



# Dungen

by: Chris Martins

IT'S A LITTLE-KNOWN FACT that on one sunny day in 1967, in a green grove near a small village in the Swedish countryside—a place called Lanna—the grass stopped growing. Just stopped. The bushes were next, then the shrubs, the hedges, various mosses and vines...eventually, even the trees followed suit. The seasons ceased—came to a live halt, flowers open and all. For 21 years nothing happened. Tucked away in the hills, this sunny day from the '60s just sat and waited for someone—anyone—to walk into it.

And then, on a particularly gloomy day, it happened. A skinny boy from the town—tall for his nine years, with curly brown hair down past his shoulders—wandered out into the woods. Following nothing more than the shuffle of his shoes through the dead leaves, he walked into the dark with his eyes to the ground. But as he walked on and the daylight faded back at his parents' farmhouse, the forest floor was getting lighter. He could see the sun beaming down through an opening ahead, and for no reason apparent to himself, Gustav Ejstes picked up his lanky legs and ran for it, jumped, and landed smack-dab in the middle of the Summer of Love.

At least, that's the way I'd like to imagine it, look-

ing at this overgrown boy laying in the grass in front of me, barefoot and making invisible snow angels where snow never falls (Los Angeles—specifically, on a tiny traffic island next to the Troubadour). Dungen are playing their first show in the big city tonight and singer/songwriter Gustav, 26, is rolling around on the sod like he isn't surrounded by cars blasting Bone-Thugs—like the population of L.A. County doesn't have an extra 0.9 million on the *country* he grew up in. (Sweden, with its additional 170,000 square miles of land.)

"We grew up out in the country—quite isolated," says Gustav. With that flowing hair, the black-and-white-striped longsleeve T stretched over his torso and the tight, low-slung jeans, he looks like a lost Allman Brother. Or Robert Plant with a winning smile. "Our generation had two TV channels that were both government-run and one radio station that was almost good. We didn't have cable, I didn't have a thousand friends...we didn't even have concrete; we had old dirt roads. And I remember when I said to mom, 'I don't know what to doooooo!' she said, 'Find something to do.'"

Which, as it turns out, is to make brilliantly exe-

cuted, completely out-of-time, frenetic fucking, savage-ass psych-rock. With a pop edge. And flute solos. And not an ounce of "post—" pretense, "neo—" nostalgia, or "nū—" posturing. *Ta Det Lugnt*—Dungen's third album, but the first to make it stateside—is an accomplishment that no country accustomed to scene-ry could ever hope to claim. And while Stockholm's exported more than its fair share of cocky punk revivalists and glitzy garage-dwellers, there's something naïve and inexplicably honest about Dungen's proggy folk-pop explosion.

Perhaps it's that there isn't a single word of English uttered on the album ("I don't think that's a problem...even the Swedes don't know what I'm singing about.") Or that after signing to Virgin for his second record (*Stadsvandringar*) and being obsessively preened for popularity, Gustav moved back out to the country to detox and rethink, started recording on a whim, and spent the next two years—virtually unassisted—creating *Ta Det Lugnt*, which literally translates to "grab the calm." Or that seeing Dungen live in full-band form—Gustav, guitarist Reine Fiske, drummer Fredrik Bjorling, bassist Tiaz Gustavsson—one gets the overwhelming desire to drop acid and run headlong into the Swedish wilderness ("dungen" translates to "grove," by the way). Whatever it is, it's the kind of thing best left to the imagination. ■