in all—that all is actually each. This is as near, I take it, as a finite mind can ever come to perceiving everything that is happening everywhere in the universe.**'

After an intense amount of practice, the album *Obscure Knowledge* was recorded at highly regarded analog/digital studio **Orgone** in North London under the watchful eye of the band's long time engineer **Antti Uusimaki**. A special guest during the sessions was former **Coil** musician **Michael J. York** on pipes - a more recent collaborator of Smith's. Says Smith: "We are both involved with **Cyclobe** and Mike also performs (and is currently recording) with me in my project **The Stargazer's Assistant**. The central drone

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section was planned quite early on with him in mind as we had been working on a Stargazer's recording together exploring similar tones and textures. On *Visitation* I constructed the more textural elements in the studio with synths and odd percussive sounds and also via remote recording sessions with **Dave Newhouse** and **Tom Scott** from **The Muffins** who play reeds & horns on the intro to '**The Pilman Radiant**'. So it was good to build on this and actually work together with a new collaborator and a unique array of instruments to achieve these most 'obscure' sounds."

Guapo will follow the May 2015 release of *Obscure Knowledge* with several festival performances, including the **Raw Power festival** (May 22) and the **Supernormal festival**, (August 7-9). These live shows will feature new bass player **Sam Warren** from **Thumpermonkey**, as James Sedwards is busy touring as a guitarist in **Thurston Moore's** band. Kavus Torabi says: "Who can begrudge James this opportunity? It's like finding the golden ticket. Sam is a really incredible bass player... I haven't even been able to work out how he might influence Guapo's music in the future, he's so good. Plus he looks a lot like Dave, so visually it's quite pleasing!"

Torabi confirms that through albums like *Obscure Knowledge*, Guapo is committed more than ever to composing and playing inventive new music. He says: "Attacking the boundaries of music is a really tricky thing. Most of what I hear that comes under the umbrella of prog is actually incredibly regressive and dull. But it's not like we stand around saying, 'We need to push boundaries.' For me personally if anything sounds too much like something from the olden days, my alarm bells go off. But really it's about four people playing together and respecting each other. All four people are trying to serve what the *music* does - not themselves. It's very democratic. But Dave tends to be the guy with whom the buck stops though and if it's ever going in a direction that he doesn't like he'll say no. And you need to have that one guy - the person who has a clear vision of what the group is."

MEMBER BIOGRAPHIES

DAVID J. SMITH: The founding member of **Guapo** also works in the field of the visual arts, something that bandmate **Kavus Torabi** thinks may have influenced his unique aesthetic: "Dave's a sculptor as well as a drummer and I think that has been very influential on him. He approaches everything in this very unique way." Smith is self-taught and - along with **Matt Thompson** - founded Guapo in the mid-1990s. He has also played in the avant classical project **Miasma And The Carousel Of Headless Horses** (alongside former Guapo keyboardist **Daniel O'Sullivan**) as well as performing with **Cyclobe** and **The Stargazer's Assistant**.

KAVUS TORABI: A stalwart of the London leftfield scene since co-founding **The Monsoon Bassoon** in 1995. He joined the ranks of the revered neo-prog, avant rock group the **Cardiacs** as second guitarist in 2003, having been a technician for the group since the mid 90s. On the dissolution of The Monsoon Bassoon in 2002, Torabi formed the avant rock band **Knifeworld**, and joined **Pogues** offshoot **The Vendettas** as a writer. Most recently, he joined **Daavid Allen's Gong**, touring with the band and recording on 2014's *I See You* LP. Torabi also heads up a record label, **Believers Roast**, which he founded in 2009 initially to release his own music, but he now also releases works by such other artists as **Alex Ward** of **Dead Days Beyond Help**. He has also co-hosted "**The Interesting Alternative**" show on **Phoenix FM** with snooker champion **Steve Davis** for the last five years.

EMMETT ELVIN: Emmett Elvin was key to the successful expansion of neo-prog funk doom group, **Chrome Hoof** into a full group, as their synthesizer and keyboard player and sampling and sequencing technician. He is also a core member of **Knifeworld** alongside Torabi, and has also played guitar for **Ed Harcourt**. More recently, Elvin has released a solo album of instrumental numbers called *Bloody Marvels*.

JAMES SEDWARDS: James Sedwards first came to prominence as the leader of **Nought**. Like every other member of **Guapo**, Sedwards has also played in **Chrome Hoof** and has also been a member of **The Devil** (with players from the **Country Teasers**), **Kish Mauve** and **Zodiac Youth** (a band formed by **Zodiac Mindwarp** and **Killing Joke** bassist **Youth**). An in demand session musician, he has also found time recently to join **Thurston Moore's** new band. Sedwards also plays with **Alex Ward** and his band **The Dead Ends**.

For more information on Guapo:

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