

MEET...

Name: Gregg Gillis

Stage Name: Girl Talk

Age: 28

Record Label: Illegal Art

Albums: Secret Diary, Unstoppable, Night Ripper, Feed the Animals



Profile: Girl Talk

Pittsburgh artist Gregg Gillis (aka Girl Talk) has scrupulously created music from samples for over eight years. His fourth album, *Feed the Animals*, continues his sonic evolution towards his party-infested live show. While his first album, *Secret Diary* (2002), was full of purposeful glitches and noise, his subsequent albums, *Unstoppable* (2004) and the groundbreaking *Night Ripper* (2006), moved closer and closer towards dance-able mixes of varying genres, often including dozens of audio sources in a stream of juxtaposed hooks. With the fourth Girl Talk album on the Illegal Art label, Gillis steps even closer towards a creation that is centered on pop musicality rather than attention-deficit sample splicing.



Girl Talk has been known to underground audiences for several years, but it wasn't until 2006 that Gillis crossed over and caught the attention of a larger audience. With *Rolling Stone*, *SPIN*, *Blender*, *Pitchfork*, and even *Beck* including *Night Ripper* in their best albums of 2006 lists, Girl Talk has gone on to be booked by major festivals (Coachella, Lollapalooza, Bonnaroo, Virgin, All Points West, Pitchfork, DEMF, etc.), and solicited for remixes (Beck, Thrill Jockey, Tokyo Police Club, Grizzly Bear, Simian Mobile Disco, Peter Bjorn & John, TeddyBears, and Of Montreal). And with roughly 200 live shows over the last couple of years, Gillis has consistently played larger venues to capacity crowds (every date on his 2007 North American tour with Dan Deacon sold out).

A year after the critically acclaimed *Night Ripper* release, Gillis quit his job as a biomedical engineer and now focuses on music full time. With his newly acquired lifestyle he can now work on music during the week and fly out to play shows on the weekend. With only a laptop in hand, the Girl Talk live show is more portable than a traditional band and has afforded Gillis the opportunity to travel the world with minimal overhead. A visceral culture of audience involvement has also become key to the live Girl Talk experience. Performances oftentimes feature the stage being mobbed with a sweaty mass of dancers who surround Gillis as he triggers samples and create mixes, new and old, out of loops from his hard drive. Such performances have quickly become one of the most entertaining and exhilarating live shows many have experienced as Girl Talk has the extraordinary ability to get the crowd ecstatic and keep the thrill going for the entire concert.

The new album, *Feed the Animals*, collects the material that was developed over the last two years as part of Gillis' ever-changing live show. With hours of material in hand, it still took months to meticulously edit together the seamless album that combines 300+ samples in 50 minutes. Such fastidious care is what separates Girl Talk from the dime-a-dozen remixes that are posted to the Internet daily. In comparison to the previous release, Gillis has described this new album as expanded, with a larger range of tempos and samples. Yet, at the same time the focus has shifted from technical prowess to the flow and balance of each segment in an effort to successfully translate the over-the-top party feel of the Girl Talk live show into album form.

Before Girl Talk suddenly reached critical acclaim, a typical show would attract 15-30 people. During those initial years it was an extreme oddity for someone to show up with a laptop and play elaborately constructed mixes of pop samples. In the last couple of years, though, not only have Gillis' live shows exploded, but he is also being recognized for his innovations. From Wayne Coyne of *The Flaming Lips* nominating him for the Shortlist Music Prize to Representative Mike Doyle speaking about him to Congress (in relation to copyright laws), Gillis has quickly become a public figure. Emerging from his underground Pittsburgh roots, he is now being lauded as the future of electronic music by techno pioneer Richie Hawtin, while celebrities such as Paris Hilton are vying to dance onstage during a Girl Talk show. Gillis modestly takes it all in stride and has stated in interviews that he will eventually go back to a normal job, all the while reveling in the party while it lasts.

While Girl Talk's music is often categorized alongside mashups, or DJ mixes, it is critical to note how distinct his assemblages are from the conventional mixing of two simultaneous tracks. Gillis' roots lie more in the rich history of sample-based composition as demonstrated by artists such as Dickie Goodman, Negativland, John Oswald, Steinski, Public Enemy (The Bomb Squad era), and countless others. Rather than taking mashups to an extreme, Girl Talk is more focused on the art of the sampling and developing new tracks that have their own character, and surpass the original elements. Such transformative work is what helps qualify his output as being protected by the fair use principle of U.S. Copyright Law.

MEET...

Members: Aaron Barrett, Scott Klopfenstein, Derek Gibbs, Dan Regan, Ryland Steen, John Christianson

Stage Name: Reel Big Fish

Record Label: Rock Ridge Music

Albums: Everything Sucks, Turn the Radio Off, Why Do They Rock So Hard, Cheer Up!, We're Not Happy 'Til You're Not Happy, Monkeys for Nothin' and the Chimps for Free, Fame Fortune and Fornication

Profile: Reel Big Fish

Fame, Fortune and Fornication

Let's just say that if it weren't for the outlandish '80s hair-metal rockers of Poison—and more specifically, guitarist C.C. Deville and his dangerously flamboyant licks, leads and neon-lime painted axes—legendary Orange County ska-rockers Reel Big Fish probably wouldn't have ever existed.

Now, one might have a disastrous time in attempting to establish any semblance of a connection between these two seemingly disparate musical entities. But as RBF frontman Aaron Barrett explains, the two are intimately intertwined in more ways than one. As a young, insanely impressionable teenager watching MTV non-stop, Barrett had taken an extreme liking to Poison and all they'd presented in their music videos.

"I was in junior high, I saw the Poison videos come on, and they were so bright, colorful and fun," he recalls. "And they were playing all these guitars and it looked like the most awesome, fun thing ever. I was like, 'I want to do that.'"

Fast-forward that VHS tape a couple decades later (adjust the tracking control, too): Barrett's on the summer musical extravaganza more intimately known as the Vans Warped Tour. Though he's been a full-time touring musician for the better part of a decade, it's during this particular mega-musical journey that inspiration strikes him like none other before: A fervent follower of Brett Michaels' VH1 celebrity reality television contest, "Rock Of Love," Barrett realized that he just had to cover some Poison songs. In fact, since Poison's such a party band, he originally wanted to embark on a party anthems cover album, with some 40 songs under his belt. Alas, after scrapping attempts at Sir Mix-A-Lot's "Baby Got Back" and the Beastie Boys' "Fight For Your Right to Party," Barrett and company reconvened to make a second attempt — an all-Poison covers album. "It was like, 'Yeah, let's do an album of Poison songs, ska versions!' But nobody else was excited about it, just me," says Barrett.

Third time's the charm, and armed with another arsenal of other peoples' material, Reel Big Fish decided to track a theme-less covers album. "It's just a disc with a bunch of random songs," says Barrett. "That's usually what happens with us. We'll pick a theme and then don't go with it. 'Let's do this!' 'OK, no!'"

The successful result is *Fame, Fortune and Fornication*, boasting a bevy of familiar hits, including two tracks from the aforementioned Poison, most notably "Talk Dirty To Me," featuring a duet with Tatiana DeMaria from London-based punk trio TAT.

There's also the long-requested cover of Van Morrison's "Brown Eyed Girl." Barrett says that he never really intended to cover "Brown Eyed Girl," but that he had to include it on the album — well, via wrongful popular demand. Rumors have persisted for several years about Reel Big Fish covering the classic rock track — and Barrett decided to make reality out of such false flack.

"I've heard it before and it doesn't sound anything like us at all, but every day of my life, it's like, 'Are you going to play "Brown Eyed Girl?"' 'I love your version of "Brown Eyed Girl.'" And it's like, that's not us. And now it's like, hey, let's do it! That'll confuse people." "Mama We're All Crazy Now," made famous by both Slade and Quiet Riot, also made the cut. While Barrett acknowledges both bands' versions, he admits that Quiet Riot's rendition was the model, as their track was one of the two songs Barrett would listen to every day before heading on stage for the Warped Tour.

"People like it 'cause we make it our own," says Barrett of *Fame, Fortune and Fornication*. "That's the most important thing about doing a cover is that you need to make it your own song, almost like you wrote it, like you've got to love it that much. A lot of bands I see, they do cover songs and it's like, 'Oh yeah, I know that song.' They just seem to do it for the wrong reasons. But I just love other people's songs. I just love music."

"It's so easy to do cover songs 'cause they're already there, they're already written and everything," he adds. "They're like ripe apples on a tree — you just pick it and eat it. But like with your own songs, you've got to wait for inspiration and stuff. You've got to figure the arrangement and play around with the parts. I don't know, that's fun, too."



**Reel
Big Fish**