

Music

A family affair



I should CocoRosie! The sisters are doing it for themselves

Bohemian sister act CocoRosie put the freak in folk. **Jennifer Conrad** clips into their surreal world ahead of their Beijing show

According to CocoRosie's creation myth, which slightly strains credulity at times, sisters Sierra and Bianca Casady were raised in the US by hippie parents, who encouraged the girls to take up creative pursuits rather than go to school.

The sisters drifted apart, then reunited in 2003, when both were in their early twenties. The reunion took place at Sierra's place in Paris, and it was there that Bianca and Sierra (whose band name comes from their childhood nicknames 'Coco' and 'Rosie') recorded their first album, *La Maison de Mon Rêve*, in Sierra's bathtub.

Although the recording was initially intended for friends, indie label Touch And Go somehow received the album and convinced CocoRosie to sign on.

'I was immediately drawn to their music from the first note I heard,' says Corey Rusk, who first signed the act.

'They are very special and so is their music.' From there, an indie-rock sleeper hit was born.

The newfound artistic direction came at just the right time. Sierra had been studying opera in Paris, while Bianca, before a fit of wanderlust took her from New York City to her sister's doorstep, had been making art – but neither sister felt fulfilled.

They followed *La Maison de Mon Rêve* (which can be translated as *The House of My Dream*) with two more albums on Touch And Go, *Noah's Ark* (2005) and *The Adventures of Ghosthorse and Stillborn* (2007). This spring, they released their fourth full-length, *Grey Oceans*, on Sub Pop.

They've honed a signature sound that evokes

descriptions such as 'dreamy', 'childlike' and 'otherworldly'. Whether you like it or not depends on your threshold for the experimental and 'out there' – and perhaps how you feel about a certain neighbourhood in Brooklyn called Williamsburg.

'Most of my cool Chinese friends are obsessed with CocoRosie,' says Al Di,

'Childhood is just one of the colours we like to paint with'

the excitable local promoter bringing the band to town. 'My friend Tian Yuan, who is a very famous Chinese actress and TV host, is also excited to be the special guest for CocoRosie! For everyone else who isn't passionate, they can stay home or go to a nightclub to listen to Lady Gaga, Pussycat Dolls and Kanye "Stupid" West!'

So what should you expect? There's Bianca's babyish moans (that sometimes earn her comparisons to Billie Holiday, although those with shorter memories might compare her to Macy Gray) and Sierra's

wilting soprano, plus a background filled out with sounds from children's toys as well as guitar, piano, harp, drums and various electronics.

It's a dark and dirge-fuelled ride through the women's own little world, touching on folk, hip-hop and cabaret – they often get lumped into the rather loose genre of 'freak-folk'.

'Childhood is just one of the colours we like to paint with,' says Bianca. Perhaps it's the influence of their nomadic childhood, but the sisters like to record all over the world (parts of *Ghosthorse* were recorded in Buenos Aires). They can now be found between Paris and Williamsburg – or wherever the wind takes them. 'We love being on the road and leaving our things behind, wind in our hair, the smell of the sea,' explains Bianca.

And their first trip to China (along with Beijing, they've got stops scheduled in Shanghai and the InMusic Festival) should provide fresh inspiration. 'We're looking forward to the newness, the possibility of a new audience, some great food and magical herbs,' Bianca says. 'Also perhaps finding a new Chinese flute or two.'

Their elaborate costumes – you might see them in Victorian dresses, face paint or oversized tracksuits – are part of the package. 'This recent tour was inspired by Cinderella, meaning "cinder", so there's a kind of chimney-sweep look,' Bianca explains.

'We love all forms of transformation and look to many different flowers for that,' she continues. Among their influences, they cite drag queens, and Bianca often appears in drag on stage and in photos. 'It's all a part of a personal fantasy, personal romance and freedom,' she says.

They've collaborated with the likes of Antony Hegarty (of Antony and the Johnsons) and Devendra Banhart. And on this tour, they'll bring Tez (a beatboxer from Paris), Gaël Rakotondrabe (a pianist from Réunion Island) and Marc Lacaillé (Gaël's cousin and a drummer/percussionist).

'You can expect to see some very psychedelic images involving blood, feathers, clowns, mushrooms and the ocean,' Bianca reveals. We can't wait.

CocoRosie play Yugong Yishan on Thursday 5. See listings for details.

