

THE HISTORY OF ROCK

1975

A MONTHLY TRIP THROUGH MUSIC'S GOLDEN YEARS
THIS ISSUE: 1975

★ FROM THE ARCHIVES OF NME & MELODY MAKER ★

STARRING...

LED ZEPPELIN
"Instant bedlam"
PETER GABRIEL
PINK FLOYD
BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
PATTI SMITH
BOB MARLEY
RAMONES
DR FEELGOOD
TOM WAITS
EAGLES
QUEEN

PLUS! WHO | DISCO | CAN | STONES | 101ERS | SABBATH | NORTHERN SOUL

THE HISTORY OF ROCK | 1975

FROM THE MAKERS OF UNCUT



Welcome to 1975

NME'S CHARLES SHAAR Murray is not wrong when he surveys from behind aviator shades a show at CBGB where Patti Smith is supported by Television and declares in his review: "something is happening".

It certainly is. Smith and her band are channelling currents that have been swelling in New York for the past couple of years, creating something in the slipstream of Bowie, Alice Cooper and the New York Dolls – a happening simultaneously local and international, primal and intellectual. Pete Townshend thinks rock is on the way out, and by the end of the year, plenty will agree with him.

On the world stage, meanwhile, our cover stars Led Zeppelin dominate the year. The band cause riots in the USA, and conquer London with their Earl's Court show. They release *Physical Graffiti*, an album in the format best suited to their heft: a double.

This is the world of *The History Of Rock*, a monthly magazine that follows each strange turn of the rock revolution. Whether in sleazy dive or huge arena, passionate and increasingly stylish contemporary reporters were there to chronicle them. This publication reaps the benefits of their understanding for the reader decades later, one year at a time.

In the pages of this 11th issue, dedicated to 1975, you will find verbatim articles from frontline staffers, compiled into long and illuminating reads. Missed an issue? You can find out how to rectify that on page 144.

What will still surprise the modern reader is the access to, and the sheer volume of, material supplied by the artists who are now the giants of popular culture. Now, a combination of wealth, fear and lifestyle would conspire to keep reporters at a rather greater length from the lives of musicians.

At this stage, though, representatives from *New Musical Express* and *Melody Maker* are where it matters. Watching Bob Marley convert the USA. Hearing how Ozzy Osbourne shot his cat. Doorstepping the Rolling Stones in Montreux.

"What are you doing 'ere?" they asked then. Now, of course, they know.

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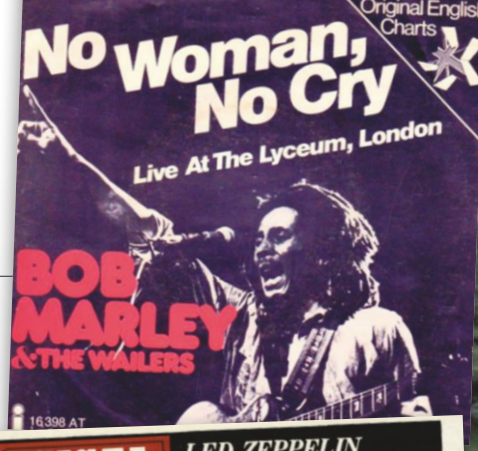
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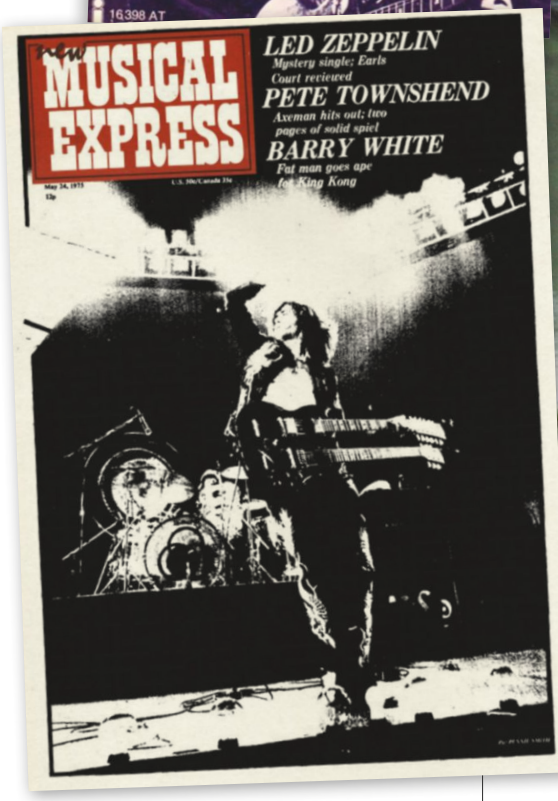
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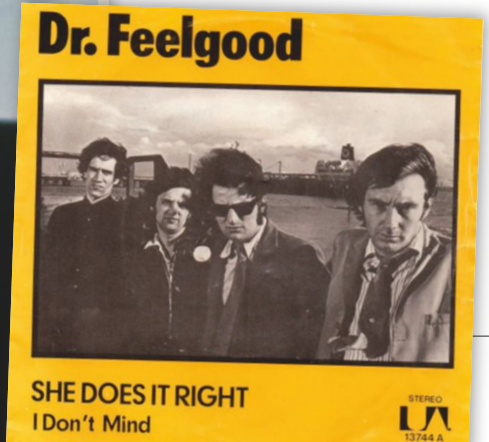
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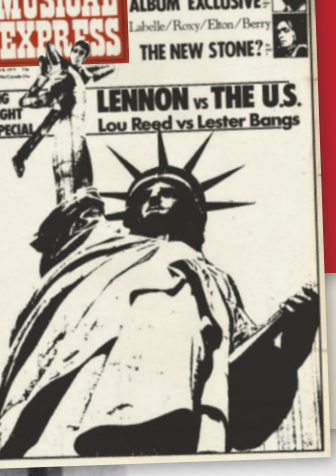
Time Inc. (UK) Ltd, 8th Floor, Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark St, London SE1 0SU | **EDITOR** John Mulvey, whose favourite song from 1975 is *Gloria by Patti Smith* **DEPUTY EDITOR** John Robinson *Golden Years by David Bowie* **ART EDITOR** Lora Findlay *Maid In Heaven by Be Bop Deluxe* **PRODUCTION EDITOR** Mike Johnson *I'm Not In Love by 10cc* **ART DIRECTOR** Marc Jones *Love Is The Drug by Roxy Music* **DESIGNER** Becky Redman *Trenchtown Rock by Bob Marley & The Wailers* **PICTURE EDITOR** Kimberly Kriete *Young Americans by David Bowie* **COVER PHOTO** © Adrian Boot **THANKS TO** Helen Spivak, James Hanman **MARKETING** Charlotte Treadaway **SUBSCRIPTIONS** Letitia Barry **GENERAL MANAGER** Jo Smalley **GROUP MANAGING DIRECTOR** Paul Cheal **COVERS PRINTED BY** Polestar Wheatons **TEXT PRINTED BY** Polestar Chantry | **WWW.UNCUT.CO.UK**

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1975

JANUARY – MARCH

PINK FLOYD, NORTHERN SOUL, JOHN LENNON, LED ZEPPELIN AND MORE

A change in musical approach

NME FEB 8 New faces for Fleetwood Mac.

FLEETWOOD MAC HAVE lost guitarist Bob Welch, who has left the band to concentrate on production work. He has been replaced in the lineup by two new members – Stevie Nicks (who despite the name is in fact a girl singer) and guitarist Lindsey Buckingham. This personnel change means that Mac now have two girl vocalists in Christine McVie and newcomer Stevie.

It is not yet clear how Mac will be affected by this new policy, although it would seem to point to a change in their musical approach. The band are now based permanently in Los Angeles, where they are currently engaged in cutting a new album – which is being produced by their former member, Bob Welch.

FIN COSTELLO/GETTY



October 20, 1975: Fleetwood Mac in New Haven, Connecticut, between rehearsals for a college-radio broadcast and a show at the city's Coliseum later that day: (l–r) John McVie, Lindsey Buckingham, Christine McVie, Stevie Nicks and Mick Fleetwood



December 24, 1975: May plus homemade guitar at the Hammersmith Odeon

"The next step was experimentation"

MM FEB 1 How Queen's Brian May made a guitar from an old fireplace. "You can measure the tension of strings with spring balances," he explains. "It's pretty straightforward."

QUEEN, WITH THEIR glam image and legion of young admirers, would hardly be the first band to spring to mind, for most people, as arbiters of musicianship. And yet, they're all competent instrumentalists – even Freddie Mercury, darling of the pin-up brigade and arch poseur, can play a mean piano. And he's no novice when it comes to writing, either.

Lead guitarist Brian May, as well as being a good musician, also has another reason for respect – he built his own guitar. Brian's guitar took him two years to build mainly in his spare time, and he used an averagely well-equipped workshop to fashion it.

"At the time the only guitar I had was a little old acoustic with a pickup which I had made myself stuck on. That was about 10 years ago," he said.

"That was the only electric guitar I had; it was the only one at all, come to think of it, and obviously there's only so far you can get with something like that. You haven't got enough frets, the sound wasn't very hot and that sort of thing. At the time I couldn't afford one of the high-priced guitars.

"A Stratocaster was my ambition in those days but I couldn't afford one. And I didn't really like the cheaper one; I didn't feel they were what I wanted at all, so I decided to make one. I was interested in making things anyway.

"I was lucky to have a father who was interested as well and I'd always had woodworking and metal working tools around, so basically we just sat down and made lots of designs. We drew lots and lots of pictures, thought about the stresses and strains, tremolo-design, truss rod design, how the strings ought to be anchored down to what shape the body should be, the curve of the fingerboard – all that sort of thing.

"We drew lots of little drawings and gradually worked our way up to gigantic blueprints, all the time thinking about the kind of thing I would want to play.

"The next step was a lot of experimentation. I wanted a good tremolo which was sensitive and yet could change the pitch of the strings and yet come back to exactly the right position – a lot of them don't.

"So I did a lot of experimentation with tremolos, tried two or three different designs, some with pivots, some with hinges and different sorts of things all on a piece of wood with the tremolo attached and some strings just to see what would happen,

> **"I made my own pickups, getting some magnets and winding wire around them"**

"You have to design something which is going to stand the strain, which is quite considerable. The system I eventually ended up with was a plate to which the strings are attached, pivoting on a knife edge which is attached to the guitar, and the tension of the strings is balanced by some motorbike valve springs on the other side. That was the second step really, and then I went on to things like truss rods which would stand the strain. You have to find something which is strong enough to counteract the bending effect of the strings on the neck. At the same time you don't want it to be too heavy. It's a question of simply finding the right material.

"You can look up breaking points of metal and stresses in books. All the information is there if you just know where to look for it. You can measure the tension of strings with spring balances, which are quite cheap. So it's pretty straightforward.

"The next thing was to bend the wood. I was lucky in that as well because there happened to be some wood kicking around in some of my friend's houses. Particularly the neck – the mahogany came from a 100-year-old fireplace which had been ripped out of a house someone was knocking down nearby. It's a beautiful piece of wood, really well seasoned.

"I used mahogany simply because it was handy at the time but it's a lovely material to work with and I think I would have used mahogany or oak anyway.

"Shaping it? It was just a plank of wood when I got it, so I drew projections of the shape I wanted on all four sides and then I just started hacking away. First of all I cut in the planes and that left me with an angular sort of thing and then it was just a question of

ANDREW PUTLER/GETTY

rounding it off. A lot of it was done with a penknife. I just worked away and kept trying the templates I'd made until it fitted. When it was roughly the right shape I attacked it with sandpaper for the final shaping, and then finer and finer grains of sandpaper to get a good finish.

"Then of course there's the polishing, which I did with plastic coating stuff. You just pour it on in quite thick layers, let it dry and then start sanding again! Finer and finer grains until you get down to something like metal polish for the final shaping and polishing.

"And that's the woodworking side. The same sort of thing goes for the body. The way I designed that was that the strain was taken by a solid piece of oak – that's what the neck is screwed to – and the rest of the body, which takes no strain at all, is just glued to that.

"At that stage you do all the hollowing out and you have to decide what you want in the way of electronics. There are quite a few hollow pockets in this one which help the sound."

What about the electronics, the pickups and so forth?

"I started off making my own pickups, just getting some magnets and winding wire around them; that's all it is really, and they were very good. They made an excellent sound, but because I hadn't designed them properly, when you pushed the string across the fingerboard the field wasn't uniform enough to take it.

"I bought some Rose pickups and they were so different in sound to my own that I decided to put new coils in them. I kept the magnets and that's what I ended up with.

"The sound of the pickup is only the start; it's a question of how you combine the different pickups – I've got three – on the guitar. There are practically no electronics in the guitar at all. If you combine two of them and just have the two sounds you get a normal blend of the two. If you reverse the phase you're in the situation where one is cancelling out the other to a certain extent, and what gets cancelled out is the thing they've got in common – the fundamental.

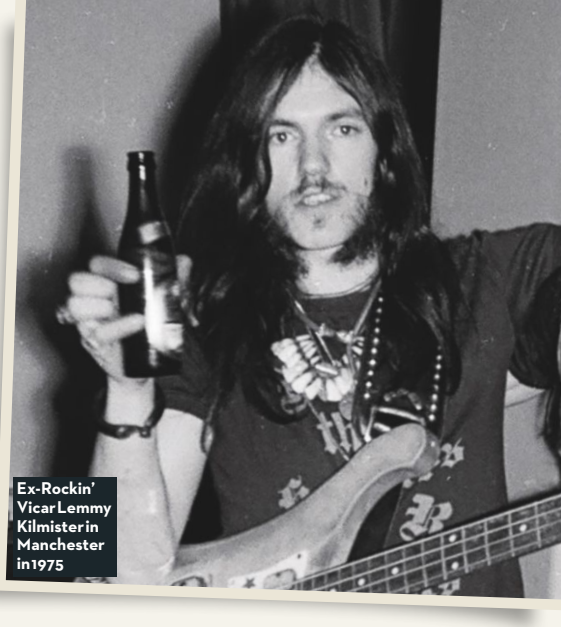
"By using different combinations you can bring out different harmonics from different parts of the string. You can vary the sound a lot.

"By the switches I've got you can get every combination from the pickups I've got. I've got six push buttons on the guitar – one phase reversal for each pickup and one cut-out for each."

Brian estimates his guitar cost about £8 to build but says he was fortunate to have a reasonably well equipped workshop at his disposal. So it looks like a good deal to put some time away, and set about building your own guitar, but Brian stresses one thing: "If you are going to build a guitar you've got to remember that it doesn't happen overnight. You've got to have patience so that when something goes wrong you can go away, think about it and come back again in a constructive frame of mind." *Brian Harrigan*

"When I fix somebody, they stay fixed"

MM JAN 18 Introducing... vaguely menacing Hawkwind bassist Lemmy. "Tito was a good lad," he avers. "He said, 'Call me Josif.'"



Ex-Rockin' Vicar Lemmy Kilmister in Manchester in 1975

FIRST, A BRIEF anecdote to preface our encounter with the Hawk-Lord's very own Angel Of Death. On one of the opening gigs of Hawkwind's current tour, Lemmy and Douglas, the band's harassed manager, were engaged in one of their frequent confrontations. A real eyeball-to-eyeball showdown this. Neither protagonist would back down, and Lemmy, having exhausted his lines of logical argument, finally resorted to one final, threatening outburst. "When I fix somebody," he said, and here you have to imagine him turning on his best Charlie Manson psychotic stare, "they... uh... they...THEY STAY FIXED."

Lemmy, by way of explanation, admits to liking the idea of appearing "kind of vaguely menacing". Although he confesses that he usually succeeds in looking more vague than menacing. Our hero began his musical career with the legendary combo The Rockin' Vicars, who were hugely popular north of Birmingham but never achieved any national success, because they made "really rough records".

Still, that band does hold the honour of being the first to play behind the Iron Curtain – in Yugoslavia, where they were guests of honour at a dinner held by President Tito. Just think, if they'd made it over some years earlier, Lemmy could have been starring in some Eisenstein movie epic as a Hero Of The People... Lemmy Nevski, or Lemmy The Terrible.

"Tito," he affirms, "was all right. A good lad. 'Call me Josif,' he said when I asked him to pass me the peas at that dinner."

Lemmy left the Vicars in '67, and rejoined again for three months during the summer for a last tour. After that our hero became a roadie for Jimi Hendrix. "Just a humper, y'know. But it was worth it because I got to see him every night."

It was with a band called Opal Butterfly that Lemmy first met Simon King, one of Hawkwind's power drummers. "That was a nasty little band as well. They'd been going for years before I joined them, and they were so tired of playing for peanuts that they folded after a year. And I didn't see Simon for a while after. Then I joined this bunch of roving hoodlums, and I saw Simon hanging out of a taxi one day and our drummer at the time was off somewhere having a nervous breakdown, so I asked Simon to come and play with us for a night. And we're still trying to get rid of him."

> **"The audience was having a collective epileptic fit"**

The Hawk-Lords rhythm section – Lemmy, Simon and Alan Powell – is, quite probably, one of the most powerful units known to modern man. Lemmy agrees, with a certain qualification: "I do get amazingly powerful at times. Other times I'm amazingly inadequate."

The whole structure of Hawkwind's performance, from the playing to the organisation of the lightshow, has never, he claims, been neatly worked out. "It's a total chaotic mess. But it works, and if we did it any other way there's a danger that we'd turn into something like Yes or ELP.

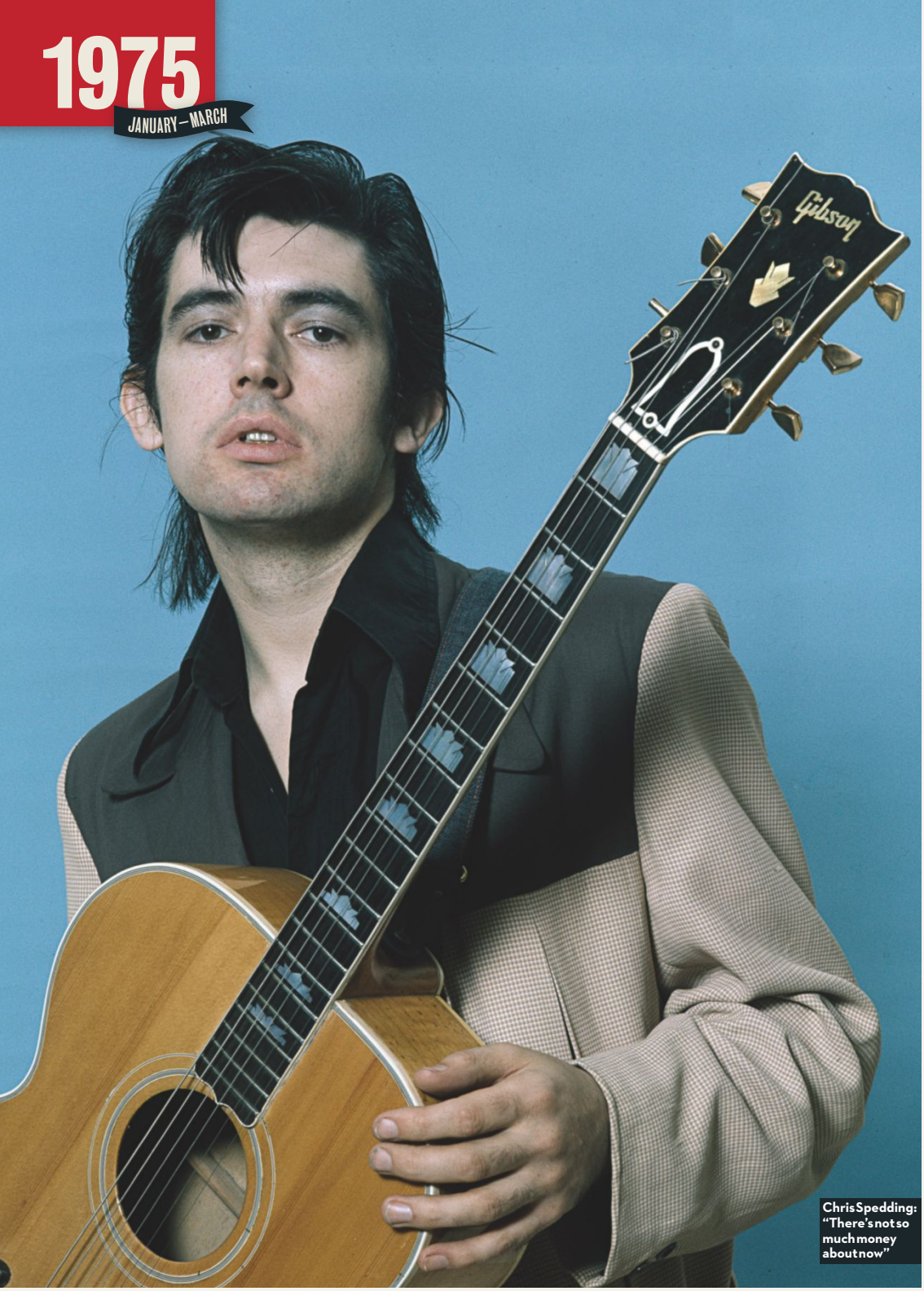
"It is more than just four guys on a stage with hair down to their backsides playing guitars. I actually saw Hawkwind a few times before I hustled me way into the band. I went to the Roundhouse, and the whole audience was having this collective epileptic fit. There was one strobe on the band and another on the audience. 'Giving them a taste of their own medicine,' I thought. 'There's a new approach.' The crowd was shaking and twitching, and I remember thinking, 'I'll have to join the band.'

"They fitted exactly into my philosophy. They were weird, and that suited me because I was always the one that people wouldn't let their kids play with. I really dug it, the ideas they were into. They were playing a lot of free gigs then. More than we can do now, in fact, even though we're the only band left who will play free."

In the same way as he was attracted to Hawkwind because of – for want of a better word – their lifestyle, so Lemmy has found himself drawn to the Hell's Angels. The Angels, perhaps less now than a few years ago, used to flock to Hawkwind gigs and festivals where the band was playing. And Lemmy, with his leathers and swastikas, looks not unlike the kind of guy who'd give you a chain whipping in a dark alley if you so much as looked at his bike.

"I'm just an old rocker with his hair grown long," he says disarmingly, "and since all me old clothes fell apart I've had to buy all this hippy gear. But I was into the lifestyle of Hawkwind anyway." *Allan Jones*





Chris Spedding: "There's not so much money about now"

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY

"I played on 'Remember You're a Womble'..."

MM JAN 25 Introducing super session man turned solo artist Chris Spedding. What are his plans if he scores a hit single? And will he be joining the Rolling Stones?

LIFE CAN GO speeding by, as any rock'n'roller will tell you. When you are as good a musician as Chris Spedding, there is perhaps not that sense of urgency to make "the big time" as might affect the callow youth who dons leather jacket and aims to be a star by his 17th birthday.

And yet Chris has been a professional musician for about 15 years and his career has lurched in curious but fascinating fashion, never quite settling in any particular direction. That's the way he wanted it. But now, Spedding is a man with a goal and a firm philosophy.

And Spedding the Geetar Star is not such a wild improbability as it might have seemed in the days of Nucleus or even Pete Brown's Battered Ornaments.

For now it can be revealed, the man who was whispered as possible replacement for Mick Taylor with the Rolling Stones, has a hot single up his T-shirt. And if it takes off on the golden road to *Top Of The Pops*, then we can expect an exciting addition to the roster of new stars for '75.

"Nobody is making nice pop records"

Chris was born in Sheffield but denies that he was ever greatly involved in the Sheffield scene, having gone to London at an early stage. From rock'n'roll bands to dance bands seemed not an improbable step for the erratic Mr Spedding, and he worked quite happily "on the boats", and with such respected senior musicians as clarinettist Nat Temple, whose band used to play on the old BBC Radio series *Bedtime With Braden*.

In more recent years, Chris has worked with Ian Carr's Nucleus, in its *Elastic Rock* period, with the legendary Pete Brown's Battered Ornaments (one of the oddest bands to emerge in the '60s), with Mike Westbrook and Jack Bruce. And along the way he became one of those rock session men with well-worn telephones.

You'd be amazed to hear some of the sessions to which Chris has contributed. Would you believe the Wombles?

"I quite enjoy sessions as long as it doesn't get heavy, and you can be selective. I like to know who I'm working for. It used to be said the session scene was a closed shop – but that's all changed now. It's still very important to the producer that the guitarist can read, though."

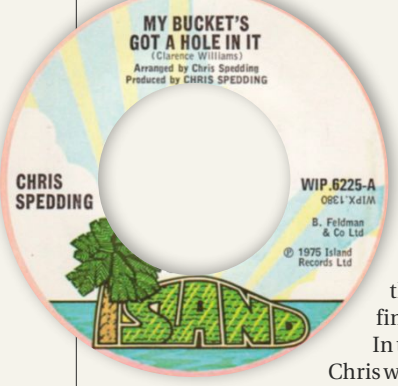
He looked up and said surprisingly: "I've made a single. It's coming out next month. Shall I play it to yer? I won't tell you what it's called." But as the tape reels rolled, it became apparent no performance could have no other title than "My Bucket's Got A Hole In It".

It wasn't quite the thing I had expected from a man who had held court in many a top jazz nitery, but there was no doubt it had that rhythm all right. A cowbell beat, the guitar strummed a simple riff, while drums and bass provided the solitary accompaniment to Chris' husky vocals.

"This version is based on one I heard by Hank Williams. I did this after Sharks broke up, because it was so frustrating not getting anything together. I thought I'd do a Top 40 record. Why not? Since I know how to do them. I tried adding more instruments to it, but it's so bare and simple like this, we left it alone.

"All this is what I'm into now. Nobody is making nice pop records at the moment. I know it's easy to say it, but you've got to follow your nose.

"The scene has changed. When I was doing so much session work before Sharks, I did whole LPs for other artists that never got released. Now the record business has got tighter.



There's not so much money about now, and all that has finished."

In the last year, Chris was on half-a-dozen Top 10 records, and this has helped convince him that singles are more important, or at least more viable, than the instant solo album that sells a few hundred copies.

"Do people want to know this?" said Chris, when I asked which records he had played on. "Well, most of the Wombles hits and the David Essex hits. Yes, I played the guitar on 'Remember You're A Womble', and all the albums. I think the quality is better now because people have to try harder.

"But I also believe that the English scene is restricted by the opinions of the producer of *Top Of The Pops*. Record producers try to find something that will appeal to *Top Of The Pops* and that will get them on TV. That's why our pop scene is now so parochial, whereas it used to be international. It's down to what the TV producer thinks will make good TV."

It seemed that the regular rock-group concept did not appeal to him, especially as the one time he threw his lot in with such a combo, its internal problems proved a painful ordeal. How did he feel when the band finally split?

"I felt really relieved. I was determined to stick it out, and I saw it through to the bitter end. I sat it out, and I'm glad I did. If I had left before… well, it might have broken big, and I would have missed it. It went down well at gigs and had its own following. If it hadn't had those personnel changes it might have made it. It never had a chance, to be quite honest.

"Now I'm putting all my energy into this single. I used the old Sharks bass player and Clem Cattini on drums. Clem gets such a good feel and because he has been around for such a long time, he gets overlooked and taken for granted. But he always comes up with a good drum sound."

What will Chris do if he finds himself with a hit?

"The idea is to get a scene going, so that I can have a career going as a solo artist. Rather than do an LP, I'd sooner keep putting singles out, and if one was a hit, then I'd put a band together and go out on the road. The idea is to get out of that routine of scraping about doing cheap gigs."

One of the big buzzes that circulated the industry a couple of weeks ago was that Chris was a hot contender to replace Mick Taylor in the Rolling Stones. How to break this suggestion to Chris? He looked decidedly noncommittal, and the subject had to be mentioned twice to draw a response.

Did the Stones ask you to join them?

(*Shakes head*) "No, they didn't. And if I was in the Stones, I'd only be a back-up man, and I want to do my own thing. There's no truth in it at all. When Sharks came up I was ready for it. Now I have to think twice about joining another band – the way things are at the moment. The way the business is at the moment, I couldn't afford to be in a band. You have to save up to join a band."

Chris Welch



Led Zep's Robert Plant on tour in the US, early 1975

Windows were broken

MM JAN 18 Led Zeppelin shows in doubt as fans riot while queuing for tickets in New York and Boston.

THOUSANDS OF LED ZEPPELIN fans rioted at the weekend when tickets were put on sale for the band's three shows at Madison Square Garden on February 3, 7 and 12. (The dates are so spaced because of sports fixtures taking place at the Garden on the intervening nights.)

Tickets were due to go on sale on Monday morning, but fans began congregating outside the Garden on the Friday evening despite freezing weather. So many fans had gathered by the Saturday evening that the Garden management decided to begin selling tickets late Saturday night. More than 50,000 tickets were sold until Sunday afternoon, when the crowd swelled to such mammoth proportions that box office windows were broken and seat sales suspended.

The remaining 10,000 tickets were placed on sale via Ticketron outlets spread across the city, and they soon sold out on Monday morning. The plan was to disperse the crowds to various selling points instead of congregating them at one outlet.

Another 40,000 or so tickets were sold for Zeppelin's Nassau Coliseum concerts, making a total of about 100,000 tickets sold in the New York area alone. At Boston, where Zeppelin are appearing at Boston Gardens, similar scenes occurred and the City Fathers – the local government authority – are considering cancelling the concert. Boston has recently been the scene of racial disturbances prompted by school bussing arrangements, and the City Fathers may be unwilling to allow a large crowd to gather, whether it be for a rock concert or political meeting.




Zeppelin fans in tickets riot

by CHRIS CHARLESWORTH in New York

THOUSANDS of Led Zeppelin fans rioted at the weekend when tickets

JANUARY – MARCH 1975

➤ The film version of Peter Townshend's *Tommy* is to have a simultaneous world premiere in Los Angeles and New York on March 19. A spokesman said that the British premiere will take place in London at about the same time, possible the next day, although the exact date and venue are still being finalised. Polydor release the soundtrack double album in mid-March, and it includes three new Townshend songs which were not in the original *Tommy* score – they are "Mother And Son", "Champagne" and "Bernie's Holiday Camp". **MM FEB 8**

➤ Promoters in São Paulo, Brazil, have been pulling their hair out because of David Bowie's tardiness in arriving for concerts scheduled for round about now. Owing to Mr B's airplane phobia, a Land Rover trek had been planned after a sea journey from New York to Caracas. Bowie's secretary, Corinne Schwab, had been sent in advance to survey the roads by



helicopter – since some "roads" are nonexistent, washed out, or just plum unfinished, especially in the Amazon river basin region. Singers, dancers, musicians and crew were on standby in New York awaiting word on the helicopter surveillance. **NME JAN 18**

JOHN KIRK/GETTY, BRAD ELTERMAN/GETTY



A short while ago Pink Floyd, darlings of the intelligentsia, the stereo-minded and lots of others besides, were victims of two NME hitmen— Benedicto Nicolini (a.k.a. Nicky the K) and Sneeky Pete Erskine, who stabbed Floyd iously in the hair, the musical integrity and in the dry ice. An inquest took place this week.

Dirty Hair Denied

David Gilmour: "I'm not interested in disguising my feelings on stage with showbiz devices"

"I don't think we deserve it"

Stung by a nasty live review of PINK FLOYD, DAVID GILMOUR defends his band's position and rebuffs assumptions made about them. "By the time Syd left, the ball had definitely stopped rolling," he says. "We had to start it all over again."

— NME JANUARY 11 —

A SHORT WHILE AGO, Pink Floyd, darlings of the intelligentsia, the stereo-minded and lots of others besides, were victims of two *NME* hitmen – Benedicto Nicolini (AKA Nicky The K) and Sneaky Pete Erskine, who stabbed Floyd viciously in the hair, the musical integrity and in the dry ice.

An inquest took place this week. There's no dandruff on this band, claims guitarist Dave Gilmour (no split ends either) before delivering key evidence as to the merits and defects of Pink Floyd, defending their music, and denying all rumours that they were killed in the attack.

Hi Dave, have you washed your hair?

"No." Gilmour flashes a thin-lipped grin as he takes his seat, "and if *he* can find any split ends in here (*lifting a clump of hair*), then…"

Then what, DAVE?

But he's already scanning the menu and doesn't hear. His free hand, however, is worrying over a plastic teaspoon. Unconsciously, he gradually crushes it, letting the pieces slip through his fingers and fall onto the tabletop. Gilmour is nothing if not self-controlled. Placid even. But not quite.

His anger is of the sullen, smouldering variety, and yet the weird thing is that even during such moments he'll often make way for a broad smile which can be utterly disarming because it might be a harbinger of doom, the herald for a personal close-up of one of the robust Gilmour flails. Although I can't imagine it ever happening. He is angry, though. He told me so on the phone a couple of minutes after he'd read the piece.

"I've just read the piece," he said, "and I'm very angry about it."

The "piece" in question – an action replay for those who missed it – appeared in the 24/11/74 NME issue, written by myself and Mr Kent in direct response to our witnessing of the Floyd on the first two nights of their four-day residency at Wembley. I'm afraid we were a little rude about them. »

ALAMY



April 23-27, 1975: Pink Floyd at the LA Memorial Sports Arena on the Wish You Were Here Tour, playing *The Dark Side Of The Moon* in its entirety during the second half of the set



Mr Kent wrote an extended review-cum-critique, and I, through the back door, managed to secure an audience with Gilmour in which I confronted him with the accusations to be aired in the piece. The overall intention, see, had been, in the words of the introductory blurb, "to get the Floyd back into perspective", a sentiment which Gilmour himself says he thoroughly condones. It was the approach that riled him.

Ultimately the phone call resulted in myself inviting Gilmour for lunch – partly as a placatory gesture, partly to prove that the aforementioned Kent and myself could, and would, stand by what'd been written, and mainly because a rematch might prove to be interesting.

The axis of the criticism in the piece lay upon the fact (self-confessed by Gilmour) that on two consecutive nights the Pink Floyd made music of such low quality that it cast rather anvil-like aspersions on (a) their motivation, (b) their overall musicianship and (c) the feeling engendered by them in their audiences (both short and long term) and admirers – one of whom, *Sunday Times* critic Derek Jewell, pulled out some florid prose in an appraisal of the debut Thursday-night gig (described subsequently by Gilmour as "probably the worst we've done on the whole tour").

Jewell wrote: "Richly they merit their place among the symphonic overlords of today's popular hierarchy… they reeled off, apparently effortlessly, a performance with musical textures so ravishing and visual accompaniments so surprising that, for once, the thunderous standing ovation was completely justified."

Such bland acceptance irritates the band, says Gilmour, equally, if not more so, than its denigrators. "I don't think anyone on our level feels deserving of that kind of superhuman adulation number," he claims, hacking at a piece of steak. "But then a lot of them probably dig it. Sure, I'm cynical of our position. I don't think we deserve it. But I'm no more cynical of our position than I am of anyone else's on our level. I mean… to try and maintain your own perspective on what you are is totally different."

The lyrics of "Gotta Be Crazy" – as Nick Kent pointed out – reveal a very great deal of cynicism, particularly the line "*gotta keep people buying this shit*", which is tantamount to a sneer at the audience.

"Mmm. Yeah. It is possibly a sneer… but not at the audience as a whole, but at the type of adulation bands like us get. I mean, I think there is something wrong with that… people needing hero figures like that, thinking that rock musicians have all the answers."

But don't you think that while not being responsible for that element, the fact that it hasn't been challenged means bands like the Floyd, through neglect, are helping compound it? "Yes. Probably. But I think we're less guilty than most. I mean, we've made conscious attempts at fighting it."

Such as?

"In things we've said in interviews and things like that. We've always said that we don't believe in that whole number, but it's very hard to get away from the image people put on you."

How large a proportion of record buyers and concert goers buy music papers, though? A question I did in fact neglect to add. Still seems a bit lame, though, eh? One would've thought that a couple of really finely honed satires would at least help… But then, really, how concerned are bands about these kind of things? Motives schmotives. It helps sell records. And you don't gnaw the digits that feed you.

Anyway, we're messing around here. To the specifics. Gilmour is raking through the apposite issue as he eats. He's inclined towards the John Peel reaction (thinly disguised in his mildly self-congratulatory Diary Of The Domestic column each week in *Sounds*) that the piece was "hysterical", overly personal and laced with supposed inaccuracies.

The first 11 of Kent's opening paragraphs make Gilmour particularly mad. He claims that description of his personal appearance and that of a member of the audience (and his attitudes) is totally superfluous.

The offending words ran thus: "On November 14, 1974, approximately 7,000 people washed their hair and travelled down to the Empire Pool, Wembley, to witness the Pink Floyd live. Almost everyone, that is, except Dave Gilmour – his hair looked filthy there on stage, seemingly anchored down by a surfeit of scalp grease and tapering off below the shoulders with spectacular festooning of split ends…" This led on to a description of a Floyd lookalike in the audience, who is held up as a Floyd fan archetype who smokes dope, prattles on about the cosmos and gets off on the stereo production quirks inherent in all Floyd albums.

"I don't see any of it being in any way relevant," says Gilmour in that sullen/placid tone of voice that could be either. Or both. "So there's a guy like that in the audience. So what? There were probably others like him, but you find people like that at any concert – but then Kent probably set out to find one and he did."

I assure him that our approach was in no way premeditated. There was no question of a pre-planned axe job on anyone's part. "Well, I just don't believe it of Nick Kent. I really don't. He's still really involved with Syd Barrett and the whole 1967 thing. I don't even know if he saw the Floyd with Syd. He goes on about Syd too much and yet, as far as I can see, there's no relevance in talking about Syd in reviewing one of our concerts."

But one of the new songs is about him. "Yes, but that's all. In the beginning the songs were all his and they were brilliant. No one disputes that. But I don't think the actual sound of the whole band stems from Syd. It stems just as much from Rick [Wright]. I mean, Syd's thing was short songs."

As for hair washing, well, the subject got short shrift. I think, though, that dressing especially for a gig is something Gilmour subconsciously associates with "showbusiness" – about which more later. Meanwhile, in subsequent conversation with Carlena Williams, one of The Blackberries, the two black back-up chicks they hired for the tour, Carlena expressed delight at the opening paras. "Shit!" she observed daintily, "when I saw that bit about Dave's hair I just cracked up. I had t'read it, y'know?"

Back to Syd.

"The band just before Syd departed had got into a totally impossible situation. No one wanted to book them. After the success of the summer

GETTY

of '67 the band sank like a stone; the gigs they were doing at the time were all empty because they were so bad. The only way out was to get rid of Syd, so they asked me to join and got rid of Syd…"

This, by the way, is also Gilmour's comeback to my assertion that: "It's almost as if the Floyd, having loafed about half-seriously as the Architectural Abdabs, garnered their persona from Barrett and, when he dropped out, for want of anything better to do, clung on to the momentum he provided."

Says Gilmour: "By the time Syd left, the ball had definitely stopped rolling. We had to start it all over again. *Saucerful Of Secrets*, the first album without him, was the start back on the road to some kind of return. It was the album we began building from. The whole conception of *Saucerful Of Secrets* has nothing to do with what Syd believed in or liked.

"We continued playing some of his songs because none of us were getting good enough material fast enough to be able to do without them. Which also, therefore, meant that I had to fit in with his style to an extent because his songs were so rigidly structured around it. Oh. And by the way, the band, when I joined, never, ever said, 'Play like Syd Barrett.' That was the very last thing they wanted!"

This had been part of a quote I'd happened across while writing up the original interview. It came courtesy of former Floyd manager Pete Jenner. It had appeared as part of Mr Kent's epic Syd Barrett piece last March and, to my knowledge, hadn't been contested then. I presumed it to be accurate.

Another past of the same quote had claimed that Syd's guitar technique of using slide and echo boxes was of his own invention. My quote had been: "The familiar slide and echo boxes were purely of Syd's invention", which in retrospect was, perhaps, a bit strong. Gilmour, anyway, hotly denies this.

"Why didn't you ask me about things like that during the interview?" he asks, righteously indignant. "The facts of the matter are that I was using an echo box years before Syd was. I also used slide. I also taught Syd quite a lot about guitar. I mean, people say that I pinched his style when our backgrounds are so similar… yet we spent a lot of time together as teenagers listening to the same music. Our influences are pretty much the same – and I was a couple of streets ahead of him at the time and was teaching him to play Stones riffs every lunchtime for a year at technical college. That kind of thing's bound to get my back up – especially if you don't check it.

"I don't want to go into print saying that I taught Syd Barrett everything he knows, 'cos it's patently untrue, but there are one or two things in Syd's style that I know came from me."

In the original, I had prefaced these suggestions by intimating that as a guitarist Gilmour appears to lack any immediately identifiable personality. The word I had used was "malleable". He says he actually feels that such a word applied to his style(s) is a compliment. Most guitarists, he claims, are pretty narrow-minded, restricting their possible range of operations. In that case he could be accused of spreading himself too thinly – ie, capable of most things, but not particularly outstanding at any one thing. Or is that the way he'd intended it?

"No. But I work within my limitations. But then, whether I'm a good or bad guitarist isn't really relevant. I mean, I try my damnedest to do my best, although certainly for the first half of that tour I was, well, rusty. I hadn't played for a long time and my fingers were really stiff. But also I would say that I got very good by the time we were halfway through."

And the accusation that from where you all stand it's impossible for you to relate any more to the thoughts of the average punter?

"If you're referring to that bit which says something about out 'desperately bourgeois existences'?… [The original quote – Kent's – runs: "I can't think of another rock group who live a more desperately bourgeois existence in the privacy of their own homes."] Well, I mean, how do you or he know how we live our lives? Apart from you – marginally – about me? Do you? Does Nick? He hasn't been to any of our houses. He's got absolutely no idea of how I spend my life apart from what you might have told him – and you don't know how the others live. Do you think my life is so desperately bourgeois?

"My house is not particularly grand. Have you seen Roger's house? He lives in a five-grand terraced house in Islington. So I really can't see how Kent can sit there and say things like that. He's no idea of what he's talking about."

> "I was using an echo box years before Syd was"

He does admit to a kind of laziness in the band, though. He's also realistic about their individual instrumental prowess: "In terms of musical virtuosity we're not really anywhere, I think; individual musicianship is below par."

And no, they're not "bereft of ideas" – just resting. And worrying about a follow-up to *Dark Side*, which has, he claims, "trapped us creatively". In passing, he says the lyrics are obvious intentionally.

"We tried to make them as simple and direct as possible, yet as we were writing them, we knew they'd be misunderstood. We still get people coming up to us who think '*Money – it's a gas*' is a direct and literal statement that 'we like money'."

The point – a good one, I thought – about the appeal of Floyd (and similar bands) being in some way associated with the rapid sophistication in stereo equipment is tossed out entirely.

"Six years ago," says Gilmour impatiently, "we still sold albums and yet hardly anyone in this country had a stereo. It was all Dansettes then…"

And yet, from casual random sampling of friends with Floyd albums, invariably the first thing said is, "Oh, such and such track sounds great on my stereo." Surely this is a case of packaging to some extent taking priority over contents? "No. That's ridiculous. I suppose the same criticism would apply to Stevie Wonder?"

Well, as it happens…

To Kent's rather brilliant summing up. The para, which starts, "OK boys, now this is really going to hurt". If I may remind you: "What the two Floyd shows amounted to in the final analysis was not merely a kind of utterly morose laziness which is ultimately even more obnoxious than callow superstar 'flash', but a pallid excuse for creative music which comes dangerously closes to the Orwellian mean for a facile, soulless music that would doubtless rule the airwaves and moreover be touted as fine art in the latter's vision of 1984."

"I mean," he continued, "one can easily envisage a Floyd concert in future consisting of the band simply wandering on stage, setting all their tapes into action, putting their instruments on remote control and then walking off behind the amps to talk football or play billiards."

"Personally," Gilmour states stoically, "I don't believe any of that rubbish about 1984."

I really do.

"But I mean, what difference is there between our sort of music and anyone else's, apart from the fact that maybe most of the other bands just play music for the body – and they're hardly progressive at all. Not that I think we're wildly progressive, either."

But at its worst, a stage show like Floyd's only dulls an audience's sensibilities, even to the extent of sending them to sleep. Nothing is left for them to project their imagination into – it's the difference between the holding power of a radio play and a TV play. And in any case, how does it feel to be part of a show where the audience doesn't even give you a ripple for a good solo, yet applauds a bucket of dry ice every time? "Yeah. That's all part of dramatic effect, isn't it?"

And that's a lame comeback.

"We went through a period where we blew out our entire light show for two years and there was no real difference. I personally know for a fact that it wouldn't make any difference if we did it again. We've never been hyped. There's been no great publicity campaign. It's built up purely on the strength of gigs. I don't think we're remotely close to that thing about tapes, do you?"

On the strength of the Wembley things, yes. You looked bored and dispirited.

"Not bored. Definitely dispirited. It gets very depressing when you're fighting against odds like dud equipment. Energy soon flags. We weren't pleased to do an encore, because we didn't deserve it."

Why didn't they say so, then? You know, don the olde showbiz batcape? "I'm not interested in disguising my feelings on stage with showbiz devices. I've seen hundreds of bands do that. Does anybody respect them? From what he writes, Nick Kent seems to believe in it all – the old thing of The Show Must Go On, Never Let The Public See Your Feelings and things like that."

Wouldn't the discipline of forcing just a little of that attitude on yourselves help in situations like that? "No. When I'm standing there I'm conscious of trying to give the most I can," says Gilmour emphatically. "And I don't need to have clean hair for that." *Pete Erskine* •



"Keep the scene alive"

Inside the ballrooms that are the citadel of the NORTHERN SOUL scene. Great music. Athletic dancing. Later, breakfast and a swim. "The scene is here as long as the punters want it," says one DJ. "Its essence is rarity and it's up to us to keep that rarity."

— MELODY MAKER JANUARY 25 —

BARRY, A FAIR-HAIRED motor mechanic from Manchester, is about five-eight tall and slim as a panatella. He keeps that way, he says, because he dances so much. He dances every weekend, all of the weekend, which tends to mean a bad time for his girlfriend.

This is what Barry did last weekend. On Saturday night he left home and picked up his girl, a petite black-haired little number, and drove over to Blackpool. He queued outside the Blackpool Mecca and got in around 8.45pm while the price was still at its basic. The later you get there, the higher the admission price.

Barry was wearing a suit when he arrived. With a tie, part of the Mecca's compulsory uniform imposed on patrons. He also carried a black Adidas hold-all.

Barry and his girl went up a couple of flights of escalators past Tiffany's ballroom where a DJ played pop sounds and a clinically professional house band played clinically professional versions of pop hits. By the time he reached the top floor Barry had his tie off.

Along a wide carpeted corridor, groups of two, three, four guys talk, poring over singles. Through the doors at the end of the corridor and into The Highland Room, a long, rectangular room, half of it lined with bars. The far wall is made of bare »

REX FEATURES

Northern soul all-nighter at the Leicester Palais, 1975



Dancing machines

wooden panels except for a couple of doors; one long wall to the right is fronted by a low stage. On the stage behind a wooden hurdle is a disco, the focal point of the activity here.

Barry stayed there for about three-and-a-half hours dancing a lot, chatting and drinking. Around midnight he left and drove to Wigan; it took about an hour. He and his girl had about an hour to kill when they got to Wigan. They spent it in a crowded, humid coffee bar full of guys like Barry, some with girls of their own but many without.

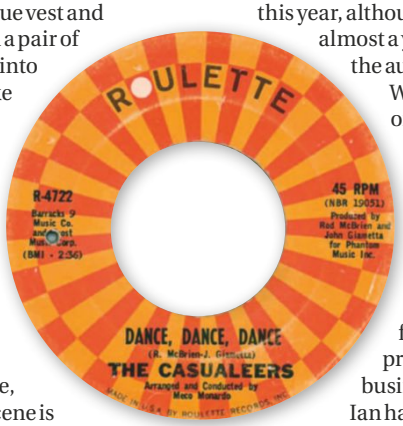
At 2am Sunday morning, Barry left the coffee bar and went into the Wigan casino. He changed out of his suit into a light-blue vest and white baggies which were in the hold-all and he put on a pair of less smart, though more comfortable shoes, and went into another dance hall. He danced there for something like six hours.

The Wigan Casino shut at 8am Sunday morning. Some of the kids went for breakfast and then took a swim to freshen up. Later they all drove to Burnley, where there was another disco, an all-dayer. There, they danced some more. Barry does that most weekends. It's his scene, and he shares it with thousands of youngsters (their ages range from about 15 to 26, with most between 18 and 22).

The scene is traditionally based on two things – the dance and the music, which is soul. It is not a new scene, its history stretches back some 10 years, but now the scene is changing through pressures of media attention and commercial exploitation. Several of those who've stayed with the scene throughout are worried by the recent glare of publicity, but most are confident that they'll weather the storm and re-emerge as unified as ever.

The reason for this thinking is sound enough – at least four of the DJs I spoke to at both the Blackpool Mecca and Wigan Casino expressed it with virtually the same words.

"It's because," they'd say, their voices becoming serious and wise, frowning slightly, "that *we're* not the scene… it's THEM out there." And they'd point to the bobbing heads dancing concentrated to the sounds. I'd be inclined to agree with that.



A SHORT HISTORY OF the scene. It's been dubbed northern soul, but dancers and DJs alike seem not to care for the title. It goes back to around 1964–5 and The Golden Torch discotheque ballroom in Stoke-on-Trent. There, early Motown sounds were played, bands spawned by the soul boom gigged and a deeply knowledgeable sort of clan grew up.

Like any scene with a dedicated following, it also attracted the unscrupulous and the downright criminal, who would take any opportunity offered to rip the kids off.

But the music remained intact. Other, more obscure records began to get played, their rarity value growing with the years. The sound, however, remained basically unchanged. A relentlessly fast snare drum snapping four-to-the-bar; a booming bassline; sharp, toppy brass and/or strings; the vocals varying from intense expressive wailing to mechanical screeching, yet all compelling and involving. They drew you in and pulled you to the dance floor.

The familiarity of listening to the same sounds every week, however, gradually bred contempt. The search for rarer sounds became more frantic – a record's lifetime on the decks became shorter. The turnover demanded was ever greater.

Inevitably the centre of the scene shifted, relocating itself to the North, in Manchester at the Twisted Wheel. There it continued to flourish for a while until it too dimmed and the axis moved on to Blackpool and Wigan. There, for the present, it remains.

At the moment the Blackpool Mecca, reacting to the spiralling commercial interest in the scene and to the incursion of white music into a previously "black soul" area, is realigning its musical policy to include newer black music.

It is a difficult, costly business to maintain their policy of playing rare records – as one of the DJs there, Colin Curtis, said: "I've only got to play a new sound two times and the next week there'll be a thousand copies pressed up or imported."

Bootleg pressing are also something Blackpool, in particular, is campaigning against, with as great a tenacity as can be mustered. But the "purity" of the soul music played in Blackpool is, perhaps, the main concern and the difficulty experienced in such a pursuit is reflected in a slight fall in attendances there (though this is something of a normal seasonal occurrence, according to the venue's manager).

Down in Wigan there are no problems filling the two halls – a large one functioning as the main scene, the smaller playing pop soul; rarity isn't so essential but danceability remains of essence.

But there is one problem which the hall has to cope with. Despite the Casino's number-one DJ Russ Winstanley assuring the Casino crowd that the all-nighters were in no danger, four guys, quite independently, came up to me and mentioned the likelihood of licensing trouble later this year, although Winstanley says that the Casino's operated for almost a year without a licence and has had no trouble from the authorities.

Whatever the future holds, whether it is forced to move on or not, it won't die. They, the dancers, the sweating, spinning, bouncing crush, will see to that.

BACK IN BLACKPOOL, Ian Levine and Colin Curtis do alternate hourly stints at the deck.

Levine is a fat, blunt northerner. He offers a stiff hand to be shaken, its thumb sticking up like a flagpole. He looks away from you as you shake the proffered palm. His bluntness isn't rude. It's as businesslike as his introductions to the discs he spins.

Ian has been DJing for some four years. He's been collecting records for eight years and has a fabled collection. He mentions how many and says he doesn't like that figure published.

He used to work at The Twisted Wheel in 1971, went to The Golden Torch in 1972 for a spell and then moved up to the Blackpool Mecca where he's been ever since.

He gets his "rare, commercial" sounds from frequent trips to the States and is due to go over there in three weeks' time. He'll stay with one of The Exciters, who are great friends of his. He can finance these operations easily because his parents are wealthy and he has other records sent over by his relations there.

All the time we're talking, leaning up against a wall in the corridor outside the Highland Rooms, people come up to Ian ("Don't call them kids… they're not," he says firmly). They ask him about a record, about a future date, about something he promised to bring along. He seems an avuncular figure there, an impression strengthened by his initially distant manner.

But, like Wigan, the scene in Blackpool attracts followers from all over Lancashire and, often, down into the Midlands. Coach parties from as far afield as Scarborough, Wolverhampton, Kidderminster, Harlow and Cambridge gravitate to the scene, drawn by the magnet of the sounds.

Ian is introducing a greater variety of sounds into the records he's currently spinning. They used to be exclusively old records from the States which had barely caused a ripple in their homeland, let alone been released in Britain.

Nowadays he's playing records just released in the States (one of the last he played before we talked was taken from a new George Clinton album which may or may not be released here. By the time that happens it is likely that Levine will have stopped playing the track.)

At Blackpool Mecca, Levine plays to a crowd of 800–900, which can go up to 1,300 or more. He only works there Saturday night but adds: "This is the one that matters to me. It's the scene that's made me England's top DJ." (He's very self-confident and assertive).

One noticeable comment from both Wigan and Blackpool DJs revolved around the music they played and their personal tastes. Few said the discs they spun were their own preferences. Ian listened to "something a bit more funky, but not basic. I like Kool & The Gang."

Ian is at once explicit and guarded about his relationship with the Wigan scene. He doesn't like the music much, because an increasing proportion is white British or white American, although it makes a suitable enough noise to dance to.





But, as any of the DJs at Blackpool and Wigan are the first to say, it's the dancers who matter. Ian and Colin want to keep the music as pure as possible; Russ Winstanley, Richard Searling and the others in Wigan want to "please the kids; they're the ones, not our egos", as one put it.

COLIN CURTIS IS pipe-cleaner lean. He has long straight hair which hangs over his shoulders. He's been at Wigan two years this March. He started out at the Stoke Mecca and then the Golden Torch all-nighters. He left there after "a disagreement". Now, including the Blackpool night, he works anything from four to seven nights weekly.

Colin is as talkative as Ian Levine is reticent, yet he is no less blunt. A man for laying his cards on the table. He, more than any other I talked to, is concerned about the commercialisation of the scene by record companies, who are now plundering with the dynamism of Vikings. Few put in what they take out. This, I think is the crux.

Currently, he's concerned "about the pressures on the punters. I don't want to make much of this so-called haggling between Wigan and the Mecca, especially if it gets the attention of the wrong types."

He feels "the punters are being immensely used. Just think, if soul music was in the same position as commercial pop music, think of the bread it'd be making."

He doesn't see the past 12 months' interest in the scene as exploitative, but "it *is* the first nail in the coffin. This music has been underground and I hate to see it turn commercial, otherwise we'll be losing a lot of punters.

"To keep the scene alive we have to keep in front of record wholesalers, because they can ring up the States once they hear what we're playing and get 1,000 copies imported. But the time lapse between us playing a sound and bulk copies appearing and killing it off is shrinking. How long can we keep that up?"

At the moment every record company in Britain is hip to the potential. Right from the time Robert Knight's "Love On A Mountain Top" went into the British charts late in 1973 after disco play had activated interest, the record business became aware of the possibilities inherent in such a fanatical and loyal bedrock of fans.

Since then, Tamla Motown have re-released old favourites and Pye has launched Disco Demand, a label drawing its material from the scene and covering the whole spectra, almost scoring with The Casualeers' "Dance, Dance, Dance", finally breaking through with Nosmo King & The Javell's "Goodbye (Nothing To Say)" and Wayne Gibson's "Under The Thumb".

Both the latter are white acts, both Wigan sounds, and both abhorrent to current Blackpool practice.

Some record companies, he says, won't export quantities of singles under 6,000, and when a British importer can afford to buy in that sort of bulk and *still* make a profit… well, it doesn't take a whole lot of brains to wise up that here is a licence to print money.

"We're really scraping round to find records now. You can't fight it really, but we'll keep trying to… right to the end.

"I mean, I could go to President and tell them what they've got in their catalogue that's worth releasing, but that's not what I want to do. How many of the soul artists on Disco Demand have got into the charts? None, right? They're all white."

And now, he reckons, there's probably going to be a TV documentary on the scene. That is another, somewhat larger nail in the coffin.

"Why do they exploit the scene in this way? They're treading on people's ground, they've no feeling for it… We're going to lose a lot of good people if TV gets a grip… It'll be a sad loss for the soul scene in general if commercialism does take a hold.

"But," he says, trying to end on an optimistic note, "the scene is here as long as the punters want it to be here… Its essence is rarity and it's up to us to keep that rarity."

AT 1.30AM SUNDAY morning, the queue outside the Wigan Casino, a large, red-brick, grim-looking edifice, is lengthening. Inside, the evening session is coming to an end. It's mainly pop. Through swing doors, up a couple of flights of stairs, through more swing doors, along a short narrow passage and through yet more doors. Out into a large hall. At the far end is the stage with curtains closed behind a deck holding three turntables and box upon box of records.

The temperature in the place starts at hot, becomes humid, then stifling, tropical, equatorial. And the kids dance on.

A record starts to play. As it reaches a bridge the snare drum cracks out two beats. Every hand in the place, in perfect sync, appears to clap. There's a sound like a gun shot, a whip crack.

That sound punctuates throughout the evening. These are the people who make the scene. There may be leeches who feed off their blood, pushers and bootleggers and other vermin, but the scene is firmly based on workaday punters who just want to dance, to be on the scene.

The hall fills up. The dancers crowd closer together. The music is based on the same sound structure as the oldest Motown records – that distinctive, fast-slapping beat – though the colour of the artist singing the beat is, at Wigan, increasingly immaterial.

Above the dance floor, around the wall of the hall, runs a balcony. Up there kids push through to the "pop" disco, a smaller hall though no less crowded, or shuffle through boxes of records, label-less or otherwise, which are being hawked.

The centre of activity switches between DJ and dancer. Faces turn to the stage as a record ends. A new one begins and the punters pick up the beat. Some jog into it slowly; others – more sold on the particular sound being played this time – fly with an effortless, often quite graceful, ease into a smooth series of kicks, pins, jumps and squats.

Gone are the suits and ties; now all is baggies with vest or bowling shirt. There are more blacks at Wigan than at Blackpool, though conversely less black music. There is the paraphernalia of Casino artefacts – posters sold to the kids, badges to sew on vest or shirt, car stickers.

As the night wears on, 3am, 4am, the dance becomes more intent, exhausting. Kids go out for a Coke or sit slumped against a wall. One little fella – he has a light-blue bowling shirt on – is dancing 10 feet from the stage. A DJ puts a new record on. The kid stops dancing. He stands, expressionless but for a hint of petulance, with hands on hips. The record, you gather, is not to his liking.

> "The music's been underground; I hate to see it turn commercial"

So there he stands while all around him bodies jiggle, twirl, hop and leap. You don't dance to something you don't dig. Behind the curtains, on stage, DJs congregate, chat to friends. Russ Winstanley is another podgy man and Boss DJ of Wigan. He isn't as worried about commercialisation as the Blackpool operators. He reckons the scene will be under close scrutiny "until about June or July. There'll be a couple more hits and then the fuss'll die down. Something like the reggae boom a few years back."

For Dave McAleer, Pye's A&R man up for the night, the testing time of the evening comes when he hands over a new Javells single to be played. As soon as the needle hits the groove there's loud, brash music – louder than most of the records played.

The kids, apart from a few small pockets of activity, stop dancing. It takes time to get a reaction and any unfamiliar sound is approached with a certain suspicious temerity. To dance or not to dance.

In the end, it's their decision which will decide how long the Javells record gets played; that goes for any new sound, no matter how rare, how black or how white. That, says Winstanley, is the way it should be.

And then you notice them. The kids sitting and leaning along the stage. One girl is staring out at the dancers and, casually, her left hand holds a tape recorder microphone to the shuddering speakers. Then you notice another. And another. One more at the end of the stage.

Finally, around 5am, it's time to leave the seething field of dance. Perhaps the most lasting memory of all was walking from one end of the Wigan dance floor to the other. It was like walking on a trampoline.

The last I saw of Barry, the motor mechanic from Manchester way, he was jumping way above the other kids, a big, big smile across his sweaty face. Then he landed, did a spine-breaking backward bend, came up and bobbed for a while. Then went into a spin, arms held tight across his chest like an ice-skater. He looked triumphant after that. The scene's his.

Geoff Brown •



March 24, 1975: Led Zeppelin round off their 38-date US tour with three nights at the Forum, Inglewood, LA



"We're not calming down"

Riots. Massive shows. A new album. Even Jimmy Page's broken finger can't derail LED ZEPPELIN's imperial phase. "We have a stride," says Robert Plant, "a gait, that if it was adjusted would be detrimental to the way we are."

— MELODY MAKER FEBRUARY 1 —

IT'S COLD OUTSIDE, freezing, sub-zero and bitter, but inside Chicago Stadium, a superstructure designed to accommodate ocean liners, 20,000 Led Zeppelin fans are roaring in unison as if some giant orgasm has overtaken each and every one.

They've recognised the opening notes to "Stairway To Heaven", the song they all came to hear. Even Robert Plant made a reverent speech before Page plucked the opening strings on the lower fretboard of his Gibson twin-neck.

"We... uh... recorded... now let me see... 14 sides of music including the new album in our career... and uh... well, we think that this song is... uh... pretty bloody good... eh, Jimmy?" says Plant. Jimmy grins and the crowd roar.

Danny Goldberg, a harassed-looking New Yorker with a ponytail who runs Swan Song Records for Zep in the States, was telling me about "Stairway" on the way to the concert.

"It's amazing," he said. "The FM radio stations in New York have done a poll on what is the most requested album track and for two years it's been 'Stairway'. Nothing else comes close to it. They're always playing it."

Up there on stage Zeppelin are giving the song a new dimension. Page is subtly altering the guitar feed-in »

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Band and manager Peter Grant (far right) on board the Starship, Zeppelin's rented Boeing 720 airliner

twisting a note here and adding an extra one there, but it's Plant's vocal that charges the song with drama.

It took about three numbers for his pipes to clear out and now he's shifted into top gear. Spoken asides between lines, building to a frenzy as Page moves up to the 12-string neck and crashes on open chords that ring out like echoes in a tunnel.

"*To be a rock and not to roll…*"

Lights everywhere, sparkling off a silver ball, and everyone is on their seats, cheering madly. John Bonham, in white boiler suit and black bowler hat, stumbles off his drum podium and nods back to the crowd. John Paul Jones, demure in gold embroidered waistcoat and fitted black pants, grins, and Page, relinquishing the twin-neck to a roadie, bows very low.

"Thank you, Chicago," says Plant, and the group retire to an ovation that continues for 10 minutes, building in waves of hoarse cheering until the group return, plug in and punch out the definitive riff of "Whole Lotta Love". Page, guitar slung as low as ever, duck-walks around, jerking out the notes that have become standard lesson number one in heavy guitar tuition, long black hair covering the right side of his face.

"Love" moves into "Black Dog" with the aid of four explosions atop the five lighting towers that beam down on the band, and it's off again for five minutes before Zep return with "Communication Breakdown", to make it almost three hours from the golden boys of heavy rock; three hours of incredible music that will be repeated nightly until Zep's US tour, the first major rock tour of the US in 1975, winds up at Los Angeles on March 27.



The jolt broke a bone and specialists say he won't be able to use the finger for another two weeks. He takes a pain-killer before going on stage.

"I can't play any blues at all, can't bend notes either," he told me before going on stage at Chicago. "It's the most important finger for any guitarist, so I'm having to modify my playing to suit the situation. A shame, but it can't be helped.

"We've had to cut 'Dazed And Confused' from the set and substitute 'How Many More Times', which we haven't played in four years. I'm still doing the violin bow routine, but we've had to alter even that and I can't do it as well as I'd like to. I can tell it's not as good as it usually is, but the audiences don't seem to notice.

"We almost cancelled the tour, but we couldn't, as we'd sold all the tickets and a postponement would have meant chaos. It couldn't have happened at a worse time, either."

Plant, too, was complaining of illness. "I'm catching flu and can't sing properly," he said.

Illness and broken finger bones are not the only problem that Zep are having to cope with on this junket. There were riots when tickets went on sale in several cities, and the worst incident occurred at Boston, where the council refused to grant a licence for the concert.

As a result the concert scheduled for February 4 has been cancelled, the first time in seven years of touring that a Zep concert has been cancelled. An extra date has been added at Nassau Coliseum to make up for the cancellation, and tickets are being distributed to Boston fans by mail order. All mail with a Massachusetts postmark received preferential treatment.

Boston was actually the venue of the first US appearance by Zeppelin, so the band feel bad about the cancellation. The real reason for the ban, however, was not so much the rioting fans as the tense racial situation in that city, where recently there have been riots over school bussing arrangements and the City Fathers are reluctant to permit any large gatherings which were just unfortunate to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

The tour opened this week with three concerts at the 20,000-capacity Chicago Stadium, the third of which I saw. "It takes them a few concerts to get into their stride," one of the roadies told me backstage. "By the time this band gets to Madison Square Garden, it'll be one of the best rock acts ever to set foot there."

Zep's three-hour set – there is no support act – includes five new songs that'll be on the *Physical Graffiti* double album, due for imminent release. The hold-up, as always with Zep, is because of the artwork.

Two of the new pieces stand out. "Kashmir" is a long song, a builder with a complex ascending riff, while "Trampled Under Foot" is an out-and-out rocker with a simple catch-line that would make an excellent single. "Trampled", in fact, might eventually take the place of "Whole Lotta Love" as a power finale.

Zep, in common with a few others in their league, have the ability to hit an audience right from the start, merely by their actual presence. In Zep's case the number is "Rock And Roll", and the effect is like a steam-driven locomotive gathering speed for a long express journey from the opening staccato notes.

Plant, bare-chested and golden hair curling over his shoulders, is the very epitome of the rock star, a superstud whose blatantly sexual manoeuvres around his stage rival anything from Tom Jones' Las Vegas routines to David Cassidy's more primitive but similar expressions of virility. The slightly built Page, shy, sleepy features hidden behind a mass of black curls, dressed in white silk suit and black embroidered shirt, prowls the stage with a Les Paul tucked in a little above knee height.

© NEAL PRESTON



John Paul Jones keeps out of the picture, alternating between three Fender basses (one fretless) and only really making his presence felt when he moves to the keyboard. His Mellotron work on "No Quarter" was a coup de grace.

Two new songs follow "Rock And Roll". The first, "Sick Again", is a trite comment on the LA scene and hangers-on that Zep accumulate whenever they visit California. Another uptempo rocker. The second is a reworking of the blues standard "In My Time Of Dying" which features Page on slide throughout. Then it's "Over The Hills And Far Away" and "The Song Remains The Same", which moves into "The Rain Song", the first opportunity for Page to play delicately and use his twin-necked guitar.

Two more new pieces, "Kashmir" and "Wanton Song", come next before Jones' solo on "No Quarter". Then it's "Trampled Under Foot" before Bonham's tour de force, "Moby Dick", which now includes a 15-minute drum solo, a power drive extraordinaire that has the audience standing time and time again at its false conclusions.

"How Many More Times" is Page's new vehicle for the violin bow scenario, modified slightly because of his broken finger but still impressive, especially the part where he uses a stabbing echo and apparently duets with himself. "Stairway" closes the set.

Hasty getaways, police escorts and armed bodyguards are all part of the routine on a Zeppelin tour. The band are hustled directly off the stage into the usual waiting limousine while the audience is still waiting for a third encore.

On arrival at the hotel the band locked themselves away for an hour's conference with Peter Grant before venturing out into hotel lobby and bar, which were rapidly crowding with fans who'd heard where the group was staying.

This week Zeppelin take possession of the Starship, the personalised rock'n'roll jet that will ferry them to and from gigs with Chicago as a base. This method of touring, used by Zeppelin on previous tours, is unique. It's also extraordinarily expensive. *Chris Charlesworth*

— MELODY MAKER FEBRUARY 1 —

LED ZEPPELIN'S COLOSSAL US tour clicked into its second week this week with one cancelled show in St Louis and a major riot at Greensboro, North Carolina. Controversy surrounds their every move.

On Monday of last week, Robert Plant, who was suffering from a cold during the group's three concerts in Chicago, took a day's rest and that night's show in St Louis was cancelled. Plant stayed in bed in his Chicago hotel under doctor's orders while the rest of the band and entourage decided to utilise their free time with a two-day trip to Los Angeles aboard the rented Starship.

On Wednesday, Plant had virtually recovered and the band made a hasty return from California, picking up Plant in Chicago before continuing on to the East Coast for the Greensboro concert, where ticketless fans clashed with security guards and police in scenes outside the massive 20,000-seater auditorium where the group were playing.

Five hundred fans attempted to storm the rear of the building, brandishing broken bottles, stones and pieces of scaffolding. Three of the group's five limousines were severely damaged before police were called to clear the area. The other two cars were hastily backed inside the hall – otherwise the band would have had no means of escape.

Although the majority of the rioting fans had disappeared by the end of the show, the group were forced to make the quickest getaway seconds after leaving the stage. Zeppelin manager Peter Grant took the wheel of one of the limousines – much to the surprise of the official driver – while the other was driven by Magnet, a British roadie employed by Deep Purple, who had come along to the concert as an old friend of the band.

Heading the procession was a police car which cleared the way for the two limousines, sirens blasting, at speeds of up to 70mph in a heavily built up area. The three cars drove over red lights and on the opposite side of the road in a scene that resembled a Steve McQueen-movie car chase. The squealing tyres almost drowned out the police siren.

Grant, an expert driver, who had offered to buy both limousines from the car company, said afterwards: "I didn't care what happened so long as I got the boys out OK. That car I was driving was out of time; otherwise I'd have driven faster still."

Relaxing on the Starship on the flight back to New York, which the group are using as their base for the rest of the East Coast leg of the tour, Grant admitted that it was one of the scariest nights in Zeppelin's career.

This week the group play three shows at New York's Madison Square Garden and three shows at the Nassau Coliseum within the New York area. The third Nassau show was added to accommodate fans from Boston where Zep's planned concert was cancelled because of fans rioting when the box office opened.

> "I can't play any blues at all, and I can't bend notes either"

— MELODY MAKER FEBRUARY 8 —

WITH TWO WEEKS of the current Led Zeppelin tour under his belt, Robert Plant is feeling the strain. One show has been cancelled because he caught 'flu and he's still sniffing and talking like he's wearing a nose-clip.

Robert blames it partly on his particularly enjoyable Christmas festivities and the changes in climate involved in traversing the Atlantic. We're talking in his suite at the Plaza Hotel in New York, the same suite just left by the Chairman of Sonesta Hotels, the chain that owns this particular chunk of Americana.

Love's *Forever Changes* album is playing on a tiny portable record player and Plant spreads out on a couch, bare-chested as always, golden hair curling everywhere and sipping a fruit drink between assaults on a paper handkerchief. We begin by talking about the new album, *Physical Graffiti*, due to be released anytime. It's Zep's first double album.

"I suppose it was about a year ago when we started, if I can cast my mind that far back," he says. "It's always a case of getting together and feeling »

out the moods of each of us when we meet with instruments for the first time in six months.

"We began as always, playing around and fooling about for two days, playing anything we want, like standards, our own material or anything that comes to us, and slowly but surely we develop a feel that takes us on to the new material. Some of the new stuff came directly from this approach, like "Trampled Under Foot", which was just blowing out, and some comes from Jonesy or Pagey or myself – bringing along some structure which needs working on. Then the four of us inflict our own venom on it to develop the idea.

"We intended to record as much new stuff as we could before we started losing the fire, because we've always believed in not prolonging periods of recording or composition to such a degree where we know we are not up to our best. So we recorded as much fresh stuff as we could before looking back at some things we hadn't recorded.

"Then we saw that there was a lot of stuff we'd put down and we thought, 'Why not put a double album out?' There's a lot of variation of material, so it gives people a whole spectrum of style which is contained in one package, and I think that's very good.

"It goes from one extreme to the other but at the same time it's very evident that it's Zeppelin. You could play a track on the radio that you'd think would never, ever be us, but then when you listened you'd hear little things that couldn't be anyone else."

Recording took about four months, which was strung out over a much longer period. "It sounds a long time but the whole essence of the band is that we do what we want to do when we want to do it. It's no race for us. We've got no deadlines to meet and when we finally do give something then it's got to be just dead right. We have a stride, a gait, that if it was adjusted would be very detrimental to the way we are."

Robert agrees that 1974 was a year of little public activity for the group, but maintains that setting up their own label, Swan Song, took up much of their time.

"After the last American tour I was so relieved to be home again, because I'd missed a season and I really need each season as it comes. I like to feel spring and I got back in August after that tour and realised I'd missed spring going into summer that year. I don't want to lose these perspectives in what I consider to be important for the lyrical content of what I write. I want to take stock of everything instead of going on the road until I don't know where the fuck I am and end up like a poached egg three days old.

"But the time comes, as it does in recording and the record company and every move that we make, when we know it's time to go out on the road again. We all met and thought, 'What have we been doing?' We all needed that time off but we cursed each other for having it and agreed at the same time that we'd been physically idle."

The group hates rehearsing, says Robert, but they realise they have to limber up to approach playing in the way they want. "The first hour is usually great, but then we think how much better it would be if there was an audience there. A lot of the construction that we do on stage is fired by the atmosphere of the actual instant.

"Obviously we had to rehearse the stuff from the new album to get it into some viable shape. We played all the new songs at the rehearsal, but some of them take such a different direction that it would be difficult to employ them live after being off the road for 18 months.

"We do 'Sick Again', which is about ourselves and what we see in Los Angeles, but it's a pity you can't hear the lyrics properly live. The lyrics say: *'From the window of a rented limousine, I saw your pretty blue eyes / One day soon you're gonna reach 16, painted lady in the city of lies.'* As much as it's pretty, it's sour really. That's exactly what LA stands for. Joni Mitchell summed it up best when she called it 'City Of The Fallen Angels'.

"We do 'In My Time Of Dying', which is a really old, standard thing. 'Gallows Pole' was an old traditional thing too, and 'When The Levee Breaks' is something I have on an old album by Kansas Joe McCoy and Memphis Minnie in 1928. There are so many classics from way, way back which we can give a little of ourselves to and take them through the years."

It's now over two years since Zeppelin have appeared in Britain. Well, Robert … "We shall

> "We do 'Sick Again', which is about us and what we see in LA"



January 25, 1975: Zeppelin in rehearsal, Indianapolis

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definitely play England by hook or crook before Midsummer Day this year. To say where and when at the moment is impossible as we haven't found out anything. All being well we shall definitely be in England soon during the summer.

"I play guitar now and again around Worcestershire, but it isn't met by such tremendous outcries as it is when we all get together on stage. I've been 75 per cent pleased with the shows we've done so far, even though we've got a new stage set-up to get used to. It's quite hard to go out and confront thousands of people with a new stage, so we have to compensate for these new things.

"At the beginning of the tour I always feel nervous because I've got a lot to stand up for over here. If ever I've given all that I've got to give, it's been to an audience and the audiences here can really drain you until you're almost in tears.

"It's not as if these kids are all 17 or 18 and going barmy. These people have been going along with us for seven or eight years. Now I know there's people in England who'll say they've been standing with us for seven or eight years, but over here the whole motion is like a seven-year trek that's charged with the energy that these people give. My nerves are really through hoping that I can re-establish the contact that I had before.

"The English promotion side of things has always been archaic. They didn't want to know us as the New Yardbirds in the early days, so we had to come over here and make a statement that no one else had made before. Then everybody wanted to know.

"I can see this happening again with The Pretty Things, who have achieved so much ability with their writing and playing. They get much more coverage here than in England, but how much coverage can you get in England, anyway? It's not too hot, and the promoters are a little reserved in what they can promote."

Zeppelin have always maintained a reputation as outlaws of the road in the US. Talk of their excesses in the hotel rooms ranges far and wide, and the faint of heart have been known to cower when they approach with the twinkle in their eyes that spells havoc.

"Like the music, the legend grows too," said Robert. "There are times when people need outlets. We don't rehearse them and, let's face it, everybody's the same. Over the last few years we've spent some of our time at the Edgewater Inn in Seattle, where Bonzo fishes for sharks in the sea from his bedroom window. Hence the mudshark thing on the Zappa album.

"No, we're not calming down yet. Calming down doesn't exist until you're dead. You just do whatever you want to do when you want to do it, provided there's no nastiness involved, then the karma isn't so good."

Moving on to more serious topics, I asked whether Robert thought "Stairway To Heaven" was becoming heavily identified as the group's signature tune.

"I don't know about that. We've always intended to try and create a spectrum of music that captures as many aspects of us as we could, although we never realised it at the beginning.

"We try and do this on stage, too. We start off like songs of thunder and then we take it down with a song like 'Rain Song' so you tend to develop a rapport rather than just a blatant musical statement. It ebbs and flows through two-and-a-half hours or so, and we feel it would be unfair for the climax to be 'Whole Lotta Love' now, because that isn't where we climax any more.

"It's quite a moving thing. I remember doing it at the Garden last year and I sang well away from the mic and I could hear 20,000 people singing it. I mean… 20,000 people singing 'High Heeled Sneakers' is one thing, but 20,000 people singing 'Stairway To Heaven' is another.

"People leave satisfied not because of the violent aspects of the music, which I don't think exists anyway, but because they feel a satisfaction with the music they've heard."

Chris Charlesworth ●

In a completely different vein



MM MAR 1 More variety and more vinyl from Zep.

Led Zeppelin Physical Graffiti

SWAN SONG

No other top band in the world gets as much stick as Led Zeppelin. Every time they bring out an album there's six months of carping because it's not full of remakes of "Whole Lotta Love"; followed by another six months of moaning because they haven't played any live dates; finishing up with six months of complaints about the time it's taken them to make the new one.

Not this time, though, I suspect. By allowing themselves the luxury of a double album, they've managed to cram in a bit of everything and in enough quantity to keep that vocal minority of moaners at bay.

For once they will have to admit that the wait since *Houses Of The Holy* has been worthwhile; some may even be moved enough to recognise *Physical Graffiti* for what it is: a superbly performed mixture of styles and influences that encompasses not only all aspects of Led Zep's recording career so far but also much of rock as a whole.

This is not just a collection of great tracks, but a perfectly balanced selection of music that weighs heavy rock with acoustic, ballad with out-and-out rocker in such a way that you can play the album non-stop day and night without ever needing to pause for a bit of peace. And for one of the world's heaviest bands, that's some achievement.

Physical Graffiti has not just been "worth the wait"; it had to take a long time to produce music of this calibre. Unlike so many bands today, who hurl out albums like they were Frisbees in Hyde Park, Led Zep can be bothered to take the time and trouble to make this one even better than the last one.

They are, if you like, one of the few "progressive" bands left – you remember them, the groups who were always going to move forward and keep exploring new avenues. Zeppelin have, and still are doing just that. They established their base with heavy blues-rock on *Led Zeppelin I*, and have constantly sought to build on that, investigating new fields; from the folky "Battle Of Evermore" to the reggae-influenced "D'Yer Maker".

> **"It's a superbly performed mixture of styles and influences"**

Now they've taken electronic space rock for "In The Light", one of the two most immediately striking cuts on *Physical Graffiti*.

It opens with eerie keyboards that sound like they belong to Pink Floyd's "Set The Controls For The Heart Of The Sun", before moving on to more familiar Zeppelin riffing. What marks it as the work of true craftsmen, though, is the linking: those space sounds are not just a frill tagged on for the hell of it, but properly joined to the core of the song, first led in by Robert Plant's voice, then led out for a reprise in the middle by Jimmy Page's acoustic guitar.

"Kashmir" hits you just as immediately. It's in a completely different vein: heavily orchestrated, with a chopping string riff which builds up to a crescendo at the end of each verse. The nearest equivalent is the work of the classical composer Moondog, who uses the same richly descriptive style.

So effectively is it used though on "Kashmir" that it actually sounds like you're travelling on a caravanserai through the East.

But the band's strength does not always rest on the new. They take that old, old theme of the blues on "In My Time Of Dying" and come up with a fresh approach, by constantly changing the pace, veering from the breakneck to the dead slow. Plant holds a note here, John Bonham continues a drum pattern there, and it joins together as tight as a clam.

And it if's heavy rock you want, Zeppelin can dive a number along like no other band on Earth. Listen to them roar through "Custard Pie" and "Night Flight" and "Sick Again", always giving that little bit extra that's the sign of class – a bubbling keyboard here, a nifty riff there, an intricate pattern elsewhere.

They can be wistful ("Down By The Seaside", fun ("Boogie With Stu") acoustic ("Bron-Yr- Aur"), melodic ("The Rover") – just about anything in fact. They can take as long as they like with the next album: *Physical Graffiti* will last 18 months or 18 years. And then some. *Michael Oldfield*



May 1974: Harry Nilsson at the Record Plant, New York City, during sessions for his 10th album, *Pussy Cats*



“I’m a very lucky man”

John Lennon’s pal HARRY NILSSON is working on a new album. Still, he doesn’t rate himself as writer or singer, especially now he’s damaged his voice. “I enjoy the gravelly sound,” he says. “I’ve got more than I asked for now.”

© DAVID GAHR



March 12, 1974: Nilsson downs another Brandy Alexander as John Lennon snogs his companion May Pang at the Troubadour, LA

GETTY

— MELODY MAKER FEBRUARY 1 —

HARRY NILSSON IS a stocky, blond Californian and pleased that right now his age is thirty-three and a third. He came striding through the Pierre lobby loaded with parcels after a morning's shopping in New York, dressed in blue jeans, blue anorak and white tennis shoes. On his head was a blue flat cap which failed to keep his hair in place. His light skin gives him the air of a Scandinavian.

But Harry was actually born in Brooklyn, New York, and didn't move to the West Coast until he was 12 years old. It's a pretty well-known fact that he worked as a bank clerk before becoming a singer, that he doesn't perform live and his discography now numbers 11 albums of mainly self-penned material. Curiously his two hits in the UK – "Everybody's Talkin'" and "Without You" – were both by other writers.

We had lunch at the Park Lane Hotel overlooking Central Park and were joined first by Harry's Irish girlfriend, and secondly by Alice Cooper. The head waiter at the establishment insisted we wore jackets; Harry had to keep his anorak on, and remove his flat hat, much to his disgust. He ordered a double Chivas Regal on ice, which he drank neat, and we started talking, first about his new record.

"I'm having an argument with RCA about the album and at the moment they're winning," he smiled. "They disapprove of the title *God's Greatest Hits*, so we're arguing. For this album I have a major addition in my band: Van Dyke Parks, who's dynamite.

"He brought with him a guy called Robert Greenwich, who is the finest steel drum player I have ever heard and is equally brilliant. There's a lot of percussion on this album, more than usual.

"Van Dyke sort of sat around and played piano and he has a credit of musical co-ordinator and maestro. His ideas were what I wanted.

"Other than that I use the usual gang of musicians: Bobby Keys, Klaus Voorman, Jim Keltner. Dr John played on one track and that's dynamite. There's 10 new songs and one more which is actually a demo that I wrote when the album was finished, so there's 11 tracks, and it's due the first week of March, depending on my arguments with RCA."

THE NEW ALBUM comes hot on the heels of *Pussy Cats*, the album released in the summer, on which Harry collaborated with John Lennon, his long-time idol. "Yeah, it's not long after *Pussy Cats* came out to release another album, but *Pussy Cats* didn't last too long, anyway.

"I liked *Pussy Cats*, but to be subjective there's good and bad about it. Unfortunately I was in bad voice at the time and that hurt. The sequencing wasn't that great and the song selection was done a bit on the spur of the moment. We were sitting around with nothing to do, so we said, 'Let's do an album.' As a result we picked songs off the top of our heads and just did them.

"Neither one of us had any songs spare at the time; John had two but he wanted them for his album. I thought the album was OK. It's not as bad as some of the reviews that I've read, but time will tell. I think 'Many Rivers' was a really good cut.

"We didn't think that I sounded like John on the songs. I think many people made the association, but I can compare 'Many Rivers' to 'Without You' and some of the old stuff that I did a long time ago. I had a grating voice on *Pussy Cats* because my vocal cords were in bad shape. I was seeing a throat specialist every day before the sessions and we even tried a faith healer and acupuncturist trying to get it fixed. It was almost permanently damaged.

"I enjoy the gravelly sound. It's something I've wanted since childhood and it's taken many bottles of brandy and cigarettes to get. I guess I've got a little more than I asked for now. I used to try and get a rasp sound before, but not lose the clearness of the notes in other kinds of songs.

"Now I've sure got the rasp and it'll take quite a while to get well; I abuse my throat more than necessary. But also, I've never had that great a voice anyway. I've always sung out of tune. You know, I don't think I'm that good a writer, either. I'm just a very lucky man."

I mentioned that Harry's two biggest British songs were not his own compositions. "Yeah… that's part of my dilemma," he replied. "It's OK, I like being misunderstood. When I'm older the kids will discover me, the next generation. But it was like a dream for me to make an album with John. I've always loved John Lennon. He's my favourite hero. We'd talked about it in the past but never done anything. He first suggested it at a Phil Spector session, but I passed that off as one drunken evening. Then we were both together in Los Angeles last summer and we did it.

"We had a lot of fun. We spent a month at a beach house with the whole band and a month at a hotel in New York and every night was a laugh. The house belonged to Peter Lawford and everywhere we went there were pictures of John Kennedy. Very spooky. It was like a musicians' commune, a laugh a minute.

"It was like OUR album rather than the normal producer/artist relationship. We're both singers and both songwriters, so all decisions were made on joint approval. We think alike, so it was easy to make decisions about what we wanted to do.



"We thought it had a sense of humour. I don't know… I guess I'm just bitter about it. I think that sense of humour is the single most lacking thing in popular music. It's also the single most lacking quality in the people that present popular music to the public. It hurts, because that's what rock'n'roll is all about – fun.

"'*Acting like a man on a fuzzy tree…*' It's humour. How serious can you get about '*your baby, my baby*'? Lots of musicians take it too seriously and it's dull and boring, and that's what's killing pop music. I like humour and I like songs that have humour. That's why I'm arguing with RCA.

"They don't get the joke about *God's Greatest Hits*. I asked them whether they'd have turned down *Jesus Christ Superstar* for the same reason. Most of the lyrics on the album are a joke, anyway."

Throughout his recording career, Harry has cut as many songs by other artists as himself. "Yeah, I'd always wanted to do 'Subterranean Homesick Blues', and I'd always wanted to do 'Many Rivers'. I thought that was going to be a hit, but you can't tell any more. If I'd walked into a room and someone played it to me, I'd have jumped. It's difficult for me to find songs I like that I want to record. I don't like most songs and I don't think anyone likes MOST songs. With 'Everybody's Talkin' and 'Without You', I just heard them, liked them and did them. Very simple.

"I found 'Without You' on an old Badfinger album, and I first heard it at someone's house. A day or two later I kept humming the hook and thought it was a Beatles song. It sounded like one, so I tried to find it by looking on all the Beatle albums. Finally I said, 'I know… it's not The Beatles. It's that group they have: Grapefruit', so I went out and tried to get a Grapefruit album. Finally it hit me. It was Badfinger.

"I brought it to Richard [Perry – Harry's producer at the time] and he agreed to record it with me. It wasn't that big a surprise when it took off the way it did. It's actually more surprising when they're not hits. I think they're all hits when I'm writing them, and if I'm singing it, it's a hit too. If you don't believe that, you go crazy."

Conversation switched into comedy, one of Harry's favourite topics. Alice Cooper arrived and the two of them discussed Mel Brooks, a mutual favourite comic. Quick repartee ricocheted across the table for 15 minutes; coupled with record company grievance stories triggered off after Harry recounted a story about a single being withdrawn by RCA because they didn't think it was commercial. The lyrics were about a TV detective series and television sets, and they include a line about "*19 inch baby*" and "*twiddling knobs*". Too suggestive, said RCA, and stalemate exists at present. "I just signed a new deal with them for eight more albums and this is the first. A stormy start, eh?"

I asked why Harry never appeared live and Alice, equally curious on this topic, craned forward to hear. "I prefer playing dead."

Cut the wisecracks. Seriously, Harry. "No, I don't want to play live. I don't really know. Everybody asks me this. It started out as a joke originally as nobody ever asked me to play live. I never had a band and I didn't have an agent, so nobody asked me to go out live. People asked me about it and I decided it was original not to go out live, so I thought I'd keep it that way a while. I've kept it for seven years.

"It doesn't appeal to me at all. I don't know whether my performing live would help record sales. I just look at the people who do perform live and don't sell records. More artists perform live than don't and more of them don't sell records. In Alice's case, I'm sure his sales would double if he did a tour, but that doesn't mean it will with me. I've just signed a new deal with RCA for $5 million and I've got a couple of gold albums without doing any live appearances. That's good enough for me.

"I've done a couple of TV shows but that was without an audience. Just a producer, myself and the crew. That's controlled. You can do what you want to do and take advantage of things that the studio has to offer which you can't do in a live situation. I did some TV shows in America a long time ago – the Johnny Carson show, the Mike Douglas show – with just me and a piano.

"I was once advised to do live shows and appear on TV. I agreed to the TV. 'Everybody's Talkin'' had just come out and it was a hit, so I went on this TV show. I didn't have a suit to wear so I borrowed my manager's suit, which didn't fit. As soon as it was over I realised I was making a mistake and stopped doing it. My reputation is now unscathed.

"I've talked about it with the band that I use on the albums but I don't know what we'd do. It wouldn't be like a concert tour, because they're on the way out anyway. Maybe we'd do a movie house with a new album. I'd just do one new album's worth of live stuff rather than all the old stuff."

At this stage Alice left, so I asked Harry why he didn't like giving interviews. "I don't know. RCA want me to do a bunch of them soon, but I don't recall when I gave the last one. It could be one year ago. No, it was at the time of the *Little Touch Of Schmilsson In The Night* album.

"I don't know what to say to people who ask questions. I loved that album, though. That's a personal favourite of mine, mainly because Derek Taylor produced it and because the songs are great songs. I didn't sing too badly, either. I sang OK, for once. I like anything if it's good, and those songs were go good. I have a deep respect for Burt Bacharach."

Holding Harry to one topic is difficult: suddenly we'd switched to astronomy – "what do I want to talk about music for?" – and his deep desire to go to the moon. He's already bought a ticket through Pan Am, and he says he'd swap 10 years of his life for the chance to go up there.

"Music? Well the only things that have made musical sense in my life are The Beatles, Little Richard, Ray Charles, The Everly Brothers. That was until I learned about some other writers from other generations. In my generation those are the ones I look to.

"The Beatles beat everyone to the punch. On my first album I did a collage of 15 Beatles songs all together 'cos I wanted to do what they did. That makes me sound like a groupie, but I was proud of the fact that I did that, that I recognised early on how good they were.

"As soon as I saw what they were doing I just backed off. They were doing exactly what I wanted to do, but they were there first. They were just at the right age to be the 'lads' and I'd always considered myself to be a 'lad'. I love them individually and collectively.

"Ringo is now a very dear, close friend and I love him and John too. John and I aren't quite as chummy because he's an individual, he doesn't hang out everywhere. Paul I don't know that well, but George I know better. I respect and love them all, and there aren't too many people I can say that about."

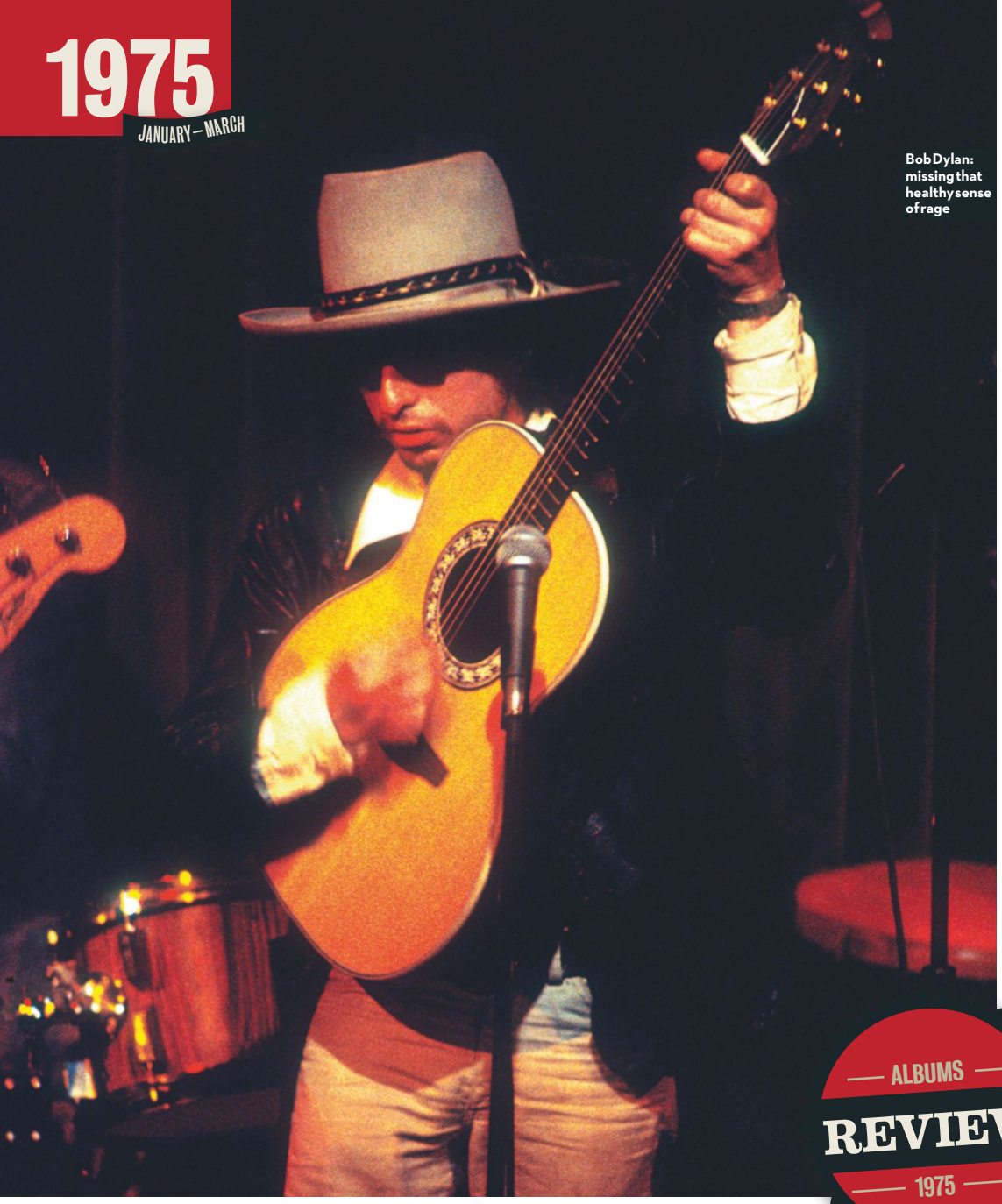
> "I decided it was original not to go out live. It doesn't appeal at all"



Harry admits to having seen just five live acts in his life. Recently he saw Elton John, whom he liked, though he's not too keen on Bernie Taupin's lyrics. "I don't like their songwriting technique that much, but they're nice guys. I never saw The Beatles, actually. I paid to see Ray Charles. He's the only one I paid to go and see. And I saw Randy Newman and Laura Nyro at the Troubadour because I respect them both tremendously. I wanted to hear them and encourage them.

"Oh yes. And the Smothers Brothers. I guess everybody knows I saw them at the Troubadour." [Just about a year ago Harry and Lennon heckled the Smothers Brothers, Lennon wearing a Kotex on his head, and made an undignified exit which was heavily reported in the press.]

"I saw The Who, too, 'cos Keith is a friend of mine. I think Pete Townshend is really good. Townshend and Keith are really strong people and I sense a protection thing going on there. Pete protects Keith, and I like that idea. I always think John would defend Ringo in the same way." *Chris Charlesworth* •



Bob Dylan: missing that healthy sense of rage

ALBUMS REVIEW 1975

ALBUMS

Bob Dylan
Blood On The Tracks CBS

In his liner notes to the new Bob Dylan album, Pete Hamill, who not so long ago was writing his very human articles for the *New York Post*, says: "Here is Dylan, bringing feeling back home. In this album he is as personal and as universal as Yeats or Blake; speaking for himself, risking the dangerous opening of the veins, he speaks for us all."

Hamill writes well. He's a Dylan fan. So am I. There are lots of us still left. And with each album Dylan has released in the past few years we've been hoping it's as great as *Blonde On Blonde* or *John Wesley Harding* or "The Times They Are A-Changing".

Maybe, when sufficient time has elapsed to provide a proper historical perspective, it will be possible to mention *Planet Waves* in the same breath, but for me, and most of those fans I would think, that feeling hasn't quite been there.

And that, in a deep sense, is because it's not really true, as Hamill says, that in speaking for himself Dylan "speaks for us all". Dylan long since ceased to do that, except in the most cliched sense. Increasingly, indeed, with the exception of the live double *Before The Flood*, which had memento value attached, his albums seem to narrow in universal appeal.

I doubt if his converts are many or substantially so. The man's hold on his generation has slackened off, I would suggest, and this was one of his strengths. After all, a fundamental rule of pop success is to seize the time.

Dylan is an artist, above and beyond chart positions, and yet his self-involvement now, a powerful source of his fascination, is not as frequently absorbing as it was. I wonder that he bothers to say, in "Idiot Wind" – probably the strongest song on this album, however – that "*Someone's got it in for me/They're planting stories in the press.*"

For him it's such an empty gesture. His ability these days to express broad truths out of highly personal emotions is less in evidence than it was, alas, Mr Hamill to the contrary.

And yet I feel instinctively that *Blood On The Tracks* will be better received than *Planet Waves*. The latter, with The Band helping him out, had a tough, sinewy quality, but there was also an experimental air in the way it veered sharply in mood, from the tender hymns of "Forever Young" to the bitter almonds of "Dirge".

With *Blood On The Tracks* Dylan seeks gentler ground. The melodies are generally softer, the instrumentation more muted after the fashion of *John Wesley Harding*, the approach more frequently narrative, as in early Dylan, and the themes more obviously those of love songs. The album could really have marked a transition between *Harding* and *Nashville Skyline*.

This is ground that will be familiar to his followers. And yet with *Planet Waves* it did look as if he were about to take off in a new direction. *Blood On The Tracks* – a brutally inappropriate title, somehow – sees him moving laterally. If not too many of the songs, however, are vintage material, yet Dylan never fails to keep the interest cooking.

"Meet Me In The Morning" is a slow, gritty blues, with such archetypal blues symbols as "*the little rooster crowing*"; "Buckets Of Rain", which he sings very effectively in a nasal rasp like that of Lightnin' Hopkins, of all people, reminds me of an old Dave Van Ronk song, "Bad Dream Blues"; "Simple Twist Of Fate", which features him just on harp and acoustic, is notable for his whispery, studied intonation; and "Lily, Rosemary And The Jack Of Hearts", almost a spoken poem against a country & western beat, draws judiciously on the traditional song motif of love and cards.

He most perfectly brings off the love song, though, with "If You See Her Say Hello" and its deep, bell-like bass resonating along the lines; as Hamill says, "a simple love song... but about love filled with honour, and a kind of dignity". But the two tracks that impress me most express other sides of Dylan. "Tangled Up In Blue" explores a favourite



GETTY (2)



records as amusements. The credibility of *Young Americans* is hindered from the start by his passion for pastiche. Worse, throughout the album I get a persistent picture of patronisation as Bowie flips through his soul cake-stall at Sigma Sound, like some cocktail-party liberal.

This would matter less if the album was up to the mark, but it's depressingly messy and vitiated, as if he knows he's not quite hitting the note. Is he forever doomed to flit through a variety of styles in a bewildering St Vitus dance? So to speak, what he gains from being roundabout he loses in swing, because there's no question that *Young Americans* doesn't cut it as a soul record, which is its primary mode, nor any other kind for that matter.

Not only are his hollow, frozen vocals weirdly out of context, but he patently lacks any deep emotional commitment to his material. He simply doesn't have the feel. The abstract, stylised schema that was so right for *Diamond Dogs* here sounds computer-processed. It's mechanistic soul.

Luckily for him, his accompaniment is generally excellent. One cut, "Fascination", is just about saved by a wah-wah soprano sax solo from David Sanborn, who also plays some nice tenor on "Somebody Up There Likes Me". Willie Weeks and Andy Newmark are well in there. And the vocal backups strongly support Bowie's mannered treatments; in fact, where they're allowed more leeway, as on "Right" – an untypically compulsive track – they produce something approaching excitement.

The single and title track is a reasonable, if unmemorable discotheque record, but the final cut, "Fame" which Bowie has written with John Lennon and guitarist Carlos Alomar, is actually rather good – some splintered guitar riffing and staccato singing, "borrowed" from James Brown, that's the closest Bowie comes to being funky.

However, Bowie irrevocably sinks his album for me with a dire version of Lennon's "Across The Universe", which wrings the original through the production mangle in piteous fashion. It's a new high in lows. And, as far as Bowie's work is concerned, so is the album. *Michael Watts, MM Mar 15*

Dylan role; that of drifter, bumming from city to city.

But if he treated this theme self-righteously in "Drifter's Escape", and with a kind of sorrowing poignancy in "I Am A Lonesome Hobo", here he employs a sense of gleeful, comic absurdity as the narrator recounts his kooky adventures to the backdrop of a slappy beat.

"Idiot Wind", the obviously "different" cut, is a long and fierce account of its author's hatred for those who invade his privacy, and by extension, the privacy of us all: "*Idiot wind blowing every time you move your teeth*", he sings.

However, as I've suggested already, it's not easy to make that extension and see beyond Dylan's personal anger at gossip-mongers. Yet he performs it with such conviction that for the only time on the album he forces the listener into an attitude.

It's just this healthy sense of rage that I miss now in Dylan. No one should want to stereotype him, but *Blood On The Tracks* is not reassuring as a reconciliation of his past with the present.

Michael Watts, MM Jan 25

David Bowie
Young Americans RCA

If *Diamond Dogs*, with its pretensions to literary intelligence, was a sort of vinyl version of future shock, *Young Americans* couldn't be more inappropriate; it's deliberately basic, lyrically straightforward and non-conceptual beyond the fact that it's designed to cast our hero in the mould of soul superstar.

Only the Barry White inclinations of "1984" on his last studio album could possibly have indicated where Bowie was heading next. The problem with Bowie is that he changes contexts with such rapidity that he's hardly entitled to feel sore when he's accused of merely observing passing fashion and of making



Queen's Freddie Mercury: gutsier and earthier

SINGLES REVIEW 1975

SINGLES

Queen Now I'm Here EMI

Who are the most successful British bands of the last 10 years? The Beatles, Rolling Stones and The Who might be a fair guess, and Queen obviously reckon so too, for this record is an unashamed assortment of all three. Throw in a touch of early Floyd and a sprinkling of Bowie and you have a Top 10 record.

Chunky guitar rhythms lead us into the dreaded Freddie opening fire with typical venom, with the lines echoing back and Brian May's lead guitar taking command, like the intro to "Daytripper". This record, which is a cut from *Sheer Heart Attack*, is more gutsy and earthy than their previous singles, although it's still heavily stylised and the way the drums and vocal chorus is arranged is pure *Tommy*. Ours is not to reason why and soon the nation will be leaping around their bathrooms as this comes over the wireless. Hit. *MM Mar 22*

Steve Harley & Cockney Rebel
Make Me Smile (Come Up And See Me) EMI

A crucial single for Steve in the light of his recent flop, which has made his rantings and modest predictions a sick joke. Wisely he's laid off the Ferry-Bowie exaggerated imitations to a certain extent and concentrated on producing a good song without relying so heavily on his own style and character to see it through. The vocals are still excruciatingly stylised and if anything that's what'll bring it down, for the song, a strongly Dylanish, tuneful thing, isn't bad. There's some interesting lyrics, too, which sound like a defensive V-sign to his critics, although his specific message is obscure by the energetic back-up vocals and Steve's ludicrous enunciation. It'll be tight but a likely hit. *MM Feb 1*



George Harrison Dark Horse
APPLE

Best single for quite a long time from the galloping guru. Hopefully he's ding-donged all the rubbish out of his system now, and this agreeable record, which integrates beefiness with composure, indicates a more solid musical approach. He sounds like a latter-day Dylan wailing above an easy-going backing that includes some attractive guitar and a crisp rhythm. Well done, sir – take another throw and collect a hit. *MM Mar 1*

The Goodies The Funky Gibbon
BRADLEYS

Those loveable bounders who weekly brighten our telly screens have produced a spoof on the "Funky Chicken" that borders between the totally obnoxious and the faintly amusing. Bill Oddie hollers out a string of puns over a sterile rhythm and a tambourine that rattles away like an out-of-control stage-coach. It's all very silly, but at least they do have some musical base for their novelty records. Hit. *MM Mar 1*

The Eagles Best Of My Love
ASYLUM

Bands of the Eagles' quality are rare, yet they have wide commercial possibilities, being more than capable of popping up with a massive hit. Sadly this ain't it. It's pleasant, close harmonies blending well over a sleepy backing – just a bit too sleepy. The song itself is inconsequential, and as delightful as it is after Gilbert O'Sullivan's rantings, I can't see this stirring any Chelsea pensioners from their beer and baccy. Miss. *MM Mar 1*



February 25, 1975: John Lennon photographed on the roof of his apartment building, the Dakota, New York City

»

“I’d do ‘Hey Jude’, the whole damn show”

After a “psycho drama” with Phil Spector, JOHN LENNON’s *Rock’n’Roll* album is finished. Meanwhile, reconciliation – with the past, Allen Klein, Yoko and McCartney – is in the air. He’s even paying royalties to Paul. “I hope he gives me a good deal,” he says.

— MELODY MAKER MARCH 8 —

UP ON THE 16th floor of the Capitol building, John Lennon is juggling with as many telephones as he can handle at one time. On the other end of these telephones are no less than 35 disc jockeys sitting at their various radio stations throughout the length and breadth of the USA. On one line, the promotion man from Capitol is calling a roll call, and each jock answers as his name is called.

John, in denim pants and shirt and wearing those slightly sinister, tiny round dark glasses, grins absurdly at the other end of the room, smoking an endless stream of Gauloise cigarettes and drinking coffee from a plastic cup.

Setting up a conference call with people in 35 different cities is no small deal, but, then the artist we’re dealing with is no small deal either. Capitol are anxious to sell plenty of copies of the new *Rock’n’Roll* album, and this method is as good as any to spread the word across the nation.

“Hello, John Lennon ’ere,” says John, picking up an extension phone when the roll call is completed satisfactorily. »

BRIAN HAMMILL/GETTY

Listening to answers without hearing the questions becomes a fascinating experience for the next 30 minutes, as John yells down the receiver in response to the nation's inquiries, which seem to cover everything from the new album to the imminent reformation of You Know Who.

"Why not?" he shrieks (one assumes someone had asked him why he recorded an album of old rock'n'roll songs). "It's something I've been wanting to do for years. In between takes on all sessions, Beatle days and since, we always messed around doing those sort of songs. We never put them out, though."

Another silence. "Well, there was a psycho drama happening," he replies to this one. "It was called Phil Spector…"

Lennon began work on his *Rock'n'Roll* album in October of 1973, doing a number of sessions with Phil Spector at the Record Plant in Los Angeles. By all accounts the sessions became pretty wild, with anything up to 28 musicians joining in on the tracks.

When the work was finished, however, Spector disappeared amid stories of a nasty car crash. When he disappeared, he took the tapes with him and it's taken John almost a year to get them back. Handing them over involved a deal whereby Spector received a very substantial producer's royalty.



"If we got back together, it wouldn't be for one last show, right?"

At the time John did get hold of them, however, he was working on the *Walls And Bridges* album, so they were temporarily shelved. On playing them after the completion of this album, John decided that only four Spector tracks were worth using and the rest were too crazy. Then he went back into the studio, this time using the Record Plant in New York, and cut a further 10 tracks that he produced himself. The completed 14 make up the album, and asterisks on the rear of the sleeve denote which songs came from which sessions.

On the subject of the sleeve, incidentally, it's interesting to point out that the photograph on the front was taken in 1960 in Hamburg during The Beatles' Star Club days. This shot re-emerged at the Beatles Convention, held in New York last July, where the original photographer, a German named Jurgen Vollmer, was exhibiting a number of very early Beatle pictures. The three blurred figures walking in front of John are, from left to right, George Harrison, Stu Sutcliffe and Paul McCartney.

Trivia fans will also be interested to know that the royalties from John's version of "Peggy Sue" will go to McCartney, who bought the publishing rights to the Buddy Holly catalogue, and the royalties from "Bring It On Home To Me" will end up in Allan Klein's pocket. Klein owns the publishing to this song.

"The project collapsed in Los Angeles," John is saying down the line to his 35 listeners. "Supposedly – you never know with Phil – he had a car accident, and I never got hold of the tapes. Out of about eight tapes, only four were worth using. I like 'Stand By Me', and 'Be-Bop-A-Lula' is one of my all-time favourites."

On he goes. "There's been more trouble with this album than Soft Mick," he says at one point, which shows that the scouse in Lennon is still there despite three years away from home. He talks about the "other" album out on the market, a bootleg version of these same tapes that has been advertised on television, but doesn't say much because of legal reasons.

"My hair just happens to have grown down to my shoulders now. It's always the right length for the right time," he replies after another silence, and one wonders which particular town jock wanted to know how long John's hair had grown.

"Let's say we're just good friends, ho ho," he says a little later, and no prizes for guessing the question this time. "At least we're talking and we're all happy with each other. If we got back together it wouldn't be for one last show, right?

"If we ever got together, my instincts tell me it would be more sensible to sit in a studio and get relaxed together and make some music before stomping out on dates. I'm not saying that's in the offing, though."

Fifteen minutes later, the US disc jockeys satisfied with their rap, John puts down the phone and relaxes before turning to me. He's always willing to talk to the English music press, perhaps feeling that because of his lengthy absence from Britain *MM* merits special treatment.

"Well, I just finished *Mind Games* when I started the new album, and I just wanted to have some fun. It was so soon after *Mind Games* that I didn't have any new material. I wanted to just sing and not be the producer. I thought, 'Who's the one to do it with?' and immediately thought of Phil Spector.

"We went down to the Record Plant and started cutting and, well, it got pretty crazy, as you might have noticed from some of the reports in the papers. It really got wild at times.

"But we managed to cut seven or eight in the end before it collapsed, which is the only way to put it. Next thing, Phil had apparently had an auto accident. Only he knows whether he did or didn't, but that's what the story said.

"That was the end of it then, because he'd got the tapes and I didn't get them back until two days before I went into the studio to cut *Walls And Bridges*. After the Spector madness I went on to do the Harry Nilsson thing, and I pulled myself together in the middle of that and prepared for my own album.

"I tried everything to get them back, even just hanging around LA to see if Phil would get better. I couldn't think what to do, so I did the album with Harry while I was waiting. When I got the tapes, I couldn't get into them because I was all geared to *Walls And Bridges*.

"When I did get into them, I found that out of the eight there were only four or five that were worth using. The sessions, like, had 28 guys playing live and a lot of them out of tune, which is too much, even for rock'n'roll.

"So I didn't know whether to forget it or carry on, but I hate leaving stuff in the can. I thought about putting out an EP – remember them? – but they don't have them in America, and thought about a maxi-single.

"In the end I decided to finish it off and produce the rest myself. I did 10 tracks in three days in October, all the numbers that I hadn't got around to with Phil. I had a lot of fun and mixed it all down in about four or five days.

"My one problem was whether it'd sound weird going from the Spector sound to my sound, from 28 guys down to eight. But they match pretty well, I think. So there it was, I suddenly had an album.

"Then there was a complication with somebody in New York whom I'd given a tape to and he started advertising it on television, which we'd talked about at one point. Capitol and EMI heard it, though, and convinced me it should go out as a regular album. They have the right to do it and I couldn't stop them if they wanted to, but they convinced me it was the right thing to do.

"I've sent away for some of the other versions of the album, but they haven't arrived yet. They've used my name on it and there's a court case


It's a busy time for JOHN LENNON – hit singles, a new album of oldies and recording with Elton John and and David Bowie. Plus at last his fight to stay in the U.S. looks like reaching an end. Between all this - and telephone interviews with 35 American dee-jays - John found time to talk to CHRIS

Rock on!



March 1, 1975: with Yoko Ono to present Record Of The Year at the 17th Grammy Awards in New York's Uris Theatre

going on. It's almost the same, with a couple of slight differences. It'll become a little collectors' item, I suppose, but it's nowhere near as good."

THE IDEA OF putting out an "oldies" album has been inside John for some time. "Every time I make an album, whether it was a Beatles album or one of my own, I jam on oldies to warm up. There must be tons of tapes around with me doing songs like this just to get the feel of being in the studio. We'd do these numbers to break the ice in case we were getting too uptight about a song. If it wasn't a 12-bar, it'd be something like 'Stand By Me', which everybody knew.

"With The Beatles, we covered a lot of rock'n'roll on the early albums, but we really were loath to do it on record because we always thought the originals were so great we couldn't touch them. We did them because they were our numbers on stage and we didn't have enough material of our own.

"We had no choice but to record 'Twist And Shout' and 'Dizzy' and all those things. We had a sacred English thing about rock'n'roll, but I've been playing 'Be-Bop-A-Lula' on stage since I was 15. Mostly they're my favourites, but 'Just Because' was one I hardly ever knew. Phil suggested that. 'Bony Moronie' was always a favourite, but there's lot I've missed. I didn't make an attempt at early Presley.

"There was one of his I tried, but it was no good. I didn't touch early Jerry Lee, and there's plenty of his I used to do. I also used to sing all the early Buddy Holly stuff – in fact I was Buddy Holly for a period, what with the glasses, even though I didn't wear them on stage.

"There was a lot to go at, but there're 14 tracks on the album and most albums these days only have 10 tracks. I could have done more but I hate double albums, even though some people like them. It's too much, especially for one guy singing."

I mentioned how McCartney would profit from the album…

"What a clever move that was. I hope he gives me a good deal. Klein owns the Sam Cooke catalogue, too, which is 'Bring It On Home To Me'. I don't care who gets the money. With Paul it's cool 'cos we're pals, and even Klein's all right really. I'm not gonna get much money from this album, anyway."

Conversation turned to John's recent appearance on stage with Elton John, an evening which obviously delighted him in that the audience gave him a conquering hero's welcome as he stepped up to play.

"It was great. He was more nervous than I was, because he was nervous for me as well. Elton used to be in the Dick James office when The Beatles sent in their latest demo, so he had a real emotional feel for The Beatles. I went to see Elton at Boston and I was nervous just watching him. I was thinking, 'Thank God it isn't me' as he was getting dressed to go on.



"When I walked on, they were all screaming and shouting"

"I went through my stage fright at Boston, so by the time I got to Madison Square I had a good time, and when I walked on they were all screaming and shouting. It was like Beatlemania. I was thinking, 'What *is* this!' 'cos I hadn't heard it since The Beatles. I looked round and saw someone else playing the guitar.

"It brought the roof down. It was déjà vu for me, not like The Beatles screaming bit, but the place was really rocking. We'd had a rehearsal, but we weren't that together. By the time we got to 'I Saw Her Standing There', Elton's piano was jumping off the floor.

"It was Elton's idea to do that song. We had to do 'Whatever Gets You Thru The Night' because of a bet we had. Elton played piano on the single and he said that if it got to Number One, would I appear on stage with him?

"I never thought it'd make Number One, but it did and Elton called me and said I hadn't to break my word. So naturally we did 'Whatever Gets You Thru The Night'. And naturally we did 'Lucy', because I did that with him at Caribou. That's me out of tune in the background, doing the reggae bit. I got it wrong just like I did the original on *Pepper*.

"Elton wanted me to do 'Imagine', but I didn't want to come on like Dean Martin doing my classic hits. I wanted to have some fun and play some rock'n'roll, and I didn't want to do more »

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than three because it was Elton's show after all. He suggested 'I Saw Her Standing There' and I thought, 'Great', because I never sang the original of that. Paul sang it and I did the harmony."

The experience, however, hasn't motivated John to go out on his own. He says whimsically that it was good fun but he wouldn't like to do it for a living.

"I'm not against live performances, but I haven't got a group and I haven't put a stage show together. I'm just not keen on it right now, but I may change my mind. It'd be dead easy to go out and do this rock'n'roll material, but I'd have to do more. I'd have to do my old hits, which I wouldn't mind really."

John was expected to play at George Harrison's Madison Square Garden show but didn't because he had a row with Harrison over the signing of what he calls the "Famous Beatles Agreement" – the final dissolution of the group which required all four signatures. John was the last to sign this document.

"George and I are still good pals and we always will be, but I was supposed to sign this thing on the day of his concert. He was pretty weird because he was in the middle of that tour, and we hadn't communicated for a while because he doesn't live here. I've seen Paul a bit because he comes to New York a lot, and I'm always seeing Ringo in Los Angeles.

"Anyway, I was a bit nervous about going on stage, but I agreed to because it would have been mean of me not to go on with George after I'd gone on with Elton. I didn't sign the document on that day because my astrologer told me it wasn't the right day, tee hee. In the end I signed it in Disneyworld in Florida with my son Julian. I thought it suited the occasion.

"George was furious at the time because I hadn't signed it when I was supposed to, and somehow or other I was informed that I needn't bother to go to George's show. I was quite relieved in the end because there wasn't any time for rehearsal, and I didn't want it to be a case of just John jumping up and playing a few chords.

"I went to see him at Nassau and it was a good show. The band was great but Ravi wasn't there, so I didn't see the bit where the crowd was supposed to get restless. I just saw a good, tight show. George's voice was shot but the atmosphere was good and the crowd was great. I saw George after the Garden show and we were friends again. But he was surrounded by the madhouse that's called 'touring'."



> "I respect George but I think he made a mistake on that tour"

Any bad publicity that George received through doing his tour hasn't affected John's attitude to live work. "I respect George but I think he made a mistake on the tour. Mistakes are easier to spot if you're not the person making them, so I don't want to come on like 'I know better', 'cos I haven't done it.

"From what I read and heard, one of the basic mistakes seemed to be that the people wanted to hear old stuff. George wasn't prepared to do that and I understand him. When I did that charity at Madison Square Garden I was still riding high on 'Imagine', so I was OK for material. But when I did 'Come Together', the house came down, which gave me an indication of what people wanted to hear.

"At the time I was thinking that I didn't want to do all that Beatles shit – but now I feel differently. I've lost all that negativity about the past and I'd be happy as Larry to do 'Help'. I've just changed completely in two years. I'd do 'Hey Jude' and the whole damn show, and I think George will eventually see that. If he doesn't, that's cool. That's the way he wants to be."

John is vague about his immigration situation, which, of course, is still pending.

"There are all sorts of things popping up and the whole thing is like a little teeny Watergate. I think things are looking up because the old guard have left and there's been a change in politics. But it's still down to a political decision



Arriving at the Grammy Awards with Yoko and David Bowie, who would present Aretha Franklin with the gong for Best R&B Vocal Performance

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from the White House to let me off the hook. There's a lotta people got into this country because there's been a special bill put through for them, and there's a chance that may happen with me. They do it for Pakistani maids and, for that matter, there're known Nazis living here who're not being harassed.

"It was on the TV a week ago that Nazis are here, including one who killed about 800,000 people in Poland. There're drug dealers, too, who are in here. My lawyer has a list of people who've committed rape, murder and drugs dealing and they're hassling me. This is a last resort but I'm gonna get that Green Card some day."

JOHN HAS RECENTLY been involved in sessions with David Bowie in New York. John met Bowie at an LA party he'd attended, he says, in the hope of seeing Liz Taylor. "Ringo knows her, so I went with him and Elton, but I really got to know him through Mick [Jagger]. I see a lot of Mick when he's in town.

"David told me he was going to do a version of 'Across The Universe' and I thought, 'Great,' because I'd never done a good version of that song myself. It's one of my favourite songs, but I didn't like my version of it. So I went down and played rhythm on the track. Then he got this guitar lick, so me and him put this together in another song called 'Fame' which is on his next album too, I had fun and it'll be out soon."

John says he's missing England. If he got his Green Card tomorrow, he'd fly to London the following day. He wants to see his Aunt Mimi again and he misses his son Julian, although Julian was recently over for the Florida vacation.

"We went to Disneyland on what must have been the most crowded day of the year. It's funny. I was sitting on the monorail along with everyone else, not being recognised, and I heard someone with his back to me say that George Harrison was there today. The guy was leaning on me at the time, and he'd heard that a Beatle was there somewhere. He couldn't see the wood for the trees.

"It was like the 'Which one of you is Ringo?' bit that people used to say to us when we first started. I try not to miss England and I make myself not get sentimental about it. I say to myself that I'm gonna get this Green Card, and when I do I'll be on the next plane."

Lastly, John mentioned that he's back with Yoko, after a separation that has lasted over a year.

"I'm happy as Larry, and she is, I hope," he said. "We've known each other for nine years. I met her in 1966. We had a sort of breakdown last year, one way or another, but we called each other often, even when I was going crazy out on the West Coast, and I probably said a lot of barmy things to her which I'll regret. I was just going over for a visit two weeks ago and it fell in place again.

"It was like I never left, although I'd been there a few times. Suddenly it fell back into place and I realised that this was where I belonged. I think we both knew we'd get back together again sooner or later, even if it was five years, and that's why we never bothered with divorce.

"I'm just glad she let me back in again. It was like going out for a drink, but it took me a year to get it."

Chris Charlesworth •



Keep 'em dancing



NME FEB 22 Lennon's long-awaited new LP is "the best since *Plastic Ono Band*".

John Lennon
Rock'n'Roll APPLE

"Re-lived by JL" it says on the sleeve – and that's where *Rock'n'Roll* scores over last year's spate of retrospective enterprises. Possessing no equivalent of Lennon's crazily alienated youth to obsess them, Bowie, The Band, Ferry et al could only look back in warm nostalgia and attempt, with artistry, to recreate.

By comparison, Lennon is fixated. His focus on his early teen years has the brilliant gleam of genuine obsession. He relives – and that's what prevents *Rock'n'Roll* from being charged with the archness, the indulgence, the ambiguity and the decadence that surrounded the attempts of Ferry and Bowie. Lennon isn't into perspectives. *Rock'n'Roll* is what it claims to be and no more.

And no more? Let's get this thing the right way up; this album is fine – the best sustained effort on John Beatle's part since *Plastic Ono Band*. (Although the parallel ends abruptly there; *Rock'n'Roll*'s twin principles are strength and hilarity... it's an "up" record... party time, kids).

His focus on his early teen years has the gleam of genuine obsession

The quickest way to become convinced is to hammer into your local disc vendor's den and demand to hear Chuck Berry's "You Can't Catch Me" followed by Larry Williams' "Bony Moronie".

Both have gigantic sounds – lots of snare, riffing saxes, chunking 12-bar guitars, and echo unlimited – care of Phil Spector (who produced and co-arranged four of the best tracks in late '73 before his car accident). "You Can't Catch Me" is a powerhouse rock-out that'd make a great single with its "Come Together" references and all; "Bony Moronie" is tackled at a markedly slow pace which allows the breaks to become yawning gaps in a mountain range of sound with Lennon left suddenly alone in them, savouring lines like "*Rock'n'roll by the light of the silvery moon*" and "*Making love underneath the apple tree*".

Both tracks are genuine rock'n'roll relived; Lennon simply accentuates the beauties that were always there. Anyone else would have felt obliged to comment. The general scheme of the album is down to fast continuity (keep 'em dancing); the overall mood concerns Lennon's attitude to his own enthusiasm (a song in his heart, a smile on his face). Witness the introduction of Lloyd Price's "Just Because" with John reminiscing over a swarm of mandolins: "*Ah, remember this? I must've been 13 when this came out. Or was it 14?*"

I'm utterly disarmed and expect you'll be also. Other points to watch include (1) an extraordinary squealing guitar solo on "Stand By Me" (which I trust is by Lennon, although the sleeve provides no personnel); (2) "Do You Want To Dance" performed at a drunken lope; and (3) a rampaging "Peggy Sue" screeching to a halt for Lennon to do his "Look out!" bit before a manic rhythm guitar charges in to take the central break.

Personally I'd have preferred a punchier version of "Sweet Little Sixteen" and don't really care either way about "Bring It On Home To Me", "Be-Bop-A-Lula" and "Ya Ya", but what's left ("Rip It Up"/"Ready Teddy", "Slippin' And Slidin'" and "Ain't That A Shame") is, in the words of the ad man, sheer enjoyment.

One comes away from this album with the hope that these old forms are still viable; their simple strengths are very much what's needed today. If Lou Reed's oldies album hits it off (and he must have a hell of a story to tell), we might witness a complete change of direction in the next year or so. Meanwhile we leave Mr Lennon wishing his listeners well from the final grooves of his latest fave album: "*Everybody here says Hi. Goodbye.*" *Ian MacDonald*

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NEED ANY BACK ISSUES? SEE PAGE 144

Readers' letters

MM JAN–MAR Bob tangled up, ELO striking gold and a genuine pressing issue.

Dylan's fresh blood

LP WINNER!

When considering Dylan's *Blood On The Tracks*, could we please resist comparisons with any previous albums and view this set as a fresh statement. The album dwells entirely on the breakdown of man-woman relationships. When has this ever been encountered so regularly as it is today – with the pathetic reasons showing an increasing irresponsibility?

The warning and the pain of consequence seem most evident in "You're A Big Girl Now", with the lines like "*What's the sense of changing horses in midstream*" showing the downward path which results from change through idle fancy.

While wishing to refrain from known past descriptions, I cannot help but feel that this album mirrors a current mood and is also an enormous artistic feat.

I do hope that the lukewarm reviews will not deter people from buying what I believe will be seen as a sane artist's attempt at persuading us all to work harder at our marriages and relationships.

DAVID R FRANKUM, Gaydon Close, Lodge Park, Redditch (*MM* Feb 15)



GETTY

Floyd: dark side of the tunes

I'm sitting here listening to a live Pink Floyd extravaganza on the Alan Freeman show. Well, just what I expected. I haven't really heard them since the days of Syd Barrett, but really, to call this band a leading contender for the coveted title of the *Melody Maker* Poll band of the year, does an injustice to the bands that really deserve it.

The songwriting and compilations [sic] must be questioned for their looseness and lack of any substantial ability. Whatever happened to the rock bands whose music kept you on a knife edge for two hours, where it wasn't a case of predicting what was coming next? Surely they are similar to ELP in the way they reproduce their songs note for note on stage. However, ELP have vast musical ability. Pink Floyd have not.

As for musicianship, I can only equate Messrs Waters, Wright, Gilmour and Mason with the likes of Sweet, but then at least I've heard some fairly good licks by them. I suppose I am grateful to Alan Freeman in a way, because now I feel fully justified in calling Pink Floyd the most overrated load of rubbish I have ever heard.

P LUNNON, High Street, Edlesborough, Beds (*MM* Jan 25)

Scratching the surface

Every record I have had from Charisma has been faulty.

Ages ago I bought *Foxtrot* by Genesis. It was faulty, I took it back to the shop and eventually I tried all their stock (six records in all), which were all faulty. They sent them back and got a new stock – all faulty. That was all they could do for me, they said, and gave me one of the faulty records.

I sent that back to Charisma, who sent me another copy (faulty) but accused my stylus of damaging records. What rubbish! Anyway, the story goes on with me purchasing more faulty records (by Genesis, The Nice, etc).

Yesterday I bought *The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway* by Genesis, which cost me £4.49. It wasn't worth £2 because most of it was damaged. The shop assistant told me that it was the second one they'd had back that morning.

I also know for a fact that a shop in Sheffield has had 50 returned.

RP Walker, Victoria Street, Ripley, Derbyshire

A spokesman for Charisma said: "We are fully aware of this problem and very much regret that initial batches of the new Genesis album were, in many cases, faulty. If anyone with a faulty record writes to Charisma we assure them that no letter will be ignored. They can also send the record direct to the company which presses our material: Dennis Watkins, EMI Records, 1–3 Uxbridge Road, Hayes, Middx. All faulty records will be replaced by perfect copies." (*MM* Jan 18)

Roy Wood defends ELO

After reading *Melody Maker*'s review of The Electric Light Orchestra at London's Drury Lane Theatre, I can honestly say I've never read such a load of self-indulgent cocky reporter's shit in all my life. I took some time off from recording to go to the concert and feel that I can probably look at it with more of an objective view than anyone else, having once played with this band.

When they are quoted as being a "singles band", obviously you haven't heard the *Eldorado* album, which in my eyes could be the most exciting work since *Sgt Pepper*.

And to say also that they are pretentious, with no spirit of adventure, makes me feel that this bloke must have gone to the wrong theatre.

The criticism of the string section was grossly unfair. It seemed to enlarge on the fact that they were "whirling celli over their heads" (which, incidentally, they only did towards the end of the show), rather than explaining that they are actually fine musicians.

The unbelievable violin solo by Mik Kaminski wasn't once mentioned. He ended up playing "Orange Blossom Special" at a hundred miles per hour, while leaping round the stage on one leg like a raving loony.

Well, that's entertainment, folks.

And how about telling everybody what nice songs Jeff Lynne is writing now, and how well he and new bass player Kelly sang them? Oh yes – Richard Tandy's name was once mentioned, but you forgot to tell everybody that he was actually playing intricate chorus and orchestral parts simultaneously – which, for want of another word, could only be described as absolutely breathtaking.

What a shame the reviewer has bad ears. It was the best show I'd seen by any group for ages, with plenty of excitement and good humour.

Reporters beware – don't wait until they become the biggest band in the land and then write nice things about them just because it's the "in" thing to do. Clean yer bloody ears out and listen to *Eldorado*.

ROY WOOD (*MM* Mar 8)















1975

APRIL – JUNE

LED ZEPPELIN, CAN, QUEEN, DR FEELGOOD, PATTI SMITH AND MORE

A natural progression

MM JUNE 7 David Bowie begins filming *The Man Who Fell To Earth*.

DAVID BOWIE LAUNCHED a film career this week when he started work on a new movie, *The Man Who Fell To Earth*. It is Bowie's first film role, although two years ago he was poised to star in the movie version of *Stranger In A Strange Land*, Robert Heinlein's best-selling science-fiction novel.

Plans for that movie fell through during the planning stages. Nevertheless, Bowie has always seen the cinema as a natural progression in his career. The new film, being shot on location in New Mexico, is described as "a mysterious American love story spanning 25 years".

It is being directed by Nicolas Roeg, who was responsible for Mick Jagger's film, *Performance*. Work on *The Man Who Fell To Earth* started on Monday and a 10-week shooting schedule has been planned. The film will be released in the autumn – and be accompanied by a soundtrack album featuring at least two new Bowie songs.





Bowie as Thomas Jerome Newton and Rip Torn as Dr Nathan Bryce in a scene from *The Man Who Fell To Earth*, New Mexico, July/August 1975

STUDIOCANAL



Scott-Heron: determined to say "something really relevant"

"Interpreter of the black experience"

MM MAY 17 Jazz/soul poet Gil Scott-Heron signs a new deal – but his teaching job keeps him "in contact with the things that create writing".

NEW YORK: "I hear they're asking Rockefeller to investigate the CIA. Well now, in my opinion that's stupid. Asking Rockefeller what's wrong with the CIA is like asking James Brown what's wrong with soul music."

Gil Scott-Heron's small audience cracks up at this statement of the obvious, one of many that are flowing this evening in his motel room in New Jersey. His energy level remains intact even though he's just walked off stage following a fiercely energetic concert at a black college 10 minutes' drive away.

His set lasted well over two hours – long by anyone's standards – and my companions and I were amazed when we looked at our watches as the house lights in the college gymnasium indicated that it was over. We thought we'd been there an hour.

There were two highlights: a percussion jam based, I was told, on an African fertility dance that involved at least half of Scott-Heron's band (The Midnight Band) on a wide assortment of unusual percussive instruments, and a half-hour segment during which Scott-Heron recited his poems.

It cost just $1 to attend Scott-Heron's performance at the Livingston College in New Jersey, a ridiculously low figure but one which Scott-Heron's contract defines quite clearly. At a more open venue he will charge more, but he doesn't want to make money out of black people.

Clive Davis has just signed Scott-Heron to his new Arista label, a move which is bringing him to the attention of a far larger public than his work was afforded previously. His Arista album (his second), *The First Minute Of A New Day*, made the Top 30 in the US and a single, a jazzy-flavoured, conga-accented, piece of funk called "Ain't No Such Thing As Superman", is still rising.

"I want to make sure my input stays in the community"

With his enormous writing talent and his exceptional band (many of whom, like himself, are college graduates) Gil Scott-Heron has it in him to be the biggest black artist in the US since Stevie Wonder. He refers to his musicians and all black people as "brothers" or "sisters."

All the members of his stage band were Lincoln students. "That was the first group I was in that I was part of the direction of... I'd played piano in beat groups and sung the 'ooohs' and 'aaaahs' and whatever," he told me as we relaxed in the motel.

"I'd sung songs like 'Ain't Too Proud To Beg', 'Knock On Wood' and 'Soul Man', which was all right, but I still felt there were so many things happening, that there were so many other things to sing about. At first I was letting the words dictate what the music should sound like and that was wrong. It should be the other way round. Once I met Brian [Jackson], who had a lot of tunes and didn't do much with lyrics, I learned how to play and he learned how to do poetry. There's a tremendous opportunity when you come into contact with thousands of people by way of radio or a concert. I could never get over it if I found myself doing a concert where I didn't say something really relevant if I had the chance."

His poems that evening had included various references to the recent CIA/Howard Hughes-backed attempt to raise the submerged warhead-carrying Russian submarine; Frank Wills, the security guard who originally discovered the Watergate break-in; and the persecution of several black extremists.

"Our [black] poetry has an oral tradition in terms of the fact there were poems before there was written language. The history of the tribes and the villages was delivered orally and verbally. A lot of things you can do orally really do not come across as well in literature, and there's something about the dramatic presentation of a poem that doesn't happen on paper."

Scott-Heron attaches a great deal of importance to his teaching post at Washington's Federal City College, partly because he feels strongly that the best teachers are not available in community schools and partly because it keeps him in touch with that community. "I want to make sure that my input stays in the community," he said. "And as I teach creative writing, I want to make sure that my writing keeps in contact with my art and the current concepts. If I'm on the road for five days, I can't keep up with my writing, but being in the classroom a day or two a week will keep me in contact with the things that create writing."

Scott-Heron cannot predict which way his career is going and refuses to be drawn on the subject. "That's like separating your life from your career and all the other things you do, like putting everything into a little box.

"I never think of myself in those terms. I just do what I have to do today, and to say my career is going into one direction is to predict the future. In general I would like to see the things we are doing now continue to develop as they have over the last five years.

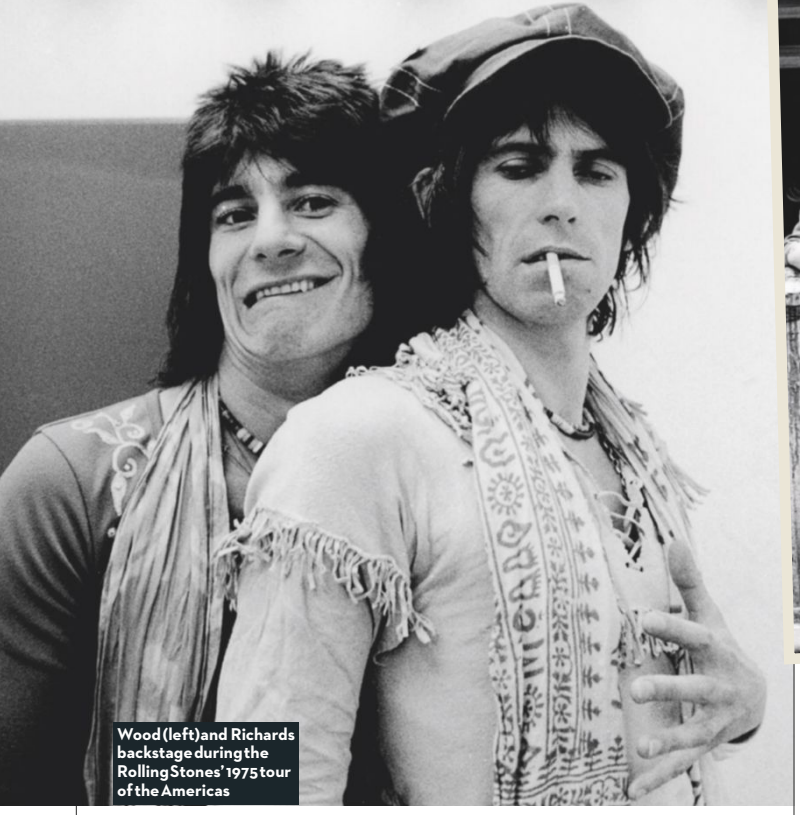
"I think we have consistently shown progress both lyrically and musically and been consistent in terms of the ideas that we express within our interpretation of the black experience. If you consider yourself an interpreter of the black experience you have much work to do and many things to say."

Among Scott-Heron's fans is Stevie Wonder. After his recent appearance at New York's Bottom Line Club, Wonder was heard to remark: "Gil says things a lot of people are afraid to say." Wonder was right.

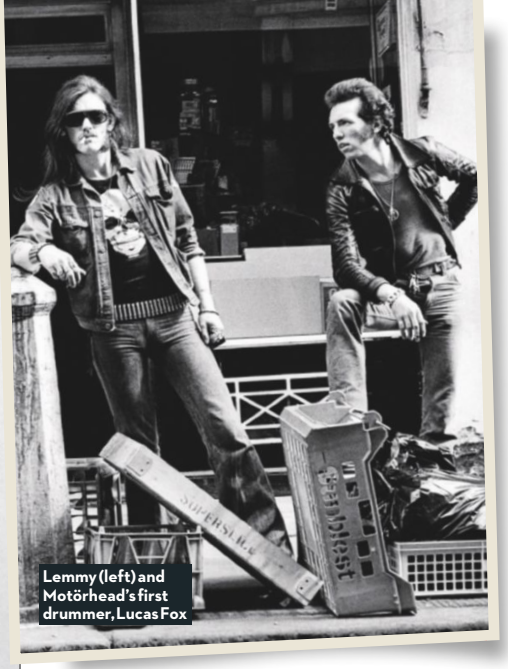
Chris Charlesworth

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Wood (left) and Richards backstage during the Rolling Stones' 1975 tour of the Americas



Lemmy (left) and Motörhead's first drummer, Lucas Fox

Close friendship with Keith Richards

MM APR 19 The Stones reveal the identity of their new touring guitarist... the Faces' Ronnie Wood.

RON WOOD IS to join the Rolling Stones for an American tour this summer. But he is not becoming a permanent member of the band. The tour, which encompasses both the North and South American continents, starts early in June, and Wood will be taking the place of Mick Taylor, who quit the band in December last year.

A spokesman for the band said that Wood will be playing with the Stones only for the tour, and he still remains a member of the Faces. Thus any decision over a new permanent guitarist for the Stones has been postponed until after the tour, which it is believed will end in mid-July. Among names mentioned for the job are Wayne Perkins and Harvey Mandel.

Wood formed a close friendship with Keith Richards last year when the Stones guitarist collaborated on Wood's solo LP project, *I've Got My Own Album To Do*. Richards also appeared at Wood's London concerts, which were a prelude to the album's release.

The American tour, which is believed to start in New Orleans on June 3, will be probably followed by European and British concert dates.

"Your lawn would die"

MM JUNE 7 Lemmy leaves Hawkwind, forms new group.

LEMMY, BASS PLAYER with cosmic rockers Hawkwind, announced this week that he has quit the band. The decision came midway through Hawkwind's US tour. Lemmy flew back to Britain, and a temporary replacement was immediately flown over to America to enable the band to fulfil all outstanding commitments.

Lemmy now plans to launch his own band, Motörhead, named after the song of the same name, which was the B-side of "Kings Of Speed". A re-recorded version of this song could be the new band's first single. No musicians have been named, but Lemmy said it will be a four-piece and that he would be handling bass and lead vocals. "This will be a step forward for me," he said. "The new band will concentrate on, shall we say, very basic music. I felt they were losing some of that quality and moving in a different direction."

Several other songs besides "Motorhead" are being considered for release, and an album is being prepared. A debut tour is scheduled for August or September. "This band will be so dirty," said Lemmy, "if we moved in next door to you, your lawn would die."

Found hanged

MM MAY 3 RIP, Pete Ham from Badfinger.

PETER HAM, GUITARIST, singer and songwriter with Badfinger, was found hanged on April 24 at his home in Woking, Surrey. He was 27 and unmarried.

Born in Swansea, he began as a musician in a group called The Iveys, who became Badfinger after sending a demo to The Beatles' Apple company in 1968. After being signed to the Apple label, and getting a hit soon after with "Come And Get It", they were always in the shadow of The Beatles, and constantly suffered from the comparison. Ham was also the co-writer of "Without You", a Number One hit for Nilsson.

The group worked mainly in America, where in 1972 they had a Number One with "Day After Day". They also played at George Harrison's Bangla Desh Benefit concert there. Two years ago, the group left Apple and signed with Warner Brothers. The funeral is next week.



➤ Elton John will debut a new lineup for his band at the huge Wembley Stadium concert this summer. Nigel Olson and Dee Murray, the drummer and bass player with the Elton John Band, have both quit. But replacements will be found before the Wembley concert on June 21. The departure of Olsson and Murray splits up a musical relationship that goes back to the beginning of Elton's career – each has been with him since the early '70s, before the addition of Ray Cooper (percussion) and Davey Johnstone (guitar) to the band.

Olsson is presently recording a solo album at the Caribou Ranch in Arizona, while Murray has yet to announce his future plans. **MM APR 19**



➤ Cult New York poetess and songwriter Patti Smith is to sign an exclusive long-term contract with Arista Records, reportedly for a six-figure advance. It is understood that several other companies were negotiating for her, but she felt that Clive Davis' Arista label could give her the support and exposure she needs. Along with Lenny Kaye (guitar), Richard Sohl (piano) and Ivan Kral (bass), Patti is performing regularly in New York, and it is likely that she will visit Britain to tie in with her Arista launch here. **NME APR 5**

IAN DICKSON/REX, MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY, RICHARD E AARON/GETTY



WARING ABBOTT/GETTY

"People want to dance and forget their troubles"

MM APR 5 In New York discotheques it's the record that's king, not the artist, but it's still good news for Barry White and Labelle.

"**THEY'RE THE BIGGEST** thing since The Beatles, and it's going to be like that for two years."

Billy Smith was screaming the above sentence at the top of his voice, struggling to be heard above the records being played at Le Jardin, a New York discotheque opposite the Diplomat Hotel on West 43rd Street.

"Rock is dead, I tell you. Kids want something different and this is it," he yells, spreading out arms towards a dancefloor where well over a hundred dancers are gyrating beneath strobe lights to an incessant output of "new" soul music.

Billy Smith is a self-styled expert on discotheques and discotheque music. The "they" to which he was referring in the opening paragraph is not a group or singer, but a phenomenon that has been directly responsible for much of the singles chart in the USA over the past 12 months: the discotheques.

Billy Smith is the first record company promotion man – he works for 20th Century, but the actual company makes little difference – whose job involves working only the discotheques. Previously, of course, record promotion men, or pluggers, have worked exclusively with radio stations, persuading programme directors and radio jocks to play their wares.

Smith's appointment is just one pointer to the growing world importance of discotheques as a means of breaking a record, and he's working a city where a new discotheque seems to open every week.

"It's the economic situation that's responsible," Smith is saying as Le Jardin jock Bobby Guttadaro juggles between Labelle and Gloria Gaynor and fights the switches on the complex lighting system. "People want to dance and forget their troubles, so they're turning to this type of music, music to dance to.

"This is the next big thing, the next Beatles if you like. The Beatles arrived after a sort of depression, and disco music is now taking the place of rock. I think it'll last two years at least before something else comes along, but right now you've got to agree with me. Just look at the charts."

Smith "broke" Barry White through the New York discotheques, Le Jardin in particular. Radio stations weren't prepared to play White's variations on the Love Unlimited themes, so Smith tried servicing discotheque jocks, taking the records round to the clubs personally and building up a relationship with the jocks and club owners that had never been attempted before.

Previously disco jocks in New York and elsewhere were lucky to receive free promotional records from companies – even by mail. Usually they bought their own and built up jealously guarded record collections.

Radio, after all, is king in the States. With so many stations pumping out every conceivable form of music hour after hour, it is not surprising that bigger companies spurned the discotheques as a promotional vehicle. Now they are regretting it.

"Now promotion men from other companies come and ask me to help them because they're new to the scene," says Smith





From cliquey gay hangout to popular dance destination: New York disco Le Jardin in 1975

with some satisfaction. "I don't mind doing it. If a record is good, danceable, then the jocks will play it anyway, with or without me recommending it. I do know now what'll go in the discotheques and what won't. So do the disc jockeys. They ought to be the A&R men these days."

There are two types of discotheque in New York. Firstly, there are those like Le Jardin which keeps regular hours, opening at nine and closing at four, serving alcohol and catering for both singles and couples. Entrance costs $10 (about £4), and that includes a couple of drinks. Le Jardin is currently enjoying a tremendous popularity, having been transformed from mainly gay hangout to a crowded dance emporium within the past six months.

The second type is the cultist discotheque that caters for the ultra-serious dancers. These clubs open later and stay open until six or seven the following morning. No alcohol is served at all (bars must close at 4am in New York) and the clientele is mainly gay.

Entrance is membership only, and membership can cost up to $100 a year (about £40). There's also an entrance fee of around $10 each time you go, but members can bring guests with them. Both types are equally important when it comes to testing and breaking potential hit singles, says Smith, who spends every night of the week cruising around discotheques until the early hours, chatting up disc jockeys and delivering records. He doesn't get to his office until well into the afternoon.

"Discos have really caught record companies on the hop," Smith continues after handing a white label of Barry White's next album to the resident disc jockey. "Now I bring my white label down here to have it played first instead of on the radio. I can also watch the reaction to various cuts on the album.

"If I see people stop dancing when one track is played and start dancing to another, then I'll know which one is Barry's best single. Jocks work out their programmes that way, too. If a record is a stiff it's simple to see because people will stop dancing. If people dance, it's a hit. The formula can't miss."

"The jocks down here have become so good at telling which records will make hits that they're starting to go into studios as assistant producers or consultants when disco records are being made. They advise the artists or the real producer whether or not it'll get the dancers going."

A glance at recent singles chart-toppers confirms exactly the points Smith enjoys making. "Lady Marmalade", the Labelle single, is an obvious dancing song, with an irresistible hookline that bodes well for events that may occur later in the evening. "Shame, Shame, Shame", too, was obviously created with the discotheque market in mind, with lyrics that spell out the need to dance if the rhythm is right.

To a slightly lesser extent there's been the recent success of black groups like the Ohio Players, Kool & The Gang and The Hues Corporation. All of them saw the light through danceable singles, and even our own Average White Band got in the act with "Pick Up The Pieces", the single that led to the enormous success of their second album in the States.

Gloria Gaynor was recently crowned "Queen Of The Discos" at – you've guessed – Le Jardin. Barry White threw a party at the same establishment when he first rose from the ranks, and White felt so strongly about the club's role in his success that he presented a gold album of his *Love Unlimited* set to Jardin DJ Guttadaro.

Strobe lights flicker all the time. The records never, but never, stop

Dancing at Le Jardin provides a release that few rock concerts can provide. Strobe lights flicker almost all the time. Conversation is ruled out completely. The records never, but never, stop. The jock never speaks but does take requests. The amount of records played seems to vary between 20 and 30, and favourites are repeated at least once an hour.

"These people buy the records and dance at home," says Smith, indicating the swelling throng on the large floor. "When 'Kung Fu Fighting' was big, there was a dance to go with it, and people practised their steps at home. It was a huge craze here for a while, with dancers chopping at each other karate style."

The record is all-important, rather than the artist, in the case of disco records. While trusted favourites like White will undoubtedly get a play on sight, a completely unknown act is just as likely to get equal promotion if the jocks – and the dancers – react to it strongly. After all, whoever heard of George McCrae before "Rock Your Baby"?

"I'm still the only promotion guy who goes in person around the clubs," Smith is saying as we travel uptown to the Hippopotamus. "They *must* see the light of day soon, and start appointing their guys to do a job like me. They'll find it hard, though, especially if they're not prepared to stay out all night."

The Hippo is a cut above Le Jardin, which offers fake plants for decor and is, after all, slightly shabby beneath the neon-lit facade. It's one of those places where you dread to see what it looks like empty and with the lights turned up full.

Hippo seems to be couples only. It caters for a richer crowd and is membership-controlled. Drinks are more expensive and the plush red velvet surroundings, while initially resembling a Paris brothel, are chic and comfortable too. They also feature a nifty line in waitresses – or hostesses – who wear dresses slit up to the hip. The dancing is just as furious, though, and the music is essentially the same. Smith agrees it's the same everywhere.

"Clubs are opening up all the time because of the craze, so it's not only record companies who are creaming off money from dance records. There's one opening up tonight and I'll bet you there's lines around the block. Mainly it'll be gays, though."

The fact that New York has probably the largest gay community in the world (certainly the most open gay community) is another contributing factor to the disco phenomenon. Gay men like to dance, and they like to dance to black music, perfecting their styles and impressing their partners. And while the sight of a dancefloor occupied solely by males is mildly disconcerting at first, you've got to admit they're great dancers.

The gay, late-night spots are mainly downtown in the vicinity of Greenwich Village, and several of them are lofts converted for the purpose. They're very private, with word of mouth being the only advertising. No more is needed, and the clubs are not so much out to make a profit as provide a meeting place for minority groups. But dancing is the prime motive, and dancing goes on until well after dawn.

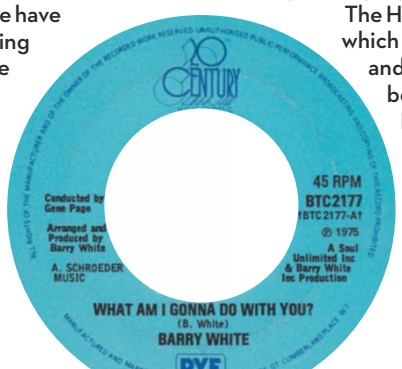
Vicki Wickham, who manages Labelle, is convinced that discotheques were responsible for the initial thrust behind the band. "We have made better records than 'Nightbirds'," she told me last week. "But they were totally uncommercial. People had to sit and listen to them. By doing a much funkier album, it got into the discos."

It was the Paris discotheques that were the first to pick up on "Lady Marmalade", not surprisingly in view of the French-language lines in the song. "When we saw what was happening in France, how the clubs were playing it, we got Epic to service the discotheques over here in the States," said Vicki. "We employed a discotheque promotion man in California to take it around LA clubs, and between him and Epic I think we covered almost every disco in America. We sent the album to thousands of discos, and the two cuts they played were 'Lady Marmalade' and 'What Can I Do For You'.

"It was definitely discos rather than radio with us. Kids were going into the stores to buy it because they'd heard it in discos and not because they'd heard it on the radio. From the discos it went on to jukeboxes in bars and then on to the radio.

"People want a good time and they can have it in a discotheque. It gets us back to the depression, but it's a fact. Ask Monti Rock or Gloria Gaynor. They'll tell you the same thing." *Chris Charlesworth*







November 29, 1975: Queen play five nights at Hammersmith Odeon a week after the release of their fourth LP *A Night At The Opera*

“We’re rock’n’rollers at heart”

QUEEN work on a new album, featuring a song called “Bohemian Rhapsody”. But has worldwide success gone to Freddie Mercury’s head? “I’m thinking of being carried on stage by Nubian slaves,” he says.

— MELODY MAKER MAY 24 —

THE TOKYO FANS roared as Queen swaggered across the stage ’midst flashing lights, smoke and dry ice. It was a curious cry, but roughly translated into English it meant “Get your knickers off”, and such debasement of the language was a direct result of coaching from one Freddie Mercury and his trusty interpreter.

Freddie was inspired to introduce his Japanese fans to the art of coarse shouting when he attended a strip club one night during Queen’s recent highly successful tour of the land of the rising steel production. To his surprise, the buxom Japanese wenches were shedding kimonos to the swelling rhythms of “Killer Queen”, the hit song that has sent hearts pulsing throughout decadent western-style society.

“We were shouting, ‘Get ’em off,’ and our interpreter asked what it meant. When we explained they fell about laughing, and translated it into Japanese. Soon Queen »

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audiences found themselves encouraged to shout not only "Yeah, yeah" and expressions to the effect that they felt "all right", but such diverse variations as "Shag out!"

Freddie chuckled at the memory as he sipped tea from a ceremonial bowl. He was clad in a dazzling kimono, and sat cross-legged on the floor of his abode, decorated with Samurai swords and hand-made parasols, just down the road from Shepherd's Bush. Rather like the Victorian explorers, he had brought home the lifestyle and artefacts of a foreign culture, and seemed anxious not to lose the magic of a country that had obviously made a considerable impression.

"I loved it there, the life style, the art… I'd go back tomorrow if I could," insisted Freddie, shooing his cats Tom and Jerry off a Led Zeppelin album that had been carelessly exposed.

How has it been these last few months? Freddie seemed just slightly enervated, not quite the garrulous showman I first met on a dark night in Liverpool, on their British tour last autumn.

"It's been… fun. When we finished the English tour we went to Europe. We came back at Christmas and then we went to America, which was quite a bash. Two months. That's when I came a cropper. I had voice trouble, these horrible nodules began to form on my vocal cords.

"I went to see specialists in England and America, and they were talking about an operation, but fortunately they seem to have gone down now and it won't be necessary. Thank God. In America they were talking about giving me laser-beam treatment. They just singe them off, but they still don't know about the after-effects, which could be dangerous.

"I had experienced trouble before, and always thought it was just a sore throat. But in America it really started hurting, especially after we did six shows in four nights. A specialist told me I'd have to stop singing or I'd have no voice left at all. And that really frightened me. So we had to cancel quite a lot of shows. We seem dogged by bad luck."

Freddie worked out that he had done some 80 shows in the past few months. Hadn't this led to any protests 'twixt group and management?

Freddie smiled his saturnine smile, and waved a gracious hand: "Well, there's been the usual, 'Are you trying to kill me?', and we protested of course, but it didn't really kill me, and we had a week's holiday in Hawaii. And you have to gauge the work against the success we've been having. In Japan we're quite a hit [Freddie has a way with understatement]. It started the moment we got there – riots at the airport, bodyguards, just like the old Beatle days.

"The organisation was spellbinding, and we loved every minute of it. Yes we needed protection. You couldn't go down into the lobby of the hotel, it would be infested, but really nice people, waiting for autographs.

"And I couldn't believe the crowds at the concerts, all milling about, swaying and smiling. I learnt a few Japanese phrases. It took a lot of practice, but the fans couldn't believe it. I used to eavesdrop and pick a few things up. You have to make it very fast and snappy."

Freddie broke off to issue a few fast, snappy instructions to his lady, in Japanese. I think he was asking her for some more tea and strawberries.

How long had this been going on in Japan?

"Well, *Queen II* was the LP of the year, and since then it just built up. We were given so many beautiful presents, dolls, lanterns, and they're so into rock music. They've got some very good groups of their own. They start out by copying ours, and after a while they start to get better. We had a Japanese road crew, and they picked up the routine in two days."





How did Queen see their position during this breathing space between bursts of activity?

"We're in the process of seeing how much money we've got. I've been living in this flat for three years and I'd like to buy a house, but I'd still like to live in London. This place holds a lot of memories. All the songs for the first albums were written on that piano." A ghostly note struck as he spoke. Thomas the Cat had leapt on the keys and was knocking out an interesting improvisation.

"Yes, *Queen II* and *Sheer Heart Attack* were bashed out on that. This is kind of stock-taking, and this is the worst possible time for me. Where do we go from here? As far as tours are concerned, we're going to start the album, do another American tour, finish the album and then do a British tour. Japan again next year, but I'd go sooner.

"By the way," (and here Freddie's thoughts again turned away from the next LP despite my holding up a large placard with 'What's the next LP like?' slashed across it in red paint), "when we were in Japan we went to a tea ceremony, like the one the Queen went to (THE Queen). And you noticed how she pulled a face after two sips? Well, it's a thick green liquid, and it's bitter as hell! You're supposed to finish it in three sips.

"We went to a reception. All the top Japanese businessmen were there, and the British Ambassador, and his wife. She told us: 'We went to see Led Zeppelin, but he was so loud!'"

Very interesting, I rejoined, snatching up a Samurai sword and preparing to disembowel the singer, but what about the next LP?

"So much has happened to us, all at the same time, and we are very fussy and particular about everything we do. We've been very successful worldwide, and that's one thing I never did foresee, our success outside Britain. There has been pressure on us and we'll have to stand up to it. We argue after every gig and there are rows in the dressing room. That's because we're temperamental and things go flying.

"I get frustrated and row with my manager, and so many times he's threatened to leave. No, I don't cover it up, or hide anything. I used to seal it up and then explode all over the place. But success has made us see the light at the end of the tunnel. It was more frustrating in the early days, when the press were not very favourable towards us. I got very depressed as far as Britain was concerned.

"And then came a time when I thought we were over-exposed in all the papers. I was talking to

> "We're in the process of seeing how much money we've got"

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Page 5—MELODY MAKER, May 24, 1975

Kimono my place

"PANT NUEDE!" roared Tokyo fans as Queen swaggered across the stage 'midst

Ah so—its Fleddie Mercury!

Queen Elizabeth II is not the

even bigger places."

What made Queen so attractive to world audiences?

"I believe it's the music and not gimmicks. Yes, it's our music actually." Freddie said it with just a glint of steel in his casual glance up from the ceremonial tea pot.



April 22, 1975: (l–r) John Deacon, Roger Taylor, Brian May and Freddie Mercury in the garden of their Tokyo hotel

Robert Plant about this in New Orleans. We get an older audience in the States; it's rock as opposed to pop. We get a lot of listeners. And in LA where we were told they were all laid-back and stoned audiences, they were all rock'n'rollers. We had to cancel a lot of prestigious gigs because I was ill, but when we go back, we'll be playing even bigger places."

What made Queen so attractive to world audiences?

"I believe it's the music and not gimmicks. Yes, it's our music actually." Freddie said it with just a glint of steel in his casual glance up from the ceremonial teapot. "I just feel the music has something sufficiently different about it, some originality and versatility. Our record company in America weren't billing us as the Next Big Thing. They just said, 'Have a listen to this; this is British rock in the raw tradition', not the newest rage. They also said our stage act was very good.

"We do 'Killer Queen', but only as part of a medley, and that's because it is only one facet of what we do, and to be honest, it's very hard to recreate those harmonies. We have been thinking of revamping the show to provide two climaxes – I'm giving away my secrets. I was thinking of having the first part in all black and the second in white. We've learnt a lot doing a two-hour show. You have to pace it out, or you get whacked."

Did Freddie still maintain his onstage aggression and ferocity?

"I feel aggressive during aggressive numbers, and subdued in subdued numbers. We're rock'n'rollers at heart. We don't want a lot of props on stage. We do a lot of dry ice and throw the odd flower. By the way, we don't use steam. Was it your man in New York who said we used steam? I had visions of us all boiling kettles backstage."

> "A girl pushed a dog into my arms while I was on stage in Toledo"

You'd all be scalded to death! I chuckled. "Gosh yes," said Freddie without enthusiasm. "We're learning all the time, and we're all getting our show more polished. Many's the time I've dashed off stage for a costume change and heard Brian finish his guitar solo abruptly, while I'm still putting my trousers on. I have to rush on stage half-undressed. I've been caught quite a few times like that. All good fun, though."

British fans will experience this spectacle once again next November, but meantime there is wild talk of Queen playing Empire Pool, Wembley, maybe at the end of August.

"I'm wondering whether to wait and do the new LP first."

Ah yes, now about that album…

"We have been a long time away. The States and Britain want a single, y'know, and we won't pull another one off an album. But we never go into a studio just to record a single. It always comes from a batch of songs. I always get depressed when it all stops for us. Then you have to will yourself back into the pace.

"Yes, I've been depressed and upset lately. Suddenly you're back home from a tour, and you have to make your own cup of tea again. And I'm used to being pampered and cossetted…"

Re the LP recording scheduled to follow up *Sheer Heart Attack*…

"Did I ever tell you about the time a girl pushed a dog into my arms while I was singing on stage in Toledo?"

Well, it was time to go, Freddie, thanks for everything…

"By the way, just one thing…"

Yes, yes?

"You must come down and hear us record the next album." *Chris Welch* »



"My nodules are still with me": Mercury on stage in 1975, suffering for his art

— NME SEPTEMBER 27 —

IT'S EASY TO understand how "Queen to split" rumours get under way. The band's expected large summer gig never happened and the non-appearance of either an album or a single kept the silence at deafening point.

From America we hear that Brian May was offered a job with Sparks and in England there were stories to the effect that the band's management situation was none too amicable. And throughout all this time the band remained schtum, giving no interviews and neither confirming nor denying anything. Even a promised visit to see the band at Rockfield Studios was "put off" at the last moment. Is all well in Mercury's trousers?

Still, all is now resolved. Queen now have a new manager, and their biggest headache is How The Hell Are They Going To Finish The New Album in time for November release? They are also planning a major British tour for late November and a single for October, so it's time to zip up and get going.

It was three dishevelled members of Queen who were finally brought to bay at the studios in London. John Deacon was absent since they were adding vocals and I was informed he doesn't participate overly on that side of things. Two members of Hustler – a quite different group – were sitting in the control room aghast at the meticulous way the band record.

If they sang "*no no no*" once, they sang it 20 times in the space of about 10 minutes. And on each occasion someone would find fault. It must get exceedingly tedious. The track in question is a Mercury composition, "Bohemian Rhapsody"; very much an operatic opus, taxing the vocal cords to the hilt. On playback it sounds truly magnificent, undeniably Queen yet with greater depth than on any previous efforts.



Mercury is bouncing about saying "Hello dear" to new arrivals. Brian May still looks fragile and Roger Taylor sits down rather wearily. They are scheduled to carry on recording till 2am. Mercury seems like he's itching to talk and, yes, there's plenty to ask. Like what happened with the old management, Freddie?

He takes a deep breath.

"As far as Queen are concerned they are deceased. They cease to exist in any capacity with us whatsoever. One leaves them behind like one leaves *excreta*. We feel so *relieved*."

It appears to be an almost rehearsed answer. I plod on. How did the change of management come about – why change?

"We felt there came a time when we had got far too big for them to handle. We needed bigger handling. We needed a change. But I don't want to delve into *trivia*…"

And on to John Reid, new manager, also manager of Elton John.

"Actually, we were approached by – and we ourselves approached – a series of top-class managers to make sure we made the right choice. John Reid happened to be the choice because he flashed his eyes at me and I said, 'Why not.'" Mercury laughs.

> "Brian acquired a new guitar – he can almost make it speak"

"He's great, actually. I thought he could do with another piano player so we could play duets all night. I said, 'What's better than one piano player? Two piano players.' In a way it's just what we wanted and the combination is going to be startling. It's the sort of combination we've wanted for years. The whole structure of record deals and his whole method of work, his whole approach is so *right*. He came in to negotiate the whole structure of recording, publishing and management."

Mercury was present at the recent much-published John Reid birthday party last week ("We're both Virgos, you know"). This he pronounced "lovely".

"I met his 'other client'. He said, 'You must meet my other client; my other client wants to meet you.' Elton John was wonderful – one of those people you can instantly get on with. He said he liked 'Killer Queen', and anyone who says that goes in my white book – my black book is bursting at the seams."

The subject switched to the new album. Apart from the aforementioned "Bohemian Rhapsody", what other tracks are there? "Well, the album is called *A Night At The Opera*. We've finished all the backing tracks and it's

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beginning to sound better than we expected. With 'Rhapsody' we've squeezed to our limitations for four octaves and not slowed down the tape! John Deacon has written a lovely little ditty called "You're My Best Friend" and Roger has written "I'm In Love With My Car", including lines like: '*I've got a feel for my automobile…*'

"Brian has an outrageous, mammoth, epic track, 'The Prophet's Song', which is one of our heaviest numbers to date. He's got his guitar extravaganza on it. You see, Brian has acquired a new guitar specially built so he can almost make it speak. It will talk on his track. Then there's 'Good Company', written by Brian, a George Formby track with saxophones, trombone and clarinet sounds from his guitar. We don't believe in having any session men; we do everything ourselves. From the high falsetto to the low, bassy *farts*, it is all *us*.

"Another track is '39', a little spacey number by Brian, a skiffle-styled number which we've never tried before and the album ends with something totally unexpected, a little virtuoso track by Brian. There's also 'Sweet Lady', a heavyish ditty in stupendous 3/4."

Apart from 'Rhapsody', Mercury himself has penned four tracks. "One is called 'Death On Two Legs'. I'm not going to say any more – just listen to the words carefully, kiddies. A nasty little number which brings out my evil streak. The words came very easy to me. There's also a lovely little ballad; my classical influence comes into it. Brian is going to attempt to use harp, real life-size harp. I'm going to force him to play till his fingers drop off. It's called 'Love Of My Life'.

"'Seaside Rendezvous' has a 1920s feel to it and Roger does a tuba and clarinet on it vocally, if you see what I mean. I'm going to make him tap dance, too; I'll have to buy him some Ginger Rogers tap shoes. 'Lazing On A Sunday Afternoon' [not The Kinks' or the Small Faces'] is a short track, just one minute six seconds. A very perky, spicy number, dear. Brian likes that one."

Summing up, Mercury says: "There were a lot of things we wanted to do on *Queen II* and *Sheer Heart Attack* but there wasn't space enough. This time there is. Guitar-wise and on vocals we've done things we've never done before."

In order to finish the album on time, Mercury says they will "work till we are legless. I'll sing until my throat is like a vulture's crotch. We haven't even reached the halfway stage yet, but from the things I can hear we have surpassed anything we've done before musically."

All right. Now to the other stuff.

Is it true about Brian being offered a gig with Sparks? Was there any serious thought of splitting up the band? Own up…

Mercury is contemptuous of the whole thing.

"About nine months ago, Brian was approached by Sparks, who said they would like him to join them as guitarist. But we all treat that sort of thing as everyday and mundane. We're so involved in what we do – anyway we've all had offers to join other bands. We don't give it a second thought.

"But while, say, Roger and I would tell them to piss off, Brian takes his time about being nice to people, so sometimes they get the wrong idea. Brian is really too much of a gentleman, which I am not – I am an old tart – but not for one moment did he consider leaving us. But that was nine months ago, so long ago that that rumour went out with the Boer War. Still, it's very flattering to get offers."

The November British tour, however should dispel any split rumours forever. Preparations are already being made for that.

"I'm thinking of being carried on stage by Nubian slaves and being fanned by them – in fact I'm auditioning for them now. I shall personally select the winners. But where to find a slave? I'm also looking for a masseur. The other one is no longer with us."

What happened to him?

"His fingers dropped off."

Trouble with Freddie, he's always concerned with his health. Still, there are reasons. On the last American tour a couple of gigs were cancelled owing to throat problems.

"My nodules are still with me. I have these uncouth calluses growing in my interior [throat]. From time to time they harm my vocal dexterity. At the moment, however," (*he allows himself a smile*) "I am winning."

How can he ensure the problem won't recur?

"I'm going to go easy on the red wine, dear. And the tour will be planned around my nodules. Actually, I came very near to having an operation, but I didn't like the look of the doctor and I was a bit perturbed about having strange instruments forced down my throat."

After the British tour, the band go once again to America and thence on to Japan. Japan holds fond memories for Mercury.

With a faraway look in his eye, he says: "I will be able to be reunited with my bodyguard. I must stress we all had one each – our own personal bodyguards, that is. Mine was called Hitami and he was the head of the Tokyo bodyguard patrol. His entire job was to pamper and cosset me throughout the tour and make sure no harm was to come to my person. He was very sweet; he gave me this lovely Japanese lantern, which I treasure."

> "A young American tart pilfered my jewels and bracelets"

Is there any likelihood that Queen may do some American gigs with Elton John?

"Well, funny you should say that. We had an offer to do two gigs in LA, but we were far too busy so we couldn't do them. But although we're all the same family, Reidy won't put us out as a package. He knows the difference in the audiences we appeal to. He wants us to be a force of our own in America to maintain what we have and to do everything bigger and better."

Mercury is not quite sure if Seattle is on their American itinerary. He remembers a young lady from that part of the world quite vividly.

"A young American tart," he starts getting very angry at the memory of it all, "came in and pilfered my contents… my jewels, bracelets, etc, and she was just evacuating the room when I accosted her by the elevator. I pulled her by the hair, dragged her into the room, emptied the contents out of her bag in the room and everything but the kitchen sink came out. I retrieved my things and said, 'Get out, you Seattle shagbag.'"

Why hadn't there been any recorded material from Queen for so long? (Yeah, I know that was an abrupt change of subject.)

"Actually, that was the way we planned it, dear, but we should have a single taken from this album out in October. The album comes out in November when we start our world tour. We're planning on a much broader scale than before, dear." *Julie Webb* •





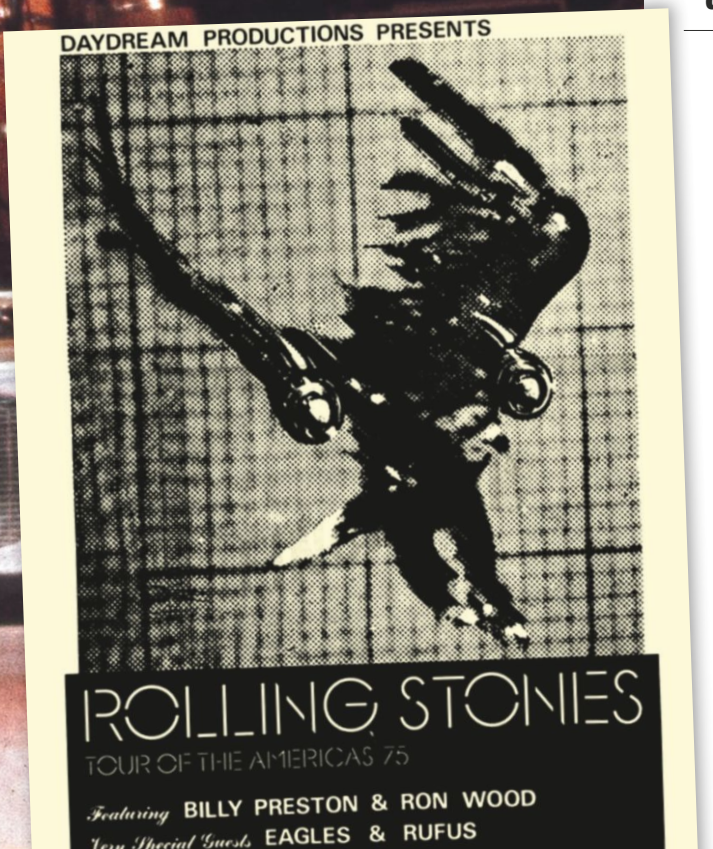
The Stones at Madison Square Garden, June 1975, with Billy Preston on keys (far left), Ronnie Wood replacing Mick Taylor and Ollie E Brown (behind Charlie Watts) on percussion

An incredible show

MM JUNE 28 Over several nights at Madison Square Garden, the Rolling Stones' arrangement with Ron Wood continues to pay dividends.

MADISON SQUARE GARDEN
LIVE!
JUNE 22





NEW YORK: SO there's half the island of Jamaica up there – drums, tambourines, triangles, maracas, talking drums – just anything that comes to hand, right, and there's this stringy dude in a denim frock coat and a beret that folks are saying is Clapton – but from a hundred yards away, who knows?

And Mick's wearing Keith's leather jacket – this is after he's poured the bucket of water over his head and after the parachute-silk dragon has spewed confetti and balloons over the front few rows... Anyway, they're doing "Sympathy For The Devil" for the first time since... since then, and wow, does it ever sound good.

Feels good, too, what with the house lights up and most everybody dancing and clapping, and the star-shaped stage flapping up and down, and fire crackers exploding everywhere, but I guess the atmosphere at Madison Square Garden is always pretty... electric and the Stones' opening night could hardly fail, could it?

All the same, it took the group a while to get into their stride, a half-hour at least, the sound so strangled and mangled for "Honky Tonk Women" through to "Star Star" that listening wasn't much fun. "You Gotta Move" was the ice-breaker. Jagger, Billy Preston, Ron Wood, Richards and percussionist Ollie E Brown locked into uncertain but enthusiastic harmonies – and Keith, in the absence of Mick Taylor, pulled off a taut and emotional blues solo.

Technically, of course, neither he nor Wood are world-class lead players, but they complement each other nicely and the lack of bone fide virtuoso only underlines all the essential earthiness that we used to associate with the old *Out Of Our Heads* period. Plus,

Keith, in the absence of Mick Taylor, pulled off a taut blues solo

Taylor never fitted visually with his shy, student good looks, while the Face, cigarette glued permanently to his lower lip, resembles some evolutionary stage between Wyman and Richards – all three of them, even in expensive silks and leathers, coming on like Portobello Road hustlers gone ape.

But the overriding impression gleaned from the whole shebang is that they're having fun. A lot of the macho-sadist excess has been pruned back, and although Jagger cavorts and leaps and pouts as much as ever, he seems more like an irresistible clown than any Lucifer figure. Indeed, at times, he lets the image slide entirely as he straps on a guitar for "Fingerprint File" and stands immobile behind the mic stand as Wood and Wyman move to bass and keyboards respectively.

And these flashes of naturalness are inevitably at odds with the elaborate props – the notorious giant phallus, the dragon head and, worse, a sequence where Jagger is raised 30 feet about the stage on a high-wire, suspended-stirrup affair. Firing on all cylinders as the vitriolic rock band, the very essence of hard blues and boogie, such paraphernalia seems exceptionally jive.

But not to bitch overmuch. It's still an incredible show. *Steve Lake*

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY

"Rock has become a spectator sport"

Just 30, "Captain Powerchords" ponders the state of THE WHO, and rock itself. Is he going through the motions? Are Ray Davies, Mick Jagger, even PETE TOWNSHEND too old for the job? "You won't catch me rockin' in no wheelchair," he decides.

— NME MAY 24 —

PETE TOWNSHEND DIDN'T die before he got old. Yet death isn't his problem; it's the passing of the years and his current position in what he feels is a younger man's occupation.

"If you're in a group," he begins, "you can behave like a kid and not only get away with it, but be encouraged."

The name Keith Moon somehow springs to mind.

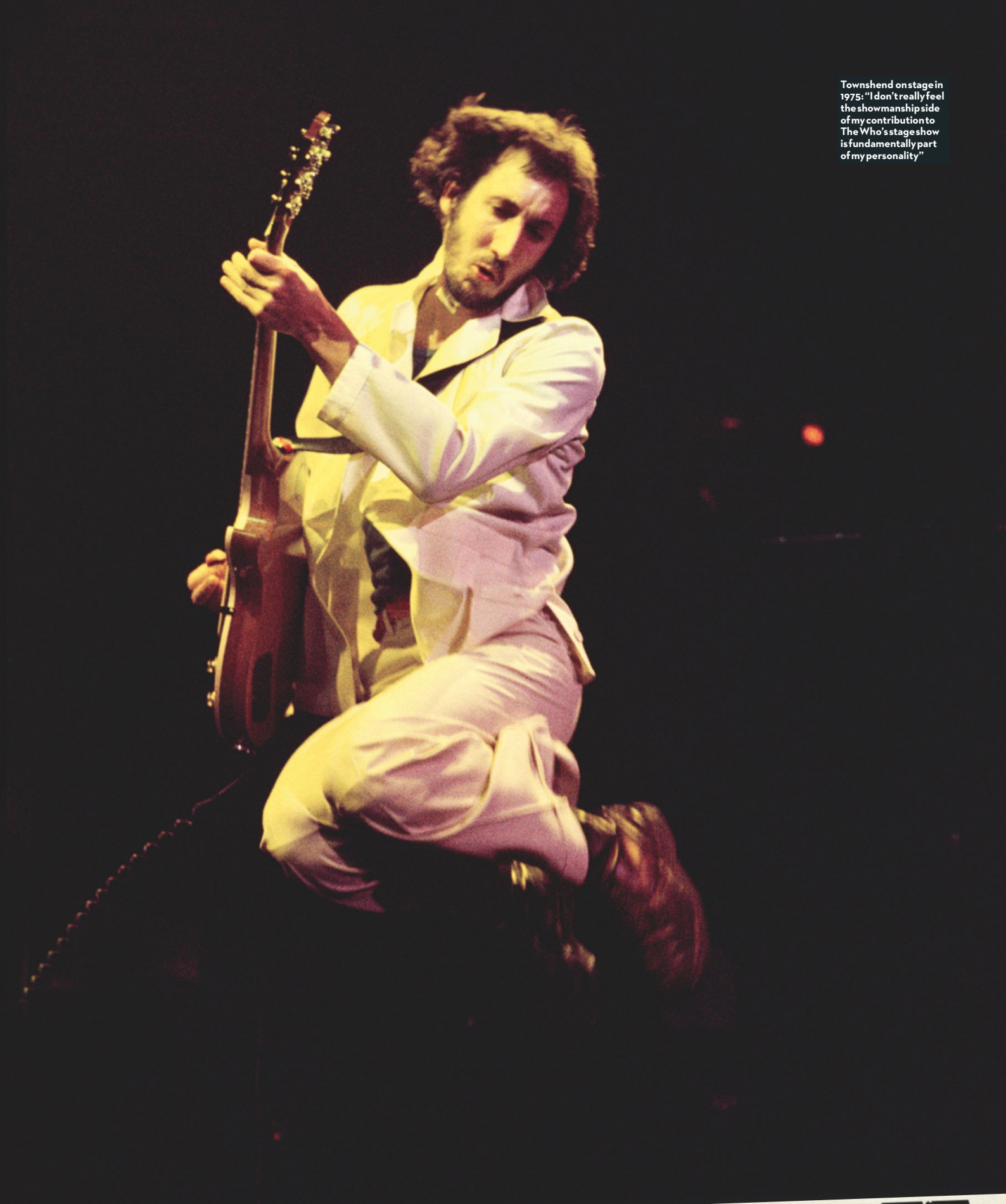
"If you're a rock musician," Townshend continues, "you don't have to put on any airs and pretend to be – in inverted commas – 'normal' or even be asked to behave like you're a mature and a highly responsible person. These are just the trappings that society puts on most people – with the result that most kids are burdened down with responsibilities far too early in their life.

"You know the deal: as soon as you leave school you've got to find a secure job and hang onto it. I wrote 'My Generation' when I was 22 or 23, yet that song breathes of a 17-year-old adolescence."

So what are you trying to tell us?

"Personally, I feel that the funniest thing – and also the saddest thing – about the current state of rock'n'roll is that it's the pretenders that are suffering the most. Those people who, for a number »

GETTY



Townshend on stage in 1975: "I don't really feel the showmanship side of my contribution to The Who's stage show is fundamentally part of my personality"

PETE TOWNSHEND

onie and if I could

Whoever they were, I'm certainly not in *their* gang!

that's geared to the way that I write."



The Who during the filming of *Tommy* in 1974: (l–r) John Entwistle, Pete Townshend, Roger Daltrey and Keith Moon

of years, have been pretending to be rock stars and have adopted false poses. It's the difference between someone who has made rock an integral part of their lifestyle and therefore doesn't feel like they're growing old."

"You want to know something? I really hate feeling too old to be doing what I'm doing. I recently went to do a BBC TV interview and when I arrived at the studios there were all these young kids waiting outside for the Bay City Rollers. As I passed them by, one of the kids recognised me and said, 'Ooo look, it's Pete Townshend,' and a couple of them chirped, ''Ello Pete.' And that was it. Yet the first time The Who appeared at those same studios on *Top Of The Pops*, a gang of little girls smashed in the plate glass front door on the building.

"Anyway, as I entered the building, the doorman turned to me and smirked. ''Ere, what's it feel like to walk past 'em now and have nothin' happen, eh?' I told him that, to be quite honest, it brings a tear to my eye. Look, I don't want them to mob me, because The Who have never been a Rollers-type band; what I'm scared of is hypocrisy."

Hypocrisy? In what way?

"Well, nowadays it's considered very passé to admit that you've got a burning ambition to stand on stage and be screamed at by 15-year-old girls. But when we started out, that was something to be very proud of. If it didn't happen, there was something wrong with you.

"Though I haven't all that much experience as to what is happening contemporarily in music, I do feel that the 'world owes me a living' attitude still prevails, not only in rock but in every walk of life. So now everyone's gotta look like they really mean business and every bloody singer I see on *The Old Grey Whistle Test* looks a-n-g-r-y."

He breaks off the conversation to pull relevant grimaces. "When I see this I go into hysterical fits of laughter.

"Sure, I know that I look angry when I play, but usually there's no reason for it. I suppose it's an adopted aggressive thing, which is in turn a subconscious layover from those days when I *was* angry. I don't quite know what I was angry at, but I was angry, frustrated, bitter, cynical – and it came through in the music I wrote."

C'mon Pete, you're either evading the moment of truth or approaching it in a very roundabout manner. What's brought on this manic obsession about being too pooped to pop, too old to stroll?

"It's just that when I'm standing up there on stage playing rock'n'roll, I often feel that I'm too old for it."

No kidding.

"When Roger speaks out about 'we'll all be rockin' in our wheelchairs', he might be, but you won't catch me rockin' in no wheelchair. I don't think it's possible. I might be making music in a wheelchair – maybe even with The Who, but I feel that The Who have got to realise that the things we're gonna be writing and singing about are rapidly changing.

"There's one very important thing that's got to be settled." He pauses again. "The group as a whole have got to realise that The Who are not the same group as they used to be. They never, ever will be, and as such… it's very easy to knock somebody by saying someone used to be a great runner and can still run but he's Not What He Used To Be." Townshend pauses yet again. "Everybody has a hump and you have to admit that you've got to go over that hump."



Yes we have… no we haven't – Townshend won't commit himself either way as to whether The Who are over the hill, but he intimates in no uncertain manner that the group are beset with acute problems.

"You've got to remember that there was a time when suddenly Chuck Berry couldn't write any more. He just went out and performed his greatest hits, and I've always wondered what that was all down to? Jagger told me at his birthday party that he was having difficulty in writing new material for the Stones, which is unfortunate because nowadays so much importance is placed upon writing songs.

"To a degree, you could call it frontman paranoia – and even Roger gets it from time to time. Let's face it, Jagger carries a tremendous amount of responsibility apart from being the Stones' frontman.

"Forget about that tired old myth that rock'n'roll is just making records, pullin' birds, getting' pissed and having a good time. That's not what it's all about. And I don't think Roger really believes it either. I think that's what he'd really like to believe rock'n'roll was all about.

"Steve Marriott has chosen to live it like that and, as far as I can see, he's having a good time. Fair enough – but in my opinion Marriott's

> "When I'm up there playing rock'n'roll, I often feel I'm too old for it"



pressure at the front of your mind that… not necessarily your fans… but then, maybe your fans really are the most important people… are actually sitting twiddling their thumbs waiting for your next album.

"Every time they wait, they become more and more impatient. What Jagger said in that interview that he did with *NME* is that between the albums they are eagerly waiting for, he'd like to chuck out an R&B set to keep 'em happy. Fair enough, if he thinks it'll make any difference – but of course it won't. It's just like making a 'live' album. The fans will say, 'Thank you very much', but what we're really waiting for is the next studio album, so get on with it."

Phewhatascorcha! New subject: Townshend was once quoted as stating that the eventual outcome of any Who recording depended entirely upon whether or not he could keep Moon away from the brandy and himself from imbibing whatever it took him to get through a session.

"At the moment, what governs the speed of The Who is the diversification of individual interests. We would have been recording the new album much earlier were it not for the fact that Roger is making another film with Ken Russell. Roger chose to make the film and John wanted to tour with his own band The Ox, so I've been working on tracks for my next solo album. Invariably what will happen is that once we all get into the studio I'll think, 'Oh fuck it', and I'll play Roger, John and Keith the tracks I've been keeping for my own album and they'll pick the best. So as long as The Who exists, I'll never get the pick of my own material… and that's what I dream of.

"But if The Who ever broke up because the material was substandard then I'd really kick myself."

But the way you're going on, Peter, old Meter, it sounds like The Who is on its last legs?

"However much of a bastard it is to get everyone together in a recording studio, things eventually turn out right. You see, though it has never been important in the past, we do have this problem that everyone has been engaged on their own project, so that the separate social existence that we lead has become even more acute.

"I mean, if I just couldn't live without Moonie and if I could go over to the States and spend a couple of months with him, we'd probably be a lot closer. But as it happens, I haven't seen Keith since last August. I may have seen a lot more of John, but as yet I haven't seen his new group or listened properly to his album because, apart from working on *Tommy*, I've been putting together new material. And the same thing applies to Roger: as soon as someone decides to do something outside of the area of The Who, the pressure suddenly ceases, because they are the people who put the pressure on me.

"Let me make this clear. I don't put pressure on them. I don't say, 'We've got to get into the studio this very minute because I've got these songs that I've just gotta get off my chest.' It's always the other way around. They always rush up to me and insist that we've got to cut a new album and get back on the road."

So it's quite obvious that the pressures are back on and Townshend is feeling the strain.

"In a sense, rock is an athletic process. I don't mean running about on stage, but as a communicative process it's completely exhausting. It's not necessarily being a part of things," insists Townshend. "Like I said, when I wrote 'My Generation' I was already in my early twenties, so I was by no means a frustrated teenager. And that's what a lot of people often tend to forget."

But you were an integral part of that generation?

"Right," he retorts, "but we're also part of the generation that we play to on stage today. Let me clarify that statement."

Yes!

"What I *don't* feel part of is not the generation of age, but the generation of type. I mean, who the »

music falls short of his potential, which is a bloody shame because everybody knows what he's really capable of… there's all those old incredible Small Faces records piled up. For me, *Ogdens' Nut Gone Flake* is one of the classic albums of the '60s, and if it's the difference between that music and having a good time, I prefer that Steve Marriott suffer, because *I want the music*.

"Believe me, I don't want to sound too cruel and vitriolic, but I do think that you have to face up to the undeniable fact that there's no point in your life when you can stop working. You can't suddenly turn round and say, 'We're on the crest of a wave, so now it's time to sit back and boogie.' Deep down inside, everyone wants to do this, but it's tantamount to retiring altogether. And personally, I can't do it.

"It's not necessarily to do with standards," Townshend continues, before I have time to fire another question. "The Who's *Odds & Sods* collection would have been released even if it hadn't been all that interesting, but it's all been put down in the past for being substandard."

Apparently the reason for its release was to make null and void the increasing amount of Who bootlegs currently being circulated, and once a second volume has been prepared and issued, there will be no need to backtrack.

"If," says Townshend, "The Who were gonna wave their banner for standards, *Odds & Sods* would still have remained unreleased. Standards have got absolutely nothing to do with it. I feel that it's the

> "While The Who exists I'll never get the pick of my own material"



ALAMY

hell were all those people at the *Tommy* premiere? Whoever they were, I'm certainly not in *their* gang! Yet funnily enough, whatever the age group, I feel much more at ease before a rock audience."

So why this current fixation about being too old to cut *le moutard*?

"Because to some extent The Who have become a golden-oldies band, and that's the bloody problem that faces all successful rock groups at one time or another – the process of growing old. A group like The Kinks don't have that problem because, theoretically, Ray Davies has always been an old man. He writes like an old man who is forever looking back on his life and, thank heavens, old Ray won't have to contend with such problems. But with a group like the Rolling Stones, there's this terrible danger… now I could be wrong… but there's no question in my mind that it's bound to happen… Mick Jagger will eventually become the Chuck Berry of the '60s, constantly parodying himself on stage. And this is the inherent danger that The Who are so desperately trying to avoid.

> "I'm far from being as technically proficient as I'd like to be"

"I can tell you that when we were gigging in this country at the early part of last year I was thoroughly depressed. I honestly felt that The Who were going on stage every night and, for the sake of the diehard fans, copying what The Who used to be. Believe me, there have been times in The Who's career when I would have gladly relinquished the responsibilities of coming up with our next single or album to another writer. There've been a lot of people who said they would have a go, but somehow it never quite worked out."

Why?

"Like a lot of things connected with The Who, I really dunno. Maybe it's because we've got such an archetypal style that's geared to the way I write."

But by his own admission, Pete Townshend has always considered his forte to be writing. The fact that he also happens to be a guitarist is, in his opinion, quite irrelevant. Yet even now, Townshend is astounded when other guitarists compliment him upon his instrumental prowess. He isn't bowing to false modesty when he insists that, after all these years, he still can't play guitar as he would really like to.

In his formative years with The Who, he compensated for his acute frustrations by concentrating his energies on the visual aspects of attacking the instrument. Every time he went on stage, Townshend insists he bluffed his way through a set by utilising noise and sound effects which eventually led to the destruction of many a valuable weapon.

"It's still true even today," he confesses without embarrassment. "I may be a better guitarist now than I was when The Who first started, but I'm far from being as technically proficient as I would really like to be.

"What I like about the way that I play," he explains, "is what I think everyone else likes. I get a particular sound that nobody else quite gets and I play rhythm like nobody else plays – it's a very cutting rhythm style. Sorta Captain Powerchords! I do like to have a bash every now and then at a wailing guitar solo, but halfway through I usually fall off the end of the fretboard. I might have a go, but I've resigned myself to the fact that I haven't got what it takes to be a guitar hero.

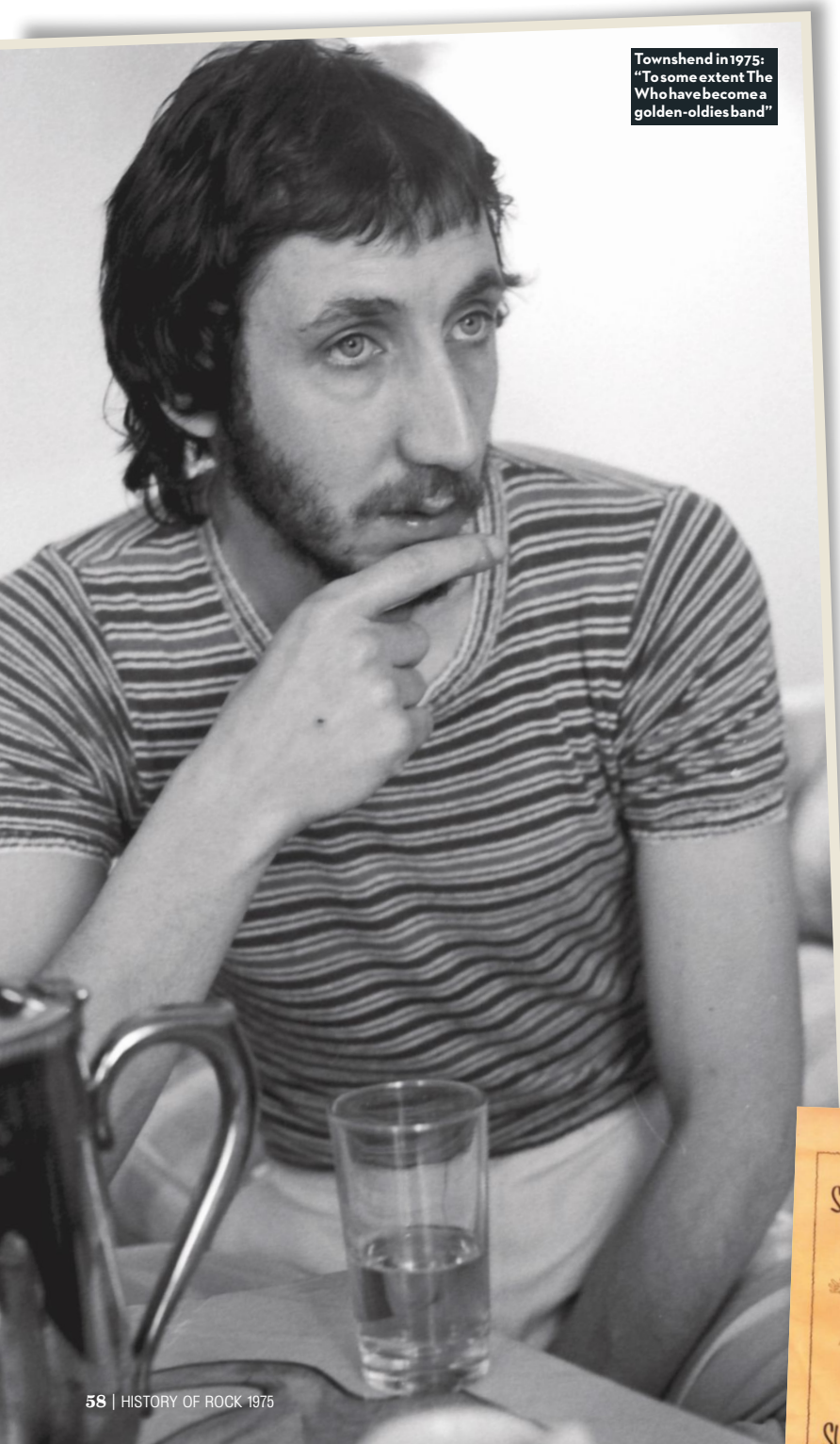
"Yet funnily enough I don't really respect that kind of guitar playing. I've got no great shakes for Jeff Beck or Jimmy Page. Sure, I love what they do, but it always seems to me that they're like the Yehudi Menuhins of the rock business. They're extremely good at what they do, but I'm sure they'd give their right arm to be writers – though not necessarily in my shoes.

"I don't really feel the showmanship side of my contribution to The Who's stage show is fundamentally a part of my personality. It's something that automatically happens. Basically, it stems from the very early days when we had to learn to sell ourselves to the public – otherwise nobody would have taken a blind bit of notice of us. And like many things, it's been carried on through up until today. Yet I have no doubt that, if we wanted to, we could walk on any stage and stand there without doing all those visual things and still go down well with an audience."

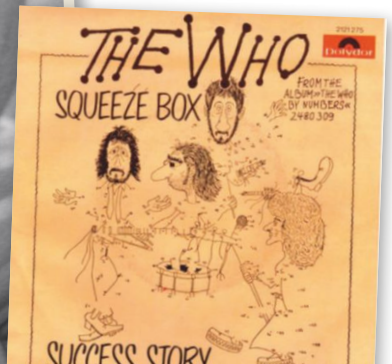
So why this depressing down-in-the-mouth attitude? Could it stem, I ask Townshend, from the fact that a critic once bemoaned that, in his opinion, The Who, once the true essence of rock'n'roll, now just go through the motions.

"Well, that statement was true – but on the other hand if it's unqualified then it might as well be ditched. But you've put the question to me and now I've got to try and qualify that other journalist's statement. To me, the success of any truly great

NEIL ZLOZOWER



Townshend in 1975: "To some extent The Who have become a golden-oldies band"





rock song is related to the fact that people who couldn't really communicate in normal ways can quite easily communicate through the mutual enjoyment of rock music. And that was simply because, for them, it was infinitely more charismatic than anything else around at that time.

"For example, you're aware that there's this great wall around adolescents and that they can't talk freely about their problems because it's far too embarrassing. Personally, I feel that adolescence lasts much longer than most people realise. What happens is that people find ways of getting round it and putting on a better show in public. And as they get older they become more confident and find their niche.

"Now why I think that journalist said The Who now only play rock'n'roll is because on most levels rock has become a spectator sport. It's not so important as a method of expression as it once was. Today something else could quite easily replace it."

Townshend goes on to concede that rock doesn't hold as much genuine mystique as it did with previous generations, to the extent that the stigma of the social outlaw has almost been eradicated. Those who have tried to become outlaws have failed miserably, hence the last-ditch shock tactics of Alice Cooper and David Bowie.

"For many kids, rock'n'roll means absolutely nothing." He compares it to switching on a television set, going to the movies or a football match. It's just another form of entertainment. "If what the kids do listen to consists entirely of the Bay City Rollers and the Top 10, then it must mean even less than most other similar forms of mass-media entertainment because they're not really listening. The real truth as I see it is that rock music as it was is not really contemporary to these times. It's really the music of yesteryear. The only things that continue to keep abreast of the times are those songs that stand out due to their simplicity."

Example?

"'My Generation'. A lot of people don't understand that there's a big difference between what kids want on stage in relationship to what they actually go out and buy on record. Perhaps the reason why so many young kids can still get into The Who in concert is simply because it's a very zesty, athletic performance. However, if we just restricted our gigs to performing songs we'd just written yesterday and ignored all the old material then I'm positive that we'd really narrow down our audience tremendously.

"I dunno what's happening sometimes," he bemoans. "All I know is that when we last played Madison Square Garden I felt acute shades of nostalgia. All The Who freaks had crowded around the front of the stage and when I gazed out into the audience all I could see were those very same sad faces that I'd seen at every New York Who gig. There was about a thousand of 'em and they turned up for every bloody show at the Garden, as if it were some Big Event – The Who triumph over New York. It was like some bicentennial celebration and they were there to share in the glory of it all. They had followed us from the beginning, 'cos it was their night.

"It was dreadful," Townshend recollects in disgust. "They were telling us what to play. Every time I tried to make an announcement they all yelled out, 'Shhhrrruppp, Townshend, and let Entwistle play "Boris The Spider"', and if that wasn't bad enough, during the other songs they'd all start chanting, 'Jump… jump… jump… jump… jump.' I was so brought down by it all! I mean, is this what it had all degenerated into?

"To be honest, the highest I've been on stage last year was when we used to play 'Drowned'. That was only because there was some nice guitar work in it… Roger liked singing it and both John and Keith played together so superbly. Really, that was the only time I felt that I could take off and fly."

Pete Townshend may well have some cause to feel sorry for himself; when the final reckoning comes he's got a lot to answer for – in particular the Curse Of The Concept Album. Though concept albums are by no means new to popular music – Gordon Jenkins and Mel Tormé were churning 'em out almost a quarter of a century ago – it was *Tommy* (as opposed to *Sgt Pepper*) which unleashed a deluge of albums built around one specific theme. These ranged from the Fudge's horrendous *The Beat Goes On* through to J Tull's obscure *Passion Play*, up to and including Rick Wakeman's Disneyesque *King Arthur*.

"None of which," says Townshend, as he bursts into laughter, "work."

Yet as we all know, Townshend himself has had no less than three stabs at the same subject. So how does he view the trilogy in retrospect?

"I don't. And if you're going to ask me which one I prefer, I don't really like any of them very much. I suppose I still like bits of The Who's original version, but the definitive *Tommy* album is still in my head."

> "Rock music as it was is not really contemporary to these times"

Perhaps it would be wise to quit this line of questioning and leave Tommy where he is. But Townshend wants the last word.

"I think that everyone in rock shares the same basic urges, and therefore that it would be very unfair to me to say it's all right for The 'Oo 'cos we invented it. I have great doubts about that. For instance, when the Big Feedback Controversy was going on in the mid-'60s, Dave Davies and I used to have hilarious arguments about who was the first to invent feedback. I used to pull Dave's leg by saying, 'We both supported The Beatles in Blackpool and you weren't doing it then… I bet you nicked it off me when you saw me doing it.' And Dave would scream that he was doing it long before that. Then one day I read this incredible story about Jeff Beck in which he said – at this juncture, he adopts a retarded Pythonesque android accent – "'Yeah, Townshend came down t'see d'Tridents rehearsing and he saw me using the feedback'… pause… 'and copied it.'"



Returning to his natural voice, Townshend scowls: "I never saw the Tridents and the man is pathetic. Obviously, Beck may feel deeply enough that he invented feedback – but for Chrissakes who gives a shit? Why even comment on it? It doesn't really matter, it's just a funny noise made by a guitar."

Townshend goes on to explain that the innovatory part of rock is not necessarily the part that he's proud of, even though he's regarded as The Who's ideas man. "I was trained in graphic design… to be an ideas man… to think up something new and different… like, let's give a lemon away with the next album!"

Thank you. »

"In the early days of The Who we were tagged with gimmicks and subsequently it made me very gimmick-conscious. Now if I might return to *Tommy* for a moment…"

But only for a moment.

"…What I think is good about *Tommy* is not that it's a rock opera or that it's the first or the last… That's, of course, if you assume that there's gonna be any more!"

Don't worry, there will be. Have a copy of Camel's *Snow Goose*.

"What I feel is very important about *Tommy* is that as a band it was our first conscious departure out of the adolescent area. It was our first attempt at something that wasn't the same old pilled-up adolescent brand of music. We'd finished with that and we didn't know which way to go. That's when we went through that very funny period of 'Happy Jack' and 'Dogs'.

"It was also a very terrifying period for me as The Who's only ideas man. For instance, though 'I Can See For Miles' was released after 'Happy Jack', I'd written it in 1966 but had kept it in the can for ages because it was going to be The Who's ace-in-the-hole. If you want the truth…"

And nothing but…

"I really got lost after 'Happy Jack', and then when 'I Can See For Miles' bombed out in Britain I thought, 'What the hell am I gonna do now?' The pressures were really on me and I had to come up with something very quick and that's how *Tommy* emerged from a few rough ideas I'd been messing about with."

And whereas The Beatles had cried that it was impossible to perform *Pepper* in public, the fact that The Who demonstrated that *Tommy* was an ideal stage presentation quickly motivated other bands to mobilise their might for the New Aquarian Age. With more sophisticated electronic weaponry than they knew how to utilise, the likes of Floyd, Yes, and ELP adopted a more "profound" stance as, in a blaze of strobes, they began to bombard audiences with techno-flash wizardry, pseudo-mystical jargon and interchangeable concepts.

Townshend may have had a helping hand in starting the whole schmear rolling (it sure didn't rock), but he is adamant in his belief than many allegedly "profound" music machines are working a clever con-trick on the public.

"All that they're really doing is getting together and working out the most complex ideas they can handle, packaging it with pretentious marketing appeal and unloading it on their fans. But" – and here comes the get-out clause – "does everything have to hold water? Obviously, it must mean something to the integrity of the band that's putting it together, but it's results that count."

> "Audiences are very much like the kids in Tommy's holiday camp"

Well, the result, as Townshend puts it, has turned many a rock theatre into a dormitory.

"It might be difficult to fall asleep at a Who gig, but I can understand why some bands send their audiences into a coma. I don't like Yes at all. I used to like them when Peter Banks was in the lineup, because apart from being extremely visual, he also played excellent guitar. With so many changes in the lineup, Yes is Jon Anderson's band and he might be guilty of much of that wishy-washy stuff they churn out, because Jon really is a tremendous romantic. Maybe he believes in the old mystical work, and maybe poetry moves him along – but I'm not concerned either way."

Just wait until the letters come pouring in.

"It's like that line in 'Punk And The Godfather'… '*You paid me to do the dancing.*' The kids pay us for a good time, yet nowadays people don't really want to get involved. Audiences are very much like the kids in Tommy's Holiday Camp – they want something without working for it. That wasn't the way it used to be. The enthusiasm that evolved around The Beatles was enthusiasm, as opposed to energy generated by The Beatles.

"You talk to them now about it and they don't know what happened! It was the kids' enthusiasm for them. Now when you see it happening again you can see how utterly strange it must have seemed the first time around. For instance, take the amount of energy and enthusiasm that's currently expended on, say, Gary Glitter… and Gary's just as confused as everyone else. All he knows is which curler to put on which side of his head – Gary readily admits this, and is all the better for it. Get in the middle of a crowd of screamin' kids – it doesn't matter who they're screamin' at – and there's a certain amount of charisma transferred to these people. But then, that's what fan mania is really all about.

"When the real charismatic figures like Mick Jagger came along, I think that rock started to change and then the kids began to create their own trends in fashion. The mods not only used to design their own clothes but sometimes actually to make them; and the fact that they did humdrum jobs to get money to buy clothes, scooters, records and go to clubs built up this elite. Therefore it wasn't too long before the artists let that rub off onto them, and in that sense I think The Who were as guilty as anybody else.

"And I'll tell you why. Because in the end we wanted the audiences to turn up to see only us as opposed to the audience being the show and struttin' about like peacocks. We had to be the only reason for them turning up at a Who gig."

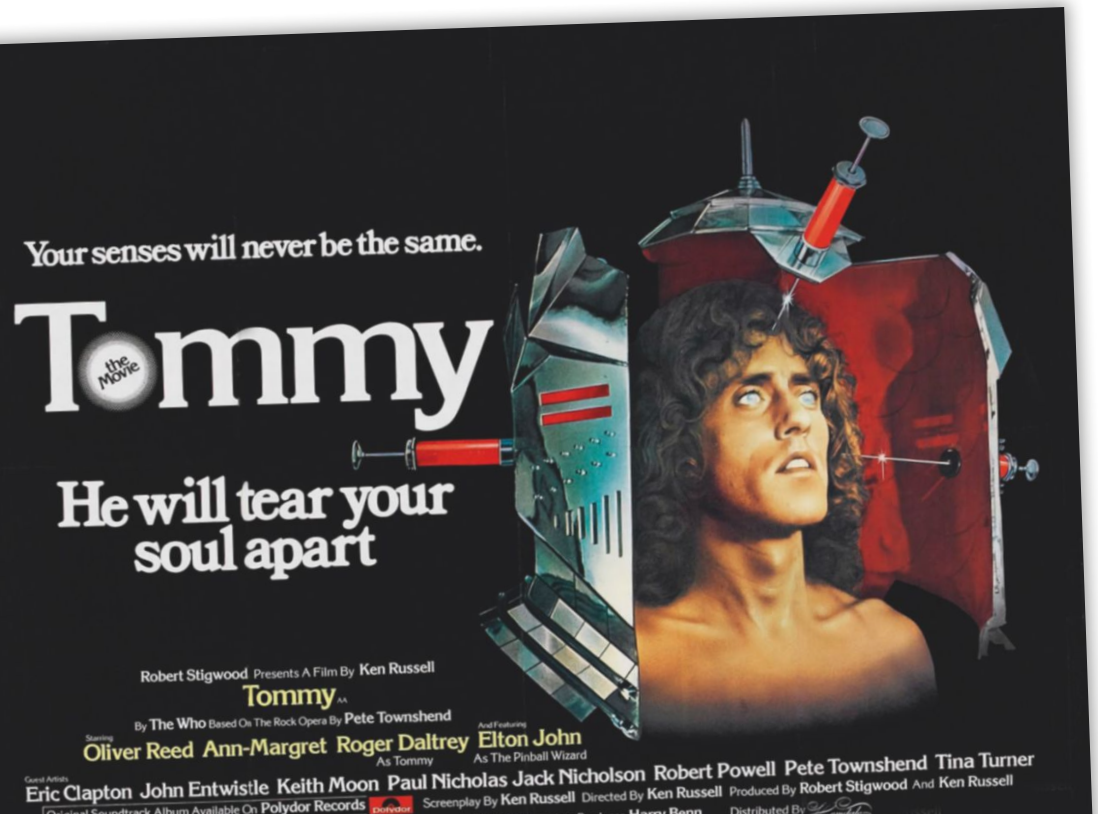
With rock and its peripheral interests having been systematically turned into a multi-million-pound consumer industry, Townshend has observed that the customer no longer dictates youth fashion. That's all down to some designer employed by a multiple chainstore.

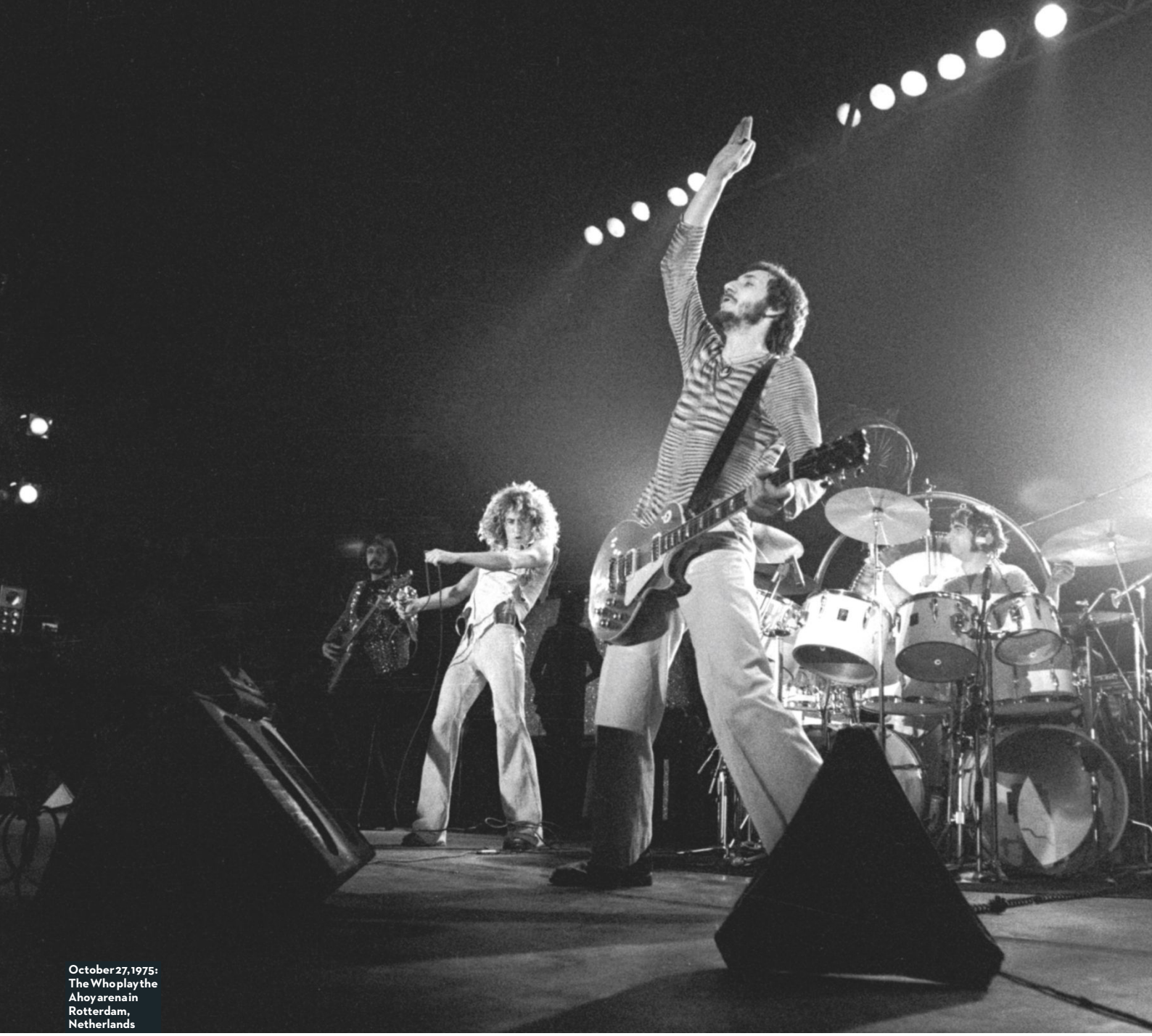
"Everything nowadays is premeditated. Within days the whole country is flooded with what someone thinks the kids want."

He believes that the only invigorating youth movement in this country appears to be centred around Wigan's northern soul scene.

"I wish that would spread more than it has, because I see it as a direct link with the mod thing. But what is more important is that it's more philosophical in its attitude about not fighting and not boozing and not smoking. Even though they're ephemeral things, they are nevertheless states of mind, which are Very Good Things. Like the early mod thing, this northern soul scene has a fashionable aspect connected with it, but basically it's concerned with the exact opposite to the mod preoccupation with getting pilled up and fighting.

"Funnily enough, I'm still not certain why the original mod movement was so obsessed with aggro. All I know is that at





October 27, 1975: The Who play the Ahoy arena in Rotterdam, Netherlands

GETTY

that time I felt an incredible amount of frustration and bitterness towards society, and maybe everyone else felt the same."

But even as far back as 1968, The Who were somewhat trapped by their own image, when Townshend states that the thing that had impressed him most was the mod movement. He had been fired by the excitement of witnessing and subsequently taking an active part in what he felt was the first time in history that youth had made a concerted move towards unity of thought and drive and motive. "It was almost surreal" was how he was quoted at the time.

Somewhere at the turn of the '60s, the youth movement was derailed. Talk of a promised land and the eventual greening of America became suffocated as the consumer industry once again took command, and the business in showbusiness grabbed the spoils.

When Townshend looks back in time, he can't help but laugh. "I don't think they were promises; I think it was just young people promising themselves something… having ambitions to do something… and, if you like, certain rock people were acting as spokesmen. So they are the convenient people to blame. That's if you want to lay the blame at anyone's feet.

"Basically, everyone had this mood that something was happening… something was changing. In essence it did, but unfortunately a lot of its impetus was carried off by the drug obsession. Everybody credited everything innovative and exciting to drugs… 'Yeah man, it's pot and leapers and LSD, that's what makes the world great.'

> "The Who went on to do what I feel to be some very brave things"

"Then when things turned out to be meaningless and people had missed the bus, they quickly realised that they'd gambled everything on something that had run away. The same thing happened to rock. Rock got very excited and flew off ahead, leaving most of its audience behind. The Who went on to do what I feel to be some very brave and courageous things, but in the end the audience was a bit apathetic. It was back to what I wrote in 'Punk And The Godfather' – you paid me to do the dancing. That's why, when I'm on stage, I sometimes feel that I'm too old to be what I'm doing."

Then, by way of contrast…

"Track by track, the new album that The Who are making is going to be the best thing we've ever done. But if people expect another grandiose epic then they ain't gonna get it, 'cos this time we're going for a superb single album."

Townshend, make your mind up, squire. If the last couple of hours are anything to go by, you're either – by your own admission – past it, or you're just after a bit of public feedback. Ouch. Better not mention that word.

Roy Carr ●

"I'm not into writing songs. I find that real boring"

A scene is developing in New York, and it is led by PATTI SMITH. Poet turned rocker, her forthcoming album has been largely improvised while John Cale looked on. "We fought a lot," says Patti, "but it was fighting on a very intimate level."

— NME JUNE 7 —

CBGB IS A toilet. An impossibly scuzzy little club buried somewhere in the sections of the Village that the cab drivers don't like to drive through.

It looks as if the proprietors kick holes in the walls and piss in the corners before they let the customers in; fo' the atmosphere, you dig. None of the low-budget would-be elegance of Max's Kansas City in the final agonies of its death throes but carefully choreographed movie-set sleaze.

The audience, who consist mainly of nondescript urban hippies, a smattering of heav-vy street bro's, rock intelligentsia and the occasional confused tourist, are revelling in the tack and basking in their own hipness just for being there.

Tonight, y'see, is Patti Smith and Television, two of the most droppable names of the New York rock circuit. Patti Smith is a Heavy Cult Figure who attracts the Cool Four Hundred, and Television are still on the verge of becoming Heavy Cult Figures, which is even more attractive. The fastest and most concise way to describe Television is that they're New York's equivalent to the Feelgoods.

They're a lot younger, perform original material and Tom Verlaine, the leader, was evidently severely traumatised by Lou Reed at an impressionable age; but outside of the obvious cultural differences between the Manhattan and Canvey Islands, the similarities are astounding.

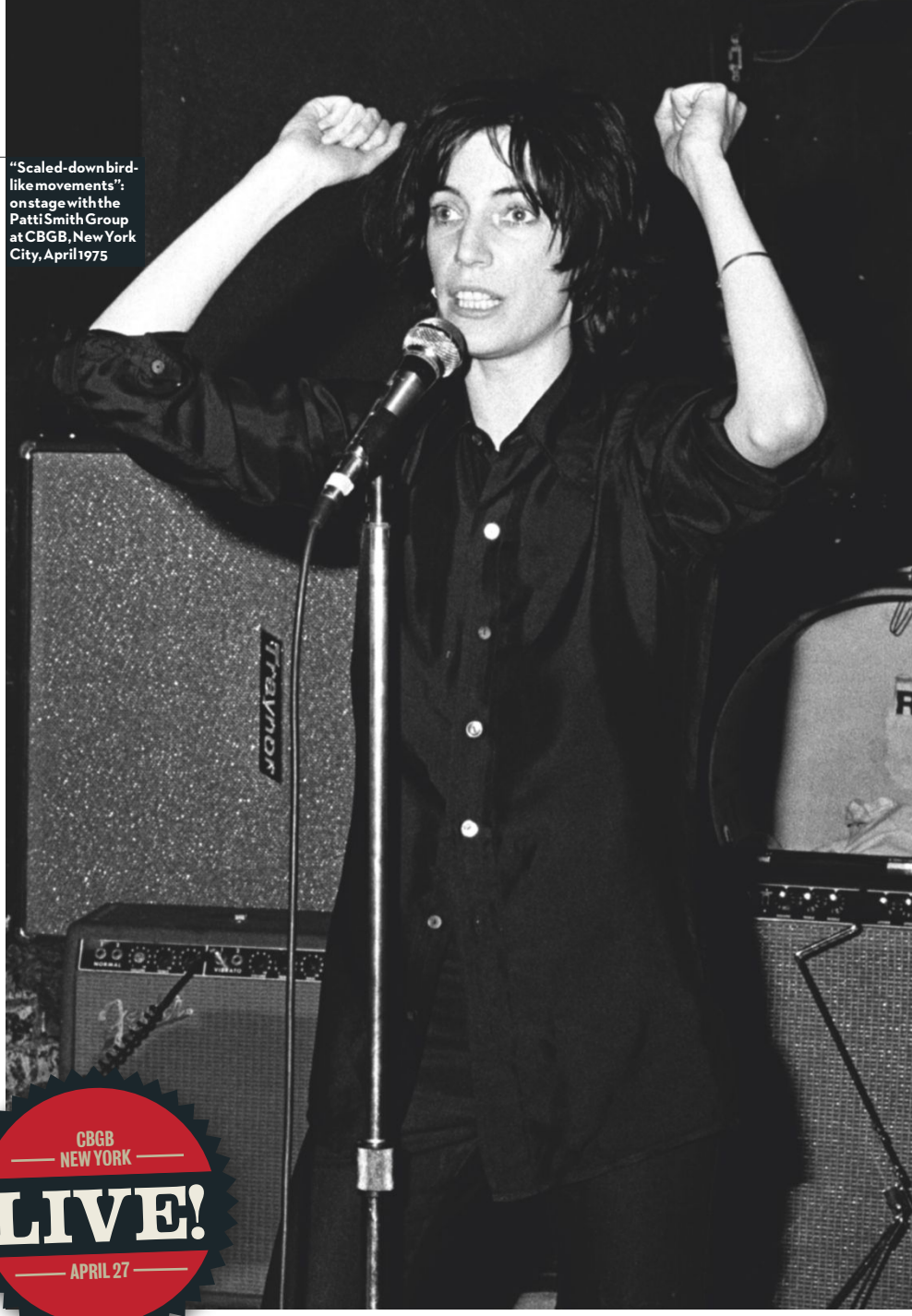
Both bands play chopped-down, hard-edged, no-bullshit rock'n'roll, totally eschewing the preening Mickey Mouse decadence that poleaxed the previous new wave of NY bands. Television don't dress up and they don't even move much.

The rhythm guitarist is spraddle-legged and blank-eyed, chopping at his Telecaster like some deranged piece of machinery, braced so that he can »

LYNN GOLDSMITH



Patti Smith in 1975, a student of Arthur Rimbaud and rock'n'roll rhythms: "the two moved simultaneously for me"



"Scaled-down bird-like movements": on stage with the Patti Smith Group at CBGB, New York City, April 1975

CBGB NEW YORK LIVE! APRIL 27

lurch in any direction without falling over. He's wearing a Fillmore East T-shirt, which is the ultimate in dressing down.

The bass player wears his shades on every other number, and Verlaine, frozen-faced and zombie-eyed, alternately clutches his mic stand with both hands and blazes away at off-balance methedrine speed-fingers lead guitar marathons on a gold-topped Les Paul.

Television are a total product of New York, but like the Feelgoods they embody both the traditional and the revolutionary, and they represent an escape from the roller-coaster to oblivion into which rock is currently strait-jacketed – ie, an imaginative return to basics – and what they lose to the Feelgoods in energy and pacing, they gain in imagination.

That a band like Television are currently happening and that people are listening to them is indisputable proof that rock is a hardier beast than much of the more depressing evidence would suggest.

Which brings us, quite logically, to Patti Smith, who has Just Signed A Big Contract and is therefore about to be massively publicised and fed into the start machine. Right now, though, she and Television are still on display fairly regularly to anybody with three or four dollars to hand over as CBGB's price of admission.

Her performing environment is a stage smaller than Greg Lake's carpet, which places her less than two feet away from the nearest customer and gives her less than a foot's height advantage. The lighting is, to say the least, elementary.

Which means that, in a club the size of CBGB, the tricks of the trade that the big guys use to duplicate or replace real charisma are technically impossible, and so the act has to either do it all by themselves or else it doesn't get done at all.

Patti Smith has an aura that'd probably show up under ultraviolet light. She can generate more intensity with a single movement of one hand than most rock performers can produce in an entire set.

On the face of it, it's an unlikely act to team with a chopped-hog, hell-driven band like Television. A lady poet, backed by a band who doesn't even have a drummer, sounds like an improbable expression for any kind of definitive rock consciousness. But Patti Smith is in the rock'n'roll marketplace and she knows the ground rules. More important, she knows how it works.

She's an odd little waif figure in a grubby black suit and black satin shirt, so skinny that her clothes hang baggily all over her, with chopped-off black hair and a face like Keith Richards' kid sister would have if she'd gotten as wasted by age 17 as Keith is now.

Her band (Richard Sohl on guitar and bass, Lenny Kaye on guitar and a kid known as DNV – an abbreviation of "Death In Venice") play like a garage band who've learned a few '30s licks to go with the mutated AM rock. She stands there machine-gunning out her lines, singing a bit and talking a bit, in total control, riding it and steering it with a twist of a shoulder here, a flick of a wrist there – scaled-down bird-like movements that carry an almost unbelievable degree of power, an instinctive grasp of the principles of mime that teach that the quality and timing of a gesture is infinitely more important than its size.

GETTY



Her closing tour de force, an inspired juxtaposition of "Land of 1,000 Dances" with a rock-poem about a kid getting beaten up in a locker room, was undoubtedly the most gripping performance that I've seen by a white act since the last time I saw The Who.

For the duration of her set that night, Patti Smith embodied and equalled everybody that I've ever dug on a rock'n'roll stage.

Whether her records will be any good or not (or for that matter, whether Television will be able to get it down on record) is another kettle of swordfish altogether.

All that really needs to be said is that watching Television and Patti Smith that evening was one of the most exciting rock experiences I've had for a long, long time, and that both acts have something that rock'n'roll desperately needs.

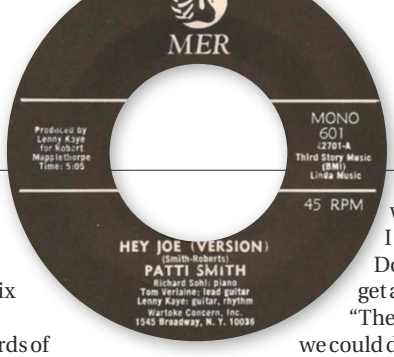
One more thing. In the audience at the Alice Cooper gig in Detroit was a kid done up exactly like Patti Smith. Something's happening.

Charles Shaar Murray

— MELODY MAKER NOVEMBER 29 —

LAST MONTH THEY caught Patti Hearst – and so ended the biggest man (or woman) hunt in the history of the US. All this is history now, of course, but it'll probably be the subject of at least two best-selling novels in the near future, not to mention a major screen movie.

But perhaps the first outside view of the Patti Hearst case was provided by New York's sparrow-like poetess Patti Smith, then a struggling



personality in the underground rock scene of the city. With considerable difficulty she raised $1,000 and headed for Electric Ladyland Studios in Greenwich Village and recorded a version of the traditional Hendrix classic "Hey Joe".

The inspiration for this move was provided by the words of Randolph Hearst, who on seeing the picture of his daughter holding a rifle, exclaimed to the anxious ears of America: "What are you doing with that gun in your hand?"

Patti Smith's version of "Hey Joe" was a bitch of a record. Opening with a poetic dialogue about the Hearst situation, it gradually flowed into the regular song. It was chock-full of atmosphere and, for topicality, it really couldn't be beaten. Had it received more exposure, I'm sure that Patti Smith would have been an overnight sensation.

It didn't, though, and it never will. About 1,000 copies of Patti's "Hey Joe" were pressed and made available by mail order through her management company and selected record shops down in the Village. According to Patti's manager, Jane Friedman, the project lost around $3,000, even though the singles were sold at $2.50, a mark-up of over 50 per cent on the regular singles' price.

Today it's a collector's item, and no more are available. Also today, Patti Smith stands on the brink of success after a long, hard struggle. This summer she signed with Arista Records, and her debut album is out in the States this month.

Thanks to Clive Davis, the boss of Arista, she is only the second of many artists in this (New York) fringe-rock fraternity to be recognised by a record company. The first, of course, was the New York Dolls, whose recording career slumped after two albums.

But Ms Smith cannot be placed in the same category as the Dolls, or any rock band, for that matter. Some may call her a singer, but she is really an improvising lyricist whose performances rush with crazy momentum as each song, or poem, unrolls. She recites with a musical backdrop, frequently breaking into song as the energy spirals, criss-crossing between the two and, more often than not, making up the words as she stumbles headlong forward.

Her band has been increasing in size over the years. Four years back it was just Patti and her guitarist Lenny Kaye, an occasional rock journalist and walking encyclopaedia on the last two decades of pop in America. Kaye, who three years ago, incidentally, compiled the *Nuggets* album of relatively obscure US singles for the Elektra label, might be described as a free-form guitarist, as he plays random notes at will according to the prompting of Patti's dialogue. They understand one another and, as such, it's doubtful whether any orthodox guitar player would fit.

Pianist Richard Sohl is a similar performer. Like Kaye, nothing he plays can be predicted beforehand.

Recently two other musicians have been added: a second guitarist, Ivan Kral, who like Patti bears a striking resemblance to Keith Richards, and drummer Jay Dougherty. There is no bass player – Patti feels a drummer is ample rhythm.

John Cale was brought in to produce her first Arista album, *Horses*, which is released this month. It was on this topic that we began what turned out to be a very lengthy conversation last week.

"It's a live album," she announced, squatting on the floor. "There's hardly any overdubbing at all. We just went in and did the songs straight away.

"In the studio we went through hell. I asked John to do it for me, I begged him to, and we had nothing but friction, but it was a love-hate relationship and it worked. At first I wanted an engineer producer, somebody like Tom Dowd, but Atlantic wouldn't let him go, so I figured I'd get a top artist producer who would act as a mirror.

"The whole thing in the studio was us proving to John that we could do it the way we wanted, so we fought a lot but it was fighting on a very intimate level."

The result is an album that's actually far more melodic than the half-dozen or so occasions I've watched Patti perform in various places in New York. The inclusion of a drummer – Dougherty was brought in immediately before the sessions began – tightens up Patti's style no end. Before, it was often shapeless and without discipline of any kind. Now you can even dance to Patti Smith, or at least some of the tracks.

Even words were improvised in the studio, she says. "I'm not into writing songs. I find that real boring. All our things started out initially as improvisation, but doing them over and over again got them into a formula.

"I can't play anything at all, so Lenny and I work out tunes as they go along. I have words and know how I think they should go, so we just pull it out and pull it out further until we get somewhere."

She and Kaye first got together in 1971. This followed a period of Patti's life when she lived at the Chelsea Hotel, writing poetry and spending time with rock musicians in what she describes as a "tequila split life".

Before that she was at art school, which followed work in a factory in New Jersey, where she was brought up. It was Bobby Neuwirth who introduced her to the changing musical inhabitants of the Chelsea Hotel. (Neuwirth is currently playing on Dylan's tour of New England with Joan Baez.)

"Neuwirth recognised my poetry and immediately introduced me to everybody he knew in rock'n'roll and kept pumping me to work at it. I studied Rimbaud, too, but being surrounded by these rock'n'roll rhythms, the two moved simultaneously."

It wasn't until 1972 that Patti started making regular appearances in New York.

In 1973, Lenny Kaye reappeared following a reading Patti gave on the anniversary of Jim Morrison's death, and from then on things accelerated. Pianist Richard Sohl joined the ranks and gigs followed at anywhere manager Jane Friedman could book them.

Which just about brings us up to where we began: the "Hey Joe" single recorded at Electric Ladyland. It was a deliberate choice of studio, for Patti strongly allies herself with Hendrix, another artist who took his art beyond contemporary strictures.

"We had three hours of studio time, but I just did it like we were on stage. Eventually we had 10 minutes left and no B-side, so I recited this poem and the musicians just joined in and we had it done."

According to Friedman, that "Hey Joe" chapter lost about $3,000 as so many copies were given away to friends instead of being sold. Part of their deal with Arista was a clause that no more could be made, so it'll remain a collector's item forever.

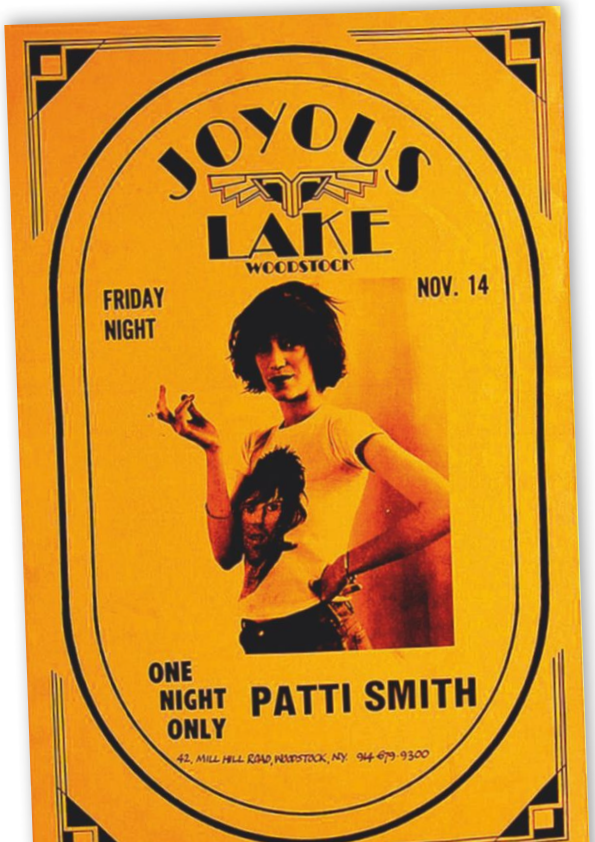
Clive Davis' interest in Patti stems from his days with Columbia, when Patti wrote the lyrics to two songs recorded by Blue Öyster Cult, a CBS act.

The deal with Arista is for five albums over the next three years, and meanwhile she has branched out from New York, playing concerts in California for the first time. In the coming months she will embark on her first proper tour, mainly visiting colleges across the country.

"We're a group now," she said. "We're together and that's it. I'm in rock'n'roll now and I'm proud to be in it."

Chris Charlesworth •

> "It's a live album. There's hardly any overdubbing at all"





John Bonham makes an entrance at Chicago O'Hare airport for the second date of Led Zeppelin's 10th tour of the States, January 1975

"Instant bedlam"

JOHN BONHAM entertains on his rural estate, and reveals how LED ZEPPELIN go about rehearsing for a concert ("three days – a bit of rust remover"), while the band decimate London's Earl's Court over five nights in May.



© NEAL PRESTON

— MELODY MAKER JUNE 21 —

GOSSIP IN THE village was running riot. John up at the farm was going to buy The Chequers. The American in the bar of another pub a few miles distant was adamant. So was the landlord, and a few grizzled farmers, as they downed pints of the finest beer known to men of science and agriculture.

But the object of the debate emitted a stentorian bellow that scotched the rumours once and for all. "No I'm not buying the bloody Chequers! Mind you… I was interested."

John Bonham, farmer, stockbreeder and drummer with the world's heaviest rock band, was supping in a Worcestershire haven of low beams and convivial company. The day before, his wife Pat had given birth to a baby daughter, Zoe, and there was plenty of cause for celebration. And apart from a small matter of being banned from driving for six months (no rumours here – it was all in the local paper), John was feeling that contentment and satisfaction most enjoyed by a self-made man.

A few weeks before, he had been pounding his massive drumkit in another world again. The world of thousands of admiring rock fans, enormous record sales and marathon, sell-out concerts. He seems equally at home in both, and he applies the same direct, furious energy.

At the historic Earl's Court concerts, Bonham's bombastic, metronomic drumming was an essential factor in a band that needs a regular supply of adrenalin. Bonham summons his reserves of strength from a tough, well-built body that was honed in the building, as much as the music, industry.

John pours out his ideas, opinions and thoughts in a tone that brooks no argument, and yet he has a fearless warmth and humour that commands respect. He looks the world straight in the eye, and expects the same treatment. No shrinking violet then, this man who was once told there was no call for his kind of loud, aggressive drumming.

And yet it's hardly a coincidence that when the men of rock, who deal in volume, flash and fame, reap the rich rewards of their craft, they head for the hills and vales, far from the stink of the city, there to enjoy the animals, earth and silence. Bonham's spread is a bit like the Ponderosa in *Bonanza*. After driving on stilted motorways through the smog of Birmingham (a living memorial to '60s "planning"), the country's scars gradually heal, and the Worcestershire countryside blossoms.

A ranch-style nameboard appears around a bend in a B-road, and twin white fences accompany a long, straight driveway to the modern brick farmhouse, where the gaffer and his family are ensconced.

Had John always intended to go into farming? "Never – I was never into farming at all. I wasn't even looking for a farm, just a house with some land. But when I saw this place, something clicked, and I bought it back in '72."

John seems to have been cheerfully accepted into the farming community, and is anyway guaranteed of one friendly neighbour. Robert Plant lives just a few miles away, surrounded by goats that John avers "eat everything, old boots, you name it".

John gave a great guffaw that could probably be heard halfway round the hundred acres of sheep and cattle that surround the house.

We set off for a stump round the fields. The view was breathtaking, apart from a line of recently constructed electricity pylons. One of the old barns has been converted to the needs of the modern rock'n'roll farmer.

"This is the hot car shop," said John with a chuckle, leading the way past a coven of cats who had been following us at a discreet distance. And there, squashed together in the darkness, stood a trio of highly improbable vehicles.

An elaborately painted contraption that resembled a pre-war taxicab, mounted on wheels a yard wide was, John explained, "a show car. I bought her in LA. She can do 150mph. And that one is a '67 Corvette with a seven-litre engine. This one is a 1954 two-door Ford with an eight-litre engine. You get guys coming past in a sports car who think it's an old banger, until I put my foot down. It's an amazing car – look at all the chrome inside. She'd only done 10,000 when I bought her."

Like many enjoying success for the first time, John once bought himself a Rolls-Royce.

"It was a white one. I went to a wedding reception in Birmingham. When I came out it looked like a bomb had hit it. All these skinheads had jumped on it. They kicked in the windscreen, smashed everything. If it had been any other car they would have left it alone."

Red rags to the bull, obviously. But John has worked hard, and still works hard, for his seven-litre crust.

BACK IN THE house we talked about his early days and the drumming career that has earned him world renown. "This used to be just a three-bedroomed house. My father did all the wood panelling, and I did a lot of the work with my brother and sub-contractors. If you have builders in, they'll make excuse after



Peak Bonham: bowler, boiler suit and translucent Ludwig Vistalite drumkit all present and correct

© NEAL PRESTON



excuse about delays during the summer so that they can have work inside during the bad weather. I know, because when I left school I went into the trade with my dad. He had a building business and I used to like it.

"But drumming was the only thing I was any good at, and I stuck at that for three or four years. If things got bad I could always go back to building. I had a group with Nicky James, an incredible lead singer. But we had so much of the equipment on hire purchase, we'd get stopped at night on the way back from a gig and they'd take back all the PA.

"Nicky had a big following then, and he could sing any style, But he couldn't write his own material. We used to have so many clubs we could play around Birmingham in those days. Lots of ballrooms, too. All those places have gone to the dogs – or bingo.

"I was so keen to play when I quit school. I'd have played for nothing. In fact I did for a long time. But my parents stuck by me. No, I never had any drum lessons. But I remember Carl [Palmer] went, he had a lot of lessons. I just played the way I wanted, and got blacklisted in Birmingham. 'You're too loud!' they used to say. 'There's no future in it.'

"But nowadays you can't play loud enough. I just wish there was a way of wiring a drum kit to get the natural sound through the PA. I've tried so many different ways, but when you're playing with a band like ours you get so many problems with sound.

"With Jimmy and John Paul on either side playing lead, they can leak into the drum mics, and if you have too many monitors you start to get feedback. I never get it the way I want."

And yet Bonham's drum sound was fairly fantastic at Earl's Court, I thought.

"I enjoyed those concerts," said John. "I thought they were the best shows that we've ever put on in England. I always get tense before a show, and we were expecting trouble with such a huge audience.

"But everything went really well, and although we couldn't have the laser beams at full power, I thought the video screen was well worth doing. It cost a lot of bread, but you could see close-ups you'd never be able to see normally at a concert. It was worth every penny."

Did the band rehearse for weeks before the concerts?

"Nah, three days. Mind you, it was only a few weeks before that we got back from the States. We just needed a bit of rust remover. We had already done a lot of planning for that States tour, because we like to change the show each year. There's nothing worse than playing the old numbers over and over again.

"You've got to keep in some of the old songs, of course. I don't know what would happen if we didn't play 'Stairway To Heaven', because it's become one of the biggest things we've ever done. When Jimmy plays the first chord in the States, it's like instant bedlam, until Robert comes in with the first line. And we always play 'Whole Lotta Love' because people want to hear it, and I still get a great kick out of 'Dazed And Confused'. I always enjoy the number because we never play it the same.

"With the other stuff, we'll put one in, or take one out. On the last night at Earl's Court we played 'Heartbreaker', 'Black Dog' and a bit from 'Out On The Tiles'. With the songs from *Physical Graffiti* we've got such a wide range of material. It wasn't done on purpose. It's just that we went through a stage where we were very conscious of everything we played. We felt it had to be a certain kind of thing for Zeppelin. Now we record everything that comes up, and of course, in the States they play it on the radio, so the people know what we're doing.

"In Britain we never get any airplay except from John Peel and Alan Freeman. In the States they'll play 'Trampled Under Foot' all day. When we first ran through it, John, Paul and Jimmy started off the riff, but then we thought it was a bit souly for us. Then we changed it around a bit. It's great for me. Great rhythm for a drummer. It's just at the right pace and you can do a lot of fills.

"But compare that to 'Dazed And Confused'. The speed of the thing! While we're playing, I think, 'Christ, if I drop one, knit one and purl one – that's it.' You've gotta be fit to play that one, and if I don't feel too good, it's very hard. We keep tapes of every show, and it's very useful afterwards, especially for my drum solo, because then I can hear what works best."

Despite John's burly appearance and confident mien, it's a fact that he suffers from doubt and worry just before every Zeppelin concert. He'll sit backstage, nervously tapping sticks, anxious to get on stage and stuck into their exhausting three-hour show.

"I've got worse – terribly bad nerves all the time. Once we start into 'Rock And Roll' I'm fine. I just can't stand sitting around, and I worry about playing badly, and if I do, then I'm really pissed off. If I play well, I feel great. Everybody in the band is the same, and each has some little thing they do before we go on, just like pacing about, or lighting a cigarette.

"It used to be worse at festivals. You might have to sit around for a whole day, and you daren't drink, because you'll get tired out and blow it. So you sit drinking tea in a caravan, with everybody saying, 'Far out, man.'

"We don't do festivals so much now because of the amount of equipment we have. There's all the PA and lights and the black floor for the stage. Imagine the changeover between us and the Floyd? It would take hours! The Bath festivals were the only ones we ever played here, and they went really well."

> "I just can't stand sitting around, and I worry about playing badly"

One of the features of Bonham's marathon drum solos during the Earl's Court concerts was the special effects employed on the tympani. Had he been using a synthesizer?

"No, it was just phasing on the pedal tymps. I was using them in '73. It's just a different sound. Not everybody likes or understands a drum solo, so I like to bring in effects and sounds to keep their interest. I've been doing the hand drum solo for a long time – before I joined Zeppelin.

"I remember playing a solo on 'Caravan' when I was 16. Sometimes you can take a chunk out of your knuckles on the hi-hat or you can catch your hand on the tension rods. I try to play something different every night on the solo, but the basic plan is the same, from sticks to hands and then the tymps, and the final build-up.

"It would be really boring to play on the straight kit all the time. On the last States tour I was really chuffed when I had some good reviews from people who don't even like drum solos. I usually play for 20 minutes, and the longest I've even done was under 30. It's a long time, but when I'm playing it seems to fly by.

"Sometimes you come up against a blank and you think, 'How am I going to get out of this one?' Or sometimes you go into a fill and you know halfway through it's going to be disastrous.

"There have been times when I've blundered, and got the dreaded look from the lads. But that's a good sign. It shows you're attempting something you've not tried before."

Was there any danger of John losing power in time in view of his arduous years on the road? "I'm not losing strength. I'm less tired after a solo than I used to get in the early days. Of course, we didn't have a break for the acoustic numbers then. »



"But it was so cold at Earl's Court, we had to have an electric fire in the dressing room. The unions wouldn't let us use blow heaters. I had a run-through on the Friday night before the first show, and I was playing in an overcoat."

One of the mysteries of Zeppelin is that they have never put themselves out for a hit single, and *Graffiti* had obvious singles-chart potential. Didn't they want one?

"No, not really. It's because of the length of a piece like 'Trampled Under Foot'. It's not worth cutting something out just for the sake of a single. And if people like Led Zeppelin they would have bought the LP anyway. No – it would be pointless to put a single out from the album."

AFTER A SOJOURN at the pub, we returned to the farmhouse to sample some brandy and the delights of a Quad sound system that threatened to stampede the sleeping herd of Herefordshire.

"Listen to this. It's great." John put on the Pretty Things' new single 'I'm Keeping'. They're a band who seem to be enjoying a whole new lease of life since they signed to Swan Song, Zeppelin's own label. He was also raving about Supertramp's album and admitted a new interest in country music.

"I wish there were some more live bands around here I could have a blow with," sighed John, tossing back a brandy, and barely audible above the thunder of speakers. "There's nowhere for them to play – now it's all discos. God, I hate those places, all those flashing lights. It's all right if you're out for a night on the tiles. But I like to hear a good live group. You've gotta remember – they're the backbone of the business."

But in case the rock business does start to dry up, John is setting his nine-year-old son Jason on the right path. He has a junior drumkit set up in front of dad's jukebox, and pounds away to Gary Glitter. But John is not sure if he'll take the right path to becoming another drumming rock superstar. He came home from the Cubs during the afternoon clutching his latest single, 'Whispering Grass' by Windsor Davies.

"You can't teach him anything," warned John. "He's got a terrible temper." *Chris Welch*

CHRIS WALTER



The definitive rock performance

MM MAY 24 Led Zeppelin scale the heights during a five-night stand.

IT'S NOT VERY often that the opportunity of experiencing the very best of something presents itself; when it does come along, it's inevitably only appreciated in retrospect. Yet before Led Zeppelin had got far into their set at London's Earl's Court on Sunday, it became obvious this was the definitive rock performance; so much so that it's inconceivable another band could do as well.

In the space of nearly three-and-a-half hours, they covered virtually every variation on rock and left no doubt they could triumph with any style they had omitted.

They can do this because Zeppelin stand at the very heart of rock: the blues/rock'n'roll-based style typified by "Whole Lotta Love", supported by a firm grounding in the English folk tradition, evident on their acoustic numbers. This is the base for development, and as they improvise around these themes, they draw in elements of jazz and classical music to build up a complete picture of contemporary rock.

For fleeting seconds, it's possible to hear traces of every major British band around – not just more obvious examples like Deep Purple or Black Sabbath, but even Yes and ELP. Naturally, they never fully explore these avenues; should they ever do so it would be interesting to see how they compare. On the evidence of Sunday night, they'd probably perform them better.

But the most immediately impressive feature of Led Zep live is not so much the superb music as the assurance with which they produce it. There's nothing apologetic about them, no "little numbers from our latest album".

They're so big and so good, there's no need to plug albums or make excuses for songs written long ago – and they know it. Some might interpret this as arrogance; in fact it's just part of the band's no-nonsense approach. They go on stage to play music, not boost either their own or the audience's egos.

This authority, though, manifests itself in an absolute power that few other bands can even hope for, and that could sway an audience any way the band wishes.

Wisely, they don't choose to use it that way; there's no need to whip up the fans or repeatedly ask if everyone feels all right. Packing 17,000 people into Earl's Court on five separate occasions – never mind those who couldn't get tickets – is all the proof they need of their power.

Their self-assurance is no more evident than in their stage act. With video cameras beaming close-ups of every movement on to a screen high above their heads, Plant and Page pose and strut, proud as peacocks, lords of the jungle. Plant thrusts his navel into a camera lens and disdainfully shakes the hair out of his eyes; Page makes his gravity-defying backward bends and describes a 180-degree arc with his arm between a series of ear-splitting chords.

It goes beyond a mere stage act, and takes on all the exaggerated expressions and mannered stage "business" of classical opera. Plant emphasises every line of the lyrics with his face, while Page's actions anticipate his next blistering solo. John Paul Jones and John Bonham take no part in this performance, Jones hugs the shadows, and when the cameras catch him, he's wearing a look of quiet intensity; while Bonham is mostly grim-faced as he piles on the pressure – the stoker of the Zeppelin express.

None of this would be worth much, of course, if the music wasn't absolutely first class. With sound problems and endless tune-ups utterly non-existent, they played brilliantly and with a practised ease that made the music flow in such a fast stream it was impossible to absorb it all in one sitting.

And there's that ever-present self-assurance: no one needs to look at another to find out how he's doing – he *knows*. Page





After three-and-a-half hours on stage, Jimmy Page soaks up a 10-minute ovation

and Jones don't have to face each other and trade licks; they both know what they've got to do and they *know* they will do it right.

Led Zeppelin look very much like four individuals on stage. It's in the music they meet and fit together perfectly.

So what of the music? As Plant gleefully pointed out, the media had got it wrong (again) and this wasn't Zeppelin's American show. After three shortish numbers – opening with a rousing "Rock'n'Roll" – they began a journey through the soul of the band.

It had little to do with chronology; both old and new were presented side by side, recording the highlights of their six-and-a-half year "relationship". It reached an incredible high with their reworking of the blues on "In My Time Of Dying" – and just kept climbing higher and higher. Jones switched onto keyboards for "The Song Remains The Same" – Page proving with a beautifully laid-back solo that he's not just the one-high-energy-solo man he's sometimes accused of being – and stayed there for "Kashmir", surely Led Zep's finest (recorded) hour.

It's an atypical Zeppelin song, highly structured, with little room for extended improvisation. Page, incredibly, found the space and made full use of it. Bonham pounded out the beat; Plant soared, his voice spitting out lines like "*this WASTED land*", and his end-of-song credit – "John Paul Jones: a rather cheap orchestra" – summed up Jones' swirling chords that give the song its atmosphere. Yet John Paul had just started.

It takes on all the mannered stage "business" of classical opera

He moved into "No Quarter", taking it through the changes from rock to almost classical and then picking out a funky riff – the cue for Page to come in with a solo that, judging by the smile that crept across his face as the number reached its climax, pleased him greatly.

Then, a new departure; four-part harmonies for "Tangerine". No trouble. In keeping with the gentle mood of that song, out came the farmhouse chairs and acoustic guitars for a peaceful three-song break, Jones, Plant and Page just sitting and playing simply.

They roared back with a stomping, driving "Trampled Under Foot", the very essence of pure rock. And then – a surprise dedication for *MM*'s Chris Welch: "This is the one you've been waiting for, Chris. Remember that snare drum?" What else could it be but Bonham's solo, "Moby Dick"? Under such circumstances, it seems inappropriate for me to comment, other than to report that it included some remarkable quad effects.

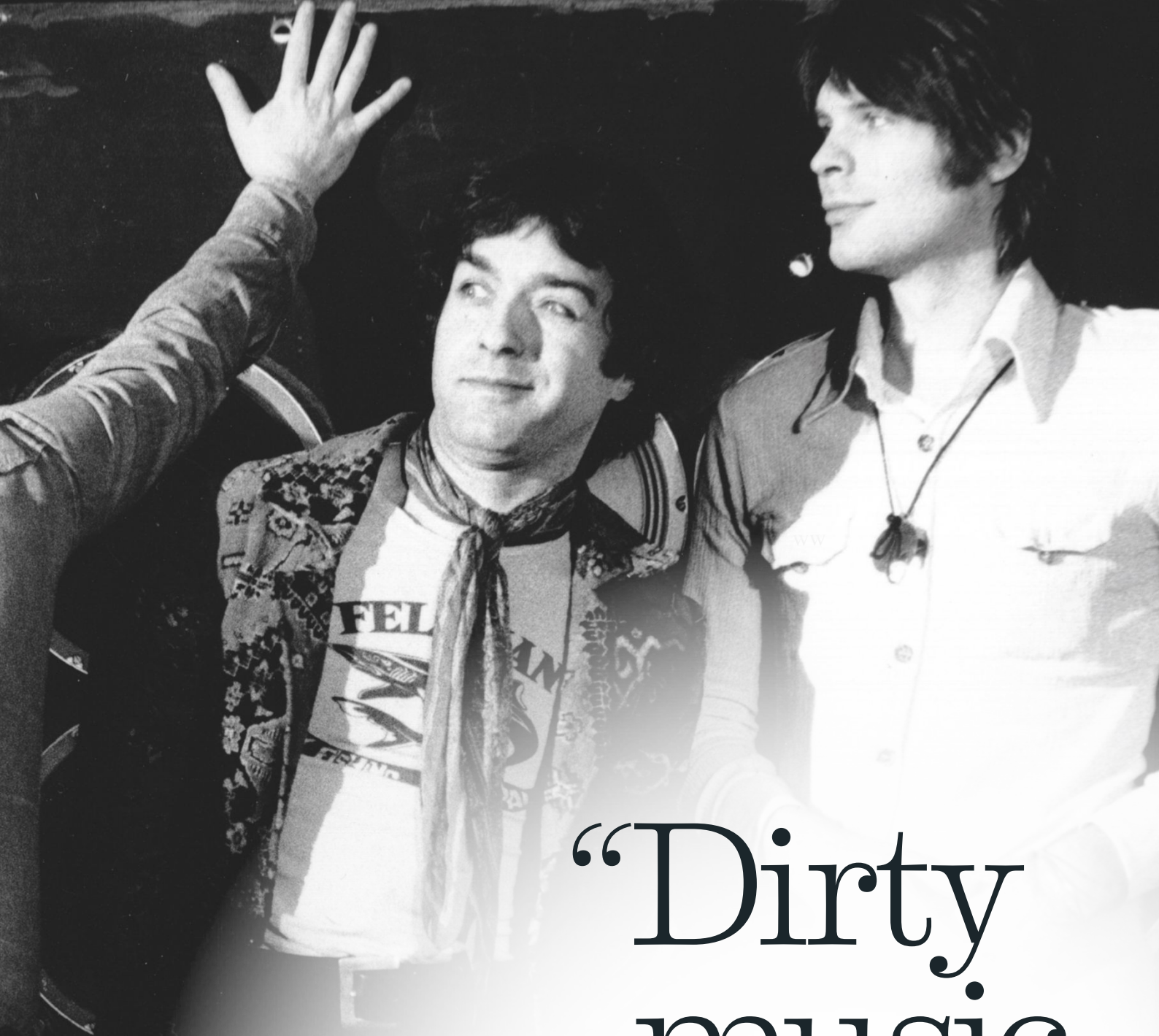
Page's turn next for the super-sound treatment. A completely restructured "Dazed And Confused", sounding even fresher than the original, brought out the violin bow. Laser lights cut through the hall while Page stood centre stage, cloaked in dry ice made all the more eerie by a green spot shining through, producing electrifying sound.

Only one song could follow; an immaculate "Stairway To Heaven", which rounded off three hours (to the dot) of superb music. They couldn't get away that easily, though.

A 10-minute standing ovation, the lights flashed, the name "Led Zeppelin" was emblazoned in light across the back of the stage – and up came the strains of "Whole Lotta Love". We came, we saw – they conquered. *Michael Oldfield*



Can in 1975: (l–r) Holger Czukay, Irmin Schmidt, Jaki Liebezeit and Michael Karoli



"Dirty music, with hairs on it"

Some strange nights in the UK with CAN, who claim the whole Stockhausen connection is overrated. "If a drug is a comparison, I like to be the drug myself," says Michael Karoli. "The people should go out either smiling or crying."



— NME JUNE 21 —

CHIANA IS AN East End lady with lots of heart, soap opera principles, no self-confidence and no surname (she dropped it after her marriage broke down). She could easily have been the subject for a rather sad *Play For Today*, a peripheral pop person whose role is not legitimised. Which is why she elected herself Can's unofficial unpaid, unsupported fan club secretary despite the fact she hasn't even got a record player. For the love of it.

So, Simon Puxley (who is handling Can's publicity on this tour) and myself are left holding her shoes, and two extra glasses, while she goes off. We also have time to marvel at the delightful incongruities of the situation: (a) that Can, a much-praised, relatively obscure, highly ephemeral German band, with a bass player who studied with and hangs out with Karlheinz Stockhausen and a guitarist who claims his main influence to be John Cage, should be playing Hastings Pier Pavilion on a wet Friday night to a half-full house of spotty 14-year-old provincials in Millets Afghans; (b) that you can get a tequila on Hastings Pier; (c) that Can have a fan club; and (d) that Chiana is its secretary.

I mean, what is there about Can that could possibly support the usual kind of fan sensibility that demands to know things like where the bass player takes his pet poodles to be clipped?

Try it. We're backstage during the interval. Holger (the bass player) walks in, still wearing the white gloves he always plays in.

Uhhh, Holger? Holger… why do you always play with gloves on?

"Well," says Holger, a polite smile flickering across his heron-like features, "it iss because I can achief a better tonality" (here he demonstrates how – with gloves – he feels he can get a better purchase on the strings).

"In fact," says Michael the guitarist a couple of days later, "Holger wears gloves because he has a cleanliness fetish – I once picked up his bass and started playing it and he wiped the strings afterwards."

This is fanmag material? The bass player wears gloves because he has a cleanliness fetish.

Try again. "Dear Chiana, I am very interested in Can; they are almost as good as the Pink Floyd. Could you please tell me where the organist bought his silver jerkin? – Floyd Fan, Bootle." "Dear Floyd Fan, Irmin's silver jerkin might prove to be a little hard to find. It is made entirely from beer-can ring pulls."

> "On the new record we have got much more into magic rhythm"

HOWEVER, THE REAL difference between Can and their contemporaries in (supposedly) free-form astral doodlings (Floyd, Kraftwerk, Neu!, etc) is that they always remain strictly rhythmic in an essentially danceable fashion. Both physical and metaphysical. So that even if the elaborately ethereal instrumental work leaves your average punter unmoved, at least the rhythm section will keep his hip joints oiled.

Thus, the house (half full but keen) gets off royally despite the fact that the two German roadies are at loggerheads, trying their best to sabotage each other's efforts so that the sound (emanating from a series of speakers set into a 12-foot baffle board behind the band) frequently emerges like a symphony for spin driers.

Irmin Schmidt (keyboards, ring-pull jerkin) met Holger Czukay (bass, gloves) in Darmstadt back in 1965 when both were studying under Stockhausen. Czukay took him seriously, writing pieces in his style and conducting small classes of his own. Schmidt, meanwhile, was losing his rocks to Cage, Fluxus and La Monte Young while taking first steps in the direction of becoming a legitimate conductor of large conventional orchestras.

Three years later, Schmidt teamed up with American avant-garde flautist David Johnson and Czukay was invited to join them. The trio decided upon a course of jazz nouveau and "beat music", the latter reminding Czukay of a young law student to whom he'd taught some guitar two years previously – Michael Karoli, who was at that time playing bass with a pop group playing the Swiss disco circuit.

He arrived the next day. The drummer – Jaki Leibezeit – then with the eminent Manfred Schoof group playing free-form jazz, arrived from Hamburg unexpectedly a couple of days later.

Enter Malcolm Mooney, a young black New Yorker, a friend of a friend of Irmin's who'd just returned from a pilgrimage to India. Irmin met him in Paris and invited him back to Cologne to sing with the band. Mooney had never worked with a band before. Reports suggest that upon his arrival he simply strode into the studio, grabbed the mic-stand and launched the band into "Father Cannot Yell", which opens Can's debut album, *Monster Movie*.

"It was," says Michael Karoli, "the first piece we ever made."

Although, in fact, they had recorded two film soundtracks.

Mooney chose the name, always performed off the top of his head and ultimately went completely off his head – to be replaced by wandering Japanese street musician Kenji "Damo" Suzuki, who spoke no German and left just before the last British tour to become a Jehovah's Witness in an obscure German hotel scullery.

The first part of the set has finished. The band are resting up in an ugly backstage room with a window overlooking the beach. Michael is telling someone how he had his guitar ripped off at the last gig in Liverpool. He has had his hair cut.

"And now I am finding that because they can see my face," he is saying, "the press have 'discovered' me. I get far more photographs now…"

Chiana is back in the bar with us.

"People keep asking for pictures of them," she is saying, "but I can't get hold of them. I wrote to the record company and they weren't very helpful."

The entire tour, in fact, seems to have been handled with an arguably low-profile approach with an arguably erratic, rather eccentric schedule that leaves the band lying around picking their noses for days on end and then suddenly heaves them into a compacted series of geographically disjointed dates. Considering the fact that the critical response to the band here has been universally laudatory, this seems a little strange.

Not that Can lose money here. They stay in cheap hotels at special pre-arranged rates; they bring their own roadies and equipment in their own van and travel overland in the group car – a Peugeot estate.

The second part of the set revolved around "Dizzy Dizzy" and "Chain Reaction", although both are barely recognisable from the recorded versions. "Set", anyway, is an inaccurate definition with regard to Can. Generally they just wander on stage and play; this has been the first tour where they used some modicum of stage planning. Basically, though, their approach remains true to the initial one.

"We made a concert three days after we met," says Karoli, grinning. "It was the first time. We decided that there was nothing we could play; there was no song we knew… so we just decided to play free. The flute player [Johnson] was into pure electronics of the Floydish kind and we had a radio on stage. It was completely chaotic.

"Halfway through, the news came on the radio and went out through the PA… and Irmin ruined a very beautiful piano completely by pure violence. We took a pair of drumsticks and began beating on the strings against me and Holger, who were both going over a stereo record.

CUT TO CHEAP London hotel room. Michael Karoli is putting on his underpants. He has a big ass. I'm moaning to him about the way in which everyone here "got funky", went completely mindless for The Meters and forgot about carrying on the old Small Faces tradition of the quintessentially English three-minute single.

"What English music has in comparison to American or German music," he observes, spraying deodorant into his armpits, "is usually English people are very thin. I mean," he explains, "there are many men in England who are very slim. And the Americans have a big ass. So if English groups are trying to play American rhythm, they just don't get that… shake… because there is not enough ass."

Outside we hail a cab and run into Irmin and the roadies in a hamburger house. Kate the photo lady arrives and immediately engages Michael in conversation about astrology. He immediately engages her in a somewhat fragmented conversation about orgies. He speaks very softly and very articulately, gives the appearance of being perpetually stoned

and slightly hedonistic. He always has a half-smile on his face except for when you crack a joke which he always takes seriously.

But, to the roots…

"I've always been into funky things," a prone Karoli observes, "as far as I know, 'funky' means 'dirty'… and I've always been into dirty music, music with hairs on it. People like Oscar Peterson or Dave Brubeck never fascinated me, and I never got into Charlie Parker – all this kind of music is very flat."

He prefers Thelonius Monk, the Stones – especially "Just Wanna See His Face" on *Exile*, the Staple Singers, Lee Dorsey… The Last Poets. Body-oriented stuff.

"If a drug is a comparison, I like to be the drug myself," he claims. "The people should go out of the concert either smiling or crying. I have that with films sometimes. I go out of a good film and I feel very close to everybody else who has seen it. I want to go and shake their hand even though I do not know them. Excuse me, I must take a piss."

And Stockhausen?

"The Stockhausen thing has been very overrated. Only Holger has been influenced by him – his *Canaxis* solo album is definitely inspired by him. But he [Stockhausen] has been a kind of patriarch to us – he must be very nice. He wrote a letter to German immigration when Damo was supposed to get a working permit and hadn't.

"They had put him in jail and threatened to deport him. We couldn't get him out. Stockhausen wrote them a very emotional letter. Like, 'Do you know that you are bringing down the entire German culture with what you are doing' – a really heavy, beautiful letter. In the end it wasn't his letter that freed Damo, though; it was a television personality…"

Karoli claims to have been more inspired by Cage – the originator of the "prepared piano" – wherein the old school prank of filling the works with bits of metal and toilet rolls is rendered as art.

"My idea," says Karoli, "is making rock music with the conscience that John Cage has left. I am very much into accidents and coincidences. I have two radio sets. I put them on at the same time; usually they're tuned to different stations. I then turn on the television, stand in the middle and play my guitar. It's really beautiful. You know, I really like listening to shortwave."

Karoli's closest musical ally he reckons to be Phil Manzanera.

"I don't know about his ideas, but I have been into South American music too. Also on the John Cale record he plays exactly the solos I would be playing – which is comforting because often I feel very alone with my style."

Which is a mite unorthodox? Possibly as much due to the fact that for years he has taken a little pill and transcended his ego every time he's gone on stage. He now reckons to be at the point of omnipotence, although, three albums back, his lack of self-confidence almost killed him.

"I got very sick after *Ege Bamyasi*. I developed an ulcer during recording which then perforated because I had very big problems concerning my ability to make music."

Nevertheless, "One More Night" on *Ege Bamyasi* still ranks as one of the most beautiful things Can have ever done.

"For my taste," says Karoli, "the album is too spartan. There's too little guitar – because I was too conscious about every little thing. Afterwards I think the guitar on 'One More Night' is very beautiful, but much too soft. This song was 'painted'.

"We put down a rhythm tape. I played a backing track that sounded like a drum. Damo came up with the idea that it sounded like people in New York with knives. So we said, 'Ah, New York.' Irmin did a harmonic thing that sounded like falling rain; I did a wah-wah thing that added to it… we really made a painting of a rainy New York night. 'Spoon' and 'Vitamin C' were old pieces, though. The whole of the second side we made in one day.

"I was completely despaired. We only had two more days left to record and only three pieces to hand. On the new record we have got much more into magic rhythm – like 'One More Night' is a magic rhythm."

He goes on to describe the construction of a piece for the new album. It started with him having a conversation with an English electronics expert as to why his Sony TV set should have a clearer picture than any other brand. The guy told him that it was because the colour screen, rather than being composed of a series of tiny dots, is in this case composed of fine stripes. The term for this is "striped mask". Karoli was musing upon this while watching it one night as a programme on a Trinidadian street festival appeared.

"The dancers wore masks with beautiful names; for example 'the devil's bride'. I had this curious chant running through my head – '*striped mask/whole mask/shadow mask*'. I had already written lyrics about getting up in the morning and being shaky and needing something to warm me up. I put those in. We went into the studio, Irmin took an old broken-down double bass and started beating the strings just below the bridge. I played timbales. Jaki played bongos. Holger played bass. It has a rhythm like a fish swimming slowly in water. It is extremely powerful. The mask text gets completely magic."

Karoli then spends 20 minutes explaining the spiral of life to me… complete with illustrated biro drawings that look like continuations on the yin-yang symbol.

"I like to use everything I can to my advantage," he concludes, "even if it is negative experience. Some people had a hard time at school," he explains, "so they tend to subconsciously want to forget everything to do with it. I have had teachers I hated, but still they have taught me some things.

"Holger and Jaki are dealing more with ordinary life – especially Holger. Jaki's approach is completely musical. He doesn't care about other things. I am very lazy – Holger is very busy. That separates us quite a lot. Each one of us wants to achieve power. I want to achieve power within myself… Actually, my dream is to be able to wake up in the morning and make tea without getting up," he sniggers.

"Holger's approach to life is not dictated by music. Holger denies many of these things for himself, but he has learnt the form of music at university. I have never learnt it – I just found out it was impossible to live without it anyway.

"Holger's the working man. He does all the recordings. His way of achieving power is that he has always kept us away from the recording machines."

Karoli's ambition is to write major lyrics about television, which he says is one of his greatest influences – a new religion almost. He has also written a multi-layered piece inspired by the soft latex rubber centre found in golf balls.

"I would say that the Germans cannot help being deep. They are always really deep. Like, before I was in Can I made much meditation. I did yoga, played a lot of music… or I was sitting at the table – it sounds really crazy – trying to get the Cosmic Chord together. I finished up trying to compare the mathematics of the distances between the planets."

Chiana is staggering towards us across the ballroom floor.

Having bundled her into the car through torrential rain, we spend 20 minutes cruising the sea front for the hotel that she knows full well she never booked into. On the way back to London she wants to know if I will join her in the back seat as she is getting cold. Finally we drop her at Notting Hill Gate. The more she refuses to accept from you, the more you give. Finally she accepts a couple of quid for the cab fare and makes off through the rain.

One more night. *Peter Erskine* •



So – der first phase iss komplete. Ve haff kaptured der NME ! Tomorrow ...der vorld!

Ja kinder, gather round while Krautrockers **CAN** *get rocking with Stockhausen at der Hastings Pier Pavilion, and reveal a sordid*

Evolving slowly, with a closed circle around them, the EAGLES are preparing for greatness. But, as one reporter discovers, their jarring personalities may not help them. "I love Bernie Leadon and I hate him," says Don Henley. "You know what I mean?"

"A certain Western charisma"

— MELODY MAKER APRIL 12 —

ON A CLEAR day in Hollywood, Glenn Frey can see from his living room right out to sea, right across the Pacific to Catalina, the island off the coast of Southern California. On a not so clear day, he can see layers of orange smog, the product of the internal combustion engine, which is God in this part of America.

Today is clear and the view is quite breathtaking. Certainly conducive to writing those typical Los Angeles soft-rock melodies with which the Eagles have become synonymous.

It doesn't take a fortune teller to predict that 1975 is going to be the big year for the Eagles. They've been clicking their boot heels for three years now, steadily building a reputation in the wake of The Byrds, waiting for the breakthrough that their third album, *On The Border*, has seemingly now brought about. Although it's easing down the charts right now, it's established the band as a force to be reckoned with.

"*On The Border* was the best-sounding record we ever made, but that's also experience. We're starting to learn how to become recording artists, which is a little different from learning how to be a member of a band or how to become a singer-songwriter.

"There're definitely things we've learned slowly over a couple of years of making records. I know when we made *Desperado* we were very conscious of having a group identity running through the songs, and that was something we learned out of doing the first album.

"After doing that one, when we went in to do *On The Border* we tried to bring in the best elements from both the albums. That probably had something to do with it, but I think it was a better album anyway. I think we just progressed and played with a little more confidence. But mainly I think it's that we stayed together."

Another factor which Frey credits as being important to the group's recent success is the introduction of Don Felder on slide guitar. Felder, »



GETTY



The Eagles in 1975: (l–r) Randy Meisner, Bernie Leadon, Glenn Frey, Don Felder and Don Henley

says Frey, put extra punch into the Eagles' live show, with the added result that they picked up more followers. "I believe in selling records on the road, and I believe that if you work hard and have a good album out, it will sell.

"Since we got Felder in the band we've had a much better second half, the rock'n'roll half, in our shows. The other part, the vocal-harmony softer part, was always real good, but Felder nails down the harder stuff.

"He's like Duane Allman: he drives the band on certain songs. Some slide players, myself included, just slide along with the song, but when Felder plays slide he drives the band and the whole thing revolves around him. So the year that we promoted *On The Border* we had a much better show together."

Desperado was a concept album in as much as many of the tunes dealt with the old West. It seemed curious, I remarked, that a band would travel to England from America to make that kind of record.

"Well," mused Glenn. "I guess you're right, but Clint Eastwood made all those cowboy movies of his in Italy. Some of the best Western movies have been made in Europe. You get a whole new perspective working in England. All of a sudden you're a foreigner, and it put us and LA and everything into perspective. Now I like staying here, although we tried going to Miami for part of this new album. We got some stuff accomplished there, but not nearly as much as we did recording here."

Another factor which possibly aided the success of the last album was their decision to tour with some of the material before it was put down on tape. Thus not only were audiences already familiar with the tracks, but the band had an opportunity to work on them before they reached the studio.

"I think we did about five songs on a college tour," said Glenn. "We were out there testing them, mixing them in with the better-known songs. I think it's good to do it that way sometimes, because it forces you to make a presentation immediately.

"It forces you to give a rendering immediately so vocal parts get simplified, and backing parts and guitar parts get honed down to what you can do best to present the song. By the time we get to the studio there's a whole basic sketch already done.

"With this next album we haven't done that, but again this album so far is nothing but our own songs. On the others we usually included a song by another writer or called in a friend like Jackson [Browne] or John David [Souther] to help on a track. We may do that in the next two weeks, though.

"This is maybe a reason why it's taking longer to make than other albums, but another reason is that Don Henley and I are trying to change the traditional symbolic rock'n'roll lyrics that most people use on albums.

"The songs have been finished for a while but we've sat around thinking whether we ought to change them. All we have to do now is to go in and sing the parts, and that's when it'll begin to sound like an Eagles record. Whenever I hear backing tracks, I can't think of it being the Eagles at all, a long way from 'Peaceful Easy Feeling'."

Last summer, the Eagles backed Neil Young at a Native American benefit concert near San Francisco, an experience which may be repeated this year, and one which Frey recollects with more than a little pride.



"The guy that put it together was our art director, and he knows the native California Indians and he approached Neil Young who said he'd do it. He didn't commit himself until three or four days before the concert, though, because he didn't want it to be advertised.

"We had a great jam on 'Cowgirl In The Sand' with me and Felder and Neil trading solos for about 12 minutes. We hope to make it an annual event as we're doing another one this May. I'm into doing things for them because I figure we're living on their land even if I don't have one iota of guilt about it.

"The Indians knew how to live here properly and a lot of people are starting to think this way and realise their Old West consciousness. I'm into the western civilisation mysticism. Over here people are always turning to the east, but I figure it's all right here if we want to look for it.

"I'm sure some of this Indian and Mexican influence was with us when we were doing *Desperado*, as we had a great time doing the little links between songs, the banjo and traditional things. I would like to do another concept album, though I'm not sure what the premise would be."

Frey's song "Best Of My Love" undoubtedly gave *On The Border* sales a boost. It was, he says, an attempt to work off a guitar tuning that Joni Mitchell had demonstrated. "Actually, I got into a totally different tuning and that's how the song ended up.

"I had a little help from John David Souther, who worked on the bridge and rang me up from LA when I was in England to play it over the phone. We actually worked on it over the phone until he came to England to see us. 'Cry Like A Lover' came about the same way, working on the phone over all that distance."

Collaboration with other LA musicians is a way of life in California, as can usually be detected by reading album credits as well as noticing various similarities in the actual music.

"On songwriting, I do it all the time," admits Frey. "If I get something I can't finish by myself, it's always good to take it to someone else. We collaborate among ourselves, but Souther helps us out sometimes.

"It's not so much calling up for help in an emergency as just calling and suggesting we spend an evening writing together and picking up on fragments. The funny thing that we find with the guys in the Eagles and Souther and Jackson is how much we think alike. Whenever anyone plays something, we tend to pick on it right away."

This summer the Eagles are making their first trip to England in over 18 months. They're tentatively scheduled to appear with Elton John at Wembley Stadium on June 21 along with stablemate Joe Walsh.

"What I like about playing in England," said Frey as we drew to a close, "is the attentiveness of the audience. In America we tend to play to very boisterous crowds, but in England they sit and listen and I just thrive on that.

"We found when we played our first ever gigs in England that being American helped us. Being an American unknown in America is a drag, but being an American unknown in England is cool. We found we had a certain amount of Western charisma. I didn't realise it until people started looking at my cowboy boots and asking where I got them."

Chris Charlesworth



"When Felder plays slide, the whole thing revolves around him"

— NME JUNE 28 —

WE'RE SITTING IN a bar more or less opposite from Rotterdam's Hilton hotel, Elektra Asylum's press officer Monty Smith and me. Elektra Asylum (the label comes under EMI's wing in Britain but when the contract expires very soon, it's more than likely EMI'll no longer distribute the label over here) have flown me to Holland to see the Eagles perform at the city's Ahoy Halle, thinking that the Dutch gig'll put the group in a more favourable light than their Wembley, London, gig some three days later.

There's also a faint chance that I'll get to talk to the Eagles, a rare occurrence by all accounts, although the band'll be given the whole *Rolling Stone* cover job a couple of issues hence.

In fact, the Eagles' drummer/singer/writer Don Henley has got word to Monty that he'd especially like to meet me after the review that appeared in this paper a couple of weeks ago of their new album *One Of These Nights*. Prior to hearing the *One Of These Nights* record I'd been an unreserved fan of the group, but on *One Of These Nights* it seemed as though they just weren't doing their best any more.

A few minutes later we're sitting around a dining table with Eagles manager Irving Azoff, a bearded, bespectacled gent, around five feet tall,

who also manages Joe Walsh (appearing with the Eagles at the Ahoy Halle), Dan Fogelberg and Minnie Riperton.

Azoff is eating his dinner. He refers to me as the band's ex-favourite writer and suggests that we drive on down to the gig with the Dutch promoter, a friendly enough gesture. But when the question of an interview comes up, he says it's right out after that review.

And when the Eagles do an interview, all five have to participate, otherwise those who don't get interviewed get jealous; a situation that arose when Henley and Glenn Frey (very much the band's leader judging from the subsequent gig) used to do all the interviews.

"We're not over here to make money. We're over here to sell a few records," says Azoff on the drive to the gig. "The Eagles are five times bigger than Walsh over here. In England they both sell about the same."

Azoff asks if we've seen the band before. No, says Monty. Yes, say I. Either way, he says, we'll be surprised at the difference guitarist Don Felder has made to the band.

The Ahoy Halle is a cycling stadium. And it shows backstage, where the dressing rooms are fitted with all the facilities a Hugh Porter would desire. The atmosphere is very relaxed, not to mention casual, as Walsh's band sit around waiting to go on.

Monty and I have been directed towards Walsh's dressing room. But hang on. Isn't this an Eagle? Yes, it's Don Henley, denimmed and tired after spending the previous night at Les Ambassadeurs, where he gambled away $2,500 with Elton John's mob playing blackjack (that's pontoon to you).

"You're the guy who got the facts wrong" – Henley's opening words. He explains what I got wrong and he's very serious about it all. "I'm trying not to be nasty," he says.

The main thing that bothers him is that I said it was Glenn Frey who sang lead vocal on the title track of *One Of These Nights*, whereas it was Henley himself singing. But there's a couple of other things, too, like where I said there were mandolins on the album, whereas in fact the instrument being played was a 12-string guitar. Also I was wrong about "Too Many Hands". "The song's about the planet," Henley explains. "It's not about a woman."

I thought it was about a woman. One line goes: "*There's too many hands begin laid on her.*" But the "her" the hands are being laid is the cacology, I think. I apologised. Henley refuses to be drawn into conversation and wanders off to his dressing room.

Joe Walsh and band play the opening set. We're sitting in the front row. As Saturday's Wembley show proves, Walsh wasn't exactly giving his all at Rotterdam and his guitar playing was lost in the overall mix.

Backstage, Eagle Bernie Leadon (there's a story that Leadon got tired of being a pop star first, musician second and almost quit the band a year or so back) tunes his banjo. "We haven't played in 10 days. My fingers are out of shape and so is my voice."

It didn't really show in the band's subsequent set, since everything except for bassist Randy Meisner's voice was record perfect. It wasn't Meisner's fault. Something was wrong in the mix, causing his vocals to very nearly vanish.

Glenn Frey's first on stage, looking slightly athletic as he runs to pick up his guitar, wearing a sloppy baseball jersey with the figure nine emblazoned on the shirt's back. Frey sings lead as the group go into an all-electric version of what amounts to their signature tune, "Take It Easy", Leadon playing a solo on Telecaster. Frey switches to the grand piano left on the stage and the band play "Outlaw Man", a great rock'n'roll song from their *Desperado* album.

The Eagles are capable of performing their excellent songs with an admirable precision, yet they lack any real onstage presence or facility for projection. One gets the feeling they're merely going through the motions.

Fine moments aside, like rendering of "Peaceful Easy Feeling", a love song from their first album, the set gets pegged at one level and goes on for far too long. The audience response, needless to say, was ecstatic.

Azoff invites me up on stage for the last couple of encores, "Best Of My Love" and "Tequila Sunrise", and a close look at the band gives me the impression that it is Leadon more than any others who is attracted by what they're doing on stage.

(The Eagles' Wembley set was a much superior performance. The show had more balance, climaxing with a particularly astonishing delivery of their Number One American hit "Best Of My Love", the vocal harmonies being a true intestinal joy.)

Frey seems in good spirits after the gig and after we're introduced he says, "I didn't mind your review."

How about an interview later, I ask, and he more or less agrees, saying: "I'll say 'yes' to anything, especially to her," pointing both retinas in the direction of the golden-skinned blonde who's next to him. "Come back to the bar at the hotel and we'll feel it out," Frey says, referring to an interview.

Azoff's hanging around outside in the corridor. I tell him that Glenn seems to be into doing an interview. "No way," says the manager. "If one of the group says they don't want to do an interview then there's no interview and Don Henley doesn't want to talk to you." I see.

Back at the Hilton, Monty approaches Henley again. Henley withdraws. We go on down to the hotel's discotheque where various members of Walsh's band are already ensconced. Drinks are ordered and it seems that the Eagles have either decided to take an early night or have slouched off to some other habitat to do their relaxing.

Less than 15 minutes later Glenn Frey and I are discussing the new album and just why the group are so reluctant to do interviews. As regards *One Of These Nights*, Frey's attitude towards the review I'd written seems to have changed a little since our brief encounter after the gig.

He now defends the album, saying that every band should be allowed some self-indulgence now and again, with particular reference to the six-minute-plus instrumental on the album "Journey Of The Sorcerer". When it comes to the subject of interviews, he compares their attitude to Joni's sentiment that it's all in the music, man. And despite her recalcitrance, Joni's albums still get in the charts. True enough.

Henley joins us and we proceed to make friends. He says that he did feel very bitter towards me but it's all better now. He appears very intense and drunk, and suddenly discloses that members of the band don't get along too well.

"I love Bernie Leadon and I hate Bernie Leadon. You know what I mean?" says Henley.

Frey returns to the table and I once again requests a more formal interview, perhaps later in the week in London. Frey doesn't want to know, but Henley now seems keen to do an interview, saying not to take Frey's word as final on the interview situation.

Two days later at a party for the acts appearing at Wembley, Henley, Frey and I meet again. Frey wishes to make clear something that he's said to me in Rotterdam about not giving a damn about record sales in England, saying he does care about the band's record success over here.

Another request for an interview is turned down since Frey has to leave the country early to go and visit his folks in Detroit, where the Eagles are playing their next gig. Henley, however, asks me to call him up at this hotel, the Inn On The Park (he's staying at a different hotel to the rest of the band) on Sunday, which I subsequently do only to find that he's not at it. I do, however, contact Henley on Monday morning and after exchanging a few words with the drummer, Azoff is put on the phone. He proceeds to call me to order for contacting an artist without going through the necessary channels, and says that if I'm as unfair to Joe Walsh (an interview has been arranged between myself and Walsh) as I have been to the Eagles I'll never get near one of his artists again.

A couple of hours later, Walsh calls the interview off, fearing a hatchet job. I'm just tired of the whole thing. I know they're sensitive people but this is pushing it a bit. *Steve Clarke* •



Recalcitrant pop star shrugs off earnest request for interview

This, says STEVE CLARKE, who ran afoul of THE EAGLES in Rotterdam, is pushing it a bit.

"It's all balls and nothin' else – and it takes gettin' into": Dr Feelgood on stage in London, 1975





"What it's all about"

DR FEELGOOD, "four guys on stage giving it a bit of stick", are on a roll. Led Zeppelin are fans, and they're not the only ones. But are they just R&B revivalists? "I ain't never 'eard nothin' like us before," says singer Lee Brilleaux. "You gotta go up there and be a nutcase."

REX FEATURES



— NME JUNE 14 —

SO WHAT HAPPENED to the mohairs then, Lee?

"I've got a mohair. It's in shreds at the moment. After you've sweated into it a few times it comes out like the cardboard they put in shirt collars. It's all down to Terylene now, I think."

Such are the strains of the Dr Feelgood stage act on sartorial aesthetics. If you've seen lead singer, harp player and erstwhile slide guitarist Lee Brilleaux work out you'll know what I mean. And if you haven't seen the Feelgoods by now I don't know where you've been.

Brilleaux, elegantly attired in a pair of denim drainies that taper down into twin rubberised mounds of black suede brothel-creeper, is sat in the offices of "Oil City Enterprises", alias the upstairs room of "Feelgood House", a modest little detached pink-brick job nestling in the suburbs of Canvey Island.

As yes… Canvey, where the pylons grow tall and the oil refineries rise and rust out of the flat scrubby landscape of the Thames Estuary, half-built and now abandoned once the American oil companies had decided they were no longer "commercially viable". A sore point with the residents, that. Didn't Wilko Johnson himself get arrested at a public demonstration about the refineries?

Later for The Roots, though – enough of the Canvey/Southend mythology has been chronicled elsewhere (not least by our own Nick Kent and Max Bell) not to need further elaboration here.

So Feelgood House, as well as being the home of manager Chris Fenwick and Brilleaux since late last year, also serves as the band's HQ, with a squat four-track studio out back. On the walls are numerous Feelgood artefacts, including a poster for the band's upcoming tour of Europe with the familiar logo figure of the "Doctor" himself. Leering from the cabin of a roaring juggernaut.

The band have already launched a commando-style four-day foray into France, culminating in an already legendary gig at the Bataclan, Paris. This time, they'll be going in earnest, with gigs in "most every country outside the totalitarian-state jobs".

But then there's a whole flurry of activity in the Feelgood camp at present. There was their party-stopping appearance at the post-Earl's Court Led Zeppelin festivities (of which more later); and an offer to play the Crystal Palace concert that was gratefully declined ("all that arguing about when you got on"); and a new single – "Back In The Night" – out next week.

And all this hard on the heels of a British tour that should lay low the oft-voiced suggestion that the Feelgood stage charisma was too rooted in the zeitgeist of early-'60s R&B ever to cut it in the arena of provincial teendom. The "the kids" couldn't relate, in short – that's if you can still give credence to a term that covers everything from the pubescent excesses of Rollerama to the karma-chewing docility of a Yes audience.

"The Kids" anyway. So what sort of "kids" go to a Feelgood gig?

"Well, if you'd have asked me six months ago who came to see us," begins Brilleaux, "I would 'ave said it was the Charlie Gillett lot – revival crowd, y'know, art-school types, students, that sort – which is roughly the category that us as geezers fall into.

"I mean," he points out, with a flourish, "we're not street punks, y'know."

After all, there is Wilko Johnson BA on lead, while Brilleaux himself spent three-and-a-half years as a law clerk before going pro musician – law school and all. "Canvey's a bit different to everywhere else," he explains. "The law's a bit different too – the bloke I worked for has been struck off now."

But to the issue… "Now it's the kids 'oo support Man Utd who come to see us – the same sort of kids 'oo were in Paris last week at the [Leeds] match."

That's right, those kind of kids.

"Now the kids, who're 15 or 16, they don't know anything about The Big Three or Kingsize Taylor, that's nothin' to them – they just see it as four guys on stage now who are a little bit punchy, who are giving a bit of stick."

See, while the Feelgoods have had half the rock journalists in the country scrabbling round for adjectives graphically heinous enough to describe a stage act that verges on the truly deranged, they've invariably also been considered by some as some kind of fossilised '60s curio thrown up by a time warp down there in Canvey.

I mean, never mind the music for a moment; just take the collective Feelgood image. These blokes come on like they're working a protection racket on seaside amusement arcades. Street punks they're not, but equally they're not the type you'd elbow out the way to get to the bar. Or let's just say that they suggest a lifestyle somewhat less wholesome than the likes of those regularly feature on *Top Of The Pops* and *The Old Grey Whistle Test*.

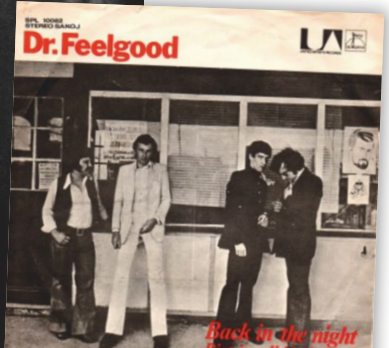
In an age of self-parody, though, originality can be an undervalued commodity – hence the notion among chic London circles that it's all some kind of pose, a suggestion guaranteed to bring forth indignant amazement from the group.

"It's like an actor has to exaggerate things," says Brilleaux, "and the bigger the stage the more 'e 'as to exaggerate – 'cos the people at the back can't see. In that sense, we do try and transmit an 'image', but we don't think, 'Right, OK boys, let's go out there an' lay it on 'em, we're gonna »

IAN DICKSON/GETTY



Dr Feelgood backstage in London, 1975: (l-r) John Martin (AKA The Big Figure), Lee Brilleaux, John B Sparks, Wilko Johnson



The best local group in the world

NME AUG 23 The Feelgoods lay waste to Baker Gurvitz Army and their like.



Lee Brilleaux performing at the Roman amphitheatre in Orange, France, 1975

ORANGE FESTIVAL FRANCE
LIVE!
AUGUST 16

ANOTHER THING YOU should remember about France, South of, in Claudius' day or your own, is that the place boasts abundant natural chauffage, a fair slice of soleil, and that in such conditions even the most placid of temperaments can be worn down after a while and stimulated into the most horrific acts. One thinks uneasily of Pamplona and the dreaded Noonday Sun – as Dr Feelgood's privately commisioned four-motored Handley Page monoplane touches lightly down on the sweat-soaked grass of Avignon Airport.

Airport ? Hah! Battle of France emergency strip, more like. And a score of blue-overalled *douaniers* leg at top speed out of a Nissen hut and into the Feelgoods' plane. Looking for you-know-what, one supposes, though one does hear extraordinary things concerning the local commercial pulling power of marmelade. Nixenheimer *gefunden*, tho', and after a while one perceives that the dreaded *demi-flics* are actually not at all disgruntled by the fearsome heat and are actually getting off on the experience.

"Silly buggers, Frogs" snorts Lee Brilleaux. And he's right. There's the usual panic over hire cars (there's actually too many, *parbleu*) but before too long even that is sorted out to the satisfaction of tour manager Jake – who is adept in Frogspeak to a degree, mightily unusual in Britbands – and the Feelgoods' caravanserai is soon heading for the fabled town of Avignon, on the bridge of which one dances, etc.

Avignon is some way to the north of Orange, home of the famed Claudian amphitheatre etc, etc, and it transpires that not even the environs of the smaller town are penetrable by vehicles owing to the extraordinary density of the legions of Soufafrance youth packed therein. In the amphitheatre, on top of the amphitheatre in the most unbelievable precarious positions, outside the amphitheatre...

They're not at all here specifically for the Doctor, mind you. But I've also got this feeling that it's not T Dream who've packed them in – 12,000-plus into a 200-year-old 9,000-seater, at grave risk to life, limb and *cul*.

The Baker Gurvitz Army ? Never. Procol Harum ? Well on the cards, I should have thought, and yet it's the total strength of this bill – which has The Doctor in that key mid-shot slot – which has brought the punters in such strength.

As all readers of *NME* will have twigged long ago, Dr Feelgood is not exactly short of admirers among the editorial staff of this paper. Me, I've seen the band about a dozen times on various occasions, but all of these gigs were what you'd term small jobs – pubs, the Marquee, Dingwalls – and I must confess I'd long wondered how Feelgood (recently and cogently described as "the best local group in the world" by a coiner of epigrams) would make out on a high-velocity, big-deal, maximum-crowd occasion.

But the Feelgoods have been Speeding Through Europe, and the Orange gig is one on a scale they've recently grown accustomed to. Being accustomed to it, they're in no fear of delivering. Delivering, I'll remind you, is what the F Goods do better than almost anyone else.

Mind you, there is John Martyn, who we hear getting applause for his last number as our party enters the chariot stables (the backstage area). Martyn is apoplectic with disbelief when he comes off stage. "Couldn't believe it," he splutters to *ZigZag*'s Andy Childs. "Play on one beat, they clap on another. Couldn't see what was going on, me eyes were shut, but I had to change to get in time with them. Then they changed back again."

The Feelgoods are next on, but there seems to be about a 20-minute timelag. During that time a massive and belligerent roar from the amphitheatre – of the sort a vintage crowd would make after the Fisher collected his thumbs-down, way back when – summons all idle eyes on the spectacle of a french *petit fasciste* being soundly booed by the entire crowd for something or other.

He keeps his cool, but seems glad to make it backstage unharmed. With typical logic, his mates – about 20, all armed with pipes and cudgels – come charging backstage to sort out somebody (couldn't take on the crowd, could they?) and for a few moments there's some ugly scenes.

> **"Johnson's pickless right hand thrums and chops away at his black Tele"**

Lee Brilleaux and the Feelgoods' manager Chris Fenwick watch from their caravan door with narrowed eyes, Oil City natural reactions hovering on the brink. No need. nobody gets mauled and the clowns are ejected.

On goes the Doctor. The Doctor crunches the crowd. As was predictable given the incredible acoustics, the odd atmosphere of edginess-mixed-with-ecstasy, the setting and The Figure, Sparko, Wilko Johnson and Lee Brilleaux. Brilleaux is in white, Johnson – as ever – in black. The interplay between the two, with the able Sparks grooving away in support but not in competition, drives the audience straightaway onto its feet in rapture.

Brilleaux's ability to ignore Johnson's splendidly crazed gyratious makes the front line weave a kind of serpentine dance which never, never, but never, comes to grief. Johnson's pickless right hand thrums and chops away at his black Tele and every so often he steps forward to add vocal support, an act so oddly normal that it almost seems out of place, considering who he is and all, and what he does and all.

In fact, Wilko tends to vocalise more on his own numbers – and get this, punters, the crowd, being mere Frogs, are unweaned on the early R&B classics which are the Doctor's original stock-in-trade, and not knowing what they're supposed to to like (Christ, what an advantage) plump in equal parts of approval for Johnson's own compositions (featured extensively on "Down By The Jetty") and stuff like "I'm A Hog For You Baby" and "Riot In Cell Block #9" – with the possible exception of "Route 66" the Doctor's closing shot. Johnson is savagely elated by this when he comes off stage. "Did you notice that?" he hisses. "And Nick Kent knocked my songs!"

There's a general decision made not to remain for Procol, and besides, the Gurvites are starting to look a bit fashionable backstage, and "fashionable" in that sense the Feelgoods are not. Anyway they're knackered, and the grey mood of anticlimax is beginning to settle.

Back in Avignon, an hour later, nothing is happening. Mind you, there are two picturesque sets of local churchtower clock bells, each of which peals the time one-and-a-half maddening minutes out of sync with the other, so nobody gets any real sleep. But you don't want to read about that. *Tony Tyler*

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come down there and wind bike chains round their 'eads.'

"It's not that that's the vibe we're trying to give to these kids; it's just that so much of the act is down to audience contact, even down to facial expressions. You gotta go up there and be a bit of a chauvinist bastard, be a wild, violent nutcase. Which is something I really enjoy bein'. I think it's great, I do it in the supermarket all the time."


Wilko chops out his unique lead-meets-rhythm guitar sound

THE COROLLARY TO the idea that the Feelgoods' hoodlum panache and psychotic stage presence is a "put-on" is that musically they're bankrupt – merely a "revival band" recycling the R&B without having too much new to say.

In particular, write-ups of the act a year or more ago in their pub-rock period – the gigs at the Holloway Road Lord Nelson are already acquiring an almost mythic aura – invariably homed in on their performance of such classic black arias as "Riot In Cell Block #9" and "I'm A Hog For You Baby", while passing over the less-familiar Wilko Johnson originals that have since become the band's staple diet.

Brilleaux is adamant that the band "aren't interested in reviving anything. I don't look on it as just playing old rock songs. It was like that at first maybe, but now… well, I ain't never 'eard nothin' like us before."

Stop and think about it and neither have you. There hasn't been anything. Sure, I've heard all the comparisons to early Stones and Yardbirds – and sure, there's the same raw pounding intensity and commitment – but beyond that, the Feelgoods' instrumental prowess alone puts them apart from what nostalgia might remember of the past. Not to mention a stage act that's pure '70s in inspiration.

"Like, I've listened to all that Merseybeat stuff," continues Brilleaux, "'cos I didn't really listen to it much first time round [he turned 23 last month], and obviously, there's four or five English guys up there playing American R&B and so on, there's bound to be similarities. But because it's 1975 and not 1964, and we've all lived through a lot of things that have happened on the way, it comes out different.

"Like we were talking about reggae earlier [LB's something of a skank fan, see], and once you've listened to that your ideas about rhythm are never gonna be the same again."

And while Feelgood music is founded solidly on the black R&B tradition – "the spark, the flame of what it's all about" as Brilleaux tells it – the way they've interpreted that tradition is entirely their own.

Much of it is down to Wilko's guitar, which casts aside the usual roles of lead and rhythm and pours forward a constant chatter of frills, fills, riffs, runs and power chords that'd make Uncle Keith blush. All spilling out from a churning right hand that never seems to vary its speed – a style that picks up where Cropper and Richards left off, with a cold metallic tone that's a strictly personal feature.

IT'S A MISTAKE, though, to underestimate the rest of the band. There's Sparko's nimble bass chords and runs for a start, providing a rumbling backdrop for Wilko's expeditions, or the Figure's pile-driving drumming which syncs unobtrusively. Lee's harp-playing has gone from strength to strength (Little Walter is the big influence), while his gruff, almost sinister vocal style betrays the same South Side Chicago influences.

"I'm trying to get my way out of the shouting bit. It all comes from the days of lousy PAs. I could sing better if I'd lay back a bit, but I can't do it. I like shouting, it's fun."

Most criticism of the band, though, has been directed at and around their debut, *Down By The Jetty* album, where the band's preference for a lean, muscular sound that relies as much on energy and precision as on the vagaries of production to make its impact. While the album has been selling steadily, most Feelgood aficionados who had been fed on a diet of their pub-rock gigs were disappointed with the band's showing on wax. The chosen production technique was taken to the point of abandoning all idea of overdubs – and even recording in mono.

Brilleaux's reactions to criticism of *Down By The Jetty* range from the blunt – "We're not interested in a production exercise, we're a rock'n'roll band" – to the more considered…

"None of us had much experience in the studio, and it can be a dangerous thing for a band to go in the studio for the first time and think they're some sort of Allen Toussaint. And they've got all these marvellous ideas they've dreamed up while they bin smashed outta their 'eads for the last three years.

"Perhaps it does lack dynamism here and there; perhaps we could 'ave



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added an extra couple of guitars here and there, but I'd rather have taken the risk we did than to 'ave gone overboard with a load of guitars all twangy and jingly, and the drums like a fuckin' military band 'cos of all the overdubs…

"It's not a big commercial thing that's gonna come leaping out the speakers of every car radio in the land; it's more like a John Lee 'Ooker record – it's all balls and nothin' else and it takes gettin' into."

The simplest solution, in fact, is simply to play the bugger ever harder and turn up the volume control. As a first album, it's a classic in any case, far from flawless but with an identity (remember identity?) and a sizeable clutch of original songs that put it way up on most of the last 12 months' comparable first albums.

"A lot of people wanted something closer to the stage act," admits Brilleaux, "but we had to say, 'Look we're not a revival band', and putting lots of originals on the album was one way of saying it. I mean, I don't want to listen to Dr Feelgood doing 'Riot In Cell Block #9'. I got The Coasters' version downstairs, which is just definitive; there's nothing more to say about that song except live, of course, when you can get an atmosphere."

> "I could sing better if I'd lay back a bit, but I like shouting – it's fun"

People who want a live Feelgood album will get one eventually when the time is right. The next album, it seems, will be a different pocket of ozone altogether. For a start the Feelgoods have been "experimenting with a few overdubs" in their studio, and now feel sufficiently au fait with recording techniques to take a few chances in that direction next time round. In fact, Sparko is thinking of recording another local band by the name of Eddie & The Hotrods.

There's also several Wilko originals in various stages of progression – indeed the band were later witnessed after the interview getting their chops together on one such number under the helpful guidance of producer Vic Maile.

So far all the group's own songs have come from Wilko, the best of them, like "All Through The City", "She Does It Right" and "Keep It Out Of Sight", taut, anguished three-minute numbers tailor-made for the band. "I know he could write songs that'll stretch out more," opines Lee. "I think he will, eventually. He has a good sense of melody, but it's a simple band, and what with me getting my singing style more from the blues shouters than, uh, Nat King Cole, the melodies have to be restricted. They add to the rhythm."

Brilleaux himself says he's rather write one great song than 50 album fillers, but thinks the band may include "Rollin' and Tumblin'", which features him on slide guitar. It's an instrument he plays with all the considered violence of a demolition hardhat going up against a brick wall. The way they play it, the Feelgoods' "Rollin' and Tumblin'" has more to do with early Velvet Underground than with Skip James.

"I used to play slide when I was 16," Brilleaux says, "on Elmore James numbers, as was all the rage then. Then we got an advance, I bought meself a Guild and got into it again. It helps break the sound up."

Suggestions that the 'Goods are, in fact, in need of a fifth instrument have not gone unnoticed.

"Sometimes I think it'd be good if we 'ad another instrument so we could all lay back a bit more – 'cos the smaller the band, the 'arder you got to work; it means you can't rely on anyone else to do your job. But then, that's one reason why I like working with an outfit this size – it means you got to give all you got every time."

Every time?

"Yeah, it's a golden rule with the Feelgoods that you give your last bit to every gig. It has to be. Like in the old days when we were greedy for bread 'cos we needed it to live, we often had to double up and do two gigs in a night, and we'd say, 'Oh, let's hold back on the first.'

But after five minutes you couldn't 'old back – everybody would be, 'Oh, fuck it, I don't care if I die in the taxi on my way to the next gig, this is where we are, this one.'

"It's amazing. Sometimes you think, 'I can't get on that stage tonight, my bones ache, I'm completely knackered.' But you get out there and the energy comes from somewhere. God knows where. And it's got to be there, 'cos that's what it's all about – that and nothing more…"

WHICH IS PERHAPS what Robert Plant had in mind when he recently said that the Feelgoods were "the best band in the world outside of Led Zeppelin".

All right, so there's a bit of drunken exhilaration in there (itself a pretty rare commodity these days), but when you think about it, Dr Feelgood have broken most of the rules of what a '70s rock band should be and do, have made their own rules as they went along, have inspired people to, as Brilleaux admits, "stick their necks out for the band".

And that, I would suggest, you can't do unless you carry within you the germ of what this whole rock'n'roll caboodle is all about.

But tell us, Lee, how come the Feelgoods were playing the Zep party?

"Well, Plant'd been up to see us a couple of times at this little club up in Dudley near where he lives – it was 'im rather than the rest of the band that invited us, like – and it would have been bad manners to refuse anyway. I knew it wasn't going to do us any harm to play there, but the other business connections it had didn't fall into place until afterwards."

The business connections referred to lie mostly in the presence of Atlantic boss Ahmet Ertegun at the gig, who together with Zep manager Peter Grant was rumoured to have been more than a trifle interested in the boys. Not that they're unhappy with the deal they have here with United Artists – on the contrary – simply that UA aren't planning to release *Down By The Jetty* Stateside and, well, Atlantic…

"There wasn't a stroke pulled," explains Lee. "It wasn't a number or anything like: 'Here's a chance for you boys to prove yourselves.' I wasn't even told Ahmet would be there till I arrived. I flipped. Actually, we thought everyone would be into their pose, but it turned out to be a good gig."

WHATEVER THE BUSINESS machinations that ensue, Atlantic or no, the Feelgoods remain the definitive stage act in Britain and it must surely only be a matter of time before they do crack the wider markets represented best by the singles and album charts.

But whether "Back In The Night" will be the single that does it for 'em I have my doubts (B-side is a live cut of Bo Diddley's "I'm A Man" with Wilko singing); which is a shame, 'cos right now one appearance of the 'Goods on the likes of *Top Of The Pops* could well change the Earth's axis and project the UK into a tropical zone. Something would 'appen…

"We've done three TV appearances," said Brilleaux. "*TV 45*, the *Whistle Test* – I thought that 'ad a touch of class, meself – and *The Geordie Scene*, and it's doubled or trebled our door at gigs. Stupid.

"When we did *The Geordie Scene* they put us all on elephant drums – circus tubs like – and I looked down and it was all these infants, these nine-year-old girls! I thought, 'I can't do this act in front of these girls, it's evil, there ought to be a law against it or something.'

"I mean, I'm not that much of a pervert." *Neil Spencer* •

BRILLEAUX AGONISTES

There's an old tale they tell in Canvey Island on moonless nights when the smell of the oil drifts in from the Estuary and the only sounds are the forlorn baying of the super-tankers mingled with the chip-chip-chip of Wilko Johnson whittling his thumb. But you ain't gonna read it here, Pancho. What you are *gonna read, straight from the harmonica player's mouth, is the grisly tale of Dr. Feelgood's* **LEE BRILLEAUX** *and What He Thinks Of It So Far. By* **NEIL SPENCER,** *who's Feeling Good.*



1975

JULY – SEPTEMBER

EMMYLOU HARRIS, BOB MARLEY, STEVE MARRIOTT AND MORE



Lou Reed in Amsterdam in March 1975, four months prior to the release of *Metal Machine Music*

"Limited appeal"

MM AUG 2 Lou Reed's record company will not promote his new album. "I think it's something that he wanted to get out of his system," says a spokesman.

LOU REED'S CONTROVERSIAL new album, *Metal Machine Music*, is released by RCA this week – but the company will not be promoting it. "We'll just let it wash through the system in a low-key way," RCA managing director George Lukan told the *Melody Maker* this week.

"We're not pushing it because we think it's an album which will have limited appeal. We realise we can't build Lou Reed's career on an album like this."

The album has left reviewers all but nonplussed. *Metal Machine Music* is four sides of almost unrelenting electronic sound, without vocals or any conventional structure – a complete departure from Reed's previous work.

The *Melody Maker* last week said of the album: "*Metal Machine Music* is so oppressive that it denies any active participation on the part of whatever audience it may eventually reach.

"I think it's something that he wanted to get out of his system," commented Lukan. "It was actually due for release before *Lou Reed Live*. He started work on it 12 months ago, but it was delayed."

Lukan, however, refuted suggestions the album has been put out by Reed as a way of fulfilling a contract he was unhappy with.

"Relations between the artist and the record company have never been better," he said. "He signed a new contract about six or nine months ago, and there is still two-and-a-half to three years to run on that. When he comes over for his European dates next month, we shall be giving him full back-up."

Reed, at present, is touring in Australia and New Zealand before embarking on the Star-Truckin' 75 European tour, which includes a concert at the Reading Festival on August 24.

He is also working on a new album – which promises to be a return to his previous musical style – for release in the autumn.



GIJSBERT HANEKROOT/GETTY



The 101ers at The Elgin pub, Ladbroke Grove, London, 1975: (l–r) Joe Strummer, Marwood "The Mole" Chesterton, Richard "Snakehips" Dudanski and Simon "Big John" Cassell



"The cat's knackers"

MM JULY 26 Introducing The 101ers, and their frontman Joe Strummer. "It's all about energy," he says. "We play until they throw us off..."

IT WAS SOMETIME back in February that I first saw the 101ers. They had a residency in the Charlie Pigdog Club in West London. It was the kind of place which held extraordinary promises of violence. You walked in, took one look around, and wished you were the hell out of there.

The general feeling was that something was going to happen, and whatever that something was, it was inevitably going to involve you. After 10 minutes glancing into secluded corners, half-expecting to see someone having their face decorated with a razor, the paranoia count was soaring.

The gig that particular evening ended in a near massacre. As the 101ers screamed their way through a 20-minute interpretation of "Gloria" which sounded like the perfect soundtrack for the last days of the Third Reich, opposing factions of (I believe) Irish and gypsies attempted to carve each other out. Bottles were smashed over defenceless heads, blades flashed and howling dogs tore at one another's throats, splattering the walls with blood... No one, I was convinced, is going to crawl out of this one alive...

The band tore on, with Joe Strummer thrashing away at his guitar like there was no tomorrow, completely oblivious of the surrounding carnage. The police finally arrived, flashing blue lights, sirens, the whole works. Strummer battled on. He was finally confronted by the imposing figure of the law, stopped in mid-flight, staggered to a halt and looked up. "Evening, officer," he said...

The 101ers no longer play at the Charlie Pigdog Club. "The builders moved in and started to wreck the fucking place," Strummer remarks caustically.

We find them now at the Elgin in Ladbroke Grove, where they have a Thursday residency, involved in a slight altercation with the manager. Jules, their newly appointed manager, and Mick Foote, their driver and unofficial publicist, are at the bar trying to placate a band called Lipstick who've turned up to play at the manager's request. The manager is under the impression that he's hired the 101ers for Monday nights, and Lipstick for Thursday. Lipstick want to play.

"Look", says Foote, "what are you doing on Monday. Nothing? Right, you play on fucking Monday, then"

The argument is resolved. The 101ers will play, Lipstick can watch from the sidelines.

The band, according to Strummer (rhythm guitar and voice), was formed "in a basement early last summer. We had a couple of guitars and a few Concord speakers and we thought we were the cat's knackers... Hey, d'you want to know how I got my Telecaster? Well, I was working at the Royal Opera House carrying out the rubbish. A fucking great job. Only had to work two hours of the day. There was this hole in the basement, where I'd creep off to play guitar. Anyway, the manager found me and fired me. Gave me £120 to get out as soon as possible. So I went out and scored an AC 30."

I thought you were going to tell us about your guitar.

"Oh yeah, yeah. I was working in Hyde Park, and I met this South American chick who wanted to get married. To stay in the country, see? She paid me a hundred quid, so I quit the job, and got a Telecaster to go with the AC 30... I'll get the divorce through in about two years."

The initial lineup of the band seems to have varied from rehearsal to rehearsal, but eventually a nucleus of musicians evolved around Strummer and they played their first gig at the Telegraph on Brixton Hill on September 7 last year.

> **"You want to see someone tearing their soul apart at 36 bars a second"**

"We had this fucking mad Chilean sax player, Alvaro. He got us a gig at a political benefit for Chilean refugees. We had five days to knock something together, we could only play six numbers. Then our fucking drummer went on holiday. That's when the Snakes joined for the first time."

Snakehips Dudanski, former head boy at Salesian College and zoology student at Chelsea University, had never played drums before: "After a couple of days of frantic practising I thought I could handle it. It wasn't too difficult, I just bashed everything in sight. I still do. There's only one difficulty... playing with odd sticks. That, and having to buy them second-hand."

He is now permanently

Pop from the beginning

GETTY

installed in the rhythm section alongside The Mole. Like Snakehips, The Mole had never even looked at a musical instrument until he was invited to join the 101ers when they were short of a bass player. For such a relatively immature musical combination, Snakehips and The Mole lock together magnetically, thrusting the 101ers along with vicious energy.

Strummer and lead guitarist, Clive WM Timperley, are the only members of the band with any substantial musical experience. Strummer once fronted a legendary outfit called Johnny & The Vultures back in 1973, an erratic but occasionally stunning formation that played a handful of gigs before sinking without trace. Timperley, affectionately referred to as Evil by Strummer, has been playing since the mid-'60s, starting with an outfit called Captain Rougely's Blues Band, which included Martin Lamble, the original drummer with Fairport Convention (unfortunately killed in a road accident in 1969). After that he worked his way through a succession of none-too-successful bands, arriving on the 101ers' doorstep in January.

He's recently precipitated a minor crisis by threatening to leave the band. He's had a lucrative offer from some "tame-brained singer-songwriter," as Strummer describes him. "He'd be a fucking fool to leave us now. But we've advertised for a new guitarist...

"We have to be careful. We want a guitarist for a beat group, we don't want any bloody acid casualties thinking they're going to join the Grateful Dead. We want someone who can whip their axe. I mean, if you go to see a rock group you want to see someone tearing their soul apart at 36 bars a second, not listen to some instrumental slush. Since '67, music has been chasing itself up a blind alley with all that shit."

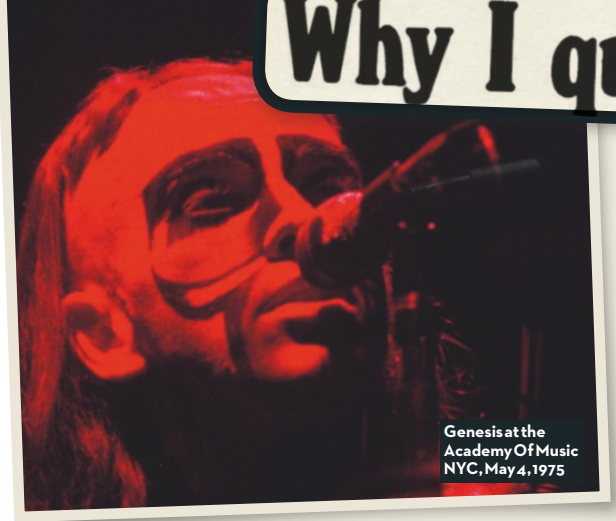
As you might have gathered, the 101ers are fairly uncompromising in their attitude towards most contemporary rock music. They are about energy: pure rock'n'roll dynamics. They concentrate almost exclusively on standard rock material, but their greatest strength lies in Strummer's own compositions, like "Motor, Boys, Motor", and particularly "Steamgauge 99" and the stunning "Keys To Your Heart", and in his own ragged charisma. He's a naturally powerful performer, given to sudden explosions of passion.

"That's what it's all about. That energy. I mean, we usually have to do a two-and-a-half-hour set here. If we're on a bill with some other bands we cut it down to an hour and a half. Or play until they throw us off. Playing that long every night can kill you. Like, there's this line in 'Roll Over Beethoven'... '*Early in the morning, I'm giving you my warning/Don't you step on my blue suede shoes...*' And if you're a classy Chuck Berry kind of singer, you've got to do the whole line in one breath to keep the energy flowing.

"Straight after that line I usually faint. Everything goes white. If you haven't eaten for a few days and you haven't had any sleep, you just keel over backwards. But I always get back on my feet for the next line, '*Hey diddle, diddle I'm playing my fiddle/I got nothing to lose...*' That's just such a great line, you've got to stay on your feet for that.

"And we'll always be on our feet. We're gonna take this all the way." *Allan Jones*

Why I quit Genesis



Genesis at the Academy Of Music NYC, May 4, 1975

"There is no animosity"

MM SEPT 6 Peter Gabriel pens his own statement to explain why he left Genesis.

THE VEHICLE WE had built as a co-op to serve our songwriting became our master and had cooped us up inside the success we had wanted. It affected the attitudes and the spirit of the whole band.

The music had not dried up and I still respect the other musicians, but our roles had set in hard. To get an idea through "Genesis the Big" meant shifting a lot more concrete than before. For any band, transferring the heart from idealistic enthusiasm to professionalism is a difficult operation. I believe the use of sound and visual images can be developed to do much more than we have done. But on a large scale it needs one clear and coherent direction, which our pseudo-democratic committee system could not provide.

As an artist I need to absorb a wide variety of experiences. It is difficult to respond to intuition and impulse within the long-term planning that the band needed.

I felt I should look at/learn about/develop myself, my creative bits and pieces and pick up on a lot of work going on outside music. Even the hidden delights of vegetable growing and community living are beginning to reveal their secrets. I could not expect the band to tie in their schedules with my bondage to cabbages. The increase in money and power, if I had stayed, would have anchored me to the spotlights. It was important to me to give space to my family, which I wanted to hold together and to liberate the daddy in me.

Although I have seen and learned a great deal in the last seven years, I found I had begun to look at things as the famous Gabriel, despite hiding my occupation whenever possible, hitching lifts, etc...

I had begun to think in business terms; useful for an often bitten, once shy musician, but treating records and audiences as money was taking me away from them. When performing, there were less shivers up and down the spine.

I believe the world had soon to go through a difficult period of changes. I'm excited by some of the areas coming through to the surface which seem to have been hidden away in people's minds.

I want to explore and be prepared to be open and flexible enough to respond, not tied in to the old hierarchy.

Much of my psyche's ambitions as "Gabriel archetypal rock star" have been fulfilled – a lot of the ego gratification and the need to attract young ladies, perhaps the result of frequent rejection as "Gabriel acne-struck public-school boy". However, I can still get off playing the star game once in a while. My future within music, if it exists, will be in as many situations as possible. It's good to see a growing number of artists breaking down the pigeonholes.

This is the difference between the profitable, compartmentalised battery chicken and the free-range. Why did the chicken cross the road anyway?

There is no animosity between myself and the band or management. The decision had been made some time ago and we have talked about our new direction. The reason why my leaving was not announced earlier was because I had been asked to delay until they found a replacement to plug up the hole. It is not impossible that some of them might work with me on other projects.

The following guesswork has little in common with truth: Gabriel left Genesis 1) to work in theatre; 2) to make more money as a solo artist; 3) to do a "Bowie"; 4) to do a "Ferry"; 5) to do a "Furry boa around my neck and hang myself with it"; 6) to go into an institution; 7) to go senile in the sticks.

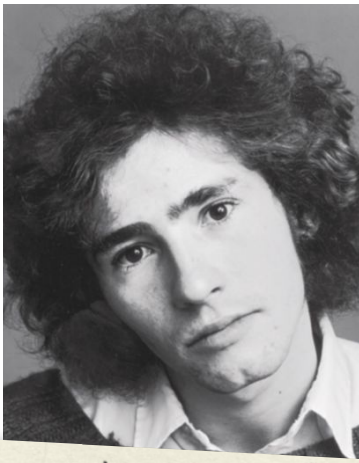
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"Seems to have been an overdose"

NME JULY 12 RIP Tim Buckley.

TIM BUCKLEY, THE 27-year-old singer and composer, died suddenly in America last week. He had apparently played a gig and returned to his hotel, where he was found dead some hours later. Manager Herb Cohen commented: "It seems to have been an overdose, but Tim wasn't into drugs, so I can only put it down to misadventure."

Buckley played in various country bands and, as a solo singer, worked in folk clubs around Los Angeles. He was signed by Elektra in 1967, subsequently moving to Reprise. Of his eight albums on release in this country, the best-known are probably *Goodbye And Hello* and *Starsailor*, the latter marking a move into avant-garde jazz. His last appearances in this country were in 1974 when he took part in the Knebworth Park concert and headlined a concert at London's Rainbow Theatre.



Buckley tragedy

"People must have a leader"

On tour in America, BOB MARLEY (with some help from Eric Clapton) is converting the people to reggae. Positive vibration is his message, as he opens up on love, the past, jail and Rastafari: "The greatest thing is life, mon, life..."

— NME JULY 19 —

IT MUST HAVE been around the 24th chorus of a seemingly endless "I Shot The Sheriff" that the audience finally cast aside whatever resistance they had left and abandoned themselves completely. Finding out that reggae is indeed another bag.

It's been an hour-and-a-half or more since the Wailers took the stage for the second show of the night and by now the occupants of the club are wringing sweat out of their jeans. On stage, Bob Marley seems oblivious to the people standing on the tables, the shouts, and the shady glances his two girl singers are exchanging. He's improvising whole new verses to the song, getting into his weird knees-up/shank-up routine. Locked inside his personal exorcism of emotion, gripped by Rasta spirits, lurching round the stage, hair exploding out of that tautly featured head.

Behind him on the wall hangs a portrait of Haile Selassie, framed in the Rastafarian colours of red, orange and green, presiding over the proceedings.

"This is the Trench Town experience," says compere and lights man Neville at the start of the show, and it's no idle phrase: the Wailers are the sound of the Kingston ghetto. Bob Marley is its finest street poet, and this is the most exciting gig I've seen in months. »

GETTY



Bob Marley on stage: "1975–it's the last quarter before the year 2000, and righteousness must win"

ME JUST WANNA LIVE, Y'UNNERSTAN?

do all these things for the benefit of we, for

bible to me to back up what he and

AND THIS IS also Boston, Massachusetts, US of A, a lengthy port of call in a six-week-long tour of the States that's amassed Marley and the Wailers a stack of rave reviews wherever they've played and which is due to arrive in England this week for a disappointingly short set of dates prior to the band's return to Jamaica.

The band have visited the States before – once for a short tour on their own; once playing back-up to Sly & The Family Stone – and each time received considerably more than a murmur of critical approval. In fact, they already command a strong cult following among both black and white US audiences, a following that has widened with the release of the epochal "Natty Dread".

But it's Clapton's hit version of "I Shot The Sheriff" that has introduced Marley's name to most of the white kids who turn up to see the band. That and the buzz that has run along the hip grapevine; why, only two days previous to this gig, NY's prestigious *Village Voice* has given a back page accolade to the band, headlining Marley as "The Mick Jagger of Reggae". A bit misleading that – irrelevant even – but still.

On the whole though, reggae is still an unknown quantity in the States. The only hit that could vaguely be called reggae is "…Sheriff"; they don't even get the odd Ken Boothe or John Holt record in the chart to keep their ear in. And though "The Harder They Come" is a huge cult thing (it's been playing Boston for three years continuously now), only Marley – and to a lesser extent Jimmy Cliff – have made any impact as individual artists.

In Boston the Wailers are playing a smallish club that turns out to be an old hootenanny haunt a dozen years on ("The green pastures of Harvard University") and which normally hosts its fair share of top-flight rock and soul acts but never gets packed like this. The club's run by earnest bearded men who wear their hair in ponytails and spend most of the second show each night trying to keep people in their seats.

One turns angrily on a black couple dancing in the aisle and received a torrid badmouthing in Jamaican patois for his troubles. He reels back confused. Something is happening here…

And it's been the same wherever Marley has played – a hidden underground of Jamaican immigrants has emerged from the ghettos and transformed the atmosphere of the gigs into something more like the Four Aces, Dalston, than what you might expect in the likes of Cleveland and Detroit. In Chicago, for instance, a gang of JA rude boys refused to leave the club between shows, scaring the proprietor half out of his wits with What They Might Do Next.

Imagine what the gig in New York's Central Park must have been like, with a crowd of 15,000, a sizeable portion of them from a Jamaican population estimated "very unofficially" by the consulate to be around 250,000 but put nearer twice that figure by sources closer to the roots.

THERE'S BEEN IMPORTANT changes since I last saw the band some 18 months back with the departure of Peter Tosh and Bunny Livingston, founder members from way back when in '64 when the Wailers were a five-piece harmony outfit fresh out of school.

It was Bunny and Tosh who supplied the high, pure Impressions-style harmonies that were the Wailers' trademark, matching their name – while later, with the addition of the Barrett Brothers' rhythm section, they played guitar and congas respectively.

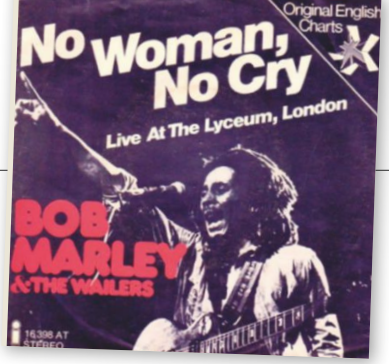
Marley's reticent about the reasons for the split: "Mebbe they don't like the tour too much," he says, "but they're still brethren, so… greeyat, y'know, we still play together sometime. But music is music and me miss the music if the music leave – but the music stay…"

He's right. The music has stayed. Some of the pastoral purity of the old lineup on numbers like "Hallelujah Time" has gone, but the inclusion of

IAN DICKSON/GETTY



July 19, 1975: Bob Marley arriving at Birmingham Odeon



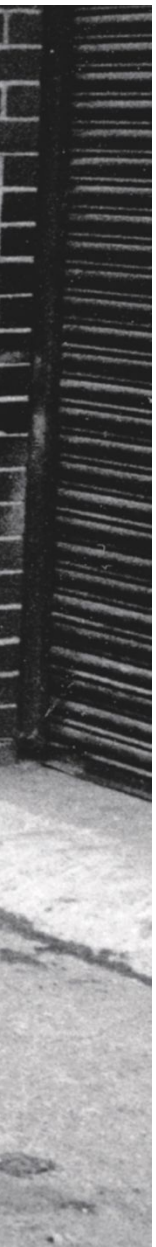
the I-Three (Judy Mowatt and Rita Marley's back-up voices) has re-sensualised the backdrop, while the band as a whole have an earthy, gutsy power in live performance that's only hinted at on the albums.

The performance I'd seen last time round was looser, more erratic, opening with a lengthy bout of Rasta drumming and chanting, before moving into a freewheeling set that had, for example, Marley strutting up and down the stage playing a solo chaka-chaka-chaka rhythm for five minutes before the rest of the band would drop in behind him.

This time it's different. The band, now eight strong and evidently drilled with commanding professional thoroughness, surge with power and breathtaking tightness, loading every riff with poise and majesty. From the first casual clatter of Carlton Barrett's drums as they sync into "Trench Town Rock", it's obvious that the aforementioned acclaim was no hollow praise.

Apart from the inclusion of Rita and Judy into the lineup, there's been the arrival of Al Anderson, a young American guitarist who plays an almost surreptitious lead, and the equally youthful Tyrone Downie, whose Hammond organ offers thoughtful shadings on "No Woman No Cry", and who otherwise sets his clarinet growling and murmuring in sympathy with the rest of the band.

The idea of a rhythm section is redundant here; everyone contributes to the sway. Unobtrusive at the back of the stage is Alvin "Seeco" Patterson, a constant elder companion to Marley for years, his face lined and scarred with street experience, and now brought in on congas. Marley himself plays thoughtful rhythm guitar (like Lennon said – "It's an important job… to make a band drive"), scrubbing chords out of his Gibson and subtly but surely directing the band's energy flow.



Behind him is Aston "Family Man" Barrett, Marley's first musical lieutenant on stage and record, underpinning the constant flux with bass figures that lope and stalk and aren't afraid to leave gaps. His nimble runs contrast with an almost studiedly indolent stance; he hardly seems to move, peering under hooded lids from under his trademark woolly titfer.

Carlton Barrett (Aston's brother) is almost equally inscrutable beneath the long shadow of his hunting cap. He provides an unflagging metric for the rest of the group, going round his tom-toms at most 20 times per night, paradiddles extra.

But it's Marley himself who hold the stage and on whom most eyes are content to rest; a slight wiry figure crowned with a gorgon's head of dreadlocks that bounce and flop and whirl around a face undergoing a continuous process of emotional contortion.

The voice. Its range from the buoyant whoops of 'Lively Up Yourself' to the heartfelt tenderness of "No Woman No Cry" (slowed down to half pace and invested with spellbinding soul intensity) is truly remarkable.

"NO WOMAN" IS the only downtempo item on the bill: otherwise things throb and churn through an exuberant "Get Up, Stand Up", the revamped "Trench Town Rock" (which Marley later tells me will appear on his next album), a tremendous, sweeping "Stir It Up" and an irresistible "Kinky Reggae", for me the surprise of the show. On record it always seemed a slight and strained joke – live, it's archetypal dance reggae.

Finally, there's a growling, almost sinister "I Rebel Music" which seems to go on forever. But then it's all "Rebel Music" songs smouldering with the anger and lackadaisical humour of the ghetto – laced with ganja and shot through with the apocalyptic undertones of Rastafarian idealism. Music that stands up to anything that the '70s (or, for that matter, the '60s) have produced – and which has never lost touch with its roots.

Backstage between shows, Marley, obviously enjoying his star status, holds open court to a procession of well-wishers: loud American hippies who bring offerings of Colombian grass, young Jamaicans who've moved to the States to earn good money as welders and builders and who exchange furious rapid-fire raps in unintelligible patois.

> "Y'call me 'natty 'ead'… greeyat. Me no vex meself as you laugh"

Street brothers, groupies – all milling about in the sweet, heavy smoke of one tiny dressing room. A young black with a cornrow haircut sticks his head through the door and yells, "Pos'tive vibrations!" "

Yeah, mon, pos'tive vibrations," replies Marley, grinning fit to crack his face.

On the wall of Marley's motel room there's a large hand-made poster for the Wailers' tour that has the same phrase scrawled across the bottom, big and fat: "POSITIVE VIBRATIONS".

It's a phrase that he's particularly fond of. More, it's a keystone in the man's approach to life – a strong, straightforward approach that reflects both the man's personal character and his belief in the ideals of Rastafarianism.

You can't get far into roots reggae without confronting the stumbling block of Rastafarianism. Walk past any record store in areas like Stoke Newington or Brixton in London, Moss Side in Manchester, wherever, and you'll hear the likes of Big Youth or Johnny Clarke wailin' about "*moving outta Babylon*", and about the youth who are "*dreader than dread*". Or just check out "Natty Dread" itself, a brilliant call to cultural arms – ask Bob Marley about Rasta beliefs and you'll get lines from his songs quoted back at you.

You can't paraphrase the Rasta doctrine into a few flippant paragraphs – it's religion, revolution, lifestyle, music, fashion, even… a system of belief based on texts from the Bible that likens the black man's estrangement from Africa, via slavery, to the tribes of Israel cast out of their homeland into Babylon. And which takes Haile Selassie, emperor of Ethiopia (now deposed as "Ras Tafari" – the "Head Creator"; "The Lion Judah who shall break every chain", as the Bible tells it.

Perhaps most of all Rasta is an inspiration for the downtrodden, an idea that cements the brethren (who call themselves "I") together. You don't have to be "natty dread" to be a Rasta, but the dreadlocks that Marley proudly sports – in truth they're reaching epic proportions – are part of the belief, an outward symbol of his faith.

"Plenty people have the wrong idea about this locks thing," he says, twirling a clutch of braids. "Like I read in a magazine: 'Marley came on stage with his waxed locks.' Now that is very much a lie, because I could never sit down and put wax on my 'air, my wool, to keep it together. It would be clammy and stink, mon. Them blind, mon! This come natural."

The term "natty dread" itself is a verbal osmosis from "knotty head": the kind of thing the shantytown kids might yell after a Rasta ragamuffin.

"Y'know, people used to call you 'natty 'ead' as an insult, but me use it as a *crown*, cos me t'ink positive, mon. Me crown meself with it.

"Y'call me 'natty 'ead'… greeyat," he chuckles, "because who care what you tink? Me no vex meself while you laugh. Laugh and the world laugh, mon, so me dig it, so me live.

"Y'see, me personally jus' wanna *live*, y'know wh'mean? That's all me wanna do – t'ink positive about everyone and everything, pure and clean, and me can walk and do things freely."

There's passion in his voice and laughter in his speech. The talk about freedom is no empty mouthing; back home in JA, Marley lives the Rasta lifestyle; footloose, fancy free… and constantly and righteously ripped on the fierce Jamaican ganja (grass) that the Rastas hold sacred.

Free too because of the Rasta faith that all things that Jah (God) does are for the best. In this sense, the Rastas are passive, content to let the world rush about its mad business while they concentrate on matters spiritual. "Love and peace" was a Rasta greeting before the hippies were thought of. It's a passive attitude that extends even to the recent deposition of Selassie by the Ethiopian military.

"What Jah do well done mon… I'm do all these things for the benefit of we, for the benefit of the people of Ethiopia. It just a change, a cycle…"

I mention that Selassie is now a very old man. Marley laughs in disbelief: "'Im ever young, the youngest man on Earth. "'Im control time."

Interestingly, Selassie himself has never acknowledged the divinity bestowed upon him by the Rastas – though equally he's never denied it either. In any case, his coronation in 1930 was taken as fulfilment of the fire-eating prophecies of Marcus Garvey in the '20s (the John the Baptist »



June 18, 1975: Marley and the Wailers attract a record 15,000 crowd to the Schaefer Festival, held annually at the Wollman ice rink in Central Park, NYC

GETTY (2)

of the movement) that the black man in the West would not be free until a black king was crowned in Africa.

"People must have a leader. Them say the ants don't have no leader but they gather food and move together, but I don't think people can do that. You must 'ave a leader, and we choose a divine king instead of a politician. 'E's not just like one person; it's one way of thinking. Jah is your aim, one aim, which is life and love…"

Michael, a soft-spoken fellow, who is travelling companion and cook for the band (many Rastas don't eat meat or salt), nods affirmatively. He's been reading passages from his huge battered black Bible to me to back up what he and Bob have been telling me about the Rastas; Revelation 5 and 19 for example: "There shall be wars and rumours of wars… Efraim shall not vex Judah.

"It's the last days without a doubt," he says quietly. "1975, it's the last quarter before the year 2000, and righteousness – the positive way of thinking – must win, good over evil, we're confident of victory…"

Before the end of the century, see, comes the Apocalypse, the Second Coming, wherein the "West shall perish" and "Righteousness cover the earth" – a message that's illustrated musically on tracks like "Revolution".

It's the sort of biblical interpretation that's caused deep enmity between the Rastas and the established Christian church – an enmity that crops up in Marley's "Talking Blues":

"*'Cos I feel like bombing a church / Now I know the preacher is lying.*"

"Politics and church," opines Marley, "are the same thing. Them keep the people in ignorance, and Jah no goin' come and say, 'I am God and you should praise me,'" he cackled heartily at the thought.

"These guys who preach are false – y'don't 'ear the preacher say God will return to Earth within 2,000 years – how come you don't hear that in church if it's in the Bible? The greatest thing them can say is about death – 'cos them say you die and go to 'eaven after all this sufferation. To go through all sufferation for that! S'like after me sick, me go to the doctor. No, the greatest thing is life, mon, life."

Michael quotes softly from Jeremiah 23: "Woe to the pastors who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture, said the Lord…"

"Politicians," continues Marley with a vengeance, "they are devils, devils who corrupt. They don't smoke 'erb [ganja], because when y'smoke y'think alike, and them don't want that…"

Heavy stuff indeed, clearly not the sort of thing you kick around at an interview with most rock bands, especially not on tour in America. But with Marley it's an inescapable confrontation.

At one point during the proceedings, after Michael has murmured Psalm 57, Bob reclines and gazes meditatively upward.

"Y'know, Jah appear to me in a vision – and every time he look just a bit older than me. 'Im don't look 90 year old or anything – like if I'm 30 [which he is], then 'Im look about 35. Man, it's so sweet; it's me brother, me father, me mother, me creator, everything…"

It's an anecdote that might well lay behind a new song that Bob tells me he's written called "Natural Mystic": "*Many more will 'ave to die, many more will 'ave to cry,*" he quotes.

"It's like people ask you plenty questions but you can't answer all of them, but you still try."

Hmmm. Very apt.

ONE WAY AND another, it's easy to see how the Rastas have been wigging out the British-orientated middle and upper classes of Jamaica. As an excellent article by Michael Thomas in *Rolling Stone* some two years back put it:

"The Rastas were making a bizarre public display of pissing on everything upward that the middle class believed in, rejecting their entire earthly existence wholesale… and they became for a time the scapegoats of a frightened society."

Since then the ruling elite and comfortable middle classes have realised that the Rastas are more interested in their own spirituality than in overthrowing the government. "We don't consider the Rastas a problem any more," said Jamaican foreign minister Dudley Thompson recently, "only a phenomenon." After all, with an apocalypse on the way, you don't need to get involved with revolutionary politics.

"Me don't want fight no guy with no guns," confirms Marley. "We mustn't fight for my right, my right must come to me. You stand up for your right and don't give up the fight [a quote from 'Get Up, Stand Up'], but you don't fight for your right."

Still, phenomenon or problem, the Rastas are here to stay. "What was once Rasta culture is now Jamaican culture," said Perry Henzell, the white Jamaican who produced and directed *The Harder They Come*. "There's no dividing the two."

Certainly throughout the history of Jamaican music, it's been the Rastas who have supplied the impetus for change, working against the orthodoxy of the hustlers and record company pirates that man the cut-throat Jamaican music business, to evolve a new distinctive music. From the roots.

Marley will tell you how it was musicians like Roland Alphonso, Tommy McCook, Ernie Ranglin and most of all Don Drummond – a brilliant Rasta trombonist who spent the last days of his life in a madhouse – who started the "ska" movement back in the early '60s; a pool of musicians who often recorded under the collective name of The Skatalites. (Remember the crazy brass of "Guns Of Navarone"?)

The Skatalites played on some of the earliest Wailers tracks, when the group were cutting hits for Clement Dodd first as a vocal quintet, then a vocal trio. Numbers like "Simmer Down" and "Put It On", and later still "Rude Boy", one of the first records to herald the metamorphosis of ska into the more earthy and compelling "rock steady" rhythms of the middle '60s.

"Rude Boy" also started a craze for "rudie" records, based on and appealing to the hard-living wild youth of the Kingston ghetto. The outlaw Rudie was also an identity that Bob, Bunny and Tosh themselves basked in. The success of their records inspired the band to split from Coxsone and start their own label – Wailing Soul – named after the Wailers and a girlie outfit called The Soulettes, which was the basis for what are now the I-Three.

The label folded.

"I thought me no gonna work for no one again, so we split from Coxsone – we form Wailin' Soul, but like, I don't know 'owt about the business, and me get caught again," admits Marley. 'Bend Down Low' was Number One in Jamaica at the time, but them press it and sell it – it was a black market type o' business."

There was also jail sentences on first Bunny, and then Bob, on ganja raps – events which, in the context of the JA music biz, are open to Machiavellian interpretation, though later Marley glosses over the incident to me with a murmur about being held for a few hours for driving without a licence. It's typical of his enigmatic style.

No matter, the failure of Wailing Soul caused a temporary hiatus in the group's output. Marley left for the States, and later, after being signed by Johnny Nash and his manager, to Sweden for an abortive project on a film score. No doubt, it was a bitter time for him.

Whatever, the group's '69 comeback with crack producer Lee Perry ushered in a new period of creativity, with songs like "Duppy Conqueror", "Soul Rebel" and "Small Axe", some of which have appeared in revamped form on the Island trilogy, and which scorched their way into the JA charts at the time.

> "Them guys have the equipment, so you don't get no money"

Within a couple of years, the group were bigger than ever and had split from Perry and established their own Tuff Gong label, which still handles their material today, as well as that by the I-Three and the solo output of Family Man, Bunny and Tosh.

Marley is bitter in his condemnation of the music scene at home. He has a list of dues paid that are second to none – ripped off, exploited and conned.

"Them guys on the machine [the producers], all them wanna do is 'ustle quick – like you find a guy put out 200 songs a year with 60 different singers (*laughs*). And like them guys don't play no music, them only have the equipment, and them try and make it so you don't get no money."

He recalls with glee how the artists themselves – and not the all-important production bosses – initiated the reggae rhythms of the late '60s to escape from the crippling monopoly of the trade:

"Them guys on the machine 'ave *all* the rock steady, so we come up with something new, we start to play reggae, and all the rock steady them 'ave them 'ave to park it, 'cos reggae take over. But the type of people who flood the market – it's like yer getting dregs of water instead of clean water, mon."

Ask Marley who he likes on the current Jamaican recording scene and he'll tell you: "Me love all the reggae artists, man, knowing that they don't understand the situation and that them can do better. Me love all of them, 'cos them 'ave the same feeling as me."

WITH HIS SIGNING to Island in 1972 and prior to that the establishment of a regular self-sufficient lineup that had imported the Barrett brothers' rhythm section from Lee Perry's studio band, the Upsetters, Marley's days of artistic frustration and being ripped off are hopefully a thing of the past.

Certainly the extended studio time that the Island deal allowed him, together with decent production facilities, resulted with *Catch A Fire* in a profound departure from the primitive production standards that had been associated sometimes unfairly with reggae up to that time.

Unlike other reggae artists – Jimmy Cliff is the most outstanding example – who have lost both their musical roots and their roots appeal in an attempt to "go commercial", the Wailers (or "Bob Marley & The Wailers" as the title goes these days) still get Number Ones on the JA charts with disconcerting regularity. To the JA youth, Marley is still a "soul rebel", an outlaw hero who stands alongside latter-day Rasta idols like Augustus Pablo, I-Roy and U-Roy and the whole gamut of dub and voiceover artists (and even producers like King Tubby and Perry) who, unlike Marley, don't get covered in the white rock press.

Not yet at least. They're simply too far out. Until white ears get accustomed to their bizarre production tricks and uncompromising rhythmic concentration.

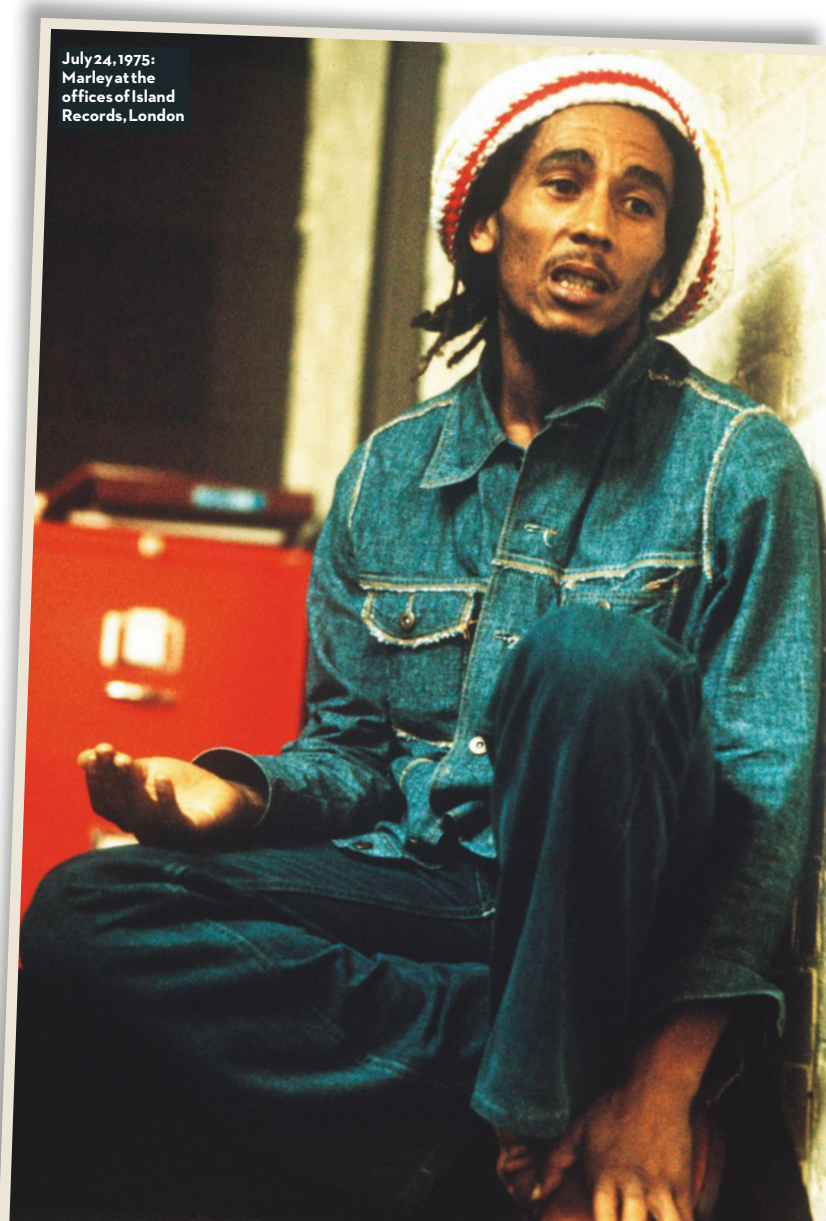
Whether Marley can escape from being merely a rock cult – albeit a headily fanatic one – and make the kind of breakthrough that would take him into the album charts remains to be seen. But as one commentator remarked last week, that isn't likely to happen until his music is given the radio airplay now afforded to both black funkadelics and white rock. A hit single might shake nations.

Though at the moment Marley says he's not really concentrating too much on his next album, he already has a few numbers written and ready. Apart from the aforementioned "Natural Mystic", there's a number called "Irie Ridin'" and another called "Turn Over" that Marley describes as "a song like 'Bend Down Low' or that intricate love song type o' bag."

There's also to be a restyled version of his first Tuff Gong smash, "Trench Town Rock", which already plays a prominent part in his stage act.

As I leave the interview, Marley's already juggling a football on his feet, itching for what is apparently a lengthy daily workout (his physical condition is pretty impressive). Back home, he tells me, they have a Tuff Gong team that has Alan Cole as skipper – a Rasta who spent a time playing at top club level in Brazil. A team fuelled on ganja could take over the world.

Neil Spencer •



July 24, 1975: Marley at the offices of Island Records, London

"I've been incredibly loyal"

ROD STEWART is clearly no longer just the frontman of the FACES. Celebrity, actress-squiring tax exile... if the cap fits, he'll wear it. "Me and Britt are free," he says, compared to his UK-dwelling bandmates. "Free of all ties, trousers and belts!"

— MELODY MAKER AUGUST 2 —

"WHY DONTCHA PAY your tax bill?... When are you going to marry Britt?... When are you going back to England?" Rod Stewart, Britt Ekland at his elbow, backed away harassed and slightly stunned by a press conference that had almost become a punch-up.

"What's it got to do with music?" called out Rod to rock specialists as they too became embroiled in the imbroglio, a confused heap of humanity shoving 'midst blazing TV lights and flashguns, and whirring, myriad sound recorders.

It happened in Dublin last week, the Georgian city with built-in sea breezes, which took a sudden influx of stars and reporters with admirable calm and a philosophical glass of Guinness. Rod Stewart's income tax affairs are as interesting as Rod Stewart's window cleaner's bill. Both are of passing »



GETTY



"I hope this won't be a farewell tour": Ronnie Wood and Rod Stewart on stage in the States during the Faces' second tour of 1975

concern to anonymous clerks in Manchester or Leeds, the aforementioned window cleaner and Mr Stewart's accountants. And yet last week tax affairs had become a story, and one subject to accusations, denials, threats and apologies.

Apart from hurling a cue sheet at a persistent TV reporter and demanding: "Will someone show this man the door?" Rod and Britt kept their cool. In truth, they might have expected something of the sort, having made themselves available in spectacular fashion.

Rod, the Faces-less man of pop (until they get together for their next tour) and Britt, the beautiful actress once betrothed to Peter Sellers and now escorting Rod on peregrinations about the globe, had been on a country-hopping promotion trip that kept them in the headlines for the best part of a week. They headed from the Continent to Dublin, ostensibly for a press reception to help launch Rod's new album *Atlantic Crossing*.

It was understood he couldn't come into Britain, and has to live abroad in order to avoid crippling taxation. But when newspaper reports claimed Rod was avoiding payment of a specific bill, then apologies were called for and received. Thus ended the matter, but said Rod after the Dublin press conference: "They made me feel like a criminal." And according to Mike Gill of Gaff Management, Rod's aide-de-camp, one interviewer had confidently told someone at the press conference: "We're going to get this bastard." The "someone" happened to be Rod's lawyer.

Rod and Britt sat behind a desk, and then began to struggle round the room, Rod finally sinking into a corner with a protective screen of rock writers. But the haranguing continued. Rod was especially startled by one voluble gent who, it turned out, was actually making an impassioned case for his defence. Another yelled: "Why don't you make your contribution to the British economy? They need the money!"

"I know they do," said Rod. "Of course they do…" (*mutter, mutter, repeated cries of, "Arrgh, you're a big money-spinner," from Irish pressmen*) "…look, can I get a word in edgeways? When they ask me for the tax, I shall pay it, but I've not been asked yet." Rod looked up, hollow-cheeked and glassy-eyed. "Does anybody really feel sorry for us?" he said suddenly, as the barrage sunk in.

"Yeah, I feel sorry for you. I don't like to see a bloke knocked for most of his bread." The PR hands of Gill emerged at this point and wheeled Rodney out of the room, away from the confused babble and any further questioning for the night. Rod and Britt spent the rest of the evening with Rod's parents in the sanctuary of his suite, hidden in a part of the hotel accessible only by a secret route through a service lift.

Next morning, Rod had divested himself of the less-than-attractive-pink-striped suit in which he had first appeared. He was clad in far more sober and pleasing attire, designed not to offend eyes tender from the overnight excesses. I met him up in the verandah suite, where Britt floated around, a cool, unperturbed and charming lady who seemed tolerant of the Stewart lifestyle, if not wholly enamoured with its drawbacks. Rod sat on the settee and spoke quietly, his normal ebullience slightly dimmed, but there were flashes of the old laconic humour.

He only became depressed on two subjects, taxation and Kenney Jones, the latter having announced this same historic week that Rod's departure to America had cost him many thousands in lost earning power from cancelled Faces dates.

"There's not a tax bill," said Rod glumly and barely audible, on the first matter. "There's no writ. I ain't been shown a tax bill, and when I am I shall pay it, like everybody else does, by the year."

But what about the alleged £750,000 tax arrears?

"There's not that much money in the world," quoth Rod. "The whole business made me feel terrible. And yesterday that press conference made me feel like a criminal. I felt like Lee Harvey Oswald or somebody. And as I said to you, it had nothing to do with music. It was all so sordid; I really felt like running away yesterday, but that wouldn't have solved anything."

Tell us about the album then, Rod.

"Ah! It was done with the rhythm section I've always wanted to record with, the MG's, Steve Cropper, Al Jackson, Duck Dunn, Muscle Shoals rhythm section, and I even used Al Green's rhythm section.

"Tom Dowd got it all together. He's such an incredible producer. I played him a song I wanted to do and he picked the rhythm section. I wanted to do 'This Old Heart Of Mine', y'know, and it was his idea to use Al Green's section and go down to Memphis, which was great. I can't wait to hear it played in Tramps! Yeah, these were all the guys I used to listen to and Tom Dowd – well, he's a legend, ain't he? It really was something to sing with a band and a producer that've worked with Otis Redding. Of course you've got to mould them the way you want them to play.

"Apart from Steve Cropper, who plays a recognisable style, the others don't sound anything like the MG's, or the rhythm section that made 'Spanish Harlem'; they really play incredibly good white rock'n'roll. There's only one soul number and that's the Al Green song. We started work on it last April and finished about four weeks ago.

"It only took three weeks' solid recording time to do it. When an album is only 40 minutes long, I'm a firm believer that it shouldn't take a year to make. I think I could make another one before Christmas."

Did Rod feel he had been in good voice on this one?

"Mmm, yeah. I knew what the vocals would be like 'cos I'd prepared all the tracks before I went down there. There're five originals on it, which is a record for me. Usually I can only muster up two or three songs.

"But it's going to be awkward now in the next few weeks, what with me making this album on me own, and knowing that all the guys that played on the album want to tour with me. If the Faces are going to break up, then they're going to break up in the next few months; that's if they're gonna break up.

"Y'know, with Woody being with the Stones [Ronald Wood, guitar player, black hair, smiles a lot] and me doing what I'm doing, there's no *reason* for us to break up."

> "I want to use a huge orchestra – I wanna do it classy"

So there'll be no official split, it'll just grind to a halt?

"No. If we're going to break up it will be official if Woody does decide to join the Stones."

It rests on his decision? "Well, it also hinges on my decision because I want to recreate the sound I put on this record. That's why I'm aiming to get Steve Cropper to play with us live, because I wanted two guitars. So it's probably up to me and him. What are the odds? Well, I'd say there is a 20 per cent chance of us breaking up."

Is there any bad feeling between Rod and the band, bearing in mind Kenney Jones' reported outburst?

"I've really got to put Kenney in his place, because that was the most unfair thing. I love him very much, but if Kenney remembers when we were all in the States on the last tour, we all decided we were going to go and live in America because it was better for the music, right?

"As it happens there's only me and Woody have decided to do it and I think he is going to live in Los Angeles, so Kenney was completely out of order. And those English gigs he talked about were never really on, because Woody was doing the Stones tour and he knew that."

So Rod had no plans to come back to England?

"To live? Nah. I'll be coming back to tour, next year."

With the American musicians?

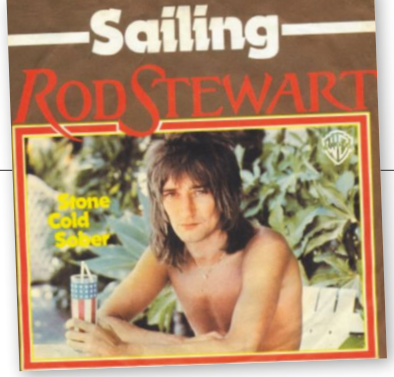
"That's what I'd like to do. Not only that, I want to use a huge orchestra – I wanna do it classy. It's the ambition of a lifetime and I'm halfway there, having made a record with the guys I've always wanted to work with. But to bring 'em over and play the Royal Festival Hall, I'd love to do that. I've never done a solo concert and it's nearer now than it's ever been."

Why not in the past? Was it because of loyalty to other people? "Yeah, I've been incredibly loyal to the band, and whether that's been a good thing, I dunno. Yeah, it's been a good thing, they're a good bunch of lads."



THE LADS SEEMED to play less a part in the affairs of Rod now that Miss Ekland loomed so large in his life. Had they in fact already secretly married?

"No, we're not married, and if we did, you would be the first to know.



We'd never keep that secret. We'll not get married yet – definitely not."

No marriage; then how about some concerts, a touch of the rock'n'roll that brought us all together?

"We're just doing this American tour and when that's finished I don't know what we're supposed to be doing. That starts on August 15 provided Woody is still alive. I don't know, he might have passed away.

"What I want to do is recreate the sound we've got on this album. I'll be really pissed off if we don't. Tetsu has got to copy things that Duck Dunn has played [Tetsu Yamauchi, Japanese bass guitarist replaced Ronald Lane in 1973]. Well, not copy note for note, but get some sort of reproduction. They should have had a tape of the album by now, because I wanted them to have copies before anybody.

"I hope this won't be a farewell tour, but if we break up afterwards, well that will be it. It's really up to the others and their attitude. I've told them that today you've really got to put on a big stage production and really try to recreate what you've got on records. It's no good doing it half-hearted and jumping around all over the stage to cover up for what you can't play. So it's up to the boys, if they want to go along with it. We'll get an orchestra. Costs a lot of money, I know, but they'll be travelling with us on this tour."

How did Rod think the new album would be accepted? Was it a breakthrough for him? Some scribes had already aired the view that it was no *Every Picture Tells A Story* (Mercury 6338 063, released 1971). He began to pace about the room while Britt answered the ever ringing telephone.

"Musically it's a breakthrough, and anyway, everything about it is different. Everything. And you never know how it's going to be accepted. It might fall flat on its face. When I did my other albums I used to try to explain to everybody what I wanted. You'd say, 'The song goes like this,' and play it and sing it – it was a real headache.

"I went down to Muscle Shoals to meet Barry Beckett, the big piano player down there, and he'd listen to the song, and write it down in figures. They don't write music in the traditional way, they put four, four, dash, dash, two, two, dash, dash… and they say, 'Is that how you want it?' and play it back to you.

"Then they Xerox the bits of paper and give it to the drummer and the bass player and the guitarist, and just play it. I don't know how it works, but it's something they invented down in Memphis."

What in blazes would the other Faces (Ian McLagan, Kenney Jones, Ronnie Wood and Tetsu) do if the band does fold?

"I've no idea. But I definitely hope it doesn't come about, but I must be honest, this is the nearest we've ever been to it. No good beating around the bush. Of course it's harder for them to leave England and come to the States, because they're all married and got kids and settled down in every sense. Me and Britt are free: free of all ties, trousers and belts!"

Talking of ties, what happened about Rod's record company wrangles, presumably all was resolved? "Yeah, I'm with Warner Brothers now. It took a long time. It's nice to have a record company behind you and I feel I have. Mercury Records did me all right, I must admit… but oh dear, I feel terribly down." Rod slumped further in the settee. "Aren't you?" he asked, looking at Britt. "What?" She raised an eyebrow. "Down."

"We got such a beating," said Britt. "We didn't expect it; people had been so kind to us everywhere. Here they are not so interested in the creative side. In Europe they are happy to see us together, and they don't care about his money or whatever."

Said Rod: "Did you see that thing in the Sunday papers in England a couple of months ago? It was about a window-cleaning bill for 52 quid. Did you see it?

"It was a headline and half a page. That could only happen in Britain. Ridiculous. There must be more important things to write about than my bloody window-cleaning bills. And that has happened to me so many times that it's pathetic!

"I like to be written about… but I'd rather not read about myself if it's going to be this kind of stuff put down people's throats. I'm getting a bit fed up with it. We wanted to come and do this, to talk about the music."

Did Rod ever feel the desire to run his own label and record or produce new talent? There had been rumours he was to buy GM Records. He laughed.

"I wouldn't buy that! Wot, buy my manager's label? I was thinking about having me own label, but no, I don't want to get involved in all that. It would just be a headache. The idea is good if you're going to try and get some new people together, and there are some good new musicians in England.

"My nephew has got a really good rock'n'roll band. He's only 18, and they play up in their attic. They've got more than three chords, five chords between four of them, which is a couple more than Jimmy Reed's got.

"There're a lot of good musicians, but not a lot of them have any charisma, there's no charm about them. Ace had an enormous single and a fairly big album, but I can't ever see them playing Madison Square Garden.

"Bad Company are doing well, and I went to see them at the Forum, and they're going to be huge, and I'm pleased because they're my favourite band. But the superstars seem to have come to a dead halt.

Frankie Miller is somebody I like; I think he'll probably do what Joe Cocker did. He's the Scots boy – a lot of good things coming out of Scotland just lately. Yeah, Frankie Miller I'd like to see happen. He's one of the best singers I've heard for a long time."

But it was tax time again, Rod. National press boys and girls were patiently waiting their turn for a cross-examination. As I filtered out, they filtered in. How much of a saving had his tax exile been? Had he done a deal with the US government?

"I'd be silly to tell you that," said Rod. "Look," and he spoke with the determination of a man having the last word, "compared to what many Americans earn, I'm not a high-earner. There was no deal done. I just applied for a residency, that's all.

"I'm NOT a millionaire. The number of times I've read that I'm a millionaire, and it's codswallop. And I'm NOT a tax exile. That's NOT the reason I left the country. The fact that I met Britt had a lot to do with me leaving."

But Rod's most startling, outburst came last. "I don't really want to make any more albums with the Faces. We've had five good attempts at albums and only made one good one, *A Nod's As Good As A Wink*, and they're not accepted like mine, and that's not through want of trying. We'll just have to sit down and decide what we wanna do."

If Dublin was a riot, then I've a feeling the *real* conference will be when Rod and the Faces finally meet up again in Miami. But remember, lads – don't do anything hasty. *Chris Welch* •



Rod and girlfriend Britt Ekland in New York Harbour to film a promo for his cover of Gavin Sutherland's "Sailing"

GETTY



Steve Marriott about to cook his goose at Beehive Cottage, Moreton, Essex, 1975

STEVE MARRIOTT is so broke, he's had to eat his horse. Where's all the cash gone? "We earned a hell of a lot of money," he says of HUMBLE PIE, "but we spent a hell of a lot of money."

"I'm skint. I'm as skint as skint is"



JOE STEVENS

— NME AUGUST 16 —

IT SEEMED LIKE a straightforward question to me: "Why are Humble Pie no more?" That's all I asked. And back came Marriott's smart-ass retort: "They broke up", which has both Marriott and the rest of his gang swilling in their own laughter.

Some way to start an interview, huh? But then Marriott's an aggressive little guy with the kind of punk ambience that often surrounds ex-mod rock stars who don't exactly have to dip their necks to walk through doorways. Musicians like Paul Kossoff or even Steve Marriott's old piano-bashing colleague from the Small Faces, Ian McLagan, have that very same vibe about them.

In fact today Marriott looks just like an old mod caught up in a time warp. His hair is closely cropped to his skull and his sidies stretch a good two inches below his earlobes. And his shoes are straight out of '65. No stack heels for Marriott.

We're a mile or two down from Steve's gaff in Morton, Essex, in the village itself. The pub's called The White Hart and it's about as English as John Betjeman. Marriott and his new band, Steve Marriott's All Stars, are all sat together like. They comprise drummer Ian Wallace, Mickey Finn (not the same bloke who once played with Bolan) on rhythm guitar ("He plays just like »

Keef," are Marriott's words on Finn's musicianship) and one Greg Ridley, who until a very short time ago, formed a third of Humble Pie's splinter group, Strange Brew.

Brew never even got as far as the recording studio and are now looking for two musicians to take Ridley's place.

"They never managed to get further than a few rehearsals because of contracts and financial situations. It was mostly me hanging everything up because I was the only one that was contracted. It was impossible for it to go any further than it did. Like everything else, it seemed like a great idea at the time," says Ridley.

But how come you got that far into it if there were contractual problems?

"I found out that nobody could find out how long I was contracted for," he retorts.

That has the whole table in near hysterics too.

But back to the Pie, who after seven years together, during which time they toured America some 22 times and recorded nine albums, closed up shop, though vile rumour had indicated for some time that all wasn't well. Anyway, an American tour was planned – a "farewell tour" as they say – completed and now Pie are no more.

In England, the band never fulfilled their expected selling potential, although this doesn't worry Marriott too much at all; nothing seems to worry him at all today, not even the fact that he's penniless and has to worry about where the next can of pet food is coming from for his dogs (honest, guv, that's what he said). But more about the Marriott finances later…

"They [the Pie] were big with the people who liked them in this country," Steve says evasively. "That's what counts".

But they didn't sell an awful lot of albums UKsville…

"Oh, I'm not worried about that. All I'm worried about was filling out our gigs, and that's what we did. That pleased me."

Actually, I remember going to a gig in Birmingham on Humble Pie's last British tour that wasn't entirely filled out. Still, the band had their moments in their native land, even if only a couple of their albums, *Smokin'* and *Rock On*, entirely reflected Marriott's undeniable talent.

In America it was a different story, the Pie going gold with at least three albums. Part of the reason for the band's US success is down to US audience's seemingly insatiable appetite for boogie. For Pie were indeed renowned for their ability in the boogie dept. Listen to their first US gold album, the Live At The Fillmore set, and you'll hear it all. (In the current *Rolling Stone*, former Pie member Peter Frampton says the band let the audience give the group their direction. Marriott doesn't agree and goes as far as saying that "Peter's full of shit. He wouldn't know. He was only in it for three years. It went on for seven, so I don't think he's really qualified to say that. Humble Pie did what Humble Pie wanted to do…")

But the band's last couple of albums didn't sell so well, even in America. And speaking aesthetically, it seemed as if the group had passed their creative peak. For the last album, *Street Rats*, an exceptionally undistinguished album containing an over-heavy version of The Beatles' "Rain", the band brought in Andrew Oldham, one-time Rolling Stones manager/producer and former head of the now defunct Immediate Record label (for which the Small Faces recorded, bringing out a whole string of classic British '60s singles, most of which were more imaginative than anything Marriott ever did with Pie) to produce. Oldham didn't really pull it off, and although Marriott seems reluctant to put Oldham down, he does admit *Street Rats* wasn't a very fine album.

"It's sad to say that, but it's true. It was too messy. I was tired of having the responsibility of producing our albums. We didn't want Andrew to produce anything. We just wanted him around. He was so nice. He thought he had a job to do, though," says Marriott laughing again, perhaps at the absurdity of the situation.

"Andrew did use the wrong vocal on the title track, and that wasn't intended to be on the album anyway. 'Street Rats' was a track with me, Ian Wallace and Tim Hinkley playing piano. It was nothing to do with Humble Pie. Somebody stole the 16-track mix and put it on Humble Pie's album. It was intended as the title track of my album," explains Marriott.

So you could say that Oldham cocked up? "It does seem that way. I can't be nasty about Andrew, bless his heart. I like Andrew."

Seems like there's some good stories there, Steve? "Maybe I can tell them all later." More laughter.

Throughout our conversation, Marriott offers these tantalising pieces of info, but refuses to go into any of the subjects thoroughly.

"Right now it's best just to forget and get ahead with what's going on right now. There's a lot I'd love to say, but not right now. Maybe in six months' time I can say a lot more than I can say now," he says without spilling any beans at all.

Marriott says that the actual initiative in breaking up Humble Pie came not from him, but from drummer Jerry Shirley and Clem Clempson. Marriott, though, had considered quitting the band over a year before when The Blackberries (three black lady singers who for a time toured with the Pie, recording with them for the *Eat It* album) parted company.

"I thought that was the best period of the band. They were asked to leave," he says.

Asked to leave?

"Well, they weren't asked to leave. Some people didn't think they were right for the band, but they were giving a lot back to me."

Marriott refuses to be drawn into any situation any more, but apparently other band members weren't entirely happy with the seven-way cash split that was being made while three Blackberries were in the band. And they said it was time for them to go…

In fact Marriott himself has produced an album for the singers, recorded in his own home studio (a place where the musician spends a large amount of his time) and using Humble Pie as a rhythm section. Like several other of Marriott's recording projects (a joint album with Greg Ridley is in the can as well as a Marriott solo album, plus enough material for three Humble Pie albums), the Blackberries album never saw the light of day. In fact Billy Preston



CHRIS WALTER

December 31, 1975: Marriott and his All Stars at the Great British Music Festival, Olympia, London



produced the singers after Marriott. "I heard the results but they weren't very good," says Steve.

He says that despite all the unreleased recordings lying around, he doesn't get frustrated at their not being released.

"The fun is doing it. I don't mind if nobody hears it, which might sound very smug. I don't know. I'll be very pleased if it does get released, but it doesn't really bother me if it doesn't."

But surely if the records were released they'd bring in some cash? And we've all got to eat.

And now comes the bit you've been waiting for. On *NME*'s last visit to the Marriott place, photographer Joe Stevens took a few snaps of a placidly grazing old grey cob loitering picturesquely in a nearby paddock. The Marriotts enthused about the animal, the joys of equestrianship, etc, and Stevens forgot the incident. This time, however, the alert lens-artist noticed the absence of the beast. He made enquiries. The story you are about to hear is true (and confirmed at press time by Marriott's PR aide, BP Fallon).

It seems that one awful night, not too long ago, the pangs of hunger smote the Marriott household. The kitty was searched for provender finance. The kitty was empty.

The pangs of hunger grew worse. Swallowing hard, the Marriotts armed themselves with kitchen knives, etc, and filed silently out into the night. Minutes later, a passing owl might have heard the frantic pounding of hooves, a swift thud and a single anguished neigh.

The stew took hours to cook.

This is true. Now back to the story. Marriott has just been asked about making bread from LPs.

"Yeah, you make money out of it, but that's the secondary point, or it should be. We're all skint, but it's still a secondary point."

How skint? "I'm skint. I'm as skint as skint is," he laughs.

But you have a good-looking Jag?

"How much do you reckon they are? C'mon. Own up. When I say I'm skint. I'm not your millionaire pop star. I survive. I blew all my money on a studio, but that was a good investment for me because it's there forever. It's a way of making music. Period. That cost a lot of money, you know. I suppose that's why I'm skint. I bought me parents a house. That's probably why I'm skint.

"I call skint when you're worried where the next dog food is coming from. I prefer being skint to having lots of money. I'd never know what to do with it."

But surely out of 22 US tours you must have made a lot of bread?

"Mmm. No. Most of it is invested in Nassau in land. I've asked our manager [Dee Anthony] to sell it for me, 'cos I don't need it. I certainly couldn't afford to go there," Marriott chuckles, "so I might as well flog it. We earned a hell of a lot of money but we spent a hell of a lot of money. The land is a bad thing. There's about 10 acres with six houses and a lot of beach."

"Our manager likes it there, too," interjects Ridley.

Marriott chuckles at Ridley's dry remark.

Marriott and Ridley are still managed by Anthony for America, but in the British Isles they're looked after by one Dave Clarke – no, not the drummer, silly.

"The situation between me and Dee is fine," says Marriott. "I mean, he does a good job in America, but…" Marriott's voice became a chuckle yet again and Ridley is just about to make a reference to Anthony when Marriott shuts him up with something about being diplomatic.

"He's not ripped me off," says Marriott with reference to Anthony, to which Ridley counters: "You couldn't say it even if he had it. You can't say things like that to a paper."

At which point Wallace chips in:

"Yeah. Who's gonna get their legs sawn off?"

> "I blew all my money on a studio, but that was a good investment"

Marriott: "Dee hasn't ripped me off, anyway. He's spent whatever money in the best way he thought. He made us, so we've got a lot to thank him for. He's still about the heaviest manager to get for America. As a manager he's the best. It's just the in-between times. It's like sending packages to the Zulus."

So does Steve think he's received money he's entitled to from the work he's done?

"What I ain't seen I don't mind. I've learnt not to mind. I've been doing it for how long? For how many people? You learn not to worry about it."

Does he owe you money, then?

"I've no idea. It doesn't matter if he does or he doesn't. I'm sure I owe him money. I don't care so long as everything keeps flying along and so long as you can keep on making music, man. I wouldn't let that kind of bollocks get in the way."

So back to music and the Pie split. As stated before, it was Shirley and Clempson who initiated the band's breaking up. In fact it was Shirley who called Marriott and said he wanted out, although the guy had said nothing about it when the two met the previous day.

"We were talking about getting some bread from our respective publishing companies, money dating back to the Small Faces, to keep the band afloat. We were fed up playing the same thing with the same people.

"I'm very proud of Humble Pie. I'm as proud of Humble Pie as I was of the Small Faces. I enjoyed myself. I've been a very lucky boy. When Jerry joined he was a novice. Now he's a professional."

So you're all still friends?

"Of course. It wasn't a sort of 'you did this and you said that' type of thing. It was all very nice. There was nothing very nasty about it."

Marriott laughs. "I was happier when I could see an end coming. We'd been constantly rehearsing, recording and playing without much rest. I think this [the new band] can be planned from the outset where we do have more rest, 'cos none of us are kids any more. We could all do with it, 'cos we all give a lot on stage.

"When I play I lose about three or four pounds – so I don't think this band'll be as constantly working as Humble Pie. It's a good marriage breaker, know what I mean?" winks Marriott, who has parted company with his wife Jenny and now lives with a lady called Jan, who's expecting Steve's child.

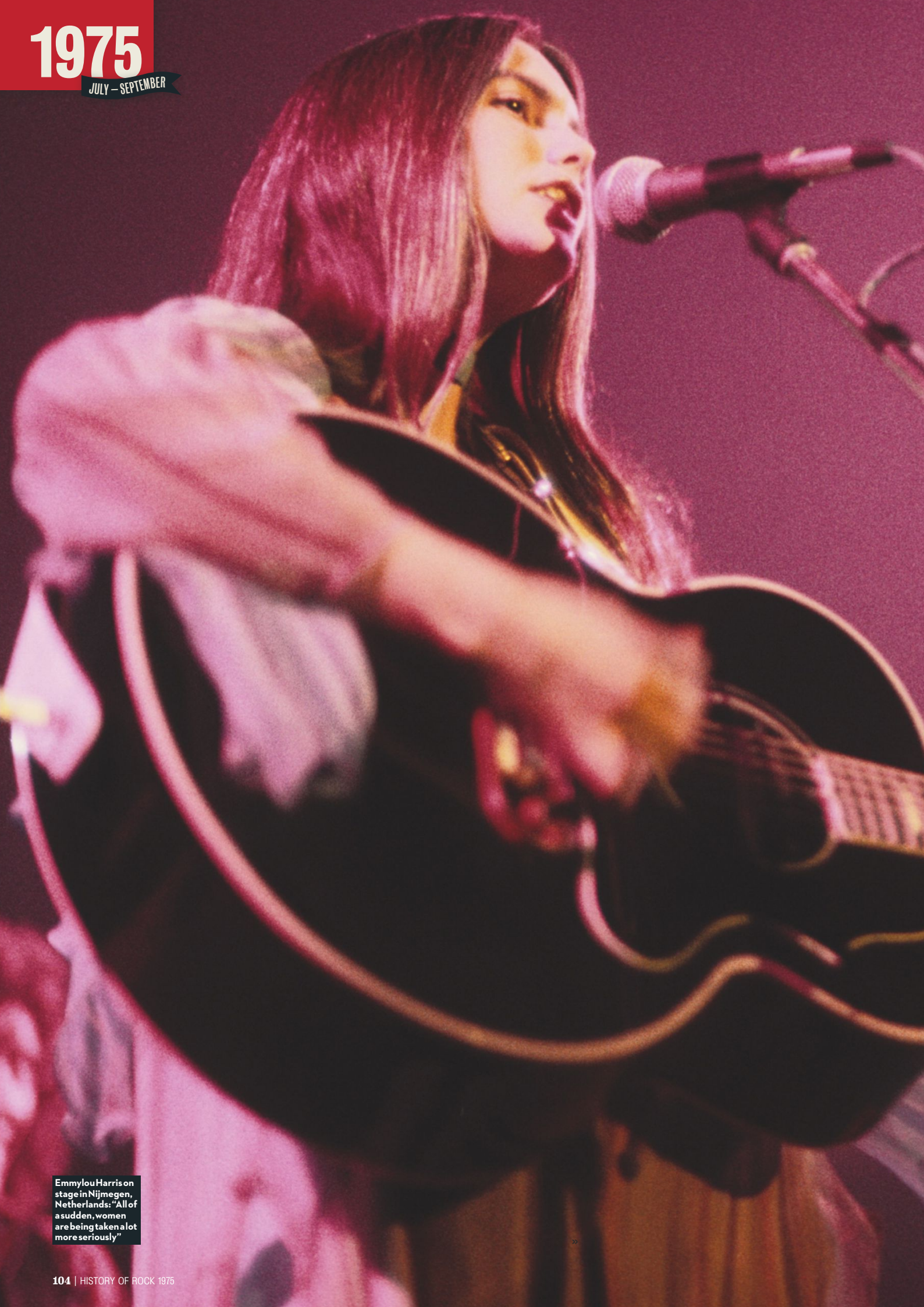
Steve Marriott's All Stars'll be gigging in late September with a couple of dates at London's Roundhouse included. Marriott says the music they're playing won't be that different from the very best of Humble Pie.

Before the tour the band will be recording in Los Angeles, hopefully with Glyn Johns producing. Meantime, Marriott has a single in the can called "Soldier", written by Joe Brown (yes, he of the stand-up hair and Brothers). "Soldier", recorded in LA with that city's Philharmonic Orchestra and a choir of black ladies, has more to do with the Marriott Small Faces period than with Humble Pie, Marriott's singing is exemplary and the whole thing is a gripping piece of music that builds from a mere acoustic intro into something closely approaching Spectorian proportions.

Marriott thinks "Soldier" will surprise a lot of people, especially since it was written by Brown, whose name is associated with MOR entertainment, to say the least. It should put Marriott's name back in the singles chart, a place where it hasn't been since Pie's very first single, "Natural Born Boogie".

Brown and Marriott are great buddies, it seems, and both come from the East End. "I identify with the East End, I love it. Me and Joe go to the pie shop regularly in Walthamstow, at least once a week. I goes to the markets and rummages about. I loves it. But I don't think they identify with me."

So what effect has Humble Pie had on Marriott? "It's made me feel older in a way, but I'm content with my lot. I'd like to earn a bit of bread and feed a few months. I wouldn't like to lose my studio, 'cos that's what I've worked for for the past seven years." *Steve Clarke* •



Emmylou Harris on stage in Nijmegen, Netherlands: "All of a sudden, women are being taken a lot more seriously"

“I’ll never put on a sequinned dress”

Country? Country rock? EMMYLOU HARRIS opens up about her place in the scheme of things and talks about her mentor GRAM PARSONS, “the most vital, alive person”. “Gram was a big influence on my life,” she says. “He had a vision.”

— NME SEPTEMBER 6 —

SEVERAL WEEKS BACK, Bob Dylan recorded a new song called “Oh Sister”. Emmylou Harris reckons it’s the prettiest Dylan song in years. “Oh my God,” she sighs, remembering, “that’s a beautiful song. One of those love songs that have the Dylan cosmic touch.” Emmylou should know. After all, she sang harmony on »

GETTY

it with Dylan at New York's Columbia studios, and she knows a thing or two about what's a good song and what isn't, especially love songs. Anyone familiar with her work with the late Gram Parsons on his *Grievous Angel* album will realise that for a fact. Then there's her own album, *Pieces Of The Sky*, which started selling all of a sudden in America with no promotion at all. On that she had the good taste to include one of McCartney's tenderest ballads, "For No One". Her next album's going to include "Here, There And Everywhere".

Emmylou Harris is a country singer who doesn't think "country rock" exists as a worthwhile musical genre: "I love country music and I love rock music, and I don't see why you have to put them together and get something less than what the two of them are separately," she says in a voice not nearly as brittle as her singing voice and with an accent that's not particularly regionalised.

But with a name like Emmylou you'd expect a girl from the South. And in Ms Harris' case you wouldn't be wrong. She was born in Birmingham, Alabama. She didn't stay there long, though – her life's been pretty much nomadic so far. "I don't feel at home any place on this earth yet, although I imagine I'll stumble across it at some point," she says.

The name Emmylou also conjures up visions of a girl in pigtails, a little on the dumb side. Not a bit of it. This Emmylou wears her dark, slightly greying hair long with a parting down the middle.

She doesn't look exactly like her album cover portrays her (willowy and with a face finely wrought in its fragile sensuality). In real life she's a bit more well fed. But she's an attractive woman. Presumably she must be kind of nervous, because she blinks perpetually at the start of our conversation, though she cuts down on that a little later on – and she has a lovely generous smile. Her hands are finely manicured, but she's dressed in sandals, blue jeans and a multi-colour T-shirt with "Palomino" printed across the front. "Isn't it so tacky?" she boasts. "I love it. Did you see the back?" The back displays a graphic of a horse. The Palomino, apparently, is a country-music club in Los Angeles.

There are a couple of Harrods carrier bags on her bed, and apart from an elderly suitcase her room at the Montcalm Hotel doesn't bear the marks of a very long stay. In fact, her visit to London is purely promotional. Tomorrow she'll be off to Amsterdam for more promotion work, which will include a TV show. Unfortunately she's not doing any performing in Britain, but money permitting, hopes to undertake a British tour in November.

> "Gram needed my energy and I needed his direction"

A FEW FACTS. THE daughter of a serviceman, Emmylou moved around a lot in her first 20 or so years, living in Virginia, Boston, North Carolina, New York, Washington and California. She now lives just outside LA with her daughter, Hallie, the result of a marriage that lasted just a year. "She sometimes goes on the road with me. I probably won't work that much in the fall when she's in school. When I do have to go off, her governess will just come to my house and stay. That is the only hassle, being torn between riding this wave that I'm on at this point and my daughter. Both are real important to me."

Emmylou married in New York when she was 22. She'd been singing since she was a kid, working in bars through her college years.

"In college I sang for $10 a night and all the beer I could drink and all the popcorn I could eat. I didn't drink beer 'cos I was usually on a diet, so I got just the $10."

She was attracted to musicians because they were a lot more fun than the other people she knew. After the marriage disintegrated, she wound up in Washington. "You name it, any bar in DC and I'll have played it. I got to be a household word in DC," she says self-effacingly.

"Washington was real good for me. I was able to rediscover why I got into music in the first place. I really got high off it. In New York I developed all these weird attitudes out of self-defence, like telling myself I was great when I didn't believe it."

While living in the capital, Emmylou first met up with Gram Parsons. She'd known his former band, The Flying Burritos, and for a time they'd considered having her in the lineup. But they broke up. However, the Burritos did tell Gram about this lady singer. He came down to Washington and the two of them did their first gig together. "I met him at the station. He went to my gig with me and we just did some singing. I drove him and his wife back to Baltimore. And we exchanged addresses and phone numbers."

A year or so later, Parsons contacted her again, and as a result she sang on his first solo album, *GP*. From January 1973 they toured together, right up until the time of Gram's death later that year. "We did a lot of singing in that time – a six-week tour of the entire country. We travelled in a bus, and we did do much harmonising in the back of that bus," she laughs at the memory. "A lot of the material for *Grievous Angel* was gotten together and perfected in motel rooms, in the back of that bus and on the stages of places like the Smiling Dog Saloon, Cleveland, Ohio."

Through Gram, who'd played with Bernie Leadon in the Burritos, Emmylou got to know the Eagles. "We did a gig with them in May 1973. That was a great gig because it was just the two of us and a bass player at the start, and ended up with the whole Eagles band. I'm just very fond of Bernie. He's a good friend and I think he's an amazing musician. I think that all the things I like about the Eagles are mostly Bernie and his banjo playing. And the songs he writes.

"I know he writes very few songs on the albums, but they usually end up being my favourites, like 'My Man' [Leadon's elegy to Gram] and 'Midnight Flyer'. That wasn't written by him but I'm sure it was his choice of material, because at one gig I went to he was walking around playing his banjo and singing it. I dug 'My Man' because I know Bernie and I know how he felt about Gram. I think it was a beautiful tribute.

"Gram was a big influence on my life. As a person you just loved him, because he just brought it out of you. He was a very wonderful person. He had an incredible musical vision. I think it was unparalleled. There are a lot of people who are really good primitive artists, people who have an inborn feel for music, and maybe they don't understand what they're doing. But they do it and it's great.

"Gram not only had that thing but he had understanding of what he was doing and I think he had a clear direction of what he wanted to do musically. I don't think there've been too many people who had all that together. I think I have a feeling for music. I think I've always had it and it was Gram who brought it out in me. I don't think I have the vision that Gram had; I think quite a lot of my music was learned from him, a combination of an instinct that he brought out in me. I'm more of a plodder, just chiselling out what I'm trying to do because of the basic feeling that I have. But I'm very slow at it.

"Like, as far as our musical relationship goes…" she pauses. "I was the energy source; I was always saying, 'OK, let's do it.' And he was always the visionary and the real leader. So we really complemented each other, because he needed my energy and I needed his direction. I really enjoyed it. I was really very, very happy working with him."

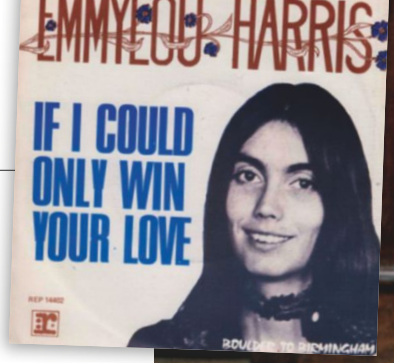
THE FRUITS OF the Parsons-Harris collaboration can be heard to their full extent on *Grievous Angel*, an album on which their singing is backed by some of the finest musicians of that particular sphere; people like James Burton and Leadon himself.

The album's a classic, containing some extremely moving ballads, genuinely bittersweet (I know it's a cliche, but the adjective describes the music better than any other I can think of) in their emotional intensity. Songs like "Love Hurts", "Hearts On Fire" and "Brass Buttons" are outstanding. If you don't know the album, get with it immediately. Emmylou is credited with co-writing one of the songs – the closer, "In My Hour Of Darkness".

"We didn't really write songs together. He always carried those songs around in his head. He just needed a little prodding to get them out. That's all I did; I helped him with a line here and there. I'd suggest something but those were his songs. I didn't dispute the credit on "In My Hour Of Darkness", which he gave to me. I think that was probably because at the same time there was this big thing about that stupid album cover," she says, her voice becoming angry.

"Gram picked out a picture of he and I to be on the back of the cover. I got really upset when those people went in and got it taken off, because I just didn't want anyone messing with his album. I mean I didn't care if my damn picture was on the back, but it just really pissed me off that anybody would… I didn't feel that anybody had the right to go in there and change one







Harris in 1975: "I'm a lyric writer; I'm not a melody writer. I write great choruses"

single thing, 'cos the album was totally finished when he died. There was no reason for anybody to change anything."

So what sort of a guy was Gram? Did he have any kind of death wish? "That's really hard to talk about. I don't think he did, but maybe that was just part of himself that he showed to me. I can only speak for the Gram that I knew. To me he was the most vital, alive person I've ever known – perhaps because he did so much to bring me to life.

"And for that reason – a person can be many things to many people – I just have too many good memories of Gram to dwell on his death, to dwell upon whatever hang-ups he might have had, whatever incidents followed his death. It's just not worth it, because I have too many good memories about our relationship and all that he gave me."

AFTER PARSON DIED ("over-stimulation of the heart" was the verdict), his body was taken from the funeral parlour and burnt in the desert. This apparently was the way he wanted it.

Naturally his untimely death had a marked effect on Emmylou. "I felt like I couldn't give it up. What I did was just to plunge myself into work on a real anonymous level. I was in Washington. Nobody cared. It wasn't like I was in LA or something. I just got a band together and started doing all the songs we'd done on stage. And I did it. It wasn't a very inspired thing. It was like therapy. It was like, 'OK, get up on the bars and walk, five feet every day, and maybe at the end of the year you're gonna be able to succeed to walk by yourself."

Because of her association with Gram she was no stranger to Reprise Records, and with Gram's former manager, with whom she signed a contract last July, recorded her first solo album, *Pieces Of The Sky*, in October. "I couldn't believe how fast things happened after the album came out. Although I thought it was a nice album," she says, her astonishment at the record's success showing in her voice. "I thought there were a lot of nice songs on it, but I figured it would just be ignored 'cos it wasn't a commercial pop record and it wasn't a basic country album. And it definitely wasn't a rock'n'roll album. It's not a Number One record, but without a single it's been bobbing around the charts now since February."

EMMYLOU REGARDS HERSELF as a purist when it comes to country music, and while she doesn't sound like Tammy Wynette or Dolly Parton, her album was nothing to do with pop and very little to do with rock, unlike Linda Rondstadt's *Heart Like A Wheel* album, which certainly fits into the LA country-rock mould. I ask her whether she thinks the success of *Heart Like A Wheel* (Number One in the US album charts earlier this year) helped her at all.

"I'm sure it must have. Because all of a sudden women are being taken a lot more seriously, with people like Maria [Muldaur] and Linda and, of course, Joni Mitchell. People are really taking their music seriously and not just thinking of them as tits and ass any more like they used to… real exotic album covers and stuff like that '*Yeah, but does she look sexy?*'" she mimics.

Despite her purist country-music attitude she admits that *Pieces Of The Sky* isn't country music in the normal sense. "Gram's albums are country albums but they never got any country play. I'm definitely not going to put out an album like Tammy Wynette, but I think there are some things on my album that are more country. I'll never tease my hair and put on a sequinned dress, but I don't get uptight at people who do. It's just my personal taste. I don't believe in country rock. There's so much of it. You hear it all the time. I can't think of anything specific. I just prefer to keep my stuff pure. I am a purist, I really am."

But surely something like *Sweetheart Of The Rodeo* (the Byrds album which featured Parsons) is country rock?

"That had some really great country stuff on it. It's hard for me to talk about people who were doing great stuff like that back when I was doing diddly shit. Right? My God, *Sweetheart Of The Rodeo* is one of my favourite albums of all time. It's incredibly innovative. *The Gilded Palace Of Sin* [by the Burritos] is my *favourite* album of all time. It wasn't played straight country but I think Gram's involvement in it made the pureness of it shine through. The playing on that album is definitely not the greatest in the world, but there's some incredibly magic stuff on it.

"Gram never intended to invent country rock. I think what he wanted to do was play country music with a rock attitude, which is what I'm trying to do. All it means is that you get up there and you don't apologise one bit for what you're doing. You just play it and you play it full volume and full force and you really kick ass, 'cos country music is really ballsy music."

Emmylou Harris is essentially a singer and there's only one of her own compositions on her album – "Boulder To Birmingham", easily one of the most powerful cuts on the album. "Yeah, I do find it hard to write. I'm not a real good writer – I've written some awful things. I won't let anything get out of my sight once I feel it's halfway good. I'm a lyric writer; I'm not a melody writer. I write great choruses.

"'Boulder To Birmingham' was written on my own except for the melody to the verses, for which I couldn't get anything. I took it to Bill Danoff, sang the chorus, showed him the rest of the lyrics, and he just took it from there. Obviously that song is about different happenings. It's a collection of scenarios, but they were all from things I'd… it's kind of like the way I write. I kind of get a picture, a photograph in my head, and sometimes the words fall into place. I was out in Los Angeles during the Topanga Canyon fire. It was right after Gram's death and I was really undergoing some strange things. It was really kind awful being out there. I felt really kind of lost.

"It's real funny; sometimes people respond to a loss or a sadness by crying a lot, but what happened to me is that I dry up inside and it becomes very painful. That's what it was, what I was going through, and that fire didn't help. I felt like I was being burnt alive."

Most of the songs she sings are sad songs. "Sad songs are more fun to sing. Everybody has the blues. I think that if you listen to Billie Holliday, no matter how sad a song she's singing I always get the feeling that she's smiling. It's kind of like you feel better when you cry. Music is a release. But I enjoy singing happy songs too.

"There might be more uptempo songs on this next album, 'cos that's what I've been doing a lot of on the road [since April she's been touring with her own band, which includes James Burton on guitar]. I've really been having fun with this band, but I think the songs on the first album are really indicative of the past year of my life.

"I look on it as therapy. I think I'd be in the nut-house if I wasn't a singer. In fact I'm positive I would be. Legally insane." She laughs. *Steve Clarke* •

GETTY



April 1975: Pink Floyd at the LA Memorial Sports Arena on the Wish You Were Here Tour

In suspended animation

MM SEPT 20 Floyd lack all conviction, while the Feelgoods are full of passionate intensity.

ALBUMS

Pink Floyd Wish You Were Here

HARVEST

This, space cadets, is IT. You've been waiting for two years for it to arrive, just so's you could snatch it, shrink-wrapped and shining, hot from the deck – Pink Floyd's long-awaited successor to their record-breaking *Dark Side Of The Moon* (in the best-selling album lists for over 30 months and still selling).

Wish You Were Here took six months to record at EMI's new 24-track studio in Abbey Road.

I am not enthralled. I have, also, to admit that its predecessor, despite its enormous popularity, left me equally unmoved. I did try, though, to acclimatise myself to its bleak, emotionally barren landscape. Just as I have tried to entertain the prospect of embracing *Wish You Were Here* as A Giant Step Forward For Mankind, I keep missing the connection, somehow. From whichever direction one approaches *Wish You Were Here*, it still sounds unconvincing in its ponderous sincerity and displays a critical lack of imagination in all departments. It's really all quite predictable, and forces one to the conclusion that for the last two years (possibly longer) the Floyd have existed in a state of suspended animation.

It's really quite alarming that they should have remained so secure in their isolation. While the world turns in destruction upon itself, the Floyd amble somnambulantly along their star-struck avenues arm in arm with some pallid ghost of creativity. *Wish You Were Here* sucks. It's as simple as that.

The omission of two of the songs premiered on their last British tour – "Raving And Drooling" and "Gotta Be Crazy" – is perhaps significant in that it suggests the Floyd have a fundamental lack of confidence in their own material. Similarly, the amount of time they have devoted to this record shouldn't be taken as a sign of their constant search for perfection. Rather, it indicates a lack of determination and resolution.

The constant embellishments and elaborate effects which adorn the album seem merely artificial and contrived. A series of masks and facades to disguise the crucial lack of inspiration which afflicts the whole project.

One thing is evident from the moment the stylus hits the vinyl, *Wish You Were Here* is no progression from *Dark Side Of The Moon*. Just as there has been no real development in the Floyd's music since *Ummagumma*. The slight concept which holds the album together is, essentially, a rather petulant tirade against the rockbiz. The attack is no more than petulant because of Roger Waters' rather dubious qualities as a lyricist. EMI describe Waters' efforts as "penetrating and significant". I refer you and your good judgement to "Welcome To The Machine", which closes side one in a blur of electronic and crowd sound effects. (The Floyd's use of such techniques throughout the album displays as much aural sophistication as a 1967 psychedelic band embarking upon their first concept album). Elsewhere, we have the same wall-to-wall cliches which have marked almost every Floyd album since *Saucerful Of Secrets*. Rick Wright's dawn-of-man keyboard atmospherics became tedious enough on that album. It's unbelievable that he's not realised since that you can do more with a synthesizer than simulate the winds of time drifting across the face of the universe. The worst move he ever made was trading in his Farfisa for a Mellotron.

As musicians, the Floyd have never made any claims for virtuosity, but here the overall standard of their performance is without exception extremely poor. David Gilmour could never be described as a graceful or inventive guitarist, and it's unfortunate that for much of the time the focus should be on his contributions. He plays with a dogged enthusiasm, but he's too often ridiculously obvious.

Only on the introduction to "Have A Cigar" do the band play with any real vigour. It's not majestic, and it's no profound spiritual experience, but at least it's enough to convince me that they haven't stiffed out completely. Yet. Roy Harper, guesting here on vocals, adds a little more interest to what is really a rather colourless song. Waters' lyrics again are painfully mundane. He's simply unable to invest his attack against rockbiz manipulation with any vestige of urgency.

Sample lyric: "*Come in here, dear boy, have a cigar. You're gonna go far, fly high/You're never gonna die, you're gonna make it if you try; they're gonna love you.*" The title track – dominated by some thoroughly inadequate acoustic guitar and Waters' weakest vocal performance – is curiously lightweight, and almost instantly forgettable "*...year after year/Running over the same old ground,*" sings Waters in the third verse. I know how he must feel.

The Floyd's real attempt at a magnum opus to rival past triumphs is the nine-part "Shine On You Crazy Diamond". This is Roger Waters' epic tribute to fractured genius Syd Barrett.

It was perhaps inevitable, within the context of the album and Waters' lyrical preoccupation, that he should choose Barrett, rock casualty supreme, as a tragic example of creative innocence compromised and all but destroyed by the pressures of the biz. The insensitivity of

GETTY





Waters' lyrics borders on the offensive in that they completely trivialise Barrett's predicament.

I can't honestly recommend it for its musical content, either, although the last four "movements" on side two have a vitality absent from the first five which open side one. For most of the ride it's the usual Floyd panorama of sound, with Wright's congregation of keyboards adding ethereal splashes behind Gilmour's armour-piercing guitar forays. The final effect is not unlike a theme from *Quo Vadis* being piped into a supermarket. Careful with those frozen peas, Eugene.

Wish You Were Here will sell as well as *Dark Side Of The Moon*, of course. And in three years, when the next Floyd album is released, I wouldn't be at all surprised if it's still in the chart.

Crazy, isn't it? *Allan Jones*

Dr Feelgood Malpractice

UNITED ARTISTS

THE FIRST thing about this album is that it doesn't make sense until you play it loud.

The second thing is that it's a mean, hard, largely uncompromising high-energy R&B record. And I like it.

In short, *Malpractice* is the cure-all album that Feelgood buffs always hoped the band would make; not unflawed, but far more immediate in impact and finally far more rewarding than *Down By The Jetty*.

Essentially a live band, the Feelgoods' attempts on *Jetty* not to lose their stage sound and identity in the studio – by recording everything in mono with no overdubs – meant substantial underproduction on all but the fiercest numbers.

But, a few limp numbers aside, the real failing of *Jetty* was, as Nick Kent pointed out at the time, its erratic pacing, uneven distribution of material, and its ultimate refusal to gel into a totality.

Malpractice is altogether a more thoughtful and potent prescription. That's clear from the moment "I Can Tell" comes howling off the turntable and sets about your senses like paint stripper. For a start there's a fullness and depth to the production (largely by the band, with four tracks produced by Vic Maile) that's more justly reflective of the riveting Feelgood stage presence.

There's also a more adventurous use of instrumentation here, with Lee Brilleaux getting to wield some vicious slide guitar on two or three cuts, piano by Bob Andrews added on a couple more, and Wilko playing enough for two guitarists most of the time anyhow.

And it's all in stereo.

Equally significant is the album's inner balance and cohesion. The ratio of Wilko Johnson originals to hallowed R& B classics like Bobby Parker's "Watch Your Step" and The Coasters' "Riot In Cell Block Number Nine" is fifty-fifty, but feels like less since Johnson material like "Going Back Home" (which he co-wrote with his guitar hero Mick Green) (whaddya mean, who's he? Played with Johnny Kidd & The Pirates, didn't he?) And "Back In The Night" are straight out of the mainstream R&B tradition.

But then the band in general seem to have absorbed the "feel" of the R&B idiom. They turn country blues like Skip James' "Rolling And Tumbling" into a pounding electric power-drive that couldn't have come from anywhere before 1975, and stack it full of black-cat-bone, put-a-spell-on-you menace and power, easily outclassing the hysterical attempts at screaming savagery we're currently witnessing from so many US punk bands.

Similarly they hand out lethal razor-edged treatments to "I Can Tell" (a Bo Diddley song) and "Watch Your Step", the number with the most extensively plundered intro in rock history, I should think, with "Riot" every bit as transfixing as the show-stopping treatment it gets on stage. Except there're no visuals, of course.

"Don't You Just Know It" is the other side of the blues tradition, a comparatively relaxed Huey "Piano" Smith romp that builds deceptively into an infectious call-and-answer choogie.

That leaves the Wilko originals – "Going Back Home" is relentless up-tempo sinew-stretching boogie in the vein of Slim Harpo's "Shake Your Hips" and "Back In The Night" is likewise straight-down-the-line Elmore James 12-bar which suffers from a lacklustre vocal treatment.

"Another Man" is slight by comparison, more in keeping with the likes of "Another Weekend Of Your Love" on the first album than the rest of *Malpractice*, though Wilko's playing saves it from becoming totally pedestrian.

And "Don't Let Your Daddy Know" is... godawful. Well, if you like obscure Stones B-sides with sneery punk paranoid lyrics (sung in deadpan Wilko style), sparse production and dubious harp, you'll really go for it. *Malpractice*'s equivalents to "Boom Boom" on *Jetty* and the album's worst lapse of taste.

Finally there's a brace of Johnson songs that close side two – "Because You're Mine" is a Wilko showcase, with vocals, bass and drums overshadowed and dictated by the stuttering, jaw-clenched rhythms that Johnson's guitar spits out. The sound is eerie, grating and sinister; the style is, as has been noted before, an almost complete synthesis of the traditional roles of "rhythm" and "lead" guitar.

Though the same synthesis is called into play on almost every track, it's particularly in evidence on this and on the two-and-a-half minutes of "You Shouldn't Call The Doctor (If You Can't Afford The Bills)" which closes the album.

The latter is straight from the Chuck Berry mould, bounding insuppressibly along, behind lyrics which you can imagine from the title. Could even become a signature tune.

What's more left to say?

Figure and Sparko play tight, mostly unobtrusive drums and bass respectively, Lee B blows his usual exemplary harp (hey, remember harps?) and grates his sandpaper vocal cords more menacingly than ever. Wilko is simply stunning for most of the time. It might even be a hit.

Neil Spencer



SINGLES

David Bowie Fame RCA

The king of excess is at it again, with lashings of overkill and exaggeration. The drumkit goes through it most of all, a steady clatter upstaging even Bowie's eccentric vocals, while a raunchy brass-flavoured rhythm drives it along with considerable impact and guts. Certainly one of the better tracks from *Young Americans*, with Bowie launching himself body and soul into the turbulent fray and fitting quite neatly into the guise of a black soul singer. There's so much conviction and sheer hostility in the performance that reaction has got to be entirely positive. Vastly better than the last indifferent single and the best from him for some time. Hit.

MM Jul 19

Bad Company Feel Like Makin' Love

ISLAND

This track, taken from the band's *Straight Shooter* album, should have been released as a single months ago. On a purely commercial level, it beats the hell out of Bad Co's last 45, "Good Lovin' Gone Bad". Good hookline, excellent vocal from Rodgers, snazzy guitar runs, even a melody line... a record which, one must assume, will be a radio programmer's delight.

Trouble is, the lyric is appalling. Lines like "*If I had those golden dreams of my yesterdays*" come straight from the Golden Treasury Of Rock Poetry. A hit nevertheless. *MM Aug 16*

Steely Dan Do It Again ABC

Buy this single. Taken from Steely's magnificent debut album, *Can't Buy A Thrill*, released back in 1972, this song has strangely never been a hit in this country. But everything about it is right, from the arrangement through to the lyric. A record which doesn't insult the intelligence. Deserves to be Number One. Hit.

MM Aug 16



1975

OCTOBER – DECEMBER

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN, PETER GABRIEL, OZZY OSBOURNE AND MORE

LENNON STAYS—
APPEAL COURT RULES

Not sufficient reason for deportation

MM OCT 18 John Lennon wins his fight to stay in the USA.

JOHN LENNON HAS won his fight against deportation from the United States. The victory came last week when the US Court Of Appeal decided Lennon's British drug conviction was not sufficient reason for the American Immigration Department's deportation order against him.

The decision came on the eve of the birth of Sean Ono Lennon, John and Yoko's first child. The Court's judgement marks the climax to a three-year struggle by Lennon to stay in the States. He entered America on August 31, 1971, originally intending to stay for a few weeks to attend a court hearing concerning the custody of Kyoko, Yoko Ono's daughter by her first marriage to film director Tony Cox.

Early the following year Lennon retained lawyer Leon Wildes when it became necessary for him to apply for an extension to his American visa. Since that time there have been numerous attempts by the government to have Lennon deported, but constant appeals have enabled him to remain in the US.

He has not been able to leave America, however, for fear that the immigration authorities would bar him from entry if he attempted to return.

The whole case was further complicated by two actions filed against the American government by Wildes. The first and most important of the actions claimed the Immigration Department pre-judged Lennon's case without giving him a fair opportunity to state his reasons for wishing to remain in the US.

August 1975: John Lennon and a pregnant Yoko Ono attend a performance of the Broadway play *Same Time Next Year* at the Brooks Atkinson Theatre, New York City

GETTY

Waits: the great white hope



Tom Waits in LA in 1975: "Before I found Kerouac I was kinda groping for something to hang on to, stylistically"

"A vicarious sort of thrill"

MM OCT 4 Introducing... Beat generation heir and "the worst-dressed man I ever saw", Tom Waits.

THIS IS AN old diner on the funky end of 8th Avenue, hung with grease-stained cardboard plaques that say things like "Hamburg + french fries + coleslaw = 95c" or "Try our soup of the day. Different soup daily 20c." Green tiled walls and green chipped Formica workbench-type counter tops, the dreary uniformity of colour broken by hulking and battered aluminium urns.

Tom Waits feels at home. Most of the... uh... clientele here are earthy working men, burly constructing crew workers, truck drivers and the odd derelict, most of these red-nosed and grimy and sporting the standard wino trim – three days of stubble, what remains of heads of hair anchored down to scabbed scalps by months, years of sweat and dirt.

Nobody here realises they're dining with the great left-field hope of the David Geffen empire. Yes sir, from the team that gave you the Eagles, Joni Mitchell, the Souther-Hillman-Furay Band and even (for a while) Bob Dylan – Elektra/Asylum Records presents... (fanfare of trumpets)... Tom Waits!

Tom Waits is the worst dressed man I ever saw. Impossibly crumpled, three-sizes-too-big, dark-grey suit, collar liberally sprinkled with dandruff, voluminous torn T-shirt decorated with axle-grease thumb prints and a flat cap with grimy brim which has been all but rubbed away by generations of usage. From underneath, straw-coloured curls protrude, crowning a drained and pallid face. Bloodshot eyes, hollow cheeks and a whispy goatee.

Although reluctant to admit it, Waits has consciously styled his artistic and personal development along the lines laid down in the '50s by the so-called Beat Generation – taking as his model writers like Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, and particularly Jack Kerouac. And never mind that virtually all the writers involved in that very loose movement ultimately disowned their hobo on-the-road years, Waits is passionately committed to the spirit of the '50s and all that it entailed.

> "I just can't find a melody to hang the words on to. I do it anyway"

In the grand Beat tradition, Waits sits in seedy luncheonettes and crowded bars writing down conversations that he hears around him, and later turns these into songs.

And the Kerouac influence makes itself manifest in these songs in more than just general terms. Why, the very title of Waits' second album, *The Heart Of Saturday Night*, is in direct reference to a passage from Kerouac's book *Visions Of Cody*, and the theme of the whole album is essentially little more than an elaboration, albeit articulate, on this self-same passage (pages 80 through 85 in the McGraw Hill paperback edition, if you want to check it out for yourselves).

And when it came to selecting a '50s-style back-up trio for his New York appearance at the swanky Reno Sweeney's Club, who should Waits choose to front such a band but tenorist Al Cohn, who just happens to be the saxophonist who worked with – you guessed it – ol' Jack Dulouz Kerouac himself on a 1960 jazz/poetry album called *Blues/Haikus*.

To be sure, then, pianist/guitarist/singer/raconteur Tom Waits walks that most perilous of lines between idolisation on the one hand and downright plagiarism on the other.

But what does Waits have that's his own, you ask? Well, Kerouac never actually wrote songs as such, of course, and thus, unlike Waits, never got his material recorded by the Eagles, Bette Midler, Ian Matthews, Lee Hazlewood and Tim Buckley – to name but five. Not that Waits likes any of the cover versions overmuch.

"The Eagles made 'Ol' '55' really antiseptic, y'know, and that song's on jukeboxes everywhere now. When I hear those songs and the real essence doesn't come across, I figure that maybe the songs just ain't strong enough."

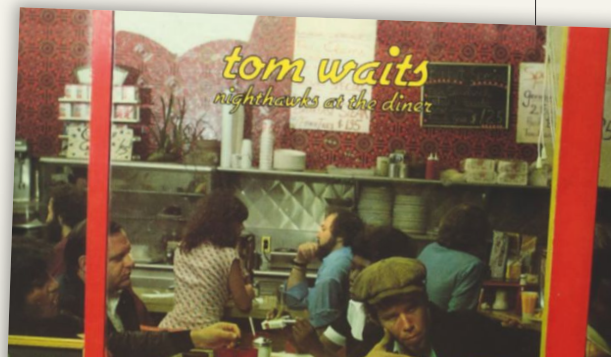
This lack of conviction in his songwriting ability has made Waits lean progressively more and more heavily (onstage) on his words: "If I can't find a melody to hang the words on to, I just don't worry about it. I do it anyway, without music.

"I got a thing on my upcoming album called 'Spare Parts', which is a thing I wrote, but in the final analysis it's a solo effort, it's something you do by yourself and nobody can really tell anybody else how to do it.

"It starts off as a vicarious sort of thrill. Through somebody else's work you get the feeling that you could do something like that, but then later you find out how very difficult it actually is to do something meaningful."

And for Tom Waits, his most "meaningful" effort to date is his new album – a live double recorded, paradoxically, in the studios. To get the nightclub atmosphere, Tom moved tables and chairs into his favourite studio, opened a bar and invited his friends along. The record is called *Nighthawks At The Diner*.

"It's probably the newness of it that makes me like it the most. I don't know – I never play



GETTY

my old records, so it's difficult to be objective. There's a new thing I've done called 'Eggs And Sausage' which I'm really pleased with, and another one called 'Warm Beer And Cold Women'... Oh and there's one called 'Putnam County' which is a little vignette about a Naugahyde town in Kentucky...

"I've always found it awkward to adjust to the studio – that knowledge that you've got the same facilities as any other artist at your disposal – you can go in and make a great album or you can go in and suck raw eggs."

At Reno Sweeney's Tom Waits looks absurdly incongruous. The T-shirt has been replaced by a white, more conventional variety and a skinny lifeless necktie is knotted about halfway down his chest. But otherwise it's the same sad suit and cap and peeling chisel-toe shoes.

Reno Sweeney's, you should understand, is what London's Biba's Rainbow Room is supposed to be, stylised eleganza.

Al Cohn pushes his tenor through a few genteel paces, blinking owlishly behind his spectacles. Come to think of it, he hasn't changed much since the '50s either. He's still sounding like a bluesier synthesis of Lester Young and Charlie Parker: not an unhealthy combination, let it be said.

But Cohn doesn't get enough room to move. This is Tom Waits' show and the music is secondary to the imagery. Unobtrusive background music, that's all that's required of one of the most important tenorists of the postwar years, a guy on a par with Zoot Sims and Stan Getz. Which isn't to knock Waits necessarily – the jazz-poetry fusions throughout history have usually transpired in the music losing out, relegated to a backseat role.

And Tom Waits is babbling. "*Under the circumcision this is pretty prophylactic*," he blurts at one point to more titters, and later I think I hear him cram a couple of stanzas from Kerouac's "Mexico City Blues" into the proceedings, but I can't be sure, and nobody else seems to notice. Seems we can't avoid talking about Kerouac. I prevail on him to explain the roots of this obsession.

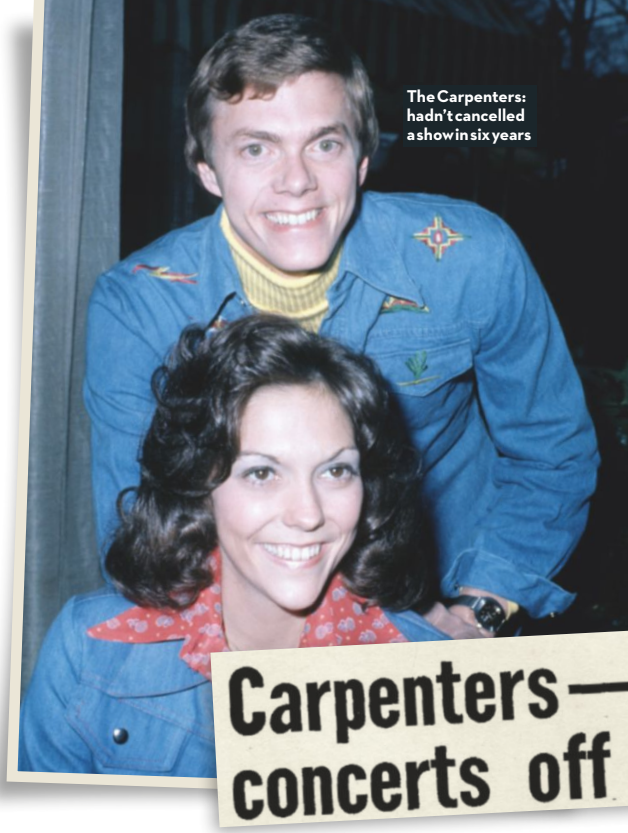
"I'm interested in the style mainly. Before I found Kerouac I was kinda groping for something to hang on to, stylistically.

"I was kinda lost in the '60s. Y'know I kinda slept in the '60s. Knowing I wanted to do something creative, not knowing how or where to do it."

Living in California, Waits remained immune to the celebrated San Francisco music explosion.

"I thought it was a waste of time, I knew it was going to consume itself pretty rapidly. I was more interested in the early beginnings of that scene than I was in its progress. I didn't go to San Francisco until the whole love-and-flowers bit was all over, and when I did go, I was looking for the City Lights Bookstore and the ghost of Jack Kerouac.

"Writing is a much more easy business to discuss," he croaks, "than to actually get down and do it yourself. You can talk for days about how you write or where you write or how you like the room or what you write about." *Steve Lake*



The Carpenters: hadn't cancelled a show in six years

Carpenters — concerts off

"I couldn't get out of bed"

MM NOV 1 Karen Carpenter's health causes concern.

THE CARPENTERS' TOUR of Britain is off because of the collapse from sheer exhaustion of Karen. Ticket holders for the 38-date trek will have their money refunded.

In Los Angeles this week, Karen told *MM* editor Ray Coleman: "It's annoying to feel that I couldn't withstand what I was doing to myself. You tend to say, 'Hey, no sweat. I can handle it', but this time I couldn't. Suddenly, a week or so ago, I went whack – I couldn't get out of bed. It took me by surprise, because for six years I have never cancelled a show in the whole time, except when I had laryngitis and couldn't talk. I've travelled with bronchitis and fever and everything else."

Karen's illness, officially described by her doctor as spastic colitis, finally hit her during cabaret in Las Vegas, a month ago. It began as a sore throat. She took penicillin, which didn't agree with her. "I kept telling myself, 'I'm not really sick, I'll be better tomorrow.' When you have a show to do, you just bear on through it. But it kept getting worse and the last two days there I don't know how I got through."

Back home in Los Angeles, her doctor sent her to bed, where she slept for 14 to 16 hours a day. "My mother thought I was dead; I normally manage on four to six hours. It was obvious that for the past two years I've been running on nervous energy. So I spent the past month in bed trying to get better, and hopefully ready for the British tour."

Karen got rid of the infection, but her brother Richard and new manager Terry Ellis insisted on a hospital check-up.

"Spastic colitis is apparently a condition prone to occur in hyperactive or tense people, and I've always been like that. I run 23 hours a day. For the life of me I don't know why it has developed this way, but I feel totally worn out."

Karen and Richard said they had not had a holiday during their entire career in the music business until midway through the *Horizon* album. "I went away for four days then and didn't know what to do with myself," Karen added. "I'm going to have to seriously try to calm down, but it's easier said than done."

In Britain The Carpenters' record company, A&M, stand to lose about £1 million worth of record sales generated by interest in the tour.

The Carpenters were scheduled to do British dates during a 50-concert, 28-day tour of Europe. Richard Carpenter visited Britain to explain the cancellation.

Rumours of disenchantment

MM DEC 20 Bernie Leadon quits the Eagles, Joe Walsh steps up.

JOE WALSH HAS replaced guitarist Bernie Leadon in the Eagles. He will be playing with the band on their forthcoming American tour.

Rumours of disenchantment within the band have been rife for some time and Leadon is known to dislike touring. The choice of Joe Walsh as his replacement, however, is a complete surprise. He has established a considerable reputation as an artist in his own right.

Walsh and the Eagles share the same manager, Irving Azoff, and both acts appeared at Elton John's Wembley Stadium concert last June – a performance which climaxed with Walsh jamming with the Eagles.

A new live album by Walsh will be released in February, and after the Eagles' US concerts, the band will be embarking on a world tour with gigs in Britain on the cards.

Although Walsh is now a full-time member of the band, it seems certain that he will also continue his solo career.



May 19, 1975: Joe Walsh at the Pinkpop Festival in Geleen, Netherlands

Walsh joins Eagles

GETTY (2)



Bobby Womack: touring with the Faces delayed work on his solo LP *Safety Zone*

"The sessions were pretty loose"

MM DEC 27 Brunch in New York with Bobby Womack: top songwriter, Rolling Stones support act and lately... Ron Wood's producer.

BOBBY WOMACK IS the kind of guy who lights up a room when he enters, and this suite in the Plaza Hotel is no exception. Sunday brunch arrived first, and Womack a few minutes later, emerging from his bedroom in a leather suit, bouncing across the suite and talking 19 to the dozen.

It's been a good year for Bobby Womack, a fact suitably reflected in the lavish Plaza accommodation, and next year things are likely to get better. Some of this good fortune can be put down to good management and some can be put down to both the Faces and the Rolling Stones.

This summer Womack played as the support band for the Stones on a number of their US tour dates, and played with the Faces as a co-opted member of the band for a few songs on their US tour.

In both cases the decision to invite Womack along stems from a long admiration for this veteran US rhythm & blues singer: Womack once sang with Sam Cooke and no one needs reminding how Rod Stewart idolises the ex-leader of The Soul Stirrers; and Womack, of course, wrote "It's All Over Now", a massive hit for the Stones in the '60s, and a featured song by the Faces ever since Stewart recorded the song on *Gasoline Alley*.

He also has a new album released, titled *Safety Zone*, which features a sleeve of pictures of the artist posing with his own Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow, and a newish band who'll be touring the US soon and, hopefully, visit Europe for the first time in the spring of next year.

Womack says, discreetly, that he'll be touring with a "big British band", but won't mention any names until contracts are finalised. One must assume it's either the Faces or the Stones. Apart from a visit to the UK earlier this year to produce Ronnie Wood's second solo album, the much-travelled Womack had never visited England. He was a bit of a myth, he admits, but there were plenty of people on hand to shake his palm reverently when he finally arrived.

Womack was born in Cleveland, Ohio one of five brothers who formed a gospel group together. The Womack Brothers toured with Sam Cooke and The Soul Stirrers, and Womack became Cooke's guitar player on the dissolution of both groups. From that moment on he became a solo artist and writer, contributing not only "It's All Over Now" to the "classic" rock catalogue, but also


Womack: Safety first-



"Lookin' For Love", which has become a tour de force of the J Geils Band, and "I'm A Midnight Mover" for Wilson Pickett.

Devouring bacon and eggs in the Plaza, he becomes gradually more and more awake, mentioning that his son is photographed with him on the album sleeve, and he was married to Sam Cooke's wife, after Cooke died, for several years. Gradually he comes around to his recent activities: touring with the Faces held up work on this new album; originally it had been thought that Womack's band would support them, but eventually it wound up as Womack appearing as a guest Face.

"I just went up on stage and we jammed together," said Womack, pushing his plate aside and pouring coffee. "I did 'It's All Over Now' with him, then a number with Ron from his album that I produced, and then I did 'Bring It On Home To Me' and then 'This Old Heart Of Mine', 'cos I like the way they do that."

The relationship between Womack and the Faces started two years ago when Womack visited the Forum in Los Angeles on the invitation of the Faces' management.

"I'd read somewhere that Rod was saying I was one of his favourite artists and so I figured I'd try to reach him. I called him one day and said… 'Hey man, this is Bobby Womack.' and he freaked out.

"At first we talked about doing a tribute to Sam Cooke type album and I thought that was fantastic, so I went down the Forum and… well, I must say I didn't know Ron from Rod."

The "Tribute To Cooke" album never materialised, of course, but Wood did wind up using Womack as his producer this year. "Somewhere along the line… I don't know whether it was the company that got involved or the manager or whatever, but it didn't come off. But I was sitting in a car with them one day and Ron says… 'Why don't we cut my album?'… and I figured I couldn't wait around for ever waiting for Rod. So I went to England for the first time.

"The people accepted me so well in England, I figured that if I'd made it there five years ago I'd never have to work here now. People kept coming over to see what I was doin', and Ron had to keep the doors locked to get them out. I felt really proud about it all."

"I didn't dig it when the Stones were doing 'It's All Over Now'… until I got the first cheque"

In the end Womack ended up writing about 70 per cent of the material for Wood's album while they produced it together. "It was me and the piano player Mac (Ian Mclagan) and Ron, who was there all the time when the others split. We was up two or three days at a time. Them sessions were pretty loose, sure, but this time around Ron concentrated on his vocals a lot."

Womack's own group have been together a matter of months apart from the relatively casual brass section he's known for five years. He would like them to work in the studio with him – "I think when I play a song in the studio and they do it live, they do a better version" – but instead he used session guys.

Already this band has played a tour with both the Ohio Players and Graham Central Station, as well as a few dates with the Stones. "When we came off that we was tight as a bug on a tree. I did a few new things and then my older stuff… Sure, 'It's All Over Now', 'Looking For Love', 'I Can Understand It' and we'd create things on stage… jamming till we found a groove.

"I've rearranged 'It's All Over Now' because I hated it through hearing everybody do it the same way. Me and Bill Withers cut it together and we changed it around, but I think people prefer hearing it the old way.

"Y'know… I didn't dig it at all when I knew the Stones were doing that song. That was my first record and it was a hit and I didn't want to know about no cover version. It was Sam Cooke that told me and he was happy because he had the publishing, but I didn't care about the Rolling Stones… no… I said, 'Let them get their own songs together, man', but they did it and I didn't understand why Sam was happy until I got the first cheque.

"Then I thought, 'Great – the Rolling Stones can do eight of my songs.' I lived off that record for about 10 years, and I'm not lying to you. The Faces did it and Ry Cooder, and I loved the way he did it."

Womack, in fact, didn't get to meet the Stones until this year, and this was through Wood. During the course of their recording together in London, Wood had to go to Paris to meet the Stones for talks on the US tour and Womack went along for the ride. It was a trip that resulted in his playing some of their dates, perhaps the most coveted opening spot in rock'n'roll this year.

Of all the artists who have recorded his material, Womack cites Wilson Pickett as the artist he prefers most. "He made the best job of the things I did, like 'I'm In Love' and 'Midnight Mover'." *Chris Charlesworth*





Ron Wood and Rod Stewart during the Faces' final US tour in autumn '75

"I don't think Ron knows yet"

NME DEC 27 The Faces finally fold. Where does this leave Ron Wood?

THE MOST WIDELY anticipated split in rock history finally came to a head last weekend, when Rod Stewart officially announce that he has broken his connections with the Faces.

Stewart said that his decision to leave the group, in order to concentrate on a solo career, was taken after much deliberation. He added that he could no longer work in a situation where the Faces' lead guitarist, Ron Wood, seemed to be permanently "on loan" to the Rolling Stones.

Stewart now intends to form his own band, the lineup of which will be made known early in the New Year. However, it now seems unlikely that Wood will join the new band, as had been widely rumoured in the past.

There has, as yet, been no official word regarding Ron Wood's future plans. It has automatically been assumed that he will now join the Rolling Stones – with whom he toured America in the summer and has recently been recording on the Continent – on a permanent basis.

When *NME* contacted Mick Jagger in Paris on Friday morning, just before he boarded a plane for the United States, he had only just heard of the Faces split. He commented: "I don't think Ron even knows about it yet. All I can say at the moment is that no agreement has yet been signed between the Stones and Ron Wood. There's nothing finalised at all. But as I say, we've only just learned of the split."

It seems logical that Wood will join the Stones. But reports in the national and evening papers last weekend, suggesting that he had already done so, were – at press-time – still premature.

Jagger reaffirmed that the Stones are planning a European tour in the early spring, and expected to include British dates in their itinerary. He said they were aiming at March–April for the tour, but emphasised that no venues are yet set.

The *NME* understands that April 6 is being held for a Rolling Stones concert at Wembley Empire Pool, but that the Stones have not yet given their final approval.

GETTY (2)

"Down to earth"

In a world of stars, LOWELL GEORGE remains a musician. While his band LITTLE FEAT wow the crowds, George keeps his head screwed on, his heart in the right place. "I will cancel a show – and have," he says, "if we're supposed to be opening for a band that I despise."

— NME DECEMBER 6 —

ONCE UPON A time in the early '60s when everybody suddenly started getting paranoid about advertising men, and half the people you met were convinced that the "Hidden Persuaders" were secretly ruling the world from Madison Avenue, you used to hear this cute slogan attributed to some grey-flannel-suited wolverine Machiavelli from one of the big ad agencies.

This bit of prefab folk wisdom went, "You don't sell the steak, you sell the sizzle."

The thing is, it ain't that easy to tell where the steak ends and the sizzle begins. Obviously it's the steak that's sizzling, and if you extend the metaphor so that Little Feat are the steak, then the sizzle is what happens when the stocky, bearded guy with the tired eyes standing up front bears down on his white Stratocaster with the metal tube on his finger and makes it sound just so…

It's a sizzle, right enough. He lays the sizzle simmering and bubbling over the chug of the rest of the band, and when he hits the note, that's when you just naturally get up on yer hind legs and put on your sailin' shoes.

Ladies and gentlemen, Little Feat. On guitar and vocals, Mr Lowell George.

Obviously, something had to give sometime. If the first half of the '70s were delineated by a desire for an excess of posturing and extravagance – a succession of arrogant elitists more concerned with mimicking the worst and most inhuman manifestations of old-style Hollywood stardom – then it was inevitable that sooner or later the whole rhinestoned bubble would burst and leave a sticky mess over the faces of a large number of both its perpetrators and its audience.

Hence the burning question of the moment, asked in the pages of most thinking rock papers and in the homes of most thinking rock devotees: "Is rock dead?" If the question is interpreted to mean, "Is the music (and by extension the makers and listeners thereof) stone kaput?" the answer is obviously, "Hell, no." If it's interpreted to mean, "Is rock in the process of streamlining itself by shedding a tacky old skin which was draining too much energy from the parent organism?" then the answer is, "Yes please – and can you put that Little Feat album on again?"

Ladies and gentlemen, Little Feat. On guitar and vocals, Mr Lowell George.

Maybe the time has come to sacrifice a few of the old gods – the ones who have become either too preoccupied by the circumstances of their godhood, or too debilitated by the stresses and strains of said godhood to be able to remember or act upon the memory of why we made 'em gods in the first place. You know – the ones who're too busy hiding out from taxmen, romancing movie stars and getting their blood changed to do records and tours and get the crumbling remnants of their music out to the people who save up for the albums and queue three days to get tickets to see 'em on stage on their biannual tours. »

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY



Lowell George on April 22, 1975: "I'm not anxious to play in gigantic halls, which is where we're headed right now"

These people have consciously divorced themselves from us to the point that what they have to say to us don't matter any more. What Mick Jagger thinks about anything is no longer relevant. What Rod Stewart thinks isn't relevant. So who needs 'em?

Sure, if we're still assessing rock in terms of these screwed-up old dinosaurs and the likelihood of new dinosaurs emerging, then yes, baby, rock is dead, and if it means an end to dinosaurs I'll be right up there lighting the first log on the funeral pyre.

But rock manifestly isn't dead – and in evidence I'll call Dr Feelgood, the Wailers, Patti Smith, Bob Dylan (a potential dinosaur who, alone among his contemporaries, cared enough to evolve) and…

Ladies and gentlemen, Little Feat, On vocals and guitar, Lowell George.



Little Feat in LA, 1975: (l–r) Kenny Gradney, Bill Payne, Lowell George, Paul Barrere, Sam Clayton and Richie Hayward

LOWELL ISN'T A star. He's a musician. You stand in the corridor outside his second-floor room in the Watergate Hotel in Washington DC, and as you prepare to ring the bell you notice a single, solitary squeezed lemon lurking on the carpet. He lets you in, murmurs "Well, hey" and disappears into the bathroom, and you prowl around for a few moments.

It takes you a few seconds to realise that the two speakers that flank the bed aren't part of the hotel furnishings because they seem to blend in so well with the decor – the same fake grain veneer plastic wood beloved by the Gracious Living Departments of both hotels and electronic equipment designers. There's a box of cassettes – Bach lute music, Ry Cooder, home-compiled bluegrass, the Stones – a folded *NME* by the sofa, a fake *National Enquirer* front page made up by Warners.

Lowell George is Mr Average. He's not a glitter wimp or a cocaine pimp or a street punk; just a stocky bearded guy with an air of bearlike abstracted amiability in jeans, scuffed suede boots, a mauve shirt and a blue V-neck pullover that, if worn by an Englishman, would seem to have space-warped their way straight out of Marks & Spencer.

He offers you a choice of real and fake mineral water, tops it up with ice and half a lemon ("Uhhhh… where'd I put that knife?") and we sit down. Before I can even think "interview", I realise that we've just spent 15 minutes talking about a mutual friend and 10 minutes discussing the Marx Brothers. How the hell do you "interview" a guy like that?

See, when the idea of going to Washington and doing a Little Feat piece came up, I hadn't intended to interview anybody at all. Little Feat's music always seemed to speak for itself more than adequately, and rather than ruthlessly interrogate the creators thereof for musical minutiae and scabrous personal anecdotes about other famous people, it seemed more appropriate to try and just hang out and write a documentary number on the band and their associates.

It didn't work out quite like that because I'd bumped into Lowell George in the lobby and had an incidental two minutes conversation which convinced me that they guy was so obviously enjoyable to talk to that getting in an hour's gab with him was going to be a pleasure in itself. So I got back in touch with the PR wing of the operation and said that I'd changed my mind, and could they fix up an interview after all. Borrowed a tape machine, fought my way past the flattened lemon in the corridor, rang the doorbell… it was quite an adventure.

So at one point we were talking about The Byrds, and how the first two albums are so similar in content, technique and texture that they sound like one album, and Mr George sez:

"The sound was very similar, because the band had not gone through any of the monumental changes that occur when a band gets very successful and everybody gets a big head.

"I mean, that's one of the problems of rock'n'roll, when a kid of twenty-two or -three gets successful and goes to a $200,000-a-year place in space and thinks, 'Shit, I can play the drums and earn $200,000 a year – fuck these guys!' And they go out on their own and they find out that it's all a mistake – ya know? What a wonderful industry."

What about the dissociation that occurs when a songwriter who draws on his environment is pulled out of that environment and placed among the limos, dope, five-star hotels and trashy women of rock stardom?

"Of course. That happens to everybody. Springsteen will write songs about all the press he's got. He's had more press than any living being who hasn't sold a hundred thousand albums ever. It's amazing. Bruce is bigger than a politician. I haven't met the guy and I haven't heard his records, so I can't tell you what's going to happen to him. That happens to me too, but I always have those cheesy Holiday Inns to bring me right back down to earth, and I don't think we'll ever escape them.

"Another thing is that I'm not anxious to play in gigantic halls, which is where we're headed right now. I don't relish that idea at all. I'd rather play to three, five, seven thousand people and play for several nights, maybe three nights in a row if we have a huge audience. Play to a small audience where the reality is much closer. You know, where there's still a communication."

But what happens when the records start breaking big and the record company starts pushing the band to play those bigger gigs and reach more consumers with less outlay?

"It isn't record companies that say that, it's agents and managers. They'd love that to happen because they make more money that way. Actually, it really shouldn't be up to them. It should be up to me, and I'm working on that right now, trying to have it be my decision and not be anybody else's. One thing is that I hate to come to a town and be out the next day. You never get to find out about the street and what's going down and if there's a song out there to be written. I mean, this city…"

Washington. The band's PR say it's their "home town" (even though they're from good ol' Ho-Lee-Wood, LA, Calif) and that night at the gig the emcee will exhort the crowd to "Please welcome home, Little Feat!"

"This city is an amazing place and I love to stay around here, because there's so much great music. It's very provincial. Twenty miles across that river right there is Virginia, where bluegrass music runs rampant in the streets. There's players here that are as good as there ever have been – I can think of two mandolin players that have lived in this town, and a dobro player, Mike Auldridge, who is just unbelievable, the dobro player of all time, and John Starling, a singer-songwriter who lives in the vicinity who is also a doctor. I hate to exclude all that.

"Jerry Garcia, you know, goes out and gets back on the street again, forms another group that is not quite together and has no – an untogether together band – and performs because he wants to get back to the street again."

I allowed as how I thought that that was great of Garcia, but wished



GINNY WINN/GETTY

that a few people whose music was closer to my own street would do the same.

"Name one." Led Zep?

"I love their music, but their presentation leaves a little to be desired. Also they play a little bit too loud for 10,000 seats. It's so godawful loud. I'd love to hear those guys come out with little cheesy Fender amps in a tiny hall some place under another name, but I reckon they're a little too advanced to do that."

Yeah, but what Zep play has to be that loud to provide that overpowering annihilation effect that H Metal depends on, especially for a band like Zep, who are all about power of various kinds.

"That's a very sexual concept – volume as subjugation of the feminine. I wonder if that's a formula that those folks have arrived at."

The doorbell rings, and when we resume, Lowell is recounting the tale of a gig at "a horrible little auditorium in Vance, California" where all the biggies arrived to catch El Feat.

"There was Phantom Fingers – what's his name? – Page, yeah, Plant and Page; that warbler from Australia – what's her name? – Helen Reddy; the Hagar Brothers from *Hee Haw* (US C&W TV show). We had Ringo – it cracked me up that those people would be concerned about the idiom that we were playing in and concerned enough to go to Vance, California. I was impressed pretty much despite myself.

"We have gathered a kind of what you might call an underground audience which is now above ground. Sometimes the show might not be very good, but it's still because we're six people with six different feelings about what should be played. Sometimes it's on – sometimes we're really great. But it's amazing how overwhelming this whole music thing is, that people should devote their lives to finding out what kind of aftershave Frank Sinatra uses.

"I think the first major music star to gain a gigantic audience was Bing Crosby. Those old musicals were kind of what created this whole massive record market. But now, heavy metal has had its day both in terms of the music and those individuals who deal in that kind of lifestyle. People came to see Joe Cocker because he was gonna throw up on the drummer, and oddly enough he did it almost every night. It was almost like it was a plan. Now Joe Cocker doesn't seem to be in mind to plan anything, so I wonder who did plan it. Maybe someone puts epicac in his Southern Comfort.

"We did a coupla concerts with him, and they said, 'You haveta play for 55 minutes. If you go over we're in trouble.' And the reason for that was that they wanted to get him on the stage as quickly as possible. He's such a fantastic singer, has such a fantastic style. He does amaz-ing things with his voice.

"Yeah, who knows. Right now it's all going backwards. Pretty soon we'll be back in the swing era. People are saying, 'We've had everything else, so…' I hate to concern myself with any of that. I'd rather just sit down and write, just try to write a good song, wherever it's supposed to be.

"Something else about what happens when you reach a certain stage: one's life gets so taken up with airports and transportation and getting to the gig on time that there's no time left for writing. Nowadays I'm really screwed to come up with a page of lyrics, which is no fun.

"Sure, when you start to make it you have to lose something, and basically this is a business and I realised that none of the people in the business see any reason why you should do it other than to make money. I've realised that and now I have to deal with it daily and now I'm a real negative factor to many of the people who have to deal with the band. I will cancel a show – and have – if we're supposed to be opening for a band that I despise. I will not play for them.

"And then I get the office, (*he slips into a classic Lenny Bruce "agent" voice*) 'Hey, whass goin' awn? Yuh cancelled th' gig!' and I go, 'Yeah!'

"They say, 'But we gotta get to that town 'n sell re-cuds!' I say, 'OK, here's what you do. Get a bass player and a curtain and I'll stand in back of you and you do the show.' They say, 'No, that won't work.'

"The logic behind why you do it is something that a lotta people forget too early on. I want to try and hold onto it…"

Ladies and gentlemen, Little Feat. On guitar and vocals, Mr Lowell George.

> "When you start to make it you have to to lose something"

THE CAPITOL IN Washington is a slick 10,000-seater seemingly constructed entirely out of recycled orange peel and old Action Man dolls. The show double-bills Dave Mason and Little Feat as co-headliners supported by Catfish Hodge.

Little Feat were brought on, up in front of a big audience in a plastic hall, and they got it on right from the opening "Apolitical Blues" (God, who else plays a slow blues with satirical lyrics as an opening number?) right through to the closing percussion shake-it-up of "Feats Don't Fail Me Now"; they were sublime.

Right from percussionist Sam Clayton's screwdriver-jiver gimme-five why-ain't-I-with-the-Ohio-Players caperings through to Lowell's almost abstracted sangfroid, their very disparity helped maintain the balance; a balance upset only by co-guitarist Paul Barrere's bullmoose parade-ground bellows of ritual invocations like "Rrrrrock'n'roll!" and "Git daown!", which are OK for the likes of Johnny Winter but seem almost absurdly contrived and affected in the context of Little Feat.

But what made it happen is that Lowell and his boys know what makes it work. They know what sounds good and they play what sounds good from an instinctive sense of balance and control. When Lowell sends a lick skimming and sizzling across the chugging, choppy surface of the band's music, he does so simply because he knows that it ought to be there because it's right.

And then be comes out and sings "Willin'", and for the first time since I grew to love that song I realised why.

Ostensibly, the subject of the song is truck driving, but anybody who thinks that "Willin'", is just a song about truck driving probably also thinks that Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe books are about a detective. In both cases, subject matter is merely a metaphor; but whereas Chandler's theme is the hardship and the necessity of being true to yourself in a world where everybody else is simply out for themselves, George's theme in "Willin'" is life and love of life and the knowledge that both the good times and the bad times come from the same place and that neither one can be denied in favour of the other because they are truly indivisible.

George's protagonist in "Willin'" has been through it all: he's weather-beaten and bleeding and rootless and he misses his woman, but he's still on his feet and still willin', not out of blind stoicism but out of a serene realisation of a fact of life that's been staring us all in the faces since Day One and is there to be built on if we can just bring ourselves to see it.

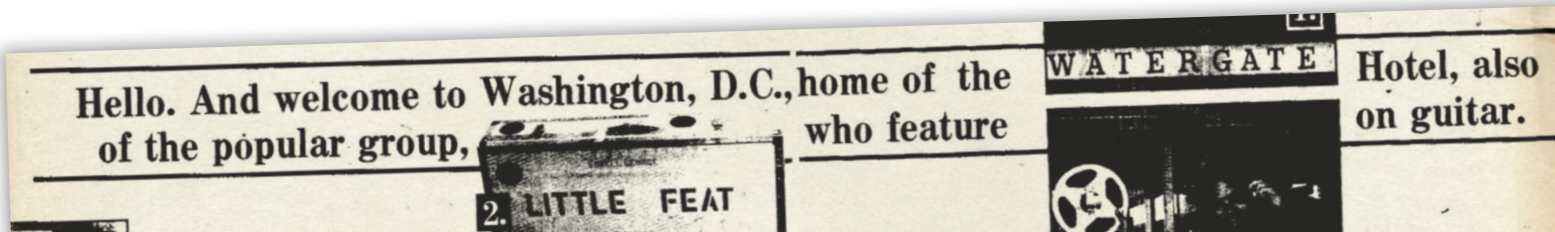
Listen to "Willin'" again; listen to the marvellous tenderness in Lowell George's voice as he sings it and think on it next time God catches you unaware with a blind forearm smash and you find yourself hurting.

Right now, too many of the biggies are too concerned with laying their pitiful little problems on us to be able to still say something that can feed back into our own lives and help us share the weight. Neil Young can, Bob Dylan can, but what has your local superstar said to you lately?

LOWELL GEORGE ISN'T a star. He's a musician. He's just this bearded guy in California who doesn't look like a leper messiah, who's probably no better in bed than you are, who's a good conversationalist and probably fun to get wrecked with, who isn't a hero and who certainly isn't a Leader or The Future Of Rock, or much of anything except a guy who writes beautiful songs and plays guitar a certain way.

It just seems that rock music is better off in the hands of unassuming guys like Lowell George than with the elegantly and expensively wasted household name of your choice. After all, he's still willin'.

Ladies and gentlemen, Little Feat. On guitar and vocals, Mr Lowell George. *Charles Shaar Murray* •





October 26, 1975: Ozzy Osbourne fronting Black Sabbath at the Falkoner Theatre, Copenhagen, during the Sabotage Tour



"I'm no idiot"

OZZY OSBOURNE blossoms as spokesman for BLACK SABBATH. Taxation prompts the band's departure from England, but meanwhile there's violence, Yuletide stoat visitation and the future to ponder. "I can't be doing Black Sabbath' when I'm 58," he says.

— NME OCTOBER 25 —

"THE CAT DIED, OZZY."

"What cat?"

"That horrible-coloured thing you shot in the garage."

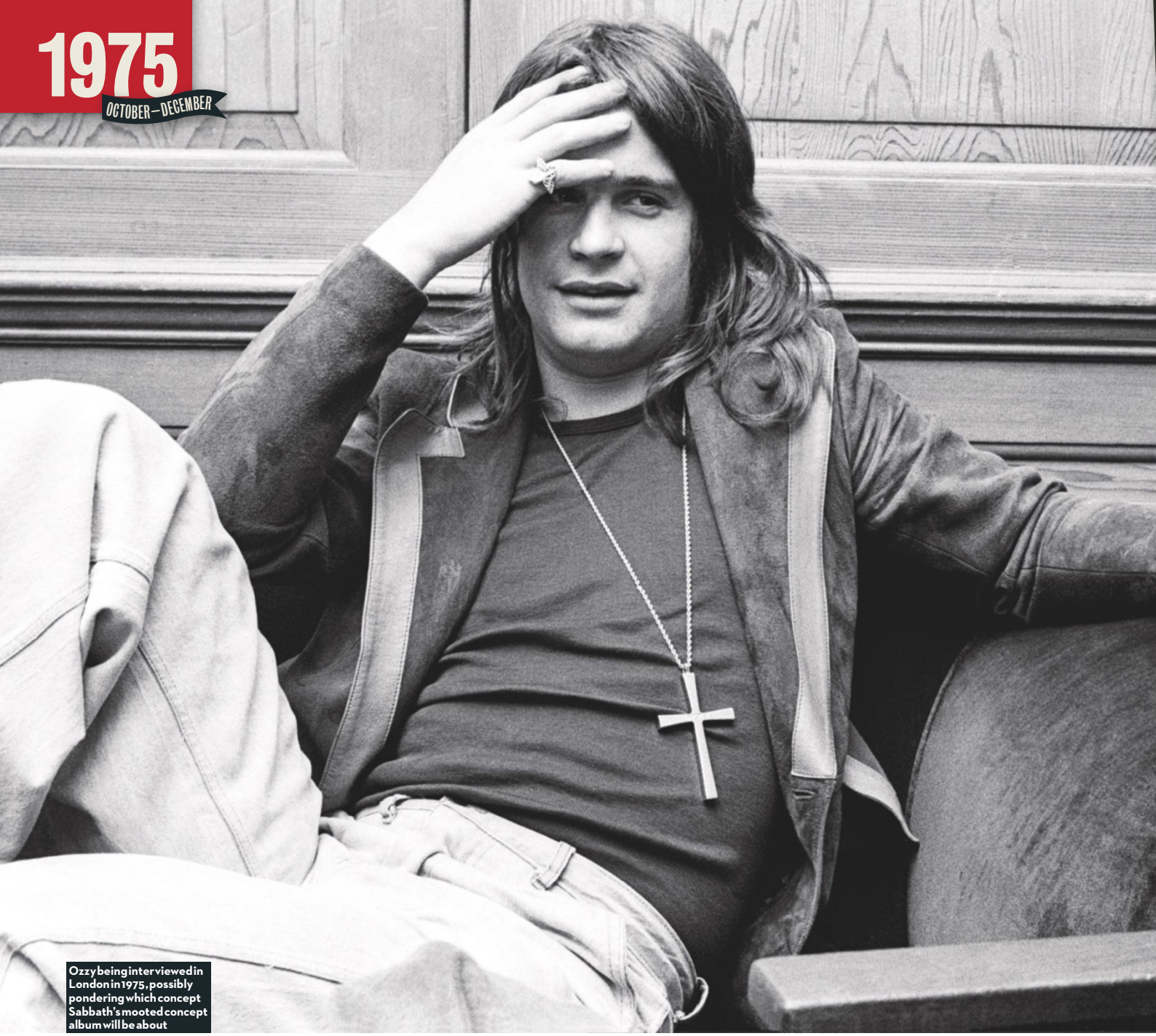
"It's like bleeding *Daktari* in our garage," mumbles the star. "You could go on an expedition in there and never come back."

This makes The Horse That Fed Steve Marriott assume a minor perspective. A little later a friend who lives near Ozzy's stately home reports that a Gentleman's Shoot the star was asking about will be charging £1,000 per gun per week. Too much.

"A thousand pounds?" repeats Ozzy, mildly disgusted. "I'd do better to pick off some more of the chickens."

We're into our sixth Pernod and water now, but Wednesday night in Bradford still ain't looking too wonderful. Geezer had some sense: he shot off home to Worcester right after the gig. »

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY



Ozzy being interviewed in London in 1975, possibly pondering which concept Sabbath's mooted concept album will be about

IAN DICKSON/GETTY

Ozzy and the Good Book

A YOUNG MAN reclines on a hotel divan. His long, fair hair criss-crosses the pillow and his triple-decker platforms are hurting his feet.

He lifts the telephone.

"Reception? Listen, how about coming up here to keep a lonely man company? No? Well listen, how does a sparrow make an emergency landing? Eh? With a Sparrowchute!"

Tony Iommi, I hear later, once punched Ozzy on the nose for repeatedly ripping up hotel-supplied Gideon Bibles. I don't know if you remember Tony with long hair. He's worn it short for a long time now, with a neat moustache and knife-edge cream trousers. Oh yes, and the same old steel cross, resting atop the immaculate pullovers. In Bradford, when it's time to change, he disappears from the bare, echoing school cloakroom that serves St George's Hall as communal dressing room and secretes himself in the upstairs chamber (with the star on the door) for more than half an hour.

Ozzy's still here: he didn't bother to hide while assuming his yellow fringed shirt, tight trousers and painful white boots. Now he leaps playfully round from one member of the band to another and pulls down their panties at crucial stages of undress.

Bill Ward endures these onslaughts without excitement. Gnarled and taciturn, looking very old, much older than the others, he's climbing into bright-red tights and the red, tent-shaped maternity coat he "found in the wardrobe" this morning. He rounds off the tights with a pair of old blue plimsolls.

He looks like the Frog Prince.

There's only one thing on Bill's mind right now: the sins of a music journalist who's been less than complimentary in print about Bill's wife.

Bill reckons he'll sue.

Are you very angry about it, Bill?

"Me and Melinda are used to being slagged off in the press" – he stares hard into my face – "but… well… No comment. I don't want to say any more.

"My wife will, though," he adds glumly.

Ozzy and the concept albums

GERALD IS SITTING alone on a hard chair in the middle of the room. Gerald is rather a well-kept secret. He plays keyboards for Black Sabbath, and every night he dresses up in his own version of the fringed costume – but he and all his equipment are always completely hidden away from the sight of the audience.

Still, he's honoured to be playing with his local heroes, and soon he'll have his own album to do; musical variations on *The Ascent Of Man*.

"Ozzy's going to help out with the singing," he confides.

The last time Gerald tried to make a record, the studio burnt down.

"Our next album's going to be a concept album," Ozzy remarks, sometime during the next two days.

"What's the concept, Oz?"

"We dunno yet."

Ozzy and the young people of today

BRADFORD ISN'T A riot, not like Sheffield turns out to be, but the kids still pile up over the front of the stage and no one sits down all night.

OBSERVE THE SABBAFF



The imaginary axemen, who are present in large numbers and *Sabotage* T-shirts, turn their backs on the band and get heavily into miming Iommi's riffs.

Iommi's manner is stately. No fringes for him; in white satin, with gold braid and knee-length trumpet sleeves, and slightly embarrassed smiles at the other lads, he squirrels about on the guitar like someone demonstrating a knitting machine; and these breaks are generally the signal for relative hush. But it's more fun when Oz doesn't leave the stage, but totes his invisible axe as well; Ozzy's performance is one unbroken act of communication across the barriers.

So Iommi's effective but a bit of a smoothie, pretty Geezer camps it up like a King Charles spaniel, Bill flails his drums like a demented Thorin Oakenshield – but Ozzy is the natural-born star, and the Sabs could never have lived this long without him. Ozzy can howl out lines like:

"No more war pigs out for power!/Hand of God has struck the hour!"

…And get straight back into bouncing up and down, peace signing ("I just did it to them one day and they all did it back") and inciting the crowd to boogie with the minimum of incongruity.

He actually notices individual faces in the crowd below him. He bridges the tuning-up gaps that straggle out numbers with "Are ya having a good time anyway? So are we!" so that the audience won't feel ignored; and as the pain threshold mounts, and the din in your head becomes a blessed haze, the leaping yellow figure and square, hurt-looking Ray Davies features dominate the town hall's trance.

Ozzy and the fans that got away

"WE WERE PLAYING this baseball stadium in the States. We're in the middle of a huge field and there's a high wire fence all round it, with the kids outside. So I say to them, you know, "Come on, come inside", and suddenly they're all climbing over the fence and running towards us like a human stampede, and we're playing away, waiting for them to get up to us.

"But when they do, they don't stop! They just trample right over the stage, bust up all our equipment, and rush away across the rest of the field and out of the stadium doors! 'Cos the police are after them…"

In Sheffield City Hall, Lady Tony Iommi seats herself on stage. She crosses Aristockinged legs and smooths her blonde hair. She must be all of 24. "Aren't you awfully young to be a reporter?" she enquires.

Tomorrow, the *Daily Mirror* is to interview the Iommis about their lifestyle. Like Ozzy and his Thelma, they too have a country house. It's not quite so easy, though, to make the connection between Ozzy and gracious living.

Tony Iommi has patented a system of cartridge-type pick-ups which can all be slotted into one guitar. He says he may be appearing on *Tomorrow's World* to demonstrate them. He doesn't know a similar device has already been marketed in America.

Ozzy and the fans who got away?

SCENE IN THE pub across the street from the hall; a be-crossed and be-T-shirted fan has been eyeing Geezer Butler longingly from the next table. Finally, he approaches.

"Geezer, will you dedicate 'Megalomania' tonight to Sandra, Glenys and Bongo?"

"We're not playing it," counters a laconic Geezer.

"Oh!" says the fan. "Oh, that's nice, innit?"

Geezer smiles seraphically.

The fan, nonplussed, backs away.

Why do you think it is, Bill, that all these really young kids like the band so much?

"I'm not sure I could tell you."

Do they just like to get into a heavy daze and forget all their teenage troubles for a while?

"Oh yes, I thought we were assuming that. I was trying to think of some more profound reason why they get off on us."

Ozzy rehabilitates himself

"GRAND LARCENY. I was in Winson Green for two months. Once I stole a telly and I was balanced on top of this wall, one of them with glass along the top, and I fell off; this 24-inch telly was sitting on top of my chest and I was screaming, 'Get me out, get me out!'

"I had nothing to do inside; you did about two hours' work a day and the rest of the time you were locked in your cell. That's when I did these tattoos, with a sewing needle and a tin of grate polish."

Were you into music in those days?

"Not really – maybe just The Kinks and The Beatles."

So how come you're a singer?

"When I came out of the nick… had to do something, didn't I?"

Geezer's back just in time for the gig. He clambers into dirty silver satin jeans and a white fringed shirt lately liberated from Ozzy. But he retains the filthy blue braces that have been holding up his offstage trouserings.

"Those are disgusting," pronounces Ozzy. "Here, let me put them straight for you."

At this point, the latest issue of *NME* arrives in the dressing room. It's a tense moment: the paper carries a lambasting review of the Sabs last week in Birmingham. Lucas, road manager, is incensed. "To think we've been looking after two of their girls for the last 48 hours," he mutters accusingly.

Ozzy, who has naturally good manners, turns his back and studies his reflection in a glass at the other end of the room. He's not about to get involved. When asked for an official reply to the review, he responds, simply (and justifiably), "Bollocks." And that's all anyone's going to get.

Ozzy and the Christmas stoat

'TWAS CHRISTMAS EVE, in the stately home, and Ozzy Osbourne, opening his bay window, leaned out to survey the snowy countryside. He sniffed at the icy air. Suddenly, right in front of him, he espied a tiny stoat, sitting up on its hind legs, gazing into his face (rather like a Sab-fan, in fact).

And what happened, Ozzy?

"Nothing happened. We just looked at each other for a while. Then the stoat went away."

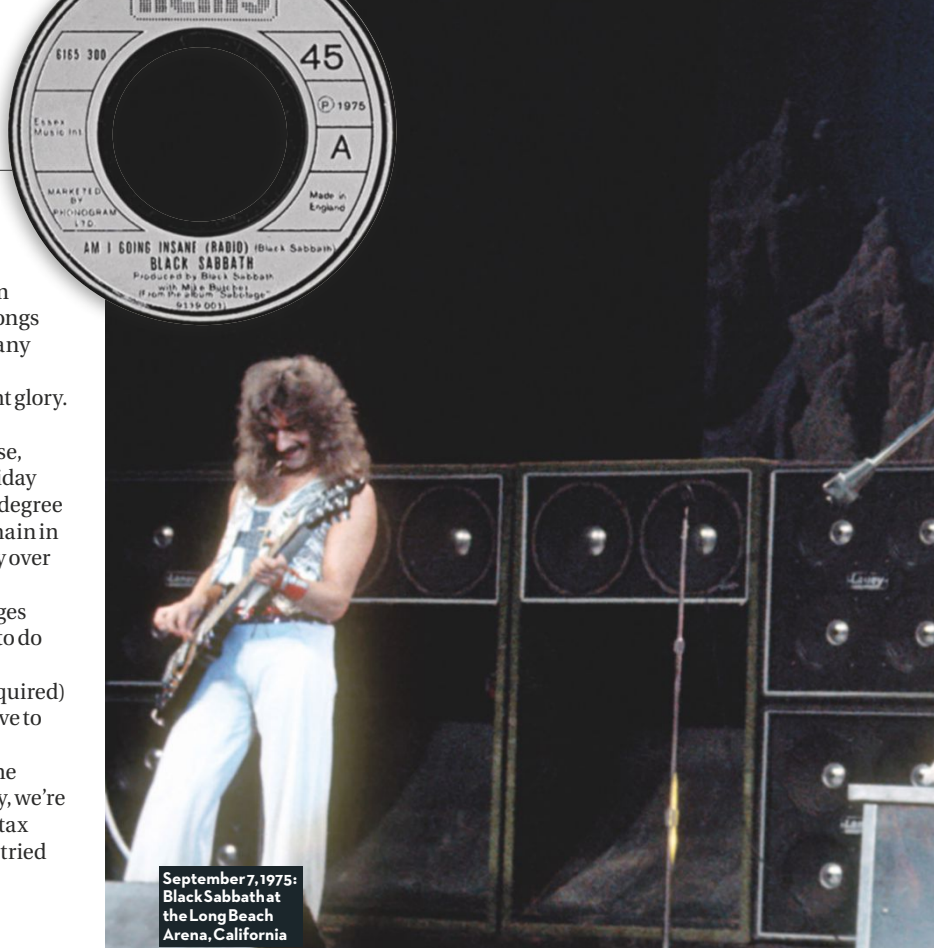
And on to Sheffield.

Sheffield audiences are well known, nay notorious, for enjoying themselves without restraint, and one can excuse the elderly security men at the City Hall for panicking a bit last Thursday. They caused some unnecessary trouble, it seemed to me, at the sides of the crowd they could reach, but no one could have penetrated the middle of it once the Sabs were on stage, and the tiers of bodies in there were left to sway and fall about at will.

> "I stole a telly and I was balanced on top of this wall and I fell off"

Iommi scuttled up and down his instrument with this usual static elegance, and Bill Ward's drum solo – that's the Drum Solo I'm talking about – sounded more like the Approach of World War One than ever, but me, I got bored whenever Ozzy wasn't on stage to vibe things up. Ozzy gives the whole thing heart; Ozzy is power; Ozzy is the reason I'd go to a Sabs gig any day rather than, say, the Hairdressers' Ball (Roxy Music) I attended at Wembley the night after that.

Make no mistake – there's no two ways about it. And you can't say fairer than that. *Kate Phillips* »



September 7, 1975: Black Sabbath at the Long Beach Arena, California

— MM OCTOBER 11 —

IT'S NO MERE coincidence that Ozzy Osbourne's song on the new Black Sabbath album is called "Am I Going Insane?" Ozzy, who professes that all his songs are about himself, is asking a question to which many others have already put an answer.

He stands before us, a rock star in all his resplendent glory. Ozzy Osbourne – long, straggled hair, leather tasselled shirt complete with the obligatory beads, metal cross and, of course, denim jeans – has just arrived at London's Swiss Cottage Holiday Inn from Birmingham. While rock music has achieved a fair degree of respect in society at large, Osbourne seems to prefer to remain in a time gone by when rock stars were rock stars and everybody over 25 hated their guts.

A meeting of the Black Sabbath co-op (the band now manages itself and confers on everything) had decreed that Ozzy was to do the interview. He thrives on the task.

The Sabbath co-op ("What's a co-op?" Ozzie innocently inquired) has also just reached the painful decision that they would have to leave Britain for tax reasons.

"It's a very sad thing for me that we have to leave England," he moans. "Because of the state of the economics in this country, we're being forced to go. We cannot afford to function under these tax things, so we'll have to join all the rest and wave bye-bye. I've tried to avoid it for as long as possible but it's ridiculous.

"It really is unbelievable, man. It's a shame in a way and the government in this country or whoever is doing it should be ashamed of themselves.

"Look at the amount of talent that comes out of this tiny island, not blowing my own trumpet, and this country should be really proud of it, but they're forcing the talent out. It's sick.

"It must sound as if everybody in the rock'n'roll business is tight and they don't wasn't to share the money, but it's not like that. People in the business have a limited amount of time. You're only young once and I can't be doing Black Sabbath when I'm 58. I don't expect to be the wild kid from Ashton when I'm that age.

"I don't want to be wealthy for the rest of my life, I want to be comfortable. I want to sit and dedicate myself to music in whatever way it comes out, but with these tax laws, at the age of 38, we'll probably all have to sign back on the dole again. I don't think we deserve that."

Hasn't it given him a comfortable living already?

"It has, but they've never done anything for me and I'm not going to do fuck all for them, basically. They've never done one thing for me apart from giving me a few quid on the dole which I probably paid them anyway. They're not giving me any incentive to stay.

"They'll change it too late. I really don't want to leave, but I'm being forced out. England is the greatest country in the world as far as I'm concerned, but I'm sorry, I can't live under these conditions. I'm no mug, I'm no idiot. You've got to be a dummy to stay here and work your balls off all your life.

"Each and every one of us has worked bloody hard for whatever we've got. I wish a lot of people would try and get that sunk in their heads a bit. Its fun, but you have a lot of hang-ups, a lot of mental hang-ups, a lot of physical hang-ups.

"The only thing that's going to suffer is that everyone is going to leave the country and you're going to lose out on recording studios. There are thousands of recording studios in England, man, which are going to fold up because they can't afford to run because of the tax situation. Every year the market is going to be flooded for about two months. Then everybody is going to disappear again and everything is going to be dead.

"It's going to end up like East Germany or something as far as music goes. Good old Radio One is going to feed everybody. Fucking hell, man, what a hope I'm going to listen to reggae music for two years."

But what is he going to do when he leaves Britain?

"I don't know, how about China? The roadies are good over there. I don't give a fuck where I go. I'm just a gypsy anyway. I'll just get on and play and get off. I'll just pitch me tent. I don't want to settle. I don't want to be a country squire for the rest of my life."

> "I wouldn't live in America. I'm frightened of the violence"

Ozzy won't emigrate to the States.

"I don't want to go there. Everybody else has gone to America. I don't wasn't to be at the end of the queue. I want to start somewhere else off. How about China? That sounds good to me. Or Russia. What a trip that would be!"

Why not America?

"I like America, but I wouldn't live there because (a) there's a lot of guns about and a lot of people who would use them and (b) I don't want to be in the firing line. I'm frightened of the violence."

Talk of the violence in the States sets Ozzy off again.

"The films! You want to see the films over there, man! They've got this bizarre thing called *Rollerball*, have you heard about that? It's fucking nuts, man! Its bananas! And the audience always start clapping and cheering when the gruesome bits come. They'll have gladiators over there soon, you wait. It's like the rise and fall of the Roman Empire. It's incredible."

And the violence on the stateside tours doesn't help?

"It just freaks me out, man. You go on stage and see 15 people in the circle battering each other to pieces. We've still gotta try and say, 'We love you,' with this guy lying on the floor with a bottle sticking out of his throat.

"There's one thing that everybody has got to understand about Black Sabbath's lyrics. They're not downer lyrics. They're just telling everybody where it's at. That's all it us. People must thing we sleep off the rafter with wings on our backs every night, taking reds and drinking wine. We're just people.

"We see a lot and we write about what we see. We have a couple of songs about people getting stoned, but so have a lot of people. It's a heavy, doomy thing but it's what we see. A love thing wouldn't go with the style of music we play. It's like going to see *Frankenstein* with *The Sound Of Music* soundtrack behind it. It wouldn't go.





"The way we write goes with the way we play. We're not telling everybody to jump off the cliff, and if anybody ever dies, I don't know what I'd do. If that happened, I'd believe that I was the devil."

Isn't it true that Black Sabbath music incites people to get over-enthusiastic?

"If people can come to a Black Sabbath gig or listen to a Black Sabbath record and get rid of their aggression, that's great. If they're miserable, they can put on a Black Sabbath record and think that the band knows how they feel. They've got something on Earth that they can relate to. It's great to see those kids at our gigs enjoying themselves and they're not kicking shit out of each other.

"In the States, violence is the fashion. This month's fashion is hitting people over the heads with bottles. Next month's might be wearing pink socks."

Isn't the Sabbath stage act encouraging that violence?

"Listen, man, if Frank Sinatra played the next gig after us, they'd probably have the shit there. They have lots of violence at everything, no matter what the gig."

The energy exerted on stage by Sabbath has been one of the main reasons they have lasted so long. They've been away from Britain now for over a year and can still sell a tour out. It's been over a year since they released an album and their new one, *Sabotage*, has reinforced their popularity.

"Sabbath is one of the greatest experiences of my life. We're stronger now than ever we were as musicians. It has progressed a lot. We have a lot of ideas that we could put out, but it's a thing that once you take the plunge, you've done it. It's got to be a change drastically or a gradual change. Whatever the change, it's going to affect you one way or another. The longer you leave change, the more chance you have of survival. If you go 'whack' it's a bit gamble."

The new album, which has seen a few changes in the band's approach, a touch of subtlety, but still the same hard-hitting riffs, took longer to record than any of the previous efforts. *Sabotage* was over a year in the making and the band say they have no intention of ever spending as long in the studio on future releases again.

"In the end, I felt like calling it 'Crossroads' and having Meg Richardson star on it. Every time there was a session we used to call it Chapter 99 – 'Will Black Sabbath complete the album this time?' It was like a bizarre nightmare sometimes, but other times it was fun, especially the times when we started throwing custard pies at each other.

"At the end of it I was very confused because I had heard so much of it, so I had to leave it alone for some time. When I heard it again, at first hearing I hated it. I realised that because of the constant work on it, I had built this barrier in my head, but I'm really satisfied with it now. It's not that bad considering that we were all going through a lot of hassles with our own heads, like 'Where can we go from here?,' 'What are we going to do to be better than the last one?'

"To me, *Sabotage* does beat the last album, but I still have a liking for the last one. The last album was our first album really, because it was the first time we had got into the actual studio production thing and it takes a couple of albums to get into that. You go through all the experiments of banging dustbin lids and running herds of cattle through the studio to find out what it sounds like."

Sanity is resumed for a second or two with talk of the band's forthcoming British tour. "We're doing two days in Birmingham now. We're doing another one at the end of the other one." Make sense of that.

The tour is being done in sections, Britain, then Europe and back to Britain again. Sabbath are aware that they haven't played Britain in some time and, when fixing the tour, were a little apprehensive about how they would be received.

"It looks as if we haven't played here since the old king died. I'm looking forward to doing Glasgow, Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham especially. In the stage act, we're trying to put in as much as we can. People want to hear a lot of the stuff from past albums, so now we have a 25-minute medley of old numbers."



The interview almost ended sensibly until Ozzy spotted what was on the television of the hotel room – the Labour Party conference in Blackpool. And who's that speaking? Yes, it's Mr Dennis Healey, chancellor of the exchequer. Ozzie goes mad – sorry, madder.

"That's him," he hollers, pointing an accusing finger. "He's why we have to leave England."

As I ease towards the door, Ozzy tells me: "By the way, don't use any of the swear words, 'cos me mam don't like it." *Harry Doherty* •

GETTY



August 21, 1975: Bruce Springsteen & the E Street Band on stage at Alex Cooley's Electric Ballroom in Atlanta, Georgia

"Gimme some damn room"

Is he really "the future of rock'n'roll"? BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN has his doubts. Post *Born To Run*, the man his band call "The Boss" is wary of all hype. "Not only have you got to play," he says, "but blow this bullshit out of people's minds."

— NME NOVEMBER 15 —

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN SAYS he just writes down his first impressions, whereas here in Hollywood, California, there are people in from New York who believe otherwise. They tell you things like, "Bruce is purity." Bruce cuts through grime in half the time. Bruce is what America has been praying for ever since Dylan fell off his motorbike and Brando got too fat to be in the motorcade any more.

And it gets harder to decide what's best to believe, because the people in from New York talk a lot louder than is natural and so do outsiders with a contrary understanding of the situation, coming on like a life depended on putting down the "I have seen mankind's future and it's a short, skinny guy in a brown leather jacket" theory.

Bruce feels more than a little sick when he hears this kind of talk. His tendency, when it occurs, is to retire into a slow, agonised idiot drawl, the relevance of which is not all that easily recognisable.



But that's to his credit. Dylan, after all, never once said, "Sure, I know the environment. The complexities of the human mind and things of that nature." And neither did James Dean or Brando when he was thin. It was only when Brando started whanging off in those kind of directions that credibility was suddenly and irrevocably reduced. »

No. The only way to make a legitimate claim to American folk-hero status is to reject the candidacy as preposterous. Then clam up and spit a mysterious spit And that's precisely what Bruce Springsteen from Freehold, NJ, is doing. Or you assume that's what he's doing.

One thing's for certain, though, and that's the fundamental lack of modesty within the Springsteen camp on the subject of the attributes and infinite potential of their boy.

Jon Landau, the celebrated American rock critic who quit worrying over an intestinal disorder to co-produce Springsteen's *Born To Run* album, says that in the "rock area" Springsteen's not only a "great artist" but also happens to be able to do "more things better than anyone else I've seen". Also he's the "best performer in the history of rock'n'roll", with the possible exception of Elvis P, whom he nominates mainly for "sentimental reasons".

Mike Appel offers scant contrast when he makes claims to being manager of "the greatest artist in the world today, that's all" – a sentiment he punctuates by attacking the palm of his left hand with his right fist.

Appel is a curiosity even among rock'n'roll managers. John Hammond, the Columbia talent scout who signed Springsteen, describes him as "offensive as any man I've ever met", a reference, no doubt, to Appel's boundless and sometimes absurd urges for conflict. Mostly it's the press who get to feel Appel's pointed end and this, it turns out, is no accident.

"I like to do things with integrity," he notes, "and since the media is not set up for integrity but for their own ends, my idea of how things should be done and their idea of how things should be done clash. So what happens is I'm the guy they focus all their hate on."

Appel and Landau's extremities are matched by virtually everyone else within the Springsteen inner circle. Peter Philbin, Columbia's New York-based international press officer, can talk up his client with a heat approaching delirium, and at the recent Springsteen concerts at Hollywood's Roxy was not so much the impassioned go-between as one more nut on a chair howling his brains inside out.

> "I really wanted 'Born To Run' to be a hit single, hear it on the radio"



EVEN WITHIN HIS band, there's an awestruck , almost religious regard for the man they call The Boss. Clarence Clemons, the 33-year-old saxman, sees his meeting with Springsteen as being no less than divinely wrought:

"Bruce is the greatest person I've ever met," he says. "He's the strongest person I've ever met. When I first met him it was like in the Bible where this guy met this guy and he say, 'Lay down your thing and follow me', and that's exactly the way it felt, man. But I didn't. And I punish myself. And I guess God punished me 'cos I got in this car accident and nearly got killed and shit. Anyway. He came back [from California where he'd been visiting his parents] and we got together and here we are."

No less extraordinary has been the contribution of *Time* and *Newsweek* to the ballooning Springsteen legend and the apparent ease with which Appel was able to manipulate these two indefatigable giants.

Time had previously run a piece on Springsteen in their April 1974 issue. Then a number of weeks ago, *Newsweek* made approaches of their own and *Time*, catching wind of the freshening scent, came back for second helpings. (The renewed interest had probably been spurred on by Springsteen's dates in August at New York's Bottom Line Club, out of which came the most excessive Bruce-Is-Easily-The-Greatest-Person-On-The-Planet coverage to date.) This time, Appel explained, the rules were substantially altered. The game now was: "You give me a cover, I give you an interview."

"…And they have to dislike you for it," he says. "They say, 'We're *New Musical Express*, we're *Melody Maker*, we're *Newsweek*, we're *Time* magazine, and who the hell are you to tell us it has to be a cover story?' But I say to you, 'I'm giving you the most coveted thing I can give you. I'm giving you an interview with Bruce Springsteen. There's nothing more I can give you.'"

The indefinable two returned and the net result was that double cover splash on October 27 (Appel's birthday), the first for an entertainer since Liza Minnelli's *Cabaret* days.

Both articles where strangely impartial considering the prominence they attached to their subject. Lots of biographical data input, a smattering of the dourest kind of rhapsodising and – in *Newsweek*'s case – a few microscopic insinuations that Springsteen might, after all, be the gravest kind of record-business hypola which, by the laws of media cause and effect, would render themselves and *Time* the victims.

A few years back, the pair of them would have hung majestically to one side until the Springsteen legend knocked them down, then they'd have performed the gesture of the cover story.



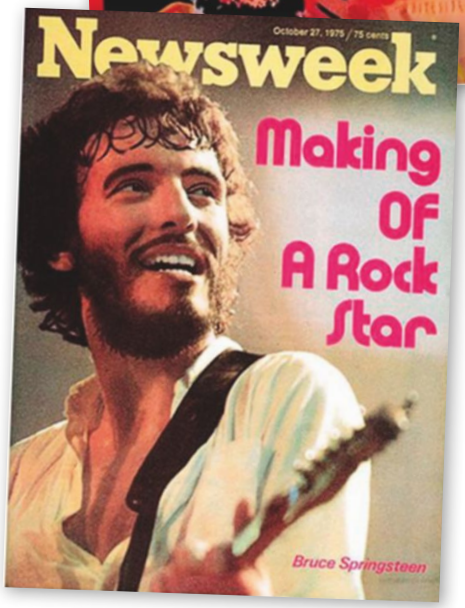
Posing for a photoshoot in Los Angeles, 1975

REX FEATURES



These days even *Time* and *Newsweek* are fearful of missing out on the very next American sensation, even if it means lining up at the wrong theatre before the box office opens.

"It's crazy," says Springsteen. "It doesn't make too much sense and I don't attach too much distinction to being on the cover. It's a magazine. It goes all the way around the world, but really… you know."



WE'RE IN A vacant room in the Sunset Marquis, Hollywood. Springsteen's eating a bowl of Rice Crispies. Already he's got on his brown leather jacket and he looks like he hasn't slept in maybe four weeks.

"It doesn't have that much to do with what I'm doing," he says. "I don't think so. The main reason I went through with it… you see one of the things I did want, I wanted 'Born To Run' to be a hit single. Not for the bucks but because I really believed in the song a whole lot and I just wanted to hear it on the radio, you know. On AM. Across the country. For me, that's where a song should be.

"And they said, 'Well, if you get you picture on *Time* or sumpin', programme directors may think twice before they drop it or throw it out.' So the only physical reason I was on that thing was for that reason specifically, you know. Otherwise, man, I'll probably regret it, you know."

Rolling Stone played an altogether cooler game. Still up in the air and blowing off over their Patty Hearst exclusives, their preference was to regard Springsteen as another of those East Coast phenomena, the kind that blows in and out with the frequency of the Atlantic tide.

And *Playboy*… Appel also tried to hustle a *Playboy* cover but was told that the Big Bunny would rather take it in the eye than set that kind of precedent.

AND SO IT was to the Roxy in Hollywood that the Springsteen entourage came October 16–19 to debunk the hype, perjury and associated theories, and it was with a deal of noise and small regard for the agreed subtleties that CBS applied themselves to the task. They began with a 50 per cent stake in the opening-night house and bought in from there until your average man on the street needed air and ground-troop support to get into the place.

By way of consolation, a roster of Hollywood's brightest showstoppers turned up to lend their support… a lineup that by week's end included Jack Nicholson, G Harrison, Jackson Browne, Neil Diamond, Jackie De Shannon (backstage introduction), Carole King (backstage introduction), Joni Mitchell (left early), Cher and Gregg (twice), Tom Waits (hitched from his own gig 90 miles away), Dick Carpenter ("John, a margarita!"), Wolfman Jack (?) and Warren Beatty.

First night there was the usual pre-performance walking to and fro; the conspicuous nonchalance, Hollywood hugging and shouting across the tables and explanations as to the root cause and nature of the Springsteen phenomena, and by the time Bruce actually walked out on stage, everyone was so relieved at not having to exhibit epic boredom any more that the house lit up with a screaming and a wailing that must have scared him half to death.

He heads straight for stage centre, which is dark, empty and almost eerie save for the screaming going on, leans his head and body against the mic stand and, just to further irritate those Dylan comparisons, whips out a harmonica for the opening of "Thunder Road".

He's got on a beaten-up leather jacket, a pair of tight blue Levi's. He's small, he's skinny and his harp playing's every bit as dumb as Dylan's.

"*The Screen door slams / Mary's dress waves / Like a vision she dances across the porch…*"

A prelude to a number about a woeful girl waiting for her King Kong to come along and make sense out of her dreaming and Springsteen as the guy who says, "What the hell, things might not be so perfect around here, but let's jump in the old wagon anyway and take a ride along Thunder Road."

"*Hey, I know it's late, we can make it if we run…*"

There's just a piano pumping away and Springsteen's knotty, out-of-tune voice… and dead still. Head bowed. Brando, in *The Men*, as his girl's telling him she'll love him forever even though his legs don't work any more. Actually, it's all pretty embarrassing. And with folk through the house going, "Whoop, yeah… you sure can make a guitar sing, Bruce," you feel kind of ominously out of sync.

Then the band comes out for the "Tenth Avenue Freeze Out", also from *Born To Run*, and the lights flash on and Springsteen starts whipping and winding up his body, attempting to lend the appearance of weight to what on record is a fairly inconsequential moment. Cluttered, dense lyrics. A melody and arrangement that are a patchwork of some of the more dubious r'n'r mannerisms of the '60s.

"Spirit In The Night" is one of his few genuinely stirring melodies, even though it leans too heavily on Van Morrison. An early song from *Greetings From Asbury Park*, a period when Springsteen was caught up with the flash of the exploding metaphor… gypsy angels, mission men and a preponderance of internal rhyme and lines that get left hanging.

Crazy Janey, Wild Billy and a bunch more drive out to Greasy Lake "*about a mile down on the dark side of route 88*", where Janey's fingers wind up in the author's "*cake*". The love scene is played out in the dark with Springsteen lying prone across a line of tables that reach out to the stage. Girls rub his back as he sings, "*Me and crazy Jane was making love in the dirt / Singing our birthday songs.*" Then the band and the spots light up, Springsteen jogs back to the stage and the house goes wild with delight (for Janey and her lover that night).

For the opening of the old Manfred Mann number, "Pretty Flamingo", Springsteen delivers a rambling explanation-as-to-the-origins monologue that's half-heard, half-grunt and a pretty fine enactment of dumb barhouse literacy. The kind of punchy drool that Dean gloried in. Everyone gets to feel mean in the presence of this kind of talk.

More sordid still is the way he frames the opening to "E Street Shuffle". Here he tells the largely factual account of how he met up with saxman Clemons, who'd been playing with a local Asbury Park R&B band when a girlfriend told him he'd best go down to the Student Prince and look in on this kid Springsteen.

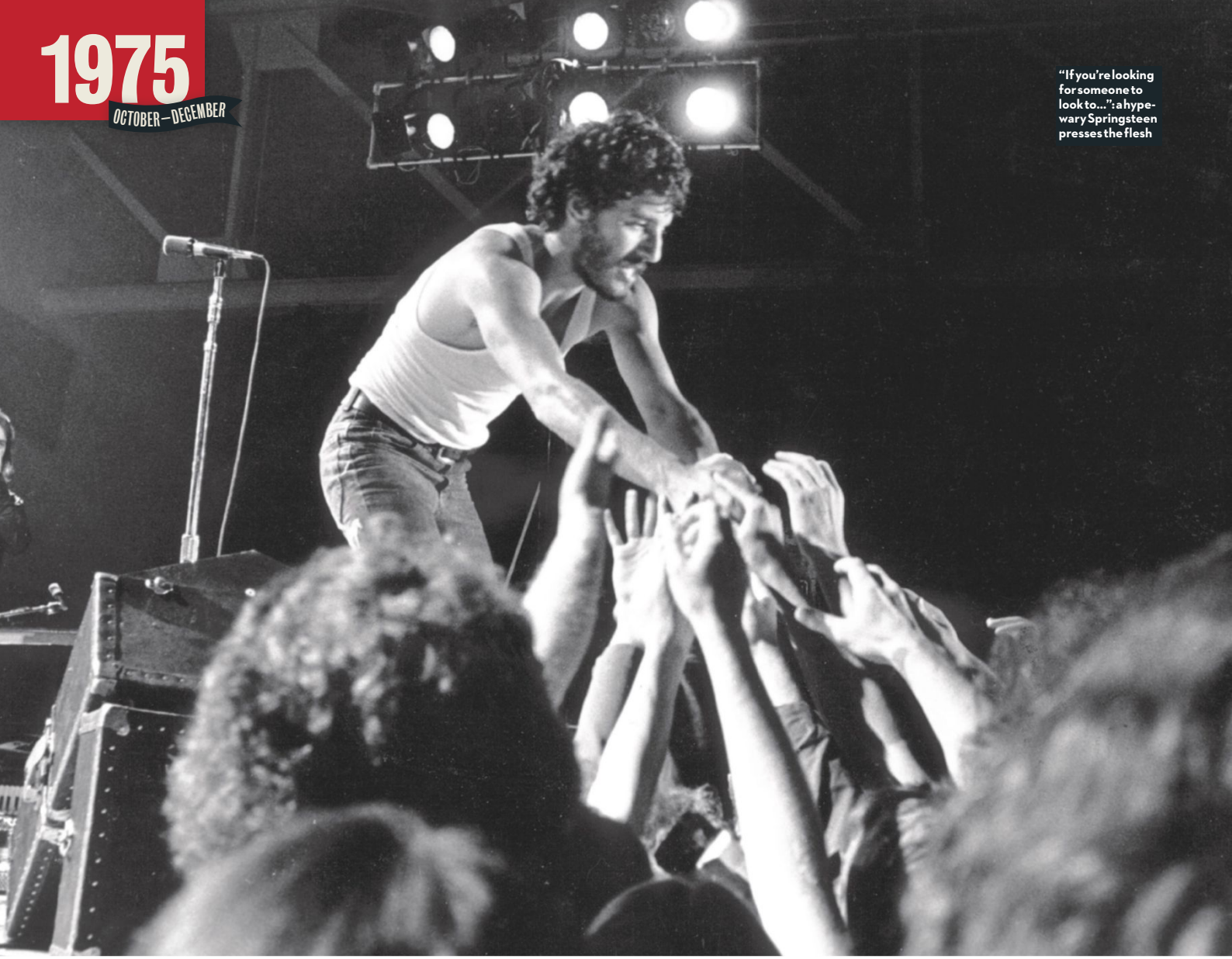
The way Springsteen tells it, he and his guitarist Miami Steve were shuffling through the cold and foggy night when they see a big man coming at them. They hide in a doorway and fall to their knees as the big man approaches. They're scared and they're cold and they're getting ready to run when Clarence holds out a hand, Springsteen reaches out to meet it. They touch. And sparks fly out on E Street.

The magic of Springsteen is right here… at the climax of this particular yarn. On the word "*sparks*", the stage flashes red, Springsteen leaps to a standstill and the band lams in with the kind of precision entrance that occurs only when there's an operating consensus. From now on the show's alive, more refined… a state of affairs that very nearly extends to the music itself.

"Kitty's Back", "Jungleland" and "Rosalita" have that foggy West Side tilt to them, and although neither is a miracle of construction there's enough ongoing momentum – and in the case of "Kitty's Back" a climactic instrumental segment – to eclipse the dubious areas.

The band, in fact, is surprisingly adept at locating Springsteen's half-concealed intentions. Excellent solos are forthcoming in both "Rosalita" and "Kitty's Back"… especially from pianist Roy Bittan… and only organist Danny Federici, whose tendency is to grip the high end of the board a lot longer than is attractive, is suspect here.

Just one encore tonight… a high drama mood piece with accordion and sometimes whispered lyrics. "Sandy" is about Bruce, or someone a lot like Bruce, readying himself to quit the boardwalk life, and it gives Springsteen the chance to open up on the reckless inhabitants of that whole scene. The clairvoyants, the bikers, waitresses, someone called Madame Marie, each of them shuffling back and forth from nothing to not much more. »



"If you're looking for someone to look to...": a hype-wary Springsteen presses the flesh

GETTY

Lyrically it's one of his most interesting pieces, since it's one of the few moments he chooses to lay bare the disillusionment he patently feels for all the shucking from pin table to roadside manner to trash can which, in most of his later works, he's inadvertently glorifying.

"Born To Run", he says, "was about New York. I was there for months. I had this girl with me and she'd just come in from Texas and she wanted to go home again and she was going nuts and we were in this room and it just went on and on. I would come home and she would say, 'Are you done? Is it over? Are you finished?' And I said, 'No it ain't over, it ain't over.' I'd come home practically in tears.

"And I was sort of into that whole of being nowhere. But knowing that there is something someplace. It's got to be right somewhere."

BORN TO RUN had already been eight months in the making when Jon Landau (previous experience: MC5's *Back In The USA* plus two Livingston Taylor albums) moved in on the job. With Landau around, things continued to move at a deathly doze, although the further four-and-a-half months taken to complete the package was, by contrast, an exhibition of fire and lightning.

Landau attributes the delays to Springsteen's fetish for detail: "He'd spend four hours," he said, "on one line. He'd say, 'Hang on, guys, I wanna check a line', and four hours later he'd be sitting there trying to make the most minute changes in one verse."

The pair had met in April '74 in a Boston club called Charlie's where the Springsteen band were playing. In the club window was a blow-up of a review Landau had just written for the local *Real Paper* – an A-minus piece that dealt with Springsteen's "many imperfections" as well as his considerable potential for world domination.

It was a cold night, Landau remembers, and he found Springsteen in the back garden in a T-shirt, jumping up and down as he read the review.

Springsteen told him he'd read better but the piece was OK, and then Landau introduced himself. The show he saw that night he describes as "astounding", although no more than a "rough draft" of what takes place these days. The pair kept in touch and a month later Landau went into print with that high-voltage review that Columbia subsequently spent $50,000 promoting... the "I have seen rock'n'roll's future and its name is Bruce Springsteen" job.

Not that CBS didn't require an amount of cattle prodding before lining up behind the Springsteen/Landau combination. Factionalism within the company was rife... due partly to the flamboyance of Appel and the intractable nature of his client and also because Springsteen was a prodigy of "disgraced" chief executive Clive Davis.

There were even reports of an alleged plot where the Springsteen myth would be hatched solely to irritate Bob Dylan, who'd recently left CBS for a two-record deal with David Geffen's Asylum company.

Appel himself goes more than half way to conceding that such a plan might well have existed.

"When you're involved in big-time record company management," he says, "there are powerplays. There's: how do you bring Bob Dylan into line; how do you bring his lawyers into line?

"His lawyer comes in and asks for the world... asks for retroactive royalties on Bob Dylan's albums. Asking outrageous sums of money. All kinds of deals. All kinds of big spending. And then when the negotiations fail, Clive Davis had left the record company and the whole world was looking at Columbia Records and everyone was taking potshots at them. They were very nervous. Very uptight at this particular time, trying to prove themselves. Naturally they might have said, you know, in the heat of the moment, 'Screw Bob Dylan, we're going to take Bruce Springsteen and use him and show that guy just where it's at.' However, that wasn't to be the case, because it took us a long time to get our album



together and *Blood On The Tracks* and all that had come out ahead of us. And they did manage to get Bob back."

A suitably ironic climax to this particular episode was the request made through CBS by *Time* magazine for an interview with Bob Dylan on the subject of Bruce Springsteen. The request was rejected.

SPRINGSTEEN IS BEWILDERED rather than flattered by the machinations on his behalf… the hoops he hopes he has to go through for the front pages.

"They made the mistake," he says, "they came out with the big hype. I mean, how can they expect people to swallow something like that? (CBS's early ads comparing him with Dylan). And it blows my mind how they can underestimate people so much. All the time, man, it's like… trying to find some room, man. Gimme some damn room. Give me a break. I was trying to tell these guys at the record company, 'Wait a second, you guys. Are you trying to kill me?' It was like a suicide attempt on their part. It was like somebody didn't want to make no money.

"I was in this big shadow, man, right from the start… and I'm just getting over this Dylan thing: 'Oh, thank God that seems to be fading away', and I'm sitting home thinking, 'Thank God people seem to be letting that lie,' and – phwoooooee – 'I have seen…'

"No, it can't be. So immediately I call up the company and I say, 'Get that quote out.' And it was, like, Landau's article. And it was a really nice piece and it meant a lot to me, but it was like they took it all out of context and blew it up, and who's gonna swallow that? Who's gonna believe that? It's going to piss people off, man. It pisses me off. When I read it I wanted to strangle the guy who put that thing in there. It's like you want to kill these guys for doin' stuff like that.

"They sneak it in on you. They sneak it in and they don't tell you nuthin'. It's like 'shotgun murderer chops off eight arms'. It's that kind of tactic, you know. It's that kind of tactic and they pull it for themselves and they pull it for me too…

"It's a stupid thing. Ignore it, you know. Ignore the whole thing, because it don't make any sense. So like I'm always 10 points down, 'cos not only have you got to play but you got to blow this bullshit out of people's minds first."

It was beautiful, I felt James Dean was back… When I saw James Dean for the first time I fell on the floor. When I saw Bob Dylan for the first time I fell on the floor. When I saw Bruce Springsteen for the first time I fell on the floor – Jackie De Shannon over a cup of morning coffee.

"Nah, it's like… if anything, you know. All I do, like, I write down my impressions of stuff, like, and what I see, you know. It's like… but if you're looking for something to look to… if you're into the band it's like… I don't know. I can't really see myself like that."

Appel has a more adroit interpretation of the hype-versus-legitimacy dialectic and it goes like this: "I just say to myself, 'Listen, fellows (of the press), your vanities may have been up, your ego might have been up, but let's stop the bullshit. The kid's really good. He's really different. If you've got any kind of talent you'll recognise him. If you don't you'll be run over. It's like a steamroller. We'll win in the end. You've got no chance against us; you've got no chance because we're right. We're good?'"

Appel used to write commercial jingles. He was also in the marine reserves, and if he comes on a little like Ed Sullivan meets Joseph Goebbels that's roughly the way Springsteen sees it too.

"It's like you can't lay an attitude on people. It's like bullshit; it's like a jive thing. You can't come on like you're some big deal, you know. I ain't into coming on like that, because it's a basic thing that's going on. It's a simple thing. It's a band, you know. It's a rock'n'roll band and you just sing and write songs."

Appel got to meet Springsteen through an early mutual accomplice called Tinker. Tinker started out building drag racers in California, moved to Nassau where he helped launch astronauts into space and wound up in New Jersey. Springsteen met him in a bar. He was 18 years old and Tinker said he could get him a job as a guitar player with Janis Joplin's band. "I ended up living with him in a surfboard factory for a year and a half. It was dynamite up there."

> "You can't lay an attitude on people. It's like a jive thing"

The first time Springsteen stepped outside the Jersey state line was with Tinker. Everyone in the band saved up $100 and drove out to California in a station wagon and a Chevy truck. Springsteen flipped from coast to coast during the next four years before realising the best band he could ever have was waiting for him in NJ.

In 1970 or '71 – he doesn't remember – Tinker took him to New York to meet with Appel, and just like in a B-movie plot, Appel is knocked out by the curly-haired kid with the wooden guitar, and within months has him eyeballing with the big record company talent scout.

Springsteen at the time is reading Anthony Scaduto's book on Dylan and is fired up over the scene where Dylan launches himself into John Hammond's office, plays a couple of tunes and gets signed in a big hurry. So Springsteen and Appel try their hand and it works a second time.

And that brings us through two low-impact albums, followed by a regeneration of Columbia's corporate faith, back to the Roxy in Hollywood, where by week's end Springsteen is being exalted to a degree that puts you in the mind of Appel's steamroller doctrine. By now even Walter Yetnikoff, president of the Columbia Records group, is up on his chair, stirred, possibly, by the avalanche of dollars that is mounting in his imagination.

The kids too – and by now it's the punter class – have taken on a demeanour that bears more than a passing resemblance to the early Beatle years, except these kids are older and so is Springsteen (26).

But the years are no insulation against the Springsteen wall of faith as codified by Appel, Landau and Philbin and expressed, if haltingly by now, by Brucesteen himself.

Time and *Newsweek* believed, and the punters believe because anything can be believed that is supported by the indomitable will of unyielding faith as manifest by the aforementioned.

Springsteen could eat a camel whole, so long as he believed such a project wasn't outside his range, so long as the camel believed and the camel trader believed… or a king's new clothes situation where no one notices the king's fat, naked legs until a kid says, "Hey, where's his trousers?" and all that faith drains away in a second and a half.

Given that sooner or later someone's going to speak up, the deciding factor remains whether or not Springsteen actually has anything to cover his legs… that something being artistic substance, and I'll offer the opinion that Springsteen is indeed naked. That he's no more than a front man for another good rock'n'roll band, composer of R&B -slanted material that tips a little in advance of the mean average.

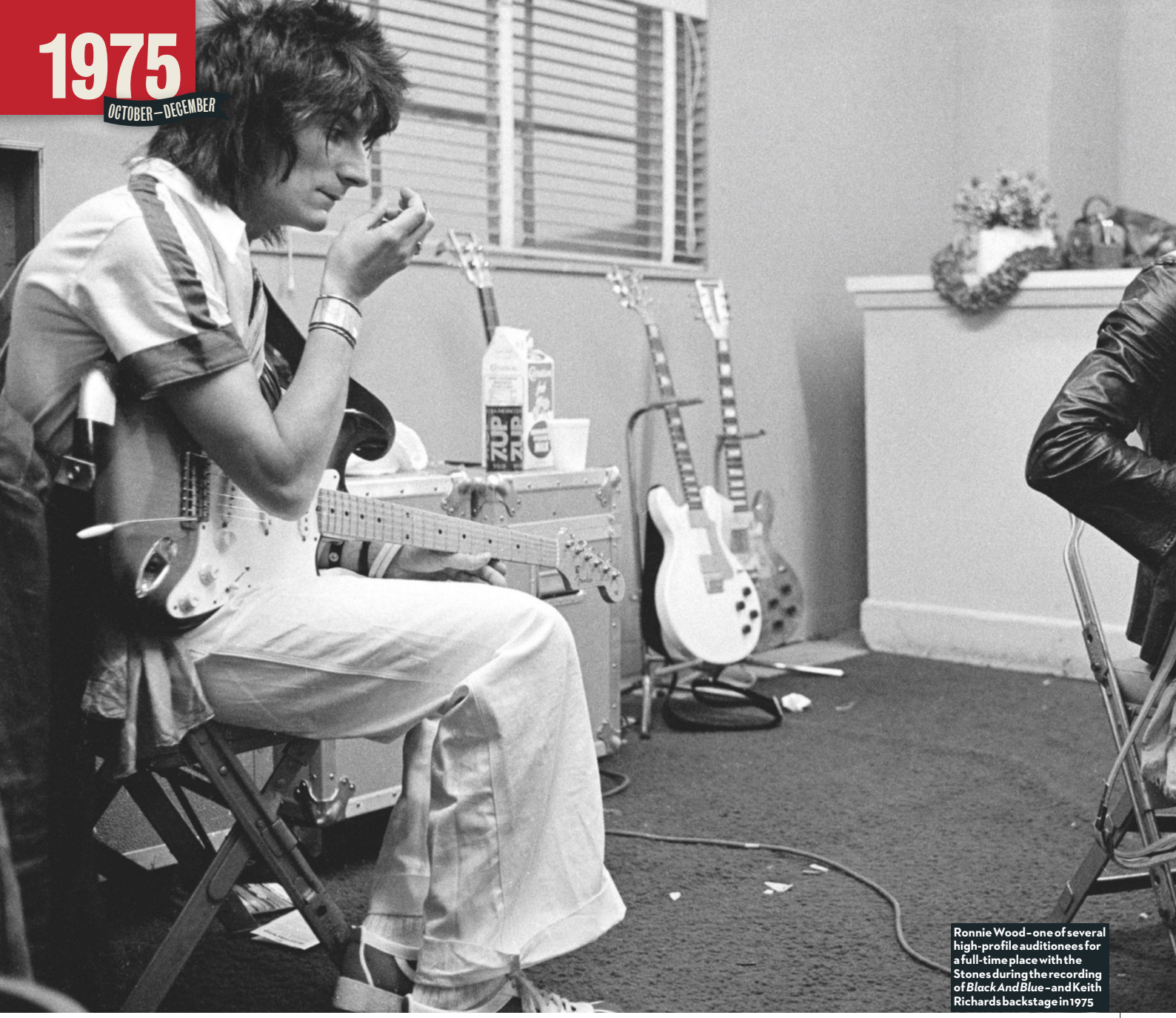
The supposed profoundly cerebral inclinations are also misleading, because Springsteen has neither the originality nor the intentions – political or otherwise – of a Dylan, which leaves him with a sackful of punk, loner mannerisms that he's already tiring of… A situation that probably caused the making of *Born To Run* to be such a vexed and anxious 12-and-a-half months.

Springsteen has a will and a strong dramatic style and the air of the all-American loner who the guys in the gang ask of, "Where ya goin', Brucie?" and Springsteen grunts and goes off to the pier to meet his girl whom he loves with a loyal and refined urgency as opposed to, say, Jagger, who could wake up anyplace and not remember how. And he exudes that dumb animal wisdom that made Brando and Dean such attractive propositions, even though Springsteen tries to upset the image with literary pretensions.

Appel, Landau and Philbin think they have to protect and talk up their man otherwise he dies, whereas Springsteen will be either musically wiped out, or more likely, another averagely regarded also-ran shouldering the resentment of punters and business types who by now see themselves as being suckered and duped.

"I used to feel I always was in control," says Springsteen, "but now I'm not so sure." *Andrew Tyler* •


Bruce Springsteen and the
WALL OF FAITH
to be able to do more t
better than anyone else



Ronnie Wood – one of several high-profile auditionees for a full-time place with the Stones during the recording of *Black And Blue* – and Keith Richards backstage in 1975

GETTY

"Bring on the girls!"

MM DEC 6 Doorstepping the Rolling Stones, as they record a new album in Montreux, with Ron Wood. What's it called? "I wish we could decide," says Charlie Watts. "It's supposed to be coming out in February."

IT WASN'T ONLY the ice and snow slithering down the mountains onto Montreux in Switzerland that induced a cold shiver last week. The news that the Rolling Stones were busy recording their next album in a brand-new studio secreted inside the Montreux Casino was enough to induce trembling, even in kneecaps wrapped up well against the plunging temperatures prevailing in this expensive millionaires' playground that seems destined to become one of the new musical capitals of the world.

Montreux is a beautiful town nestling on the shores of Lake Geneva, with high mountain ranges pressed up closely against the shore. There is barely room for two high streets, a railway line and a motorway. And it's getting pretty used to the world's top musicians descending on it. During the summer they have TV awards and the famous jazz festival, bringing every conceivable artist from America, Britain and the rest of Europe.

Now, with the construction by Alex Grob of the new Mountain Studio inside the Casino (the £5m confection that stands on the site of the old building which burned down a couple of years ago during a concert by Mr Frank Zappa and his band), artists will be lured by Montreux all the year round.

The Stones are among the first to use the facilities, although Alex's wife, Anita Kerr, has recorded there and the 1975 Montreux Jazz Festival was also captured on tape, utilising the studio equipment.

Being in town to study the Swiss method of brewing beer and local tram operations, it was with some surprise that I found Keith Richards and family occupying a suite of rooms in a hotel only yards away from the casino. Here Keith's children raced noisily up and down the corridors, giggling occasionally, kicking a football and enjoying horseplay with Uncle Ronnie Wood, wandering guitarist, Face and part-time Rolling Stone.

Would Ronnie and Keith like to do an interview, I asked at nine one morning as they staggered bleary-eyed to breakfast. "No-o-o!" said Keith. "Oh no-o," said Ronnie, "can you come back in two weeks' time?"

Understandable, really, as they had been literally up all night recording without a break, and after breakfast were planning to sleep for at least eight hours. But it was kindly agreed that a visit to the studio to see the Stones at work, rest and play would not be too much of a problem. After all, they didn't have much time, and privacy is of the essence when a new album is being hatched.

Thus it was with a mixture of curiosity, fear and excitement that I entered the midnight



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world of the Stones hidden by massive soundproof doors in the Casino complex. And in a way, they were into something new, for the tapes rolling back on the machines and wiring their signals to the huge speakers concealed in the walls, revealed a whole new Stones sound. Still immediately identifiable as the Stones, but with a precision and attack that must herald a new era for one of rock's oldest and most respected bands.

The riff that came blasting overhead was filled with pulsating drive, with Charlie Watts' drums brisk, tight and developing a marvellous clarity and depth of tone that has not always been present on past Stones' recordings. And there were all the Stones, bar Bill Wyman, smiling a greeting, somewhat surprised to see the *MM* in their midst, and offering the hospitality of the house.

"What are you doing here," demanded Mick. But he didn't seem about to hurl me into the slush outside, as it was rumoured had been the fate of other would-be interlopers.

Mick, in cord trousers and jackets, gyrated around to the music, not for anybody's benefit, but simply because he couldn't keep still, the old restless energy filling him with desire to get into it and avoid the waste of precious seconds.

Ronnie Wood, in brilliant colours, pink trousers and furry boots, smiled in ever-cheerful fashion, and referred to the band respectfully as "they", a clear indication that he considers himself still one of Rod Stewart's men, on loan to the Stones.

And Keith Richards, for all his fame as the wild reprobate of R&B, a charming man with thin, boyish face and earrings, toiling in expert fashion over the sliders and switches of the control desk.

While in a corner, on a spare chair, Charlie Watts, his hair shorn and combed back, looking like an early photograph of Phil Seamen or Ginger Baker, furiously practising with a pair of drumsticks on his knees.

The sixth Stone bustled around, after 14 years still loyal and a devoted servant: Ian Stewart, once boogie pianist and now administrator, listening keenly to the music.

"They've recorded a lot of stuff in Munich," said Ronnie. "We're here to record vocals and dub on some more instruments. But most of the tracks are finished. Billy Preston is coming out soon, and Ollie Brown, Stevie Wonder's drummer is playing percussion with Charlie. No, that's not me on lead guitar on this track, it's a guy called Steve."

Did the album have a title yet? Charlie Watts laughed: "I wish we could decide on a title, because they need the LP cover. It's supposed to be coming out in February."

Apparently the working title at the moment is "Hot Stuff", one of the tunes on the album, and one being whispered as a new Stones classic. This could change, of course, and the Stones never like to be tied down to details. But Stu did say: "We may do some dates in Britain next year." Around when the album comes out? "Be nice," said Stu noncommittally.

"I keep cracking that top note," said Mick. "It sounds like a fart in a bucket"

It was time for Keith, Ronnie and Mick to quit the control room for the studio, hidden behind a solid wall. Communication is by TV camera, but Mick, finding that he could be watched from the control room, insisted that he should be able to see back the other way, and another camera and monitor were installed so that the artists could check up on their engineers. If anybody was going to pull faces, Mick wanted to be in on the act.

After the untitled stomper had been played a few times, the vocal trio of Jagger, Richards and Wood set about laying down a suitable version of "Memory Motel", a song about a girl whose memory was stamped on some far-flung lodgings.

Over and over they sang: "*You're just a memory!*" and increasingly going out of tune, as the lateness of the hour took its toll. "I keep cracking that top note," said Mick despairingly, while Keith too had trouble, and eventually they sang as flat as humanly possible. "It sounds like a fart in a bucket" says Mick. "Bring on the girls." Much laughter in the control room.

A look of pain momentarily crossed Stu's careworn features, and Charlie exchanged with him the merest flickers of a grin. Not a word was said, but inside the studio the culprits collapsed with laughter. "This is serious music!" insisted Mick. "C'mon now, let's try again."

"*YOU'RE JUST A MEMORY!*" they bellowed once more.

"This is going to go on all night," said Charlie wisely, but somehow an acceptable version was "kept" for future reference. And amid the jesting, that unique Jagger vocal style emerged – complaining, emotive and mocking.

The Stone-ettes returned from the studio for fresh supplies of throat lubricant. Mick, while not crazed with alcohol, was certainly high in spirits. "Why didn't you give a bigger tribute to Al Jackson," he demanded, in reference to the late Stax drummer. "A measly news paragraph, and that's all."

Mick was also most concerned with the fate of the Bay City Rollers and their lead singer, expressing a genuine anxiety about the perils of Les McKeown and his brushes with the law.

Chris Welch





"It did feel an important chapter of my life was about to change": Peter Gabriel on stage with Phil Collins in Genesis, 1975



"Let me out!"

PETER GABRIEL has left GENESIS, not to grow cabbages, it turns out, but to investigate completely new ways of working. "The Cosmic Cadet Force", ghosts, UFOs, mysticism and stories will all figure in his plans. "Left to my own devices," he confides, "I can go a little haywire."

— MELODY MAKER DECEMBER 6 —

PETER GABRIEL'S DEPARTURE from Genesis was one of the biggest shocks of 1975 for those who admired, nay loved, the combination of perverse talent they represented. For Genesis with Gabriel was something special, unique in international rock. Over six years they had gradually built up their following and respect, and just as they were reaching the heights of the supergroups, playing at the sports stadiums and prestige halls, so it seemed to dash to pieces.

But Genesis have re-emerged. Drummer Phil Collins has taken over vocals, at least until they can find a new singer. Steve Hackett, their lead guitarist, has found himself with a hit solo album.

That just leaves Peter – out in the cold of apparent exile in Bath.

Gabriel has not been moping or wasting his time. Instead, he has found time that was denied him by the hectic schedule of a touring group and is involving himself in all kinds of research and study. He has been absorbing everything from piano lessons to attempts at levitation and telepathy. There is no doubt, though, that the pressures, however subtle, that led to his departure from the band into which he poured his soul have scarred him.

When we met at a flat off London's Knightsbridge on Saturday morning for breakfast, he still had his old sense of humour and fascination with the mysteries of the unseen world intact. But there was an undercurrent of suppressed feeling that occasionally flashed to the surface. I could not be sure whether he thought our degree of communication was adequate, or whether he felt he had fully transmitted his feelings. He seemed to be torn between a desire to be diplomatic and to let it all pour out.

He even suggested we do an interview in which there would be two answers to each question.

"It's up to you entirely how you want to do it, but I thought we could have the true-love, positive response and the negative, true-hate response," said Mr G enigmatically.

He feels that vital new forces will be at work during the second half of the 1970s. After we had chatted of Bruce Springsteen over the toast and »

ALAMY

coffee ("He was magnificent – an animated pixie"), Peter adjourned to the living room. Had he really been merely in hiding to grow cabbages?

"I had actually been growing cabbages at the time I wrote my letter to the press. It was a symptom of a time when I had the opportunity to do a lot of things I'd not been able to do before. There were a lot of things I wanted to follow up as part of the CCF – the Cosmic Cadet Force.

"I've been investigating more esoteric approaches to sound. Different harmonics have different biological effects on people. I've also been trolling around seeing different people in various communities. It's very ironic but I was doing an audition for a group of people the other day, called Genesis. One of the possibilities I've got on ice at the moment is joining a commune.

"It's not your drug-ridden sex orgies, but a group of people working together in a lot of areas, and one of the communes is called, by complete coincidence, Genesis."

That must have given Peter a shock!

"Yeah, I can't get away from them. Let me out! There's another place in France I'm going to have a look at. I'm thinking of joining with my family.

"I'm very excited about what's happening at the moment. In the same way that the end of the '60s produced a lot of interesting ideas, the end of the '70s is going to do the same thing. A lot of the people who didn't actually end up as zombies at the end of the '60s have kept their idealism, but buried themselves. Now they're beginning to surface again, with much more down-to-earth use of some of the '60s' idealism.

"A lot of things which interest me are coming to the surface. In themselves they aren't particularly important – ESP, telepathy, UFOs, astrology, tarot, the rise in mysticism, the prospect of religious wars in the 1990s – but it's all very exciting. A lot of things written off in the past are coming back in more credible and down-to-earth forms. There are believable human elements in all this, rather than some alienating, white-robed, mystical figures.

"I'm fascinated by all these things and basic psychic research. There are quite a lot of children now who are able to do what Uri Geller can do, and some of these are gathered together in groups."

Does all this herald an Era Of New Knowledge?

"Naw – I don't think anything is particularly new. But where people were infatuated with all sorts of ideas in the '60s, they are now actually giving them practical use. I believe all people have experiences which they can't easily relate into their own terms, whether it's seeing ghosts, or premonition of an accident. They are regular occurrences, and you can learn to understand what brings on these impressions, and how to make use of them."

Had Peter done any experiments?

"I have been working on various techniques which have produced results I've found amazing. You try to pick up experiences recorded in rooms. The exciting thing is that anyone can do it. We restrict the powers of the mind very much and it's amazing what you can do if you try."

Couldn't that be very disturbing to the mind?

"Yes, it can be. You aren't given any more power than you can handle. I don't mean power in a black magic sense, but the internal experiences that are going on inside you. There are a lot of things done where you shut off the senses, like the Black Tank where you float in water, unable to hear anything, see anything and minimise all sensory inputs.

"It allows the mind freedom. That's why people write at night – and I've been doing quite a lot of writing. The night is my most productive period."

Has Peter's research and experiments affected his musical output?

"No – I haven't gone all cosmic. Some of the stuff is fantasy, as I was doing before, and some of it is simple pop songs which I've been writing with Martin Hall. I've been writing the music and he's been writing the words. And some more stuff I've been doing more recently which is a little more atmospheric.

"The stuff I've done with Martin is ready pretty well, and the stuff I've done on my own will be ready soon. Martin is a poet and lyricist and I heard his songs a long time ago when John Anthony was producing us. He put me in touch with Martin and we'd been meaning to get something together for a long time, and there wasn't an opportunity until I left the band.

"Now we're hoping to get other people to perform those songs, and perhaps I may do some of them myself. Hopefully others will perform and we'll just write and produce. Um – my own stuff… some are video fantasies and I hope to be able to get those made for TV here and abroad. They're short things, 10 to 20 minutes, and one of them is suitable for me to perform and the others concern older characters. I've no immediate plans for going on the road as such."

That will disappoint a lot of people.

"In many ways that's why I left the band… if I get back into a full-time road situation again it will be self-defeating. Essentially, I see this as a learning period. I'm sure the fact I've made a change and had time to think will benefit what I want to do.

"It means I can respond to impulses as they strike me from day to day, which is good for a period, but I'm at the point now where I want to introduce some self-discipline and get things constructively organised. Left to my own devices I can go a little haywire at times. So now I will work to getting things out and recorded, and they should appear early next year."

He hadn't recorded anything yet?

"No. Demos. But no final recordings. But I hope to start in December. And I've been having piano lessons in Bath. I've now got a better understanding of music, reading that is, and I'm trying to develop my playing. In a band situation there are things I'd written that the others were patient enough to work out for me. I'd do the whole thing by ear. If I'm going to be working with session people, it's going to be very useful if I can write out the parts. I feel very positive about everything at the moment."

Did Peter feel a weight had been lifted from his shoulders when he left the band?

"I felt in many ways it was tying me down to one particular role, and it was beginning to take out some of… um… my creative instincts. In a musical sense I was proud of my involvement with Genesis, and in terms of the rest, taking it out on the road. But when things get to such a scale it does tend to drain the humanity out of it."

It became less pleasure than it had been in the early days?

"Yep," said Peter, clipped and guarded.

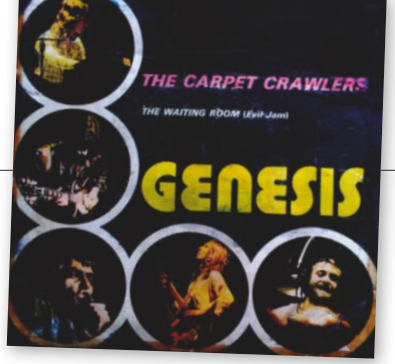
Which had been the happiest period with Genesis?

"Oh, I learnt a lot. Um, I regret nothing! (*Laughter*) Playing at Wembley I didn't like too much, actually. Personally I wouldn't like to play there again. I don't like that situation. It's curious, because one big hall in



Genesis in London, 1975: (l–r) Phil Collins, Steve Hackett, Mike Rutherford, Tony Banks and Peter Gabriel

REX FEATURES



Germany, I think it was in Cologne, really had an intimate feeling. There were 9,000 people there. But the Empire Pool really wasn't intimate at all.

"In many ways the size of the audience was enabling us to put on a big presentation, but it became self-defeating. It was time for a change for me internally, and externally with the band."

How had his writing changed without the others breathing over his shoulder?

"It was never like that really. Half our material was written within the group and the other half was done individually. What's coming out of me now has changed. I've always written the pop-song type things, some of which were allowed to come through the band. Now I can fiddle about with more poppy things that couldn't come out with the band."

Did Peter feel a responsibility towards those fans who had supported and followed him for five or six years? Weren't they waiting for him to do something?

"I think they'll be interested in what I come out with. Yes, there are people who liked what I put into Genesis. For seven years I put most of myself into Genesis. There was 100 per cent commitment.

"And now some of the songs that come from inside me I hope will get through in the same way. I'd like to make albums important to me and those who buy them, however many it is, and have some fun with singles. I did a thing with Charlie Drake. An entertaining song. Nothing particularly arty. It was just fun doing it."

Peter writing for Charlie Drake!

"Well, Martin and I had written a song that seemed suitable for an animation thing. We wanted a cartoon character, and then decided on a character actor, and Charlie seemed ideal. We played him the song and he recorded it. It came out last weekend. I don't particularly want my contribution to Genesis to be judged purely on that, but it's good fun."

Did Peter miss performing and being on stage?

"Oh, when I've been to see other people, I feel like being up there again, but I don't miss it from day to day. I'm really excited about the prospects of video and I would enjoy performing in a controlled situation like that."

Had he heard anything from Genesis since he left them?

"I've been to hear some of their new album at Trident Studios and it sounds much better than I've heard them before – much cleaner."

It must have been difficult working with Genesis...

"I found some gigs very depressing. They didn't want me to say anything until a replacement had been found. But I was getting very emotional with audiences at times. I'd come away wet-eyed. On the last tour it did feel an important chapter of my life was about to change. It was quite highly charged with emotion."

It's going to be a testing time for both Genesis and Peter in the new few months.

"I'm a bit non-competitive in my attitude at the moment… but in some ways I want to get something out as quickly as possible, before those miserable bastards."

We both laughed in shocked surprise at this sudden vehemence. This was obviously part of the positive/negative interview we had discussed earlier. It seemed wise to dispense with the miserable bastards and press on. Was Peter actually going to do a solo album?

"This week – yes. The writing side is something I want to emphasise, but yes, I would like to do some recording and get something squeezed out of the middle of me rather than something off the top of the head.

"And I don't particularly want a Peter Gabriel solo career as such. I'd like to develop the writing and the video thing. I want to develop my playing, with a view to possibly going back on the road if the circumstances are right. I wouldn't go back unless I was doing something (a) very strong and (b) totally original. Different to what I'd done before and from what anyone else was doing."

It was hard, surely, for Peter, having created such a strong image with his followers?

"There will be a percentage who won't like what I do now, but maybe some who will, who didn't like what Genesis was into – I don't know. I know there are still things inside of me that I've tried to communicate before.

"I don't intend to be that critical of the group, but there were certain areas which weren't flexible. And for me, some of the fire had gone. In fact my absence has given them new-found energy. This democratic thing – it didn't really work like that; there was a playing of politics. One would pretend that things were someone else's ideas to get them through. That sort of thing – which got a bit silly."

> "In fact my absence has given Genesis new-found energy"

Very frustrating.

"Yeah. Well, politics operate in all bands to some degree. With the writing thing, royalties were shared out five ways when generally three people in the band did the words. Again, that seems to have changed since I left."

Did people take each other for granted in the band, having been together for such a long time?

"You begin to build up roles and ways of acting towards people, intending to sidestep certain challenges. Yeah… (*silence*). And in a living situation, it's particularly intense. You're stuck with them in the hotel as well! Mostly we were a happy band and you learn to live with and suppress dissatisfactions.

"All bands are compromises to a certain extent. We used to have arguments, but less so later on. Now they've got to prove as much as possible that they're a whole, strong band without me – and they've done it from what I've heard of the album. I felt a little strange towards it, but I haven't felt sad about it, and I think the album will be successful for them and it will give them self-assurance."

Steve has done a solo album, and Phil has his own band. Couldn't Peter have relieved internal pressures by doing his own solo album and staying with Genesis?

"Oh, I see. Well not really. A lot of solo albums are diversions from the central direction – you can spread yourself too thin, and I don't think I could have put my heart wholly into Genesis and into a solo album."

What was Peter's first move on leaving?

"Waited for a while – then wrote about 20 songs with Martin, and the video things. Recording is the next item on the agenda as far as Gabriel output goes. One story is called 'The Box' and the other is 'People In Glass Houses' – what's the other one called?" Peter dissolved once more and looked somewhat helpless. He couldn't remember.

Did Peter think that a time would come when rock musicians utilised some of the psychic powers that were waiting to be tapped, in their performances?

"Ah yes," he said, brightening up. "You mean the cosmic heroes? I'm sure that a mystically orientated rock star will emerge in the next 10 years. I'm sure it will be a particularly good thing, because I'm not sure if rock music brings out the best in people. But it would be interesting."

Had Peter used any of his powers or psychic abilities on stage?

"There are certain things I felt during some performances. The old shivers down the spine when things were really happening. That might just be the old audience thing, but at certain times you feel it could be controllable energy flows. At times there were things that seemed to be happening within me."

Did Peter take an interest in politics and events in the outside world?

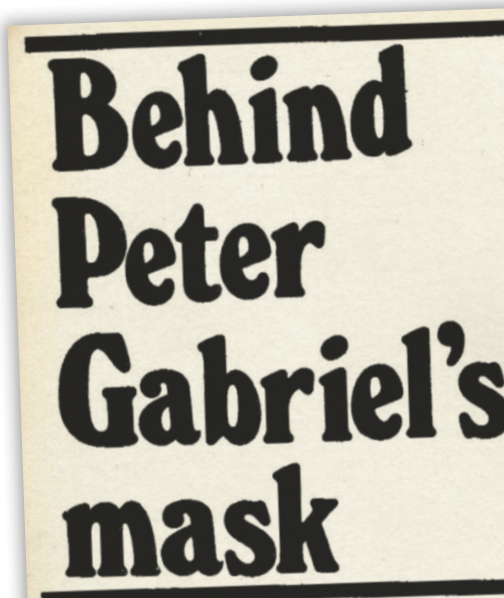
"Yes. I quite often listen to Radio 4 in the bath, in Bath. I always want to be grounded enough to be able to relate to anyone. In some ways I've been a self-orientated, ambitious person, and I'm trying to make myself more sensitive to other people's feelings – with what success, I don't know.

"I feel more real now, although I'm still a dreamer in many ways."

Finally, what is he going to do with all the old costumes and headdresses and masks?

"I'll go down to the village and frighten all the children," he grinned. "Or busk the queues outside the next Genesis gig!"

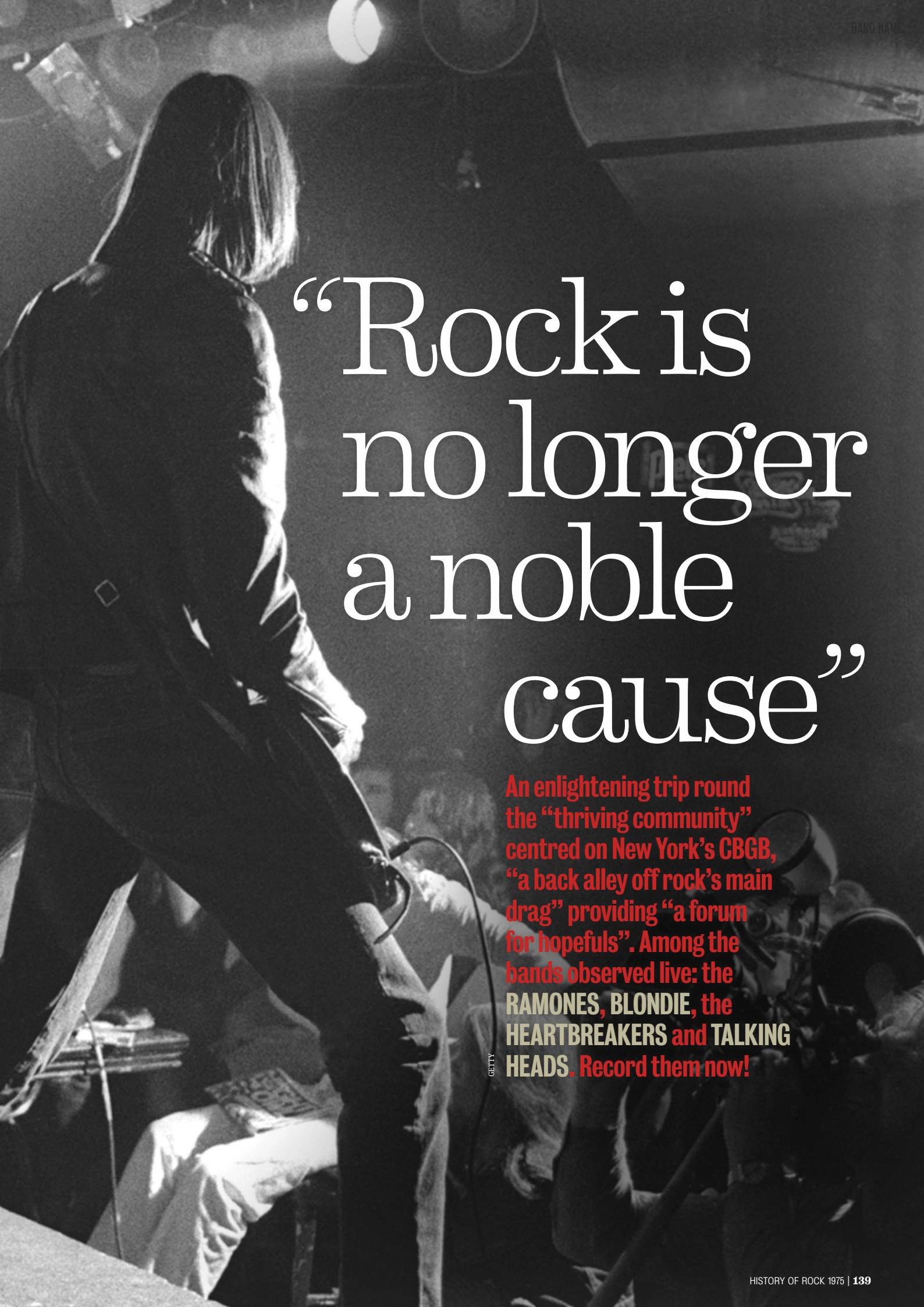
Chris Welch •





The Ramones play to a seated crowd at Hilly Kristal's CBGB club in 1975: (l-r) Joey, Dee Dee and Johnny Ramone (drummer Tommy Ramone out of shot)

»



"Rock is no longer a noble cause"

An enlightening trip round the "thriving community" centred on New York's CBGB, "a back alley off rock's main drag" providing "a forum for hopefuls". Among the bands observed live: the RAMONES, BLONDIE, the HEARTBREAKERS and TALKING HEADS. Record them now!

GETTY



— NME NOVEMBER 8 —

"Beat on the brat, beat on the brat, beat on the brat with a baseball bat…"

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, the Ramones.

The Ramones are quite ridiculous. They used to play 20-minute sets because they only had eight songs, but now they're up to 45 minutes. At one gig they clocked in with 12 songs in 26 minutes, instant classics like "Beat On The Brat" (the complete lyric of which is quoted above), "Judy Is A Punk", "I Don't Wanna Go Down In The Basement", "I Want To Be Your Boyfriend" and many more. Many, many more.

Tonight they're playing the Performance Studio on the Lower East Side. You walk up a flight of stairs to get to the Studio, where a sign informs you that it's a free gig, but a three-buck "donation" is requested, and if you don't pay the "donation" ya don't get in, capeesh?

However, as part of the deal you get all the beer you can drink (if you're prepared to draw it yourself), and sets by the Ramones and Blondie. You also get the chance to sit through about an hour and a half of '50s tapes memorising the faces of the other nine people who showed up. This is because Blondie's drummer had to be collected from the airport.

For a while it looked as though there were going to be nearly as many people on the stage as there were in the audience, because the Performance Studio is pretty damn small. I mean, I've been in bigger living rooms. It makes me remember how disappointed I was the first time I ever went to the Marquee. It was so small and scuzzy, not at all the place of myth and legend that I'd built it up to be all those years, and it came as a shock to discover that a highly touted NY flash like the Ramones would be playing to a total audience of – at final count – 27 people, nine of whom were photographers.

What had happened was that the Ramones – and, by extension, most of their colleagues on the New York underground circuit – had received such a lot of media attention from the NY area rock press that I'd assumed that they were getting to be quite big. What's actually happening is that New York has a thriving local band scene, and they get coverage in their local rags just as a hot new San Francisco band might get coverage in *Rolling Stone* or a good Detroit band might make it into *Creem* or a pub band with promise might get a little space in *NME* even though they're only playing to a hundred people a night. Or less.

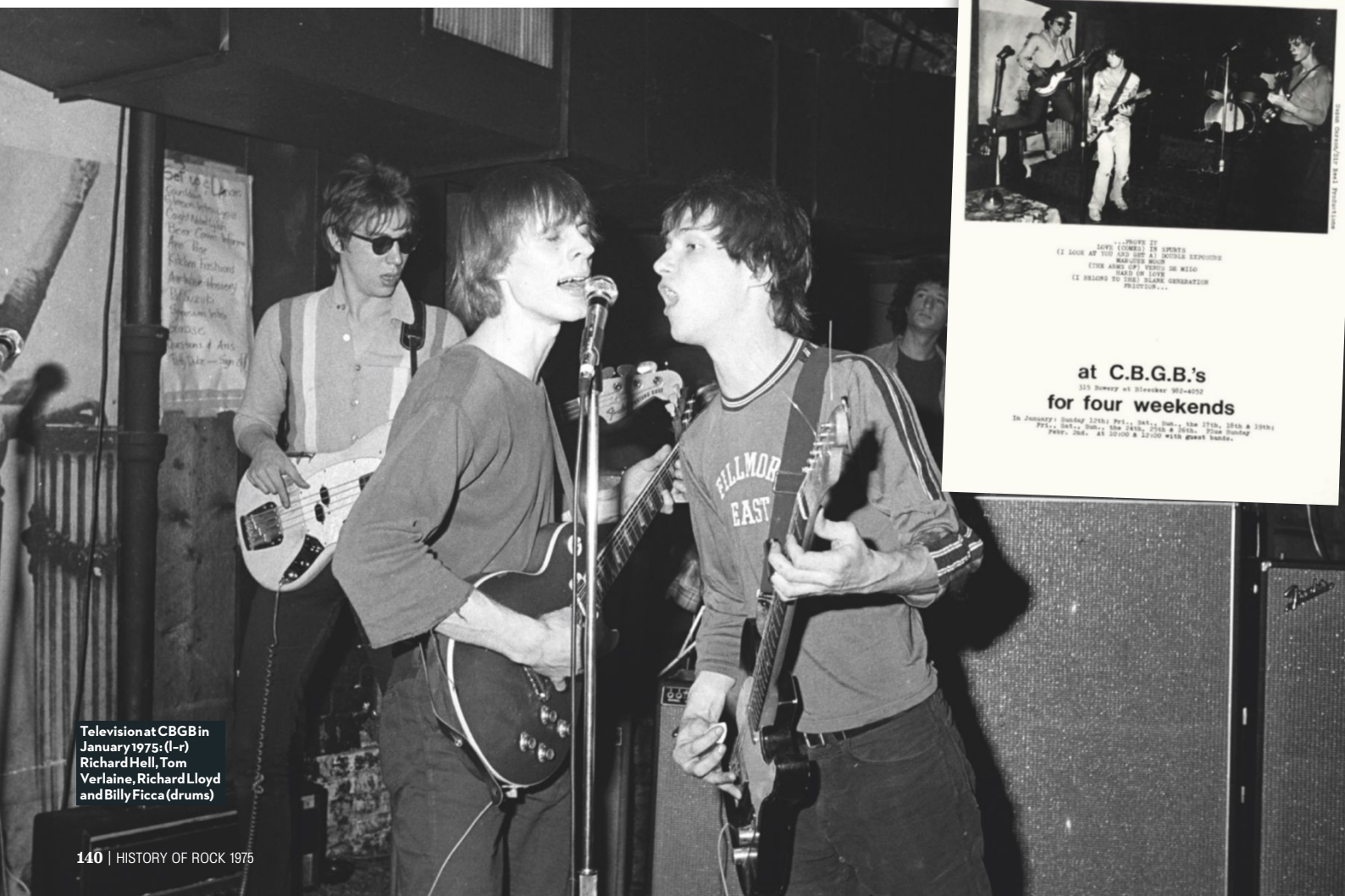
CBGB, a small club on the Bowery round about the Bleeker Street intersection, is to the New York punk band scene what the Marquee was to London rock in the '60s. It's where most of the bands do their main gigs and where they hang out to watch and/or heckle (the latter activity a speciality of members past and present of the New York Dolls) their friends and competitors.

So far, the nearest thing to a star to be produced by CBGB is Patti Smith – put it this way, she's the only one out of that scene to have a record deal with a major company – and she was out of circulation around the time I was there because she was closeted in Electric Ladyland with John Cale making the *Horses* album.

Similarly, Television, regarded by the prime voyeurs on the New York scene as being the Next Band To Happen, were conspicuous by their elusiveness. Having been thoroughly knocked out by them earlier this year, I was hot to see 'em again, but couldn't find head nor hair of them. Their bass player, Richard Hell, had teamed up with ex-Doll Johnny Thunders to form a new band called the Heartbreakers, and casual chat with the locals revealed conflicting reports as to whether they were actually still together.

Since then, I've heard a privately pressed single – "Little Johnny Jewel (Parts 1 & 2)" on the Ork label – and a tape. The single is rotten and the tape reveals only sporadic flashes of the power they revealed the night I saw them.

NME's Tony Tyler – who, apart from being one of the three tallest men in rock'n'roll, is also acknowledged as knowing a good band when he hears one – saw Television a few weeks before I did and reports that they stunk on ice. Still, Television are known around New York for their wilful inconsistency. (A piece on the band in New York's *Soho Weekly News* by



GETTY (2)

Television at CBGB in January 1975: (l–r) Richard Hell, Tom Verlaine, Richard Lloyd and Billy Ficca (drums)

Alan Betrock begins: "Take two people down to see Television on two different nights and the odds are that they'll return with completely diverse opinions.") And since they still haven't recorded anything impressive (viz the debacle of the Eno Tape, a tale of almost legendary status in CBGB annals), it seems unlikely that any of the major labels who've decided that they can get along without Television are likely to change their minds unless a particularly hip A&R man manages to catch Tom Verlaine and his henchmen on a flamingly good night.

The Ramones, though, are a band that the London rock scene could really use. Jeez, I'd give a week's pay just to see them explode over an unprepared audience at, say, Dingwalls. They're simultaneously so funny, such a cartoon vision of rock'n'roll, and so genuinely tight and powerful that they're just bound to enchant anyone who fell in love with rock'n'roll for the right reasons.

I mean, if you started digging rock because it provided a vital insight into the mood of the times, or because so many rock musicians today are – what you say down there? – genuinely creative (you know, like Rick Wakeman or Mike Oldfield), then forget it, Jack, 'cuz the Ramones will just make you whoops your cookies.

The Ramones aren't worried about being genuinely creative, and if you told them that they provided a unique insight into anything they'd probably piss on your shoes, and you'd deserve it, too. They ain't glitter queens. They ain't a blues band. What they do is fire off ridiculously compressed bursts of power chords and hooklines, nuthin' but hit singles or what would be hit singles if there was any justice in this crummy world (well, well, well, take a look arowooned, etc).

C'mon up and meet the boys. That's Dee Dee on bass – he's the one in the black leather jacket, sneakers and torn-up jeans. Over there behind the drums is Tommy – he's the short one in the black leather jacket, beat-up jeans and sneakers. Johnny's the guitar player in the black leather jacket, Captain America T-shirt, torn jeans and sneakers, and the one in the black leather jacket, torn jeans, sneakers and McGuinn shades is Joey. They all claim "Ramone" as their surname.

Joey Ramone isn't much over seven feet tall. You see this unbelievably long and thin streak of dirty denim and scuffed leather up on stage and when your eyes get to the top you find out he's slouching. Joey Ramone slouches like a telegraph pole slouches, and what's more he stays slouched. At moments of extreme urgency he performs this strange jackknife motion with his right leg. It looks as though he's trying to kick himself in the ass.

Each song begins with Dee Dee shouting "One-two-thee-four", followed by a headlong, full-speed rampage around the riff – whichever riff it is. The Ramones not only don't play no drum solos (thank you, Lord) but they don't even play guitar solos – well, maybe one or two, but nothing lasts over three minutes top whack. It's more likely to be two minutes and 10 seconds on the average. Never more than three-quarters of a minute between songs except in cases of equipment failure.

Joey spits out the title of the song, Dee Dee shouts "One-two-thee-four" and they're off again, maybe with "53rd And 3rd" ("*53rd and 3rd waiting for a trick/53rd and 3rd is making me sick*"). They're great.

Coming on alternately like tough kids pretending to be innocent and green kids pretending to be tough, the Ramones are pocket punks, a perfect razor-edged bubblegum band. They should never make an album. They should make a single every week, 'cuz they've already got enough songs to last them for the first six months.

Whether the Ramones will get that chance while they're still young enough to take advantage of it is a whole different thing, though. White hard rock is about the least commercial singles material currently extant in this age of disco tyranny and MOR slop, and the Ramones are a clear case of a product existing well in advance of a market.

Which is probably why, at the moment, there's no sign of a record deal.

Supporting them, incidentally, on that epic night at the Performance Studio, was Blondie (formerly of decadent Ladybirds-type vocal group The Stilettoes), who's this cute little bundle of platinum hair with a voice like a squeaky bath toy and quite the cruddiest garage-type garage band I've seen since the last band I was in (and that band was a fuzzbox pretentioso blues band. This one is just cruddy.)



Debbie Harry: a "cute little bundle of platinum hair with a voice like a squeaky bath toy"

> The Ramones are such a cartoon vision of rock'n'roll and so tight

She has what could politely be described as a somewhat suspect sense of pitch, but her charm lies in the fact that she's a kid who's pretending desperately hard to be a star and who's aware of it. Which is why it works at all (apart from on account of she's so gosh-darned cute); because her act has that home-made-ish quality.

Sadly, Blondie will never be a star simply because she ain't good enough, but for the time being I hope she's having fun. Whatever her actual age, though, she's spiritually a part of the Great American Nymphet Tradition.

Down at CBGB itself, however, things are cookin'. The place is a lot brighter and cleaner than it was last time I saw it. It's pretty solidly packed out and the jukebox is pumping out classic stuff like The Animals' "Club-A-Go-Go", Jeff Beck and Donovan's great "Barabajagal" – definitely the hippest jukebox this side of the Hope & Anchor.

There's a band setting up on stage, and the unpleasant-looking guy who looks like Lou Reed wearing one of Wilko Johnson's suits who's shouldering his way past the bar turns out to be the lead singer. The group are called Tuff Darts. The bass player looks like Peter Tork on speed.

"*I'm so sick 'n' tired of the crap I gotta take in this town*," they sneer eloquently. "*If it don't get no better I swear I'm gonna burn it down*."

Well, really, boys… don't you think that's – uh – taking things a little too far? I mean, the state New York's in right now you couldn't even claim the insurance. Tuff Darts are more like your standard-issue rock band, which means that the lead guitarist plays solos and the bass player goes zoom instead of clunk. They conjure up more of a late-'60s/early-'70s heavy »

metal roar than the trebly clang of the more early-'60s-orientated CBGB bands, but they sing in the classic acrid whine of the modem-day NY punk, and they look great. Apart from the Ramones, they're probably the best of the current crop.

Tonight they're supporting the Heartbreakers, the first (tadaaaaaaa!) NY punk supergroup, formed by Richard Hell, former bass player with Television, and the New York Dolls' Johnny Thunders (guitar, vocal and lurch) and Jerry Nolan (drums and sweat stains).

The lineup is completed by a morose-looking lead guitarist who looks as if his name ought to be Gary, but is more likely to be Albert. They are dreadful. Brother, are they dreadful. They make their entrances in standard NY punk uniform: black leather jackets, T-shirts, sneakers and jeans. Hell is the sole exception: he's got a short '65-style British moddycut, shades and a crumpled black suit.

Thunders is playing a huge, unwieldy Gretsch White Falcon guitar; Hell a Felix Pappalardi-style Gibson violin bass, and the erstwhile Gary (or Albert) an anonymous-looking Les Paul. Thunders is, I'm told, a fairly inadequate guitarist at the best of times, but since no one's seen him at anything which could possibly be described as "the best of times" since the early stages of the New York Dolls it must reluctantly be assumed that the display of minimal ability combined with maximum arrogance that he put on that night is the norm.

"Ooohhh, look! Johnny's taking his jacket off! YUMMMMM!!!" breathes Miriam from Cleveland. Miriam and her sister (and/or best pal) Helen flew up from Cleveland just to see the Heartbreakers, and they weren't disappointed, which either says a lot about Thunders' much-vaunted "charisma" or for Cleveland – a town where, according to Miriam, there is a group of people who get *NME* sent over to them from England, all have the first Feelgoods album on import and helped break Alex Harvey in that part of the world. Hi there, Cleveland!

The only thing they did all night that got me off was an enthusiastic if undisciplined performance of the immortal Tommy Boyce and Bobby Hart song "I'm Not Your Steppin' Stone" featured by The Monkees on the B-side of "I'm A Believer", and that was GREAT because the song is GREAT and therefore any performance of it no matter how otherwise mediocre is GREAT.

The basic trouble with the Heartbreakers is that while Richard Hell was an effective foil for Tom Verlaine in Television and Johnny Thunders more or less functioned in the Dolls, neither of them has either the personality nor the talent to lead or co-lead a band, which means that the Heartbreakers are forced to rely on Mach 9 volume and Mach 10 posturing, neither of which are any cure for the summertime blues. Unless you're from Cleveland.

However, Thunders' ex-Dollhood gives the group a little added cachet around CBGB; after all, the Dolls made two albums and toured the world, while most of the other Bowery punk bands haven't even played much outside of New York State and New Joisey, let alone Britain and Europe and Japan. So that makes Johnny Thunders a big man and gives him the right to demand to use the back door at CBGB so he doesn't have to walk through the audience like everybody else does.

Meanwhile, over on West 4th Street just past the Bottom Line, the orthodox wing of the New York Dolls (ie, vocalist David Johansen and guitarist Sylvain Sylvain) are holding court in a video studio and viewing videotape of their Japanese gigs.

Sylvain – if I may call him by first name Sylvain – is wearing a black leather jacket, T-shirt, sneakers and jeans and enthusing about Ibanez guitars. He claims Ibanez make Fender and Gibson copies that are better than the originals. He was particularly fond of their Flying Arrow, which he can be seen playing on the big screen that dominates the far end of the room.

Equipped with an ex-roadie on bass, a session drummer they found waiting for work at the Musicians' Union Hall and a fairly nifty keyboard player, they begin to sound like a fairly enjoyable high school R&B band, though they still indulge in old-style Dolls cavorting, which now has a certain endearingly nostalgic quality.

Johansen is slumped up against the wall with his girlfriend Cyrinda Foxe (a nice gal from Texas, natch), wearing red pants and boots and an absurd red hat. "This band is more like me and Syl always wanted the band to be like, but the others couldn't play this stuff. What we did before was a lot of fun, and I think it's great that a bunch of kids like us did that much," he says.

It's a safe bet that the new-look Dolls (who, at the time of writing, had not yet done any US dates and are – you guessed – currently without a record deal) will not be playing CBGB. According to reports, Johansen considers that the Dolls are too big a name to play CBGB, believing them to be a concert rather than a club band.

Apparently nobody's told him how many foreign tours and hit records some of the bands who play the Marquee have had. Actually, the Dolls were the most successful of an earlier wave of New York bands, all of whom were firmly attached to the glitter fiasco of a coupla years back. There's a well-known line around to the effect that in those days "the hottest band in town were the ones with the highest platforms", and that's about the way it was.

> The best of the class of '75 are delivering what the Dolls promised to

Now, however, the best of the class of '75, like the Ramones and Tuff Darts, are delivering what the Dolls promised to, but didn't.

The last CBGB double-bill I saw was Talking Heads supporting Shirts. They're a bit oddball for CBGB in that neither band is remotely in the dominant punk tradition. Talking Heads are seemingly aiming for an effect similar to the early Velvets' more icily restrained material, but their music is too thin and disjointed to make it work.

They've got a lead singer who looks a cross between John MacLaughlin and Bryan Ferry who scratches away earnestly at a big acoustic and a Fender Mustang with a Gibson humbucking pick-up wired in to replace the original top pick-up on account of Fender top pick-ups ain't as hot as their back pickups for some reason. (Take that, Rex Anderson!)

Their bassist, however, is probably the most arresting single figure in any of these



Talking Heads, whose first gig was opening for the Ramones at CBGB on June 5, 1975: (l–r) Tina Weymouth, Chris Frantz and David Byrne



The Heartbreakers, "the first NY punk supergroup": (l–r) Jerry Nolan, Richard Hell, Johnny Thunders and Walter Lure



bands, with the possible exception of Joey Ramone. Her name's Martina Weymouth; she wears leather pants, grips her bass like it was the only thing keeping her from drifting out into some weird, echoing warp phase, has blonde hair and the most frightened eyes I've ever seen. She plays mean, zonking bass, like the heavier she plays the more secure she is, the less likely to just float away or vanish or something.

Talking Heads' trip just didn't come through for me, possibly because David Byrne was having a lot of trouble with his amp and I couldn't hear the words, but Martina Weymouth ("Rock is no longer a noble cause," she told the *Village Voice*) is some sort of star and as long as she needs that desperately to keep playing the bass like that, she stands a good chance of being Heard Of.

Shirts were the lead act that night, and they were far and away the most conventionally commercial act in their league. They were oddly reminiscent of the kind of act that CBS were signing in their *Rock Machine* phase: keyboards, horns, congas, two guitarists and a girl singer. The latter, Annie Golden by name, works by day in the promo department at ABC Records, and sends out neatly typed handouts on the band to anybody who expresses an interest.

They play less interesting music than their colleagues; nohow and contrariwise, they're also the best musicians by far and, given the non-visionary nature of the average A&R office, far the most likely to get signed and Make It. Ms Golden, however, is a better-than-average white female rock singer and an energetic live performer (to get academic for a second); and with or without the band, someone'll pick up on her.

It would be cruel, though not strictly inaccurate, to remark that if all these bands were doing their scuffling out of Tulipville, Arkansas, no one would ever hear of them (though it would require a major genetic mutation for Tulipville, Arkansas, to produce a band like the Ramones in the first place).

At the present moment, the Dolls and Patti Smith are the only acts to emerge from the '70s New York into the national and international rock market from the New York club scene, though Kiss, Bruce Springsteen, Todd Rundgren and the Blue Öyster Cult all have associations with New York and its immediate environs.

The areas whose bands seem to be judged most appealing by the Yankee rock lumpen seem to be the South, Midwest and West Coast. Basically, it's a tight, thriving community scene, a back alley off rock's main drag, and CBGB is home turf to the whole host of bands, many more than I had a chance to see (like the Fast and the Miamis – same theoretical basis as the Ramones, I'm told – and the Stilettoes).

The reason that CBGB makes it is that it offers a forum for hopefuls who have something going and plays host to those bands' audiences, not to mention turning one band's audience onto another band and helping to broaden the field. It genuinely – pardon the lapse into '69 London Ladbroke Grove-ese – provides a genuine service to the community.

People talk about "CBGB bands" the same way that they musta used to have talked about "Max's type bands". It's one of those rare rock'n'roll venues which has a character all its own and has taken it upon itself to nurture a specific scene; a specific school of music. Plus the bucks ain't bad, either. On three bucks a throw and a two-drink minimum, nobody's hurtin'.

The New York bands probably don't play as well as their British counterparts; they're much lower on the conventional virtues and ain't no way as consistent. But there's a kind of spark in the best of them, like Television on a good night (I assume what I saw was a good night) or the Ramones (ditto) or even Tuff Darts (ditto again), that I haven't seen in any post-Feelgoods British bands at all.

> There's a spark I haven't seen in any post-Feelgoods British bands

What makes them happen is a generally abnormally high energy level, the desire to combine traditionalism with experiment by cutting rock right down to the basic ingredients that made 'em like it in the first place and then rebuilding from there. Maybe they just have a different – and therefore more novel – line in cliches from their British counterparts, but their humour, vitality and simplicity are engaging indeed.

Mostly, they have eschewed blues, country and jazz flavourings: they don't play no folk-rock, jazz-rock, funk-rock, country-rock, glitter-rock or nuthin' like that. They play rock-rock; rock'n'roll stylised, interpreted, refined according to personal preference and perspective and then fed back into itself.

Maybe the present decade is less of a specific area in its own right than simply a viewpoint from which to reassess the '50s and '60s. Seems that way in New York, because when it comes right down to it, what all of these bands have in common is that they're re-presenting the '50s and '60s in a way that could only be the '70s.

"*In spite of all the amputations / You could still dance to a New York station.*" Lou Reed said that. Something like that, anyway.

"*I'm goin' back to New York City / I do be-leeeve I've had ee-nuff.*" Bob Dylan said that.

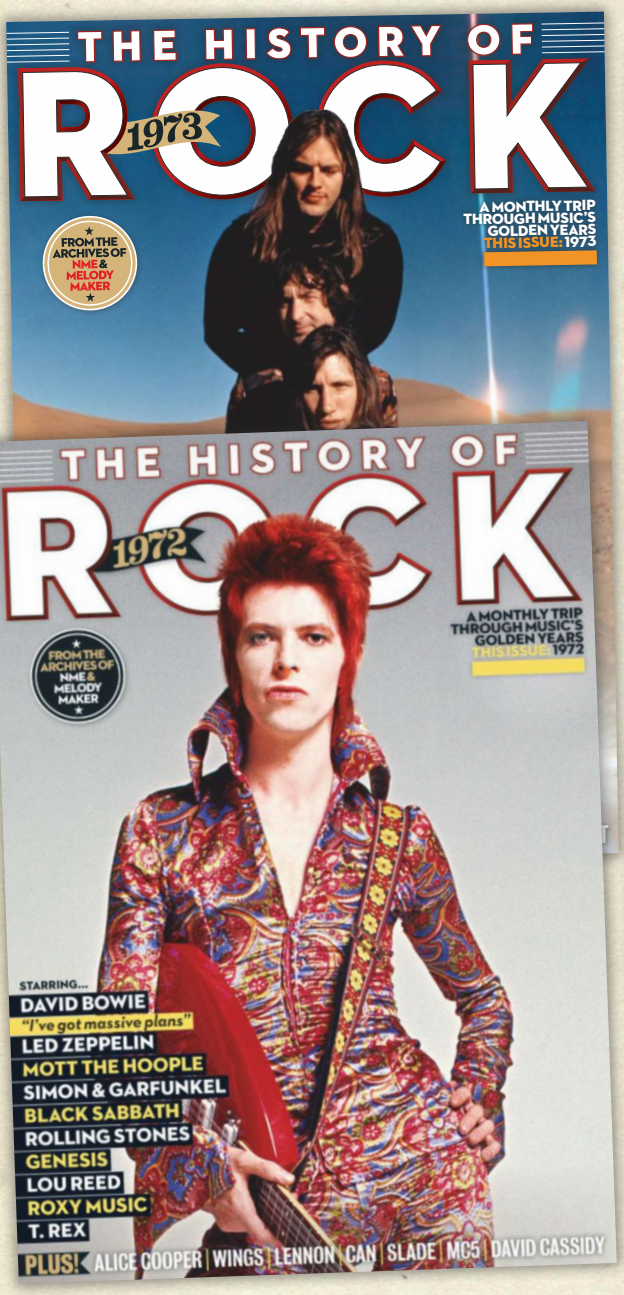
"Somebody better record these bands (and do it right) before they become extinct." I said that. *Charles Shaar Murray* •

GETTY (2)

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Readers' letters

MM OCT–DEC The lure of big bucks, Floyd's self-defeating satire and other gripes.

Wish you wouldn't

From Allan Jones' first abusive, smug and belittling comment, it was obvious what sort of putdown his review of Pink Floyd's *Wish You Were Here* was to be. He states that it took six months to record, and later amplifies this statement by saying this shows "a lack of determination and resolution" and that it "shouldn't be taken as a sign of their constant search for perfection".

But it should! Six months is not a particularly lengthy time for recording an album in this day and age, and the superb production and masterful technical quality of the album surely vindicates this. Maybe the Bay City Rollers did record "Rollin'" in four days, but it's hardly a masterpiece.

CHRIS FERRARY, Coolgardie Ave, Highams Park, London (*MM* Oct 4)

The Who (and everyone else) by numbers

Having just listened to Keith Moon on the radio "discussing" the new Who album with John Peel, I'm left wondering if Moon has any interest in music or The Who at all. Such apathy is never shown to America, though. The Who are doing not one but two American tours in the coming months, compared with the miserably inadequate number of concerts British fans can go to.

Of course, they're not the only ones…

- The Rolling Stones have not appeared in Britain since September 1973, but have completed a huge coast-to-coast American tour. It's doubtful whether they will appear in Britain at all next year.
- Led Zeppelin are probably not due to return here until 1978, when they will no doubt do their obligatory five dates at a major London venue to coincide with the release of their new album.
- Bad Company are currently doing nothing in the South of France.
- Pink Floyd (cough, next…)
- Yes will do their open-air football ground routine next summer, where 60 per cent of the audience can't see.

The list is endless: Elton John (remember him?), Jethro Tull, Eric Clapton and George Harrison have all turned their backs on us. The bands' usual reply to this is shortage of good venues, no possibility of making a profit, tax problems and so on. But if somebody who earns as much money and pays as much tax as Paul McCartney can keep on the road on a regular basis, I see no reason why others can't.

"Oh, but our shows are too big to keep on the road for any time!" I hear Robert Plant cry. Well, make them smaller!

COLIN ROBINSON, Hartslock Drive, Thamesmead, London (*MM* Oct 11)

The doctor is in

Today's top rock musicians tend to bemoan playing the "same old music" repeatedly at concerts. Well, OK, even I, as a simple liker of good music, can understand that this must cause boredom and the inevitable lowering of musical standards.

Consider, however, the relatively unknown group's position. Take Dr Feelgood, who play the same music at every concert and seem to enjoy it more every time they play. The audience reaction is invariably electric and the group indulge vigorously in the stimulation they provide.

Of course I do appreciate that groups like Deep Purple and Pink Floyd have been through this exhausting circuit, but surely



this doesn't give them a ticket to be complacent and to sit on their behinds?

Roger Waters of the Floyd does this, and produces sardonic music like "Welcome To The Machine" on *Wish You Were Here*. I think this is particularly significant, because if he is so bored with "the system" and "playing the same old tunes", why the hell doesn't he devote his time to writing more beneficial lyrics that can inspire instead of inducing apathy as he does? If this song is also a "profound comment" on society today, then if the rock musician can offer no more than criticism on his own medium that he has created, one wonders why he bothers at all.

Satirical comments can sometimes induce a beneficial reaction from authority, but as it is a comment on his own musical world, where is the logic?

CHRIS VINE, Bellmeadow, Sutton Road, Maidstone, Kent (*MM* Nov 22)

Meet the new boss

Every 10 years or so, the music world suddenly realises it has a giant in its midst. We are all very familiar with these milestones – Presley, Beatles, Dylan, etc, etc. Now add Bruce Springsteen to the list.

Springsteen is unquestionably a unique talent who will finally alleviate our frustrations from dozens of so-called "superstars" who never got past first base.

TONY ZETLAND, Corri Ave, Southgate, London (*MM* Nov 22)

Fans but no fans

I, for one, am fed up with the wailings of the "fans" who complain because Zep, Floyd, ELP, etc, have not appeared lately at their local church hall. The argument that the fans "made" these groups and are therefore owed a visit by them does not hold water. Basically, it is the music that makes super groups – not the fans. Fans only buy records if they like the music, not to make the creators and purveyors wealthy people.

Super groups are established because their music is consistently of a high order. Their music comes from whatever creative ability they have to call on. Having transposed this inspiration to wax, their debts to fans are paid handsomely. To insist that they then appear personally at Tewksbury Town Hall is arrogant greed.

If Zep, etc, decide they'll do five nights in London then thank your lucky stars, cough up and travel – or else top the "real fan" talk as you obviously do not know their worth (Mohammed went to the mountain and not vice versa).

RICHARD SHAW, Courtlands Drive, Watford (*MM* Nov 1)











GETTY



Coming next... in 1976!

SO THAT WAS 1975. Hope you did it right.

Certainly, that's not it from our reporters on the beat. The staffers of *NME* and *Melody Maker* enjoyed unrivalled access to the biggest stars of the time, and cultivated a feel for the rhythms of a diversifying scene; as the times changed, so did they. While in pursuit of the truth, they unearthed stories that have come to assume mythical status.

That's very much the territory of this monthly magazine. Each month, *The History Of Rock* will be bringing you verbatim reports from the pivotal events in pop culture, one year a month, one year at a time. Next up, 1976!

DAVID BOWIE

MUSIC STAR? MOVIE star? A meeting with a multi-faceted artist pondering his own status. "I didn't want my enthusiasm for rock'n'roll being mixed up with my own dissatisfaction with becoming a rock'n'roll careerist," he says.

PUNK ROCK

WRITERS ATTEMPT TO define a fast-moving scene; even the name is unsatisfactory. "The name is too old, too American, too inaccurate," writes Tony Parsons. "The teenage kids in the Hot Rods who shake the foundations of Wardour Street every week ain't 'punks'. That makes them sound like refugees from *West Side Story*."

NEIL YOUNG

OVER A PLEASANT London dinner, Neil talks about his reputation and his fans. "Remember, all those people who say Neil Young songs are a drag because they bring you down – it's a sign of strength rather than weakness if you, the listeners, can cope with them."

PLUS...

BOB MARLEY!
THE EAGLES!
ABBA!

FROM THE MAKERS OF **UNCUT**

THE HISTORY OF ROCK 1975

Every month, we revisit long-lost *NME* and *Melody Maker* interviews and piece together *The History Of Rock*. This month: 1975.
"Oh let the sun beat down upon my face/Stars to fill my dream..."



Relive the year...

LED ZEPPELIN ROCKED THE WORLD, AND DELIVERED A HEAVY DOUBLE

BOB MARLEY BROUGHT TRENCHTOWN TO AMERICA

PATTI SMITH AND TELEVISION LED THE CBGB REVOLUTION

...and **JOHN LENNON, PETE TOWNSHEND, PINK FLOYD, QUEEN** and many more shared everything with *NME* and *MELODY MAKER*

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