

## BOSTON SPACESHIPS



## LET IT BEARD

### **Boston Spaceships**

*Let It Beard*

Guided By Voices, Inc.

Street date: August 2

Let's begin with a bold and yet entirely defensible premise: The new Boston Spaceships double album, *Let It Beard*, is the most ambitious, varied, sprawling — and yet entirely coherent— record that Robert Pollard has made in his entire career.

This is not an accident. Though some—understandably confused by Pollard's ambitious, varied, and sprawling output post-Guided By Voices—may have earlier consigned Boston Spaceships to the "Pollard side-project" pile, (which is admittedly considerable), this is not a side-project. This is a band. This is Pollard's main band. *Let It Beard*, the fifth Boston Spaceships album in its three year existence, is nevertheless the product of more than half a year's work by that new band, and it shows.

Pollard initially delivered to Portland-based guitarist/bassist/keyboardist (and ex-GBV member) Chris Slusarenko acoustic demos of 40 songs. Between the two they whittled down the list to 26, for which Bob sketched a rough sequence. Slusarenko worked out the basic structures and took the songs to drummer John Moen (Decemberists, Stephen Malkmus). Chris and John then banged out the basic tracks over the course of three days in engineer Jonathan Drews' basement studio in Portland. It was Chris' idea that John not hear any of the songs prior to recording, in an attempt to engender some of the tension and spontaneity of early Guided By Voices records, something he felt had been partly jettisoned in the latter stage of that band's illustrious career, in favor of a more professional approach. Moen, who Pollard calls "the most creative drummer I've ever worked with," proved more than up to the task of working quickly with unfamiliar material. Moreover, as John himself says, "It was tremendously freeing to work like that. And a little scary."

But that was the easy part. Over the next six months or so, Slusarenko fleshed out the arrangements, adding new sounds, coming up with new ways to record some of those sounds (including recording on 4-track, *Bee Thousand*-style, in his house). He kept a flowchart of the album's sequence and instrumental ideas that threatened to take over every available space in his home, and lost hours of sleep thinking about ways to: make each song distinctive; make the transitions between each song work; make the overall scheme of the album coherent; and keep from losing his mind.

What happened next was remarkable. Pollard, notorious for changing the song order, replacing one song with another, changing his mind about the album title fifty or sixty times over the course of recording, and even on occasion shit-canning the whole deal, *did none of these things*. The album was always going to be called *Let It Beard*. It was always going to be a double album. And though he wrote and re-wrote lyrics and changed the titles of some of the demos, he stuck to the original sequence. This has never happened before, either during or post Guided By Voices.

The result: what Pollard has called "a subconscious concept album about the sorry state of rock and roll." A 75 minute thrill ride through the many forms of rock Pollard has mastered in his three plus decades of writing and recording songs. "The *White Album* meets *Quadrophenia* meets *Jesus Christ Superstar*," he says. "Meets *Same Place The Fly Got Smashed*," adds Slusarenko. An album with strings, horns, keyboards, a female soul singer, and guest guitar turns from such luminaries as Colin Newman from Wire (!), J Mascis from Dinosaur Jr, Steve Wynn from the Dream Syndicate, Mick Collins from Dirtbombs and the Gories, Dave Rick from Phantom Tollbooth (among others), and some guy named Mitch Mitchell.

Chris took a more-or-less complete version of *Let It Beard* to Ohio where Bob "put the head on the body," as he likes to say, by recording vocals with Todd Tobias at Waterloo Studios in Kent. Over the course of last year, the record slowly began to take shape.

"It's difficult to make an album under what I call the 'mushroom cloud' of Guided By Voices," admits Slusarenko. "Especially now that the reunion tour is happening. But we worked really, really hard on this one, and it's important not just to myself and John, but to Bob as well. He's fond of saying 'I used to be in Guided By Voices, but I'm in Boston Spaceships now.'"

This is not a contradiction. Even as Pollard delights in re-creating the classic line-up of Guided By Voices for fans who never got to see that incarnation of the band, he has never been and never will be a man who trades on nostalgia. His impulse is always to push ahead, to go farther, to stretch his songwriting abilities to its limits: to actually *get better*. He doesn't begrudge those who revere the *Bee Thousand*/*Alien Lanes*/*UTBUTS* era of GBV, but knows that as an artist he's long since moved past those benchmarks in search of higher ground.

*Let It Beard* takes Pollard's magic to a whole other level. It has the patchwork quilt/crazy collisions of *Bee Thousand*/*Alien Lanes*, but weds them to a variety of sonic textures, quickly shifting styles, and pseudo-epic songs-within-songs that down-shift and twist abruptly and wonderfully before taking flight or speeding straight into a brick wall. The songs themselves are more expansive and ambitious than any he's written before ("Nobody writes 'Happiness Is a Warm Gun'-type songs, anymore," he says. "So I figured I would. And for this record, I wrote a bunch of 'em."). The musical settings are sure-handed but never showy, and the arrangements well-considered but never labored. Making a record sound simple requires enormous effort, and even if, as Slusarenko says, "I nearly lost my mind when we got to around song 18," that effort pays off in pure rock gold here. *Let It Beard* (the title itself contains multitudes: *Let It Be*, bee, beer, weird, beard-rock, weird-rock, we could do this all day) is a monster, and the only thing that could prevent someone saying it's the best thing Pollard et al. has/have ever done is the sure knowledge that he has already written the next Boston Spaceships record. But that is another story for another day. Dig the *Beard*, and dig it now. And as always, friends, never forget: play it loud.



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Robert Pollard: Vocals, Cough Guitar (13)  
Chris Slusarenko: Guitars, Bass, Keyboards  
John Moen: Drums, Additional Guitar (24)

With:

Jonathan Drews: Keyboards, Percussion  
Kaitlyn ni Donovan: Strings  
Victor Nash: Trumpet, French Horn

J. Mascis: Guitar Solo (3) Recorded by Justin Pizzoferrato at Bisquiteen  
Colin Newman: Additional Guitars (7)  
Tahoe Jackson: Vocals (8)  
Mick Collins: Guitar Leads (10) Recorded by Chris Koltay for High Bias Recordings at Case Quarter in Detroit, Mi  
Steve Wynn: Guitar Solo (15) Recorded at Up There, NYC  
Gordon Withers : Cello (17) Recorded at Three Toed Recording Studios  
Mitch Mitchell: Guitar Solo (25)  
Dave Rick: Guitar Leads (26) Recorded by Dew Claw  
Sean Croghan: Scream

*Let It Beard* Recorded and Produced by Jonathan Drews and Chris Slusarenko at Last of the Explorers, Portland, Oregon  
Vocals Recorded by Todd Tobias at Waterloo Sound, Brecksville, Ohio  
Mastered by Carl Saff

All songs written and conjured by Robert Pollard  
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## **LET IT BEARD**

1. Blind 20-20
2. Juggernaut Vs. Monolith
3. Tourist U.F.O.
4. Minefield Searcher
5. Make A Record For Lo-life
6. Let More Light In The House
7. You Just Can't Tell
8. Chevy Marigold
9. Earmarked For Collision
10. Toppings Take The Cake
11. Tabby And Lucy
12. (I'll Make It) Strong For You
13. A Hair In Every Square Inch Of The House
14. The Ballad Of Bad Whiskey
15. I Took On The London Guys
16. Red Bodies
17. A Dozen Blue Overcoats
18. Pincushion
19. Christmas Girl
20. Let It Beard
21. The Vicelords
22. German Field Of Shadows
23. Speed Bumps
24. No Steamboats
25. You In My Prayer
26. Inspiration Points
- A. Shove Thy Neighbor
- B. Human Amusements At Hourly Rates
- C. Man Of A 1000 Worlds
- D. Inspiration Point

# BOSTON SPACESHIPS



## BROWN SUBMARINE (2008)

4 Stars \*\*\*\* - Mojo

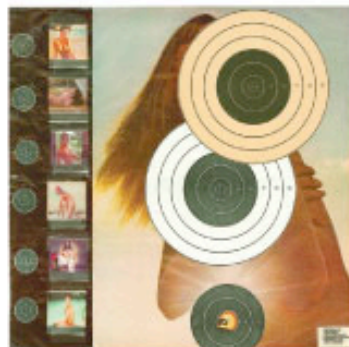
Top 20 Albums of 2008! - Magnet



## THE PLANETS ARE BLASTED (2009)

Another jaw-droppingly wondrous mashup of British Invasion jangle and lyrical non-sequitors - Paste

Hits the same giddy melodic heights as GBV's golden era but with a grander sense of scale and drama. 6/6 \*\*\*\*\* - All Music Guide



## ZERO TO 99 (2009)

Another winner...Pollard's making some of the best music of his life - Pitchfork

4 Stars \*\*\*\* - Mojo

Top 20 Albums of 2009! - Magnet



## OUR CUBEHOUSE STILL ROCKS

An anthem-heavy affair that's the band's best work to date - The Onion

Top 20 albums of 2010! - Magnet

"Swinging chorus and chimpanzee bravado shows that grandad Pollard still rocks. 5 Stars \*\*\*\* " - Times Of London