

# The Chris Stamey Experience

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## Notes on *A Question of Temperature*

with Yo La Tengo and Tyson Rogers

We started this record just for fun, for adventure; I'd written a song called "McCauley Street" that I thought Yo La Tengo would sound great on; they'd named *Summer Sun*, their last album, with my 1978 single by the same name at least in mind, and we thought we'd recut that song together, too. It all made some kind of sense. We'd been neighbors in Hoboken, N.J., years back, I'd played and recorded with the band a bit over the ensuing years, we'd played the same guitars, kept in touch . . . we weren't sure where we were going but the ride seemed worth taking.

By the time we met up for our fly-by-the-seat-of-our-pants sessions, in August 2004, things had turned a bit more serious, and the idea of recording a version of the 1970 Eddie Harris / Les McCann recording, "(Let's Make It Real) Compared to What," with its Vietnam War-era lyric stating "the president, he's got his war / no one knows just what it's for" and "Shapes of Things," with its apocalyptic anxiety ("come tomorrow . . . will I be . . . a soldier?") made even more sense. Wunderkind keyboardist Tyson Rogers joined us, this time on Acetone organ as well as piano. We pulled out the charts and started laying down takes one song after another, "don't look back" our squadron motto. ("Venus" is in fact the first take, without overdubs; I stop playing every now and then to adjust the mixer. "Summer Sun" and "Plainest Thing," among others, are also first takes.)

When some songs wanted more urgency, James moved over for double drumming with Georgia, and Gene Holder, my old partner in the dB's, ran bass for him.

On the second morning, we decided that the thing to do was to run down a few takes of a pro-voting, "Schoolhouse Rock"-styled PSA I'd scribbled over breakfast, a variation on an old Otis Redding pro-school PSA. We pulled "Politician" out of our hat, "Sleepless Nights" the same, and the record took on another slant entirely.

Upon returning to Chapel Hill, I roped Caitlin Cary and Choosy Beggars' vocalist Bryan Cates into singing a few harmonies, and the award-winning bluegrass quartet Chatham County Line dropped by for a closing track, but for the most part the record is as it happened that one "lost weekend." Mitch Easter mixed it all at his Fidelitorium studio, hot to the touch.

—CHRIS STAMEY,  
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