

POINT BREAK

With help from Adrock and Chuck Brody, Northern State kills a major-label mold

Interviewing Northern State is like chatting with your enviably cool East Coast girlfriends. Friendly and effusive, Hesta Prynn (aka Julie Potash) and Spero (aka Correne Spero)—along with bandmate Sprout and co-producers Chuck Brody (of Shitake Monkey) and the Beastie Boys' Adrock—have spent the past year recording *Can I Keep This Pen?* (Ipecac, 2007) and watching reality TV. "Adrock watches *Project Runway* with us," Prynn says, "and 'Oooh, Girl' is inspired by that show and *America's Next Top Model*. Oooh, girl, auf wiedersehen!" she chuckles, echoing *Runway* host

Heidi Klum's tagline. Although these three bandmates are as witty, pop-culture-savvy and often downright silly as all that, they're also serious, dedicated musicians who have gone through a rebirth with their latest effort.

Previously in the Columbia/Sony stable ("Columbia was...a bad match for us," Prynn explains diplomatically), Northern State is now with Ipecac and couldn't be happier. But the limbo in between labels generated uncertainty, so the new album was made slowly but surely, sparked by a Brody co-written song and solidified by Brody and Adrock's offers to produce. Brody's aim was to return the ladies to their signature sound.

"I wanted to bring them back toward their first record," Brody says, "with more D.I.Y., more experimenting. I also wanted to take them further with the

guitar work. We took almost a year, but I think it's their best record to date."


Tracked at Brody's New York studio, The Fireplace, they recorded on Pro Tools|HD, with an Akai MPC4000 taking on the bulk of the drums and programming duties. Brody also brought in a Casio CZ-1 for the groovin' synth sounds, an old Minimoog ("for that West Coast Dr. Dre sound," Brody explains) and a Roland Juno-60 that Prynn became enamored with. "I still go over to Chuck's studio to use it all the time," she says. "It's such a dense instrument. I love the way it sounds. I wanted to put it on every song." "And we love the Space Echo," Spero adds with a laugh. "We used it on lots of songs."

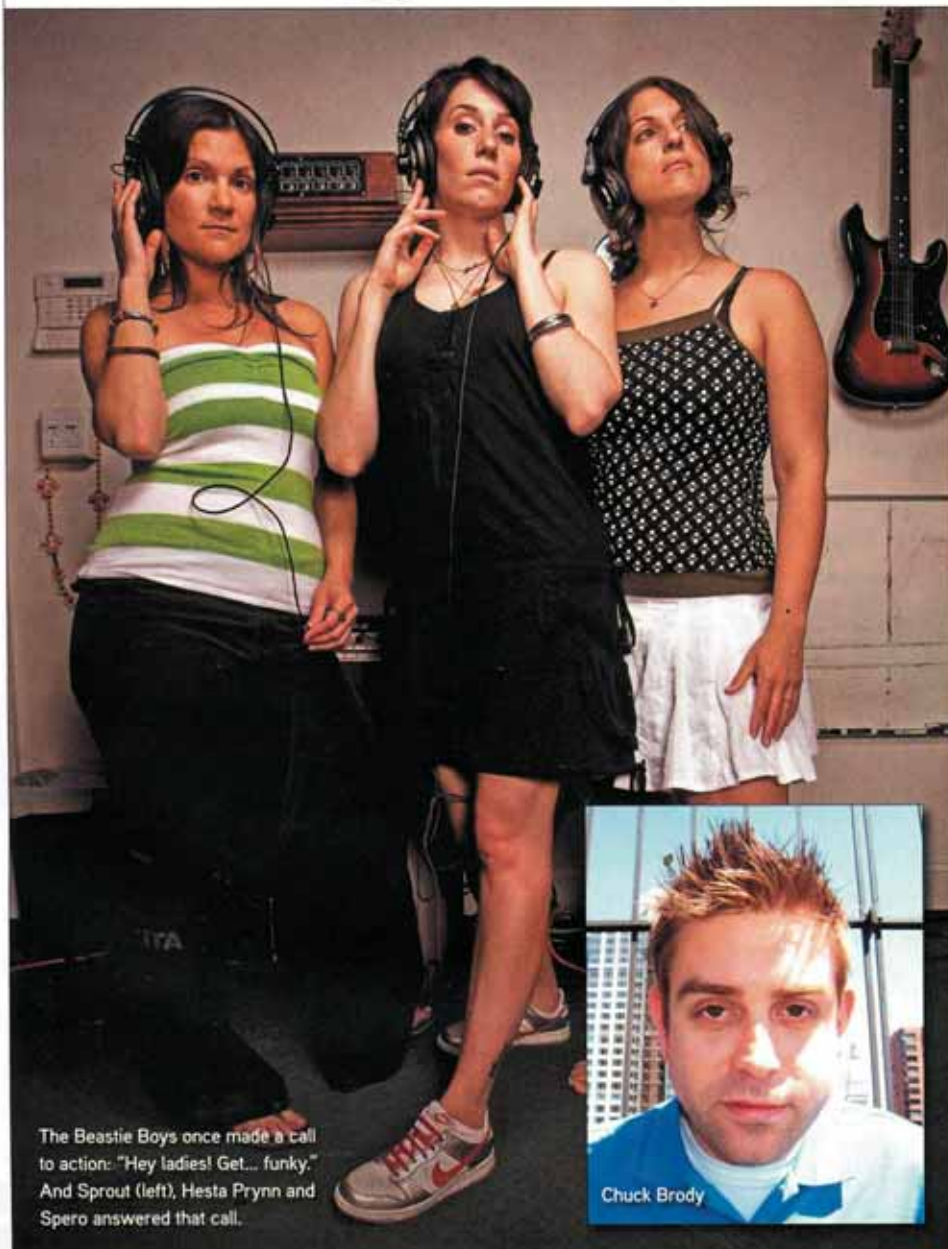
Multi-instrumentalist Brody played right alongside the girls, but that's not to say the trio can't hold their own. Sprout enhanced the rhythm section with solid work on her Fender bass, while Prynn skillfully manned the keys and Spero churned things up guitarwise on her Fender Telecaster. And who could miss their revamped vocal sound, with even snappier wordplay and...singing?

"We've actually all done different levels of singing," Spero explains, "just not in this band. But we do have side-project bands, so we each have our own niches." Brody, who Spero points out is "very specific about microphones," chose Neumann U 87s and the coveted AKG C12s for the vocals, which range from the prettily delivered harmonies of "Away Away" to the crisp "Mic Tester" and the sing-alongable "Better Already." And the band's political statements on "Cowboy Man" and "Cold War" are EQ'd with the appropriate level of punch. It's an intriguing and smart blend of hip-hop and electro-rock that also includes plenty of the experimenting that Brody was shooting for.

"Things I'll Do" ended up especially cool," Spero recalls. "I put the beat together on a sampler with [Brooklyn DJ] Nik at Nite. I'd record a line, we'd bounce it to CD-R, he'd add scratches on a CDJ, and we'd take it to the studio to add keys and guitars."

"Chuck really reinvented this band," Prynn adds. "We'd already gotten two rap records out of our system, so he helped us develop an entirely new sound. Both Chuck and Adrock really believe in us, and they helped give vision to our ideas."

After tracking was wrapped, Brody took the set to New York's Sony Studios for mixing, working with Dave Kutch on the facility's SSL 9000 console. The album's completion was an end to one phase for Northern State and the beginning of another. "Bands go through cycles creatively," Spero says, "and being free from Columbia, we felt even more excited about being independent, like, 'Let's go out on a limb and do something different.'" Prynn echoes those sentiments: "I feel that we just wrote the best record of our lives." 



The Beastie Boys once made a call to action: "Hey ladies! Get... funky." And Sprout (left), Hesta Prynn and Spero answered that call.

Chuck Brody

MATTHEW RODGERS



To read a full Q&A from Northern State and Chuck Brody, go to remixmag.com.

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