

When Svein Berge and Torbjørn Brundtland were growing up in the arctic town of Tromsø, Norway they would play among a kind of fungus that erupted in a cloud of spores when trodden on. Berge would use them as lo-fi explosives with which to bombard his Star Wars figures. The name of this fungus was røyksopp, literally "smoke mushroom". It's also a word for a nuclear mushroom cloud and a silly drug reference. "You can't really call a band Røyksopp," admits Svein. "It shouldn't work."

Now, though, this obscure bit of Norwegian vocabulary is familiar to most fans of electronic music. Since its release in October 2001, Røyksopp's debut album, *Melody AM*, has become a word-of-mouth phenomenon to the tune of almost half a million copies worldwide.

Amidst dance music's myriad overhyped disappointments, *Melody AM* was a genuine surprise: a sound nobody expected from a place nobody was looking. It's chilly and it's warm. It's melancholy and it's playful. At various points it's synth-pop, deep house, breakbeat, ambient and electronic folk, but you can't hear the joins. No wonder its charm reached clubbers, comedowners and open-minded rock fans alike.

"People haven't been able to define a genre for what we're doing," says Svein. "It's often just comparing, like 'It's a bit like Air meeting Radiohead at an after-party in Stockholm smoking opium.'" He laughs but he might have something there.

Svein and Torbjørn were childhood friends in Tromsø and played cover versions of Kraftwerk and Depeche Mode together in their early teens. Røyksopp came to life when the pair moved to Bergen in 1997 and fell in with the DJs and musicians who would soon found the pivotal Telle label.

The first track they recorded was the haunting *So Easy*. Sampling an obscure cover of Bobby Vinton's *Blue On Blue* by easy listening combo Gals'N'Pals, *So Easy* would snake its way into Britain's consciousness via a Vodafone advert five years later. Svein: "We chose the name because everything felt very easy at that point. We had just moved to Bergen and it was one of the best summers for the last 100 years."

*Melody AM* came together slowly over the next four years. "We wanted to make some music which we felt that the world needed, which sounds pretentious but we like pretentious. We had an idea of what this was and not being able to describe it in words we decided to make it in music."

Their ambitions outweighed their finances. While making Melody AM, Röyksopp had so little money that during one two month period they ate mashed potato with dried oregano for dinner every night, which is not a diet they'd recommend. The most they thought the album might sell was 20,000.

However the release of So Easy as a Telle seven inch (backed with The 64 Position, an ode to the Commodore 64) pricked the ears of several A&R men and brought a flood of offers. Wall Of Sound landed the deal and introduced Röyksopp to the kind of people who don't buy limited edition Norwegian seven inches. The bouncing, bleeping uncategorisable Nordic funk of Eple (pronounced Epp-ler, it means "apple") was a huge underground hit in summer 2001 and Melody AM soon followed to blanket critical acclaim.

Melody AM's entry into the mainstream was a stealthy one. It finally reached the Top 10 in August 2002 and has sold steadily ever since, returning to the Top 10 in February 2003. In the process it's spawned a string of singles: Eple (twice), Poor Leno (twice), Remind Me and Sparks.

One ingredient of Röyksopp's success has been their energetic live shows. They have toured Europe with Moby, supported Basement Jaxx and Orbital and been hand-picked by Pulp for Sheffield's Auto event in December 2002. Numerous festival appearances include a triumphant headlining performance at 2002's Big Chill. Not bad considering they started out with no live ambitions.

Svein: "We consider ourselves more producers than performers but we really like a challenge. The reason I ended up with the drum pads is because they were closest to me in the studio and Torbjorn was closest to the sampler. It's funny how things turn out."

Röyksopp were nominated for four MTV Europe awards in 2002 and took home the viewer-voted Best Video gong for Remind Me. They were also nominated for Best International Group at the Brits. Back in Norway, where they're the biggest musical export since a-ha, they were garlanded with a special award.

Röyksopp fans are an interesting bunch. Coldplay, Doves, Garbage and, bizarrely, Britney Spears are among those who have beaten a path to the duo's door with requests for remix, production or tour support. Lucky recipients of Röyksopp's remix magic to date are The

Streets, Felix Da Housecat, Peter Gabriel, Kings Of Convenience, Spiller and Mekon.

So what's been their proudest moment so far? "It was actually when we finished the album," says Svein with a smile. "It felt a bit like running in slow motion to Vangelis's Chariots Of Fire because we'd done everything ourselves, from programming the tiniest hi-hat to co-designing the cover. Everything else we consider a bonus. It's all been good. It's like Christmas. You don't say, Oh this wasn't a very good present, because it's still a present."

Musicians are usually the last people to explain their own success but Svein has an idea. "One of the advantages of coming from a little shitkicking place in northern Norway is most people wouldn't know what to expect. We are not bound to shifting trends so we can mess around and do what we want to. We don't believe there is anything called Norwegian credibility."

There is now.