THE HISTORY OF ROCK

1978

A MONTHLY TRIP THROUGH MUSIC'S GOLDEN YEARS

THIS ISSUE: 1978

FROM THE ARCHIVES OF NME & MELODY MAKER

KATE BUSH

"I prefer to take a risk"

STARRING...

SEX PISTOLS

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN

SIOUXSIE & THE BANSHEES

ROLLING STONES

BOB MARLEY

DIRE STRAITS

BOB DYLAN

THE CLASH

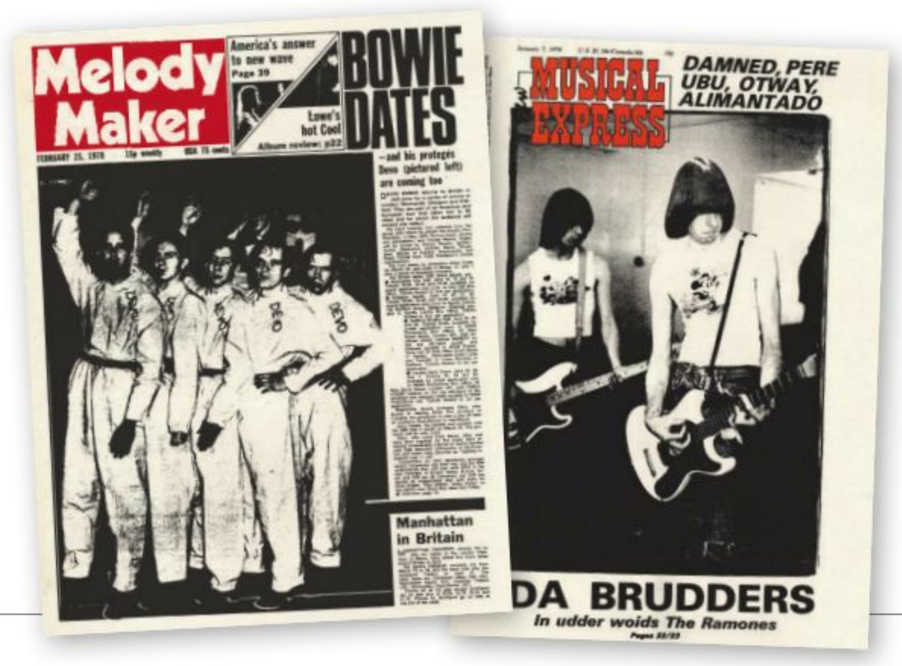
BLONDIE

THE JAM

PLUS! TOM WAITS | XTC | DEVO | SHAM 69 | TAMMY WYNETTE | DAMNED

1978

MONTH BY MONTH



Welcome to 1978

AFTER THE REVOLUTIONS of the past year or so, this is a year where in music's war-torn landscape, reconstruction, of a kind, begins. There are survivors of punk's revolution – Bob Marley, The Clash and John Lydon to name three – but others aren't so lucky. Bands like The Damned, Television and the Sex Pistols break up. Sid Vicious ends the year in a foreign jail.

Long before this, *NME*'s Charles Shaar Murray meets Howard Devoto and decrees Magazine one of the best of the "post-punk" bands. Nearly 40 years on, we have come to think of post-punk as a genre – here, though, its liberated values and policy-driven music have yet to coalesce into anything so formal.

Instead there are new bands – among them XTC, Pere Ubu, X-Ray Spex, Devo, The Slits and Siouxsie And The Banshees – who have taken punk as a means to their own end. Among the artists of the "new wave" (as everyone is calling it), our cover star Kate Bush, being a more mystical and theatrical figure, is an odd fit. Still, in 1978 her records convincingly slug it out with the Bee Gees in the Top 10 – clearly it is a time for odd fits.

This is the world of *The History Of Rock*, a monthly magazine that follows each turn of the rock revolution. Whether in sleazy dive or huge arena, passionate and increasingly stylish contemporary reporters were there to chronicle events. This publication reaps the benefits of their understanding for the reader decades later, one year at a time. Missed one? You can find out how to rectify that on page 144.

In the pages of this 14th edition, dedicated to 1978, you will find verbatim articles from frontline staffers, filed from the thick of the action, wherever it may be. Backstage with Bruce Springsteen. Discussing Charles Manson with Siouxsie Sioux. In Rikers Island with Sid Vicious.

Sid protests his innocence. Even if no one believes him, at least someone is there to offer him a fair hearing.

1978 MONTH BY MONTH

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THE HISTORY OF ROCK

Time Inc. (UK) Ltd, 3rd Floor, Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark St, London SE1 0SU | **EDITOR** John Mulvey, whose favourite song from 1977 is *Skank Bloc Bologna by Scritti Politti* **DEPUTY EDITOR** John Robinson *Public Image by Public Image Ltd* **ART EDITOR** Lora Findlay *The Beast by The Only Ones* **PRODUCTION EDITOR** Mike Johnson *Still The Same by Bob Seger* **ART DIRECTOR** Marc Jones *Jilted John by Jilted John* **DESIGNER** Becky Redman *Kaya by Bob Marley & The Wailers* **PICTURE EDITOR** George Jacobs *Mull Of Kintyre by Wings* **COVER PHOTO** Peter Mazel / Camera Press **THANKS TO** Helen Spivak, James Hanman **MARKETING** Charlotte Treadaway **SUBSCRIPTIONS** Letitia Barry **GENERAL MANAGER** Jo Smalley **GROUP MANAGING DIRECTOR** Paul Cheal **COVERS AND TEXT PRINTED BY** Wyndeham Group | **WWW.UNCUT.CO.UK**

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RICHARD E AARON / GETTY, REX FEATURES



1978

JANUARY – MARCH

SEX PISTOLS, BLONDIE, DEVO, BOB MARLEY, KATE BUSH AND MORE

"Pessimistic, but not unreal"

MM FEB 25 The Slits, Adam Ant and Jordan appear in Derek Jarman's film *Jubilee*.

DEREK JARMAN'S *JUBILEE* is the cinema's first serious attempt to assimilate punk. Independently produced and made entirely in Britain (virtues in themselves these days), it features music by Eno, Adam & The Ants and Wayne County (among others), and gives sizeable parts to Jordan and Adam Ant as well as cameo roles to The Slits, County and Gene October.

But the music is unimportant in the movie – apart from an admittedly impressive sequence where Jordan mimes to an outré version of "Rule Britannia" (a forthcoming single), bands are usually just half-glimpsed going through the motions on TV.

Jarman is far more concerned with his own ill-conceived ideas about punk attitudes. He has said: "Punk seems to be a genuinely popular movement, and anyone wanting to make a film about England has to take it into account. It is a deeply pessimistic film, but it's not unreal… The demise of Western culture may not happen, at least not as we've imagined, but while I'm not attempting to preach, *Jubilee* is a warning."

Jarman "warns" us by postulating a near-future in which government and authority do not exist beyond a few psychopathic policemen. This world, it becomes clear, represents his extension of what he conceives to be punk attitudes, which he takes to their logical conclusion – to all but nymphomaniac crabs, sex is boring and passé, and the inhabitants, particularly the predominantly female gang on which the movie centres, get their kicks instead from violence and destruction.

Which means that Jarman has no more knowledge of what "punks" are like than the lowest, most cheaply sensationalistic of the tabloid reporters, to whom the movie will seem like a dream come true.

The leader of the gang, Bod (Jenny Runacre), enjoys having her back cut up with a razor; Amyl Nitrate (Jordan) says her heroine is Moors murderer Myra Hindley; and the gang derive great pleasure from murdering just about everyone they bump into. Needless to say, Jarman's camera dwells lovingly on each piece of gore, whether Adam Ant's face is being ripped apart with a bottle or a cop castrated, and even manages to throw in a few bits of non-erotic sex, despite the general disdain.

Jarman may hide behind the "warning" line, but he takes no stand here while gaining the commercial benefit of sensationalism, and the film thus seems to glory in violence – it was even subtitled *A Celebration Of Sex And Violence* before the censor stepped in.

Jarman might defend himself by saying this is an "artistic image" of certain elements of punk, and by "artistic" I suppose he'd mean the pervasive reek of perverse and esoteric artiness, the delight in degradation and decay simply for its "beauty" when stylised.

An irresponsible movie. Don't remember punk this way.

REX FEATURES



Pamela Rooke from Seaford in East Sussex, AKA Jordan, as narrator Amyl Nitrate in Derek Jarman's *Jubilee*



Subway Sect: (l–r) Rob Symmons, Vic Godard, Mark Laff (Bob Ward's predecessor on drums) and Paul Myers

"We wanted to finish rock'n'roll"

MM MAR 18 Introducing... Subway Sect. "Rock'n'roll should raise people's consciousness," says Vic Godard.

SUBWAY SECT SEEM to have stayed underground longer than any other of the original "punk" bands. No more than a dozen gigs in their first year; an unbending unwillingness to talk to the press; no hint of an approach from a record company, nor of any recorded output on a private label.

All of that appears at last to be changing – as well as this tour, there should be a single released soon on Bernard Rhodes' Braik label; and, of course, they agreed to do this interview. But I reckon they've needed that time to develop before showing their faces outside the lower reaches of Clash bills. The difference between their performance on the first date of the tour at Chelmsford (which they were dissatisfied with) – or even their disastrous momentary appearance at the Music Machine before Christmas – and their earliest gigs was pretty startling.

At Chelmsford, their set had its drab patches, but that couldn't hide the interesting patterns into which their pieces fall. The monochrome backbeat and eerily off-colour tone are constant, but they often stumble across an extra element (the whistling at the end of "Rock'n'Roll Even", for instance, or the harmonica giving a real subway flavour) or teasing melody that infuses real life into their adventures.

> **"Our first single is pretty rank, as it happens – I wouldn't advise anyone to buy it"**

Like many bands, they're at their most subversive when melody makes their ideas accessible, though they maybe have yet to recognise that as well as Wire. If they did, they would surely push "Parallel Lines", the best-known and most attractive of their songs (and still the best to these ears), to the forefront again instead of filing it away for a while, though their decision to drop it from the current set because they know it too well is typical of their laudably uncompromising attitude to the rockarama rigmarole.

Just about the only aspect of their performance that brought back memories of their early days was vocalist/songwriter Vic Godard, hulking and awkward as he leaned into the mic, his voice halfway between a quaver and hiccup, fragmenting into a whining torture. Ah yes, the old days.

Subway Sect's tunnelling into the daylight began at the fabled London 100 Club punk festival in September '76. They had formed just three weeks before the festival, without any previous experience, and were invited to appear there by Malcolm McLaren, whom they'd met at early Sex Pistols gigs and who liked the idea of Pistols fans forming bands.

The Subways were so terrible at first, though, that when McLaren saw them at work he had to book them into a rehearsal room and make them practise continuously for 12 hours until he thought them just about good enough to stagger up on stage at the 100 Club.

Whether he was right or not was dubious – I thought they were godawful, a monotonous blank-walled drone – and in retrospect they don't disagree. I also caught their second concert, supporting The Clash at the ICA in the Mall, and was, if anything, even less impressed.

They were so bad, so catatonically unattractive, and yet at the same time so apparently uncaring and in command that I figured it must all be deliberate, that they must be art-school punks subscribing to the "bad is good" trash aesthetic. But none of that was true: "Oh no, we were just beginners in music. We probably started before we should have done – instead of learning numbers and then going on, we learnt them as we went along. We had a few disasters."

They're a difficult band to talk to, rarely volunteering information or enlarging their answers without prodding, so that after a considerable time speaking to them I was still a little unsure about where they were coming from. This wasn't because they were moody or unpleasant, but rather because they're naturally quiet, particularly Godard, though in fact he talked more than either Rob Symmons or Bob Ward (guitarist and drummer respectively, bassist Paul Myers being absent).

We started with the past, with whether their only idea in forming a band was to jump into the slipstream of the Pistols.

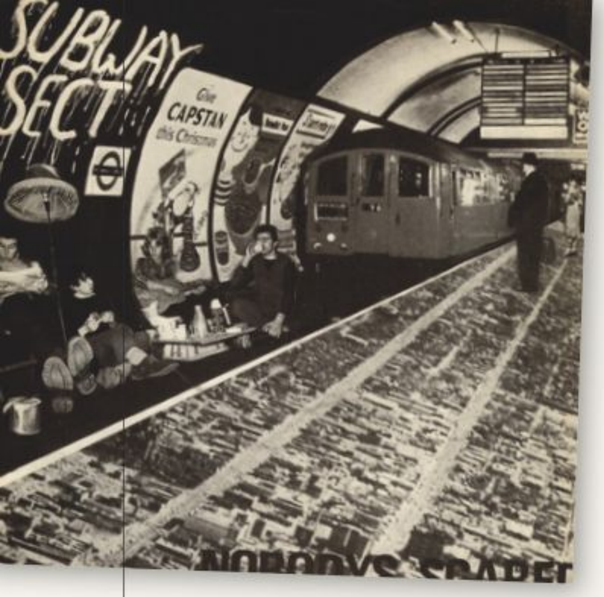
"Oh no," said Vic, "what we wanted to do was become part of what we thought was going to change the face of rock music."

Rob: "Then we found out that wasn't the aim of other groups. When we first saw the Sex Pistols we thought that was their aim, but then we found all the other groups, such as The Clash, just wanted to put life back into rock, saw it as a kind of rebirth, and the Sex Pistols seemed to latch on to that and start becoming a really good rock band."

So just putting life back into rock'n'roll was different from what you wanted?

"Yeah we wanted to finish rock'n'roll. All the other groups just wanted to get rock'n'roll back as it was in the '60s. We wanted to finish the traditional style, the rock form, the showbiz element."

ERICA ECHENBERG / GETTY



Vic: "We wanted to change the reasons for playing rock music. We didn't want it to be rock for rock's sake; we wanted it to be a medium for ideas rather than a release from boredom.

"It's not as if we're saying, 'Wipe out the whole of rock'n'roll and bring in a new music.' We're just saying, 'Go about things in a different way. Don't just use it as a way of releasing people's tension so that they can go back to work the following morning after a good night out. Rock can be made into a really good secondary education system."

But educating people into what?

"Teaching them to educate themselves for a start." Right. "And to ask themselves why they're going to work instead of putting up with it. Rock'n'roll should raise people's consciousness."

Godard's tunes are usually indirect and not easily assimilable, as in songs such as "Chain Smoking" (about predestination) or "You Stand Back". The latter deals with the refusal of challenges, especially by other people, though the "you" in the song is supposed to represent England as much as any individual or type.

In their obliqueness, their cerebral quality, his lyrics resemble prominent New Yorkers more than his British contemporaries, and thus it is not very surprising that the band seem to dislike every band over here but Buzzcocks and Wire, and rave instead about Television ("Turkey Neck, old Throttle Neck Verlaine"), Talking Heads, and especially Richard Hell, whom they call "Dickie" and whose performance at the Music Machine on the last tour they rate as the greatest gig they've ever seen. His guitarist, Robert Quine, is, they reckon, the best in the world.

At the moment the only way the Subways can communicate is in concert, yet their words then are (inevitably) inaudible, which strikes me as a little futile but doesn't seem to worry Godard since he looks forward continually to when they will be able to make an album.

At the moment there's only a single, "Nobody's Scared", in the offing, which they recorded six months ago and are amazingly scathing about.

Vic: "Our first single is pretty rank, as it happens – I wouldn't advise anyone to buy it."

Can't you do anything about that?

"Yeah, make a really good second one. I liked it when we recorded it, but we've developed so much since then, it doesn't really worry me. It's just like when we first started and were really rank – it gives you something to build up from."

Bob: "It's definitely not commercial – that's why I like it. My old man heard us on the radio, on the John Peel show. He heard 'Parallel Lines', right, and he said, 'Cor, that's fucking good, it's got a nice ring to it.' And then 'Nobody's Scared' came on and he said, 'That's fucking terrible, that's really rank, that's terrible.' So I said, 'That's gonna be the single', and he said, 'Well, God help you lot, then.'"

Chris Brazier

Still Number One

MM JAN 14 Checking the stats on Paul McCartney's first chart-topper since The Beatles...

"MULL OF KINTYRE", Wings' first Number One, is all set to be the first single ever to top two million sales in Britain, making it the country's best-selling and fastest-selling single ever.

The previous record holder was The Beatles' "She Loves You", released in 1963. That sold about 1.6 million. Last week "Mull Of Kintyre" had already sold more than 1,667,000 and was only just beginning to slow down from its original sales of 250,000 a week. It is still Number One in this week's *MM* chart.

The record entered the chart at Number 18 in the week of November 26 and went to Number One the next week. It is Paul McCartney's first release to reach the top since The Beatles' last Number One in Britain, "The Ballad Of John And Yoko", released in 1969, and is only the 17th single to sell more than a million.

The first seven-inch 45rpm record to sell a million was Acker Bilk's "Stranger On The Shore" in 1961, although this only just made the million mark. From 1968 to 1974 there were no British million sellers at all, Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody" reversing the trend in 1975 and staying at the top for a record eight weeks.



Macca: home recording breaks chart records



The 10 best-selling singles are, in order of sales: "Mull Of Kintyre" by Wings; "She Loves You" (Beatles); "I Want To Hold Your Hand" (Beatles); "Tears" (Ken Dodd); "Can't Buy Me Love" (Beatles); "Save Your Kisses For Me" (Brotherhood Of Man); "I Feel Fine" (Beatles); "We Can Work It Out" (Beatles); "Release Me" (Engelbert Humperdinck); "Bohemian Rhapsody" (Queen).

Records released before 1959 are not included in the best-selling singles chart because reliable figures are not available. But no record approaches the 30 million world sales of Bing Crosby's "White Christmas".

Moral turpitude

MM JAN 7 Finally, the Sex Pistols are allowed to enter the US. "Hundreds of people go to America with minor convictions," says Malcolm McLaren.

THE SEX PISTOLS left early this week for their first tour of America after days of top-level wrangling to get their visa, following revelations about the band's criminal records. Last week the band tried to collect visas from the American Embassy for the 14-date tour, but were told visas would not be issued because of the band's "moral turpitude".

Glitterbest, the Pistol's management company, commented: "Hundreds of people go to America with minor convictions, but they seem to have picked on the band. They all have something on their records, but the offences are only minor – petty theft, taking and driving away, drugs and assault." On Friday last week, the day the Pistols were due to make their debut America show at Pittsburgh, Glitterbest were trying to arrange visas through the US State Department in Washington.

It was only after Warner Brothers, the Pistols' US record company, sent their top lawyer to Washington for talks with State Dept and immigration officials that permission was given for the band to enter America.

The tour lined up for the Pistols included 14 dates covering San Francisco, but the first three concerts have had to be axed following the delay.

CHIP HIRES / GETTY, PAUL FIEVEZ / GETTY



The Pistols leave Heathrow for New York, January 1978



Squeeze in 1978: (l–r) Gilson Lavis, Glenn Tilbrook (top), Chris Difford, Jools Holland and Harry Kakoulli

"All our songs are perverted"

NME MAR 18 Introducing... Squeeze. Produced by John Cale; put together by a pal in the porn biz.

LET'S JUST GET one thing straight. Despite being produced by punk Svengali John Cale and having their debut album packaged in a sleeve so vile it could stand alongside the *Bollocks* cover and not be outdone, punks Squeeze certainly aren't.

"Judy Garland is an influence as much as punk," declares Chris Difford, a straight-faced 23 and Squeeze's rhythm guitarist and lyricist. Guitarist Glenn Tilbrook echoes his colleague: "We play music different to punk. Although punk has been an influence, I don't think we ever want to be associated with it."

However, A&M obviously aren't totally averse to exploiting Squeeze's punk connections, however tenuous. After all, Rick Wakeman's records don't come wrapped in shocking pink sleeves. Like current tour mates Radio Stars and Eddie & The Hot Rods, the band are riding the new wave – albeit belatedly.

Their penchant for the – how shall I put it? – offbeat has already meant that one Squeeze song, "Deep Cuts", an opus about obscene telephone callers, was nixed from the A&M album because of its content. Instead it will be issued on Squeeze's previous label, Deptford Fun City, a small independent responsible for Squeeze's recording debut last year with "Packet Of Three".



Unlike the numerous other hot combos with which the isle is currently teeming, Squeeze didn't just form and almost immediately land themselves a record deal. They've been together for four years.

Readers old enough to remember might find it interesting to know that their first manager was early-'60s pop singer John Leyton, who had a hit single with "Johnnie Remember Me". Leyton met Squeeze via a mutual pornographic photographer friend, and wanted to get them into cabaret.

Apart from the addition of drummer Gilson Lavis, a beefy geezer who comes on like a tame spiv, all winkle pickers and "contrasting" shirts and ties, the lineup hasn't changed during the four years. But until Lavis' arrival they admit to being directionless.

Group faves span a broad arc. Difford is strong on Lou Reed (it shows on the album's "Hesitation (Roll Britannia)" and Zappa; bassist Harry Kakoulli is a sucker for reggae and funk, especially Bootsy Collins; Tilbrook lists his main men as Zappa, Jonathan Richman, Ian Dury, Johnny Winter, Nils Lofgren, Hendrix, The Beatles, Roy Brown, Elvis and Fats Domino.

Under Leyton's direction they brushed shoulders with Island Records, for whom they auditioned three times, the verdict of current A&R man Richard Williams being that they were a good band with strong material – ahead of their time even – but too short on stage experience to sign.

Squeeze didn't argue since at this point (mid-1974) they hadn't done a single gig.

Eighteen months later, they signed with RCA. They'd worked themselves in as a live band, at one point doing a regular three-nights-a-week stint at the Bricklayer's Arms, Greenwich. But after six months with RCA, during which time they laid down five cuts at Rockfield Studios, their contract was terminated.

"They just weren't interested," complains Tilbrook. "It was almost like we were a tax loss."

Prior to the parting of the ways, RCA were about to issue "Take Me I'm Yours", their current A&M single, though the song bore little resemblance to its 1978 reincarnation.

Leyton had long since vanished from the scene and Squeeze were now managed by Miles Copeland. Despite his considerable music-business experience, Copeland found re-signing Squeeze difficult.

GEORGE WILKES / GETTY



Peripheral punks plump for perversion

There didn't seem to be much mileage in love songs so . . . how does obscene phone calls grab ya? SQUEEZE pant it out to STEVE CLARKE

Glenn: "Record companies weren't sure whether we were hip enough to be signed as a punk band. They were just mucking us about."

Copeland promptly formed his own label, Deptford Fun City, for Squeeze, and recruited the services of John Cale to produce the band's long-overdue first waxing, the *Packet Of Three* EP. According to the group, Cale's interest in them was largely financial. "He wasn't that interested," reveals Chris.

Nonetheless, Squeeze were pleased with the results, and when last year they once more signed to a major label – this time A&M – Cale was again at the board and more enthusiastic about the work in hand.

Along with keyboard player Jools Holland ("He's another little Nicky Hopkins," was Cale's opinion), who despite his slender years (he's under 20) has the face of someone much older, drummer Gilson is Squeeze's most accomplished musician.

He's done the rounds – cabaret, backing Chuck Berry, and almost landing himself a gig with McCartney. Jools Holland, who's into Oscar Peterson and Ray Charles and fond of wearing a leopard-skin titfer, is a demon boogie-woogie pianist. Mind you, the remaining musicians, especially Glenn Tilbrook on lead, are no passengers.

Visually, Squeeze – each of 'em wearing purely arbitrary threads and haircuts – are a rather downtrodden bunch who look as if they'd just raided the local Oxfam shop (they hail from Deptford, South London).

And yet even in such adverse circumstances as opening for Radio Stars and the Rods, they showed in their half-hour set that they have plenty going for them. Except for the speed of several numbers (check out "Get Smart" and "Sex Master" from the album), they have nothing in common with new-wave stereotypes save for their fixation with "perversions".

The group reluctantly agree that they're better musicians than a lot of their contemporaries. Tilbrook for one had come to the conclusion that musicianship was the be all and end all – until the advent of the new wave: "When I first heard 'Anarchy' I thought it was a load of crap. I thought the chord sequence was dumb. It did get through to me later.

"The good thing about the new wave is that it cracked open an opportunity for a lot of bands who wouldn't have got through before. Like when we were around two years ago, we were supporting various bands who we weren't at all suited to.

"They were so musically competent that they were sterile. You've got no hope of competing against them. It's like competing against jazz people."

When Squeeze started out, they laced their own material with various '50s sounds like "Boogie Woogie Country Girl", "Down The Road Apiece", "At The Hop" and "Saturday Night". These days the only cover in their set is Berry's "Let It Rock", and then only occasionally.

Tilbrook and Difford are the writers. The aforementioned "Deep Cuts" was inspired by an episode of *Dan August*. Difford remembers: "They caught this guy who was a disturbed chartered accountant. I just found it very amusing. This guy had a wife and three kids and, like, he was out there every morning making dirty telephone calls. It had me in fits. There must be people like that."

Is that something to laugh at?

Difford: "Well, actually, since then we've made a few of our own. A lot of people get really upset about them, so it can actually be a very touchy subject." You don't say.

As it transpires, Squeeze miked up a telephone to record 24 obscene telephone calls for inclusion on the B-side of "Deep Cuts". The calls were all made to people they knew – with Jools calling up Chris' mum and so on – but not everybody thought it was as funny as the band did. Difford: "In some cases the women were getting upset, but some people thought it was really great. They were saying, 'Yeah, come round.'"

"'Bang Bang' is about people losing parts of their anatomy"

Isn't this a little irresponsible? "If I'm quite honest, I agree," concedes Tilbrook, "but on the other hand, we did let all the people know afterwards. I did feel guilty when we called up a girl from the office. She said she would have been really scared if she's been alone."

Difford: "All our songs are almost perverted. Like 'Sex Masters' was written after seeing... I think it was called *A Day Out In Denmark* – an S&M romp complete with 'actors' dressed in monks' habit. 'Bang Bang' is about people losing parts of their anatomy. A lot of famous people have lost parts of their anatomy – Napoleon, Hitler, Van Gogh. It's just really amusing. And there's other songs that are creeping up now about Siamese twins and hippies."

Tilbrook: "We were writing love songs three years ago and the new wave came along and inspired us in a different way. If something else comes along in four years' time, we might go back to writing love songs. We didn't write perverted songs just because of the new wave."

So what effect do they want these songs to have on people?

"I know it sounds really bland," Tilbrook continues, "but we just want people to enjoy them. We're not trying to put any message across at all. It's too easy to write broad-structured songs about being on the dole. It's so cliched just even talking about it." *Steve Clarke*



Sham 69 at London's Roxy Club in 1977.

"The true spirit of punk"

MM Feb 4 Sham 69 release their debut.

THE MAN WITH a crowd in his hands – Jimmy Pursey, leading light with Sham 69, one of the bands picked for the top in 1978, who are preparing to prove their worth with a debut album and planning a European tour.

In tipping the band for stardom this year, *MM*'s Chris Brazier wrote: "Sham 69 are perhaps closer than any other band to representing the true spirit of punk as it was originally conceived – the honest, raw, soulful, fiercely emotional rebellion of the working-class kid against the injustice and oppression he feels in the world around him."

Since then the band have been on the road and next week hit Glasgow – their first visit to a city that has been passionate in its interest in Pursey and the group without having a chance to see them.

In a fortnight Polydor release *Tell Us The Truth*, Sham 69's debut album that includes a live side recorded at London's Vortex and Marquee clubs. The album is released on February 17, following the band's support gig at London's Roundhouse with The Adverts on February 12.

"Three Enos..."

MM FEB 4 Devo, David Bowie's new favourites, to be licensed by Stiff.

DEVO, AMERICA'S MOST talked-about new band, have been signed by Stiff Records for exclusive worldwide rights, excluding America, to the band's first three singles. The Ohio-based outfit's reputation was secured by David Bowie's strong interest in producing the band, and there has been talk of a battle between giants WEA and CBS to sign them in America. Bowie is quoted as describing Devo as "three Enos and a couple of Edgar Froeses in one band" and plans to produce their first album as soon as he can find the time.

Devo's first single, "Mongoloid/Jocko Homo", has been released on the band's own label in America, and will be out on Stiff/Booji Boy in Britain on February 24.



Devo at The Bottom Line NYC, Oct '78

ALLAN TANNENBAUM / GETTY

1978

JANUARY – MARCH

January 8, 1978: suffering from a cold and pelted with beer cans, Johnny Rotten fronts the Sex Pistols at Randy's Rodeo nightclub in San Antonio, Texas

“I’m not here for your amusement”

The SEX PISTOLS make a counter-intuitive tour of the USA, taking in the South – but not hip spots like New York or LA. “We want to decentralise the country,” says Malcolm McLaren. But at what cost to the band?

— MELODY MAKER JANUARY 14 —

LIKE ALL GOOD stories, it started quietly and finished with a bang, for on Delta flight 225 to Memphis from Chicago I’m sitting beside an old Southern gentleman dressed in sober broadcloth. No frivolous man he: clasped in hands that are blotched with liver spots is a copy of *The Baptists Who Shaped A Nation*.

Hardly light plane reading, you may think, but then the American South does tend to create men with strong, literal views about life. A fundamentalist concept of right and wrong, good and evil, is pursued through both the religion and the music of the South. In country music it’s tempting to think that emotions have to be simple and direct because the fans couldn’t handle anything equivocal.

Down here the lines between music and religion are finely drawn, anyway. Holy Joes razzmatazz about salvation and hellfire with the help of country and gospel stars, rhinestoned gods and goddesses of the jukeboxes who are carrying on for Jesus night and day.

If you’re looking for a country artist, you could try a church. In fact, it was recently reported of Johnny Cash that he keeps changing his church because the fans have been attempting to pass him demo tapes in the pews.

But now a new religion is growing in the South. It’s called Elvis Presley and its icons seem to be multiplying. Since his death on August 16, worshippers have flocked in their thousands to his graveside in Graceland, the Memphis estate where he lived since 1957.

They pour along a renamed Elvis Presley Boulevard with their flowers and wreaths, stopping only to buy an Elvis Presley jumpsuit or a framed dedication written by his father Vernon. Not since Valentino died has there been such a lavish display of public affection for a popular artist. The Twang use to be the Thang, but now it’s the Kang, y’all here. »

RICHARD E. AARON / GETTY

1978

JANUARY – MARCH



Johnny Rotten and (right) Paul Cook: touring the Southern states in stuntman Evel Knievel's tour bus



Memphis is a deeply conservative city, seemingly full of slow, overstuffed white men with huge grey quiffs; they're all called Roy, and they're accompanied by wives with very large rears. The cab drivers, leathery, bull-necked black guys, look like Howlin' Wolf. You can barely understand them, and they, because of your funny English accent, invariably think you are a fag.

But one and all agree that Elvis was a great man. Yessir! A holy man, like as not. Didn't he give out Cadillacs to poor blacks, and hasn't he made Memphis the centre of a thriving tourist industry?

Every other person one meets in Memphis has an Elvis story. I am told by the wife of the former District Attorney in Abilene, Texas – yes, how about that! – that her cousin once dated Presley and asked him for a Pontiac rather than a Caddie because she wouldn't be able to afford the petrol. True.

So it's easy to imagine the atmosphere in Memphis last weekend, when mourners converged on the city of celebrate what should have been the King's 43rd birthday. A marker was unveiled, Elvis movies were shown continuously at the Orpheum Theatre and there were displays of memorabilia at the Mid-South Fairgrounds Pipkin Building.

And for those who could hold back the tears, Elvis impersonator Kick Saucedo was around town. All it needed was Todd Slaughter; but what Memphis got in addition was the Sex Pistols. By a blissful irony the Pistols found themselves playing last Friday in the hometown of the rock figure they most publicly despised. "His gut hung like a shadow over rock'n'roll," was Johnny Rotten's memorable obituary. No Beatles, no Stones, no Elvis.

Well, at least there was now no Elvis, the symbol of everything in rock music that the Pistols have decried: middle age, superstardom and America itself. If the mourners came to praise Elvis, then the Pistols would presumably have liked to bury him in person.

But the music business has a way of upending the political statements of its popular entertainers, for here the Pistols were, in America, actually staying a block away from where the old wave has finally washed up, on the tour that the pundits have predicted would bring them… what else but superstardom? Perfect.

IN TRUTH THIS is a strange old tour, though. They are playing seven dates ending in San Francisco on January 14, which is the only gig that remotely could be said likely to attract diehard punk fans.

There is no New York or Los Angeles, the chief tastemakers, although for the first performance in Atlanta last Thursday the big boys and girls from *The New York Times*, the *Village Void*, UPI, *Time* and *Newsweek*, etc, all flew down – at their own expense, it should be added, for Pistols manager Malcolm McLaren has stipulated that there will be no freebies. Even the tickets, at three dollars 50 each, the press has to pay for.

British daily newspapers present, among whom are *The Sun*, *Daily Mail*, *Mirror* and the *Express*, are most disgruntled about this and the generally diffident treatment they have received. Frequent comparisons are made with the professionalism of Rod Stewart and The Who.

McLaren, a slight, elfish personality despite black leather trousers and motorbike boots, merely replied that if the Pistols can go down well in the Taliesyn Ballroom, Memphis, they will be twice as popular in New York.

"We want to decentralise it, much the same as we did in Britain. There are too many bands playing in New York and LA and saying they have cracked it, and they have not. New York and LA are not America."

Johnny Rotten echoes this view. He says, "We want to play for the poor people of America. That's why we came down here."

"But people are trying to make a big deal out of this country for us. It could be Birmingham for all we care. People are just the same. It's no big deal."

He also denies that they ever intended to play Madison Square Garden.

On the Pistols' heads, however, may rest the success of the British new wave in America. *The New York Times*, for example, whose critic John Rockwell is a fervent supporter of the Pistols, has described them as the most important change in rock music for a decade; and the American press generally have made much of them, to the extent of Walter Cronkite mentioning their problems on national television over getting visas for America. (Suggestions that President Carter intervened have been greeted with amusement, however.)

Every performance in the South so far has been preceded by TV and newspaper speculation about the extent of the human debasement they represent, the audience having been alerted by a recent 60-minute special on British punk rock.

The safety pins, the self-mutilation, the practice of vomiting and spitting are much in the minds of confirmed citizens like E Winslow Chapman, director of Memphis police, who has said, "Ah doan 'low no masturbation on stage. They kin spit and vomit as much as they lahk, but no masturbation."

Mr E Winslow Chapman was so disturbed by this notion of the Pistols performing simulated sex that the Memphis Vice Squad went to Atlanta to look for any hints of depravity that would prevent the show going ahead in Memphis.

"The worst thing about them is their music," the police were quoted as saying afterwards on a Memphis TV channel, which before the gig that night invited more concerned citizens to "sound off", as they put it, about the band.

"As long as they stay in lahn it'll be all raight, ah guess," said one chubby youth. "Ah thank they should arrest 'em if they doan."

"It's sick," a 30-ish black lady volunteered. "If they do that kahnd o' stuff, they shouldn't come."

Who knows what she meant exactly by "that kahnd o' stuff," but the TV station certainly knew what it thought. "They set out to be scuzzy and they succeed," intoned the voiceover as we saw Paul Cook, the drummer, and Sid Vicious looning about in the dressing room at Atlanta.

"They said they wouldn't do an interview unless they were paid 10 dollars," the voice went on in outraged tones, just as Sid's hand suddenly shot out towards the camera to block the screen.

RICHARD E AARON / GETTY (3)

SUCH COMMENTS DON'T greatly bother Warner Brothers, the record company with whom the Pistols are signed in the States. They claim that the media reaction to the group here is unprecedented, even compared with more successful acts like Rod Stewart and the Stones. Television stations are acting in a novel way; they are prepared to pursue the band around America at their own expense, even if the Pistols won't talk to them. After all, Stewart and the Stones do.

Also pursuing the band, according to McLaren and Rotten, is the FBI. So paranoid about this are they that they are leaving cities as soon as possible after the gigs, travelling in a luxury bus with eight bunks that is usually used by Evel Knievel, who is currently in jail. Four bodyguards are also assigned to them.

Rotten believes the FBI are following them around. "You can recognise them. It's obvious. There's always some big pig following us around. It's a different one in every town. They're trying to take us for a ride."

Curiosity among the kids, however, is insatiable and wide-eyed. Earnest guys who find out you are travelling with the Pistols (following them around is a better description) suddenly start getting intense and ask with trepidation if it's really true that they spit on each other. "Really? Wow!"

Take Rusty Boettcher, a 17-year-old Memphis High School guy, who's going to the gig with his friend George Gogonelis. "All my other friends wouldn't come. They thought there'd be a riot," he tells me. "They're afraid of the Pistols 'cos of what they heard on the news. Say, is it really true they beat up people to get out their record contracts?"

Rusty hasn't heard any of their records – as a matter of fact, The Beatles are his favourite group – but he's looking for something new. And so, he says, are other American kids.

"I think the Sex Pistols may have a chance."

"They've sold out on curiosity," says Bob Kelley, promoter of the Taliesyn Ballroom. He's booked the band in because he's intrigued, but also because he does a lot of business with Premier Talents, the prestigious New York agency who broke many British bands, like Led Zeppelin, in America. The fact that Premier are handling the tour is a big plus for the Pistols.

Ole Bob is so intrigued, though, that he sells 300 more tickets to the Memphis show than he should have done. At 8pm that night, after more than 650 people are found to be inside, the Fire Marshall has the doors closed.

Within minutes, cops, including E Winslow Chapman, are tapping their night sticks in front of the entrance, and 200 ticketholders are left griping outside.

"I've waited two years for this," screamed one guy who's wearing black lipstick and a bowler hat, presumably because it's the most outrageously English costume which he conceive. Things get so bad, in fact, that the kids bust two small panes of glass in the entrance. Some riot, but at least the thought was there.

"Hey, hey waita minute," says this dick in a raincoat who is carrying a walkie-talkie. He means me. "Where the fuck do you think you're goin'?"

Inside.

"Lemme see your credentials."

I hand him a 1975 press card which doesn't even carry my picture.

"Is this some kind of joke?"

No. I'm from London – England, I add.

He peers suspiciously at me. It's that accent again.

"Oh, I don't fuckin' know. It don't seem right to me, but you better get in there quick."

THE AUDIENCE INSIDE the hall was typically dodo as far as fashion was concerned – better than the usual baggy jeans and lumber jackets, but not by much. Ninety per cent white and the other per cent must have wandered in out of the cold.

But all of them has to wait a couple of hours before the Pistols appeared, as the delay may have had something to do with the fact that Vicious had deliberately stabbed himself during the soundcheck.

He wore a bandage on his left arm, but his skinny chest through the studded leather jacket also revealed a latticework of cuts. Vicious, in fact, looked and behaved like an extra from *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*: now leering at the audience, the next moment screwing up his face into brutish expressions; in between, he executed scissor jumps and flung his arm over the bass strings in a windmill motion.

> "We want to play for the poor people of America... It's no big deal"

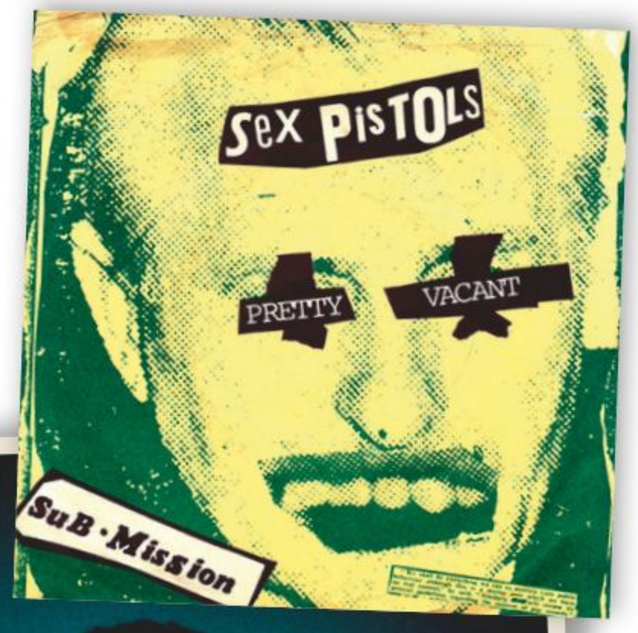
Rotten, suffering from a cold, staged his usual act of a demented hunchback and oozed malevolence. Wearing a blue checked suit, from which a large dirty handkerchief debouched, he gibbered over the mic stand, his head hunched into his shoulders and swivelling around to scan the audience with awful eyes. Handkerchief flopping, he suddenly reminded me of a Dickensian creature, one of Fagin's twisted urchins, abruptly come to life.

"You wanna celebrate Elvis' birthday?" he addressed the audience in careful, wicked tones. They, poor bewildered lambs, merely threw their arms in the air and cheered, as though this was ZZ Top or some other Southern boogie band.

What were they supposed to do, anyway? There has never been anything like this in Memphis before – these English fruits, sneering at them, giving them the finger, and the music – crude, elemental, unheroic. So this was punk rock? Maybe throw some drinks at them. That's what's supposed to happen in England, it says here in this script.

But after Rotten has been showered with Coke and ice cubes he turns to them and says, very coldly, "I'm not here for your amusement – you are here for mine. Stop throwing things at me. I don't like it."

More cheers, but before the gig was halfway through there were people leaving the hall. It was just incomprehensible to them. That was punk, eh, they were saying to each other. Well, now I don't have to see it any more. And the Pistols were really left performing to the newly converted enthusiasts in the first 15 rows. That was Memphis.





Sid Vicious and Steve Jones: respectively "preening" and "impassive" on stage

BUT IF THE chemistry wasn't right in Tennessee and the gig was only a mixed success – not even as good as Atlanta the night before – the performance in Texas two nights later demonstrated how real the Sex Pistols are.

Randy's Rodeo in San Antonio, a city with a strong Mexican flavour, is a cowboy joint right down to the "Cowboys" and "Cowgirls" signs on the toilet doors. Essentially a 15-lane bowling alley, it holds upwards of 2,000 people, more than the Pistols have ever played before, and these people are outlaw funky – guys with long hair and macho swaggers, drinking Coors and Lone Star beer with their gals. »



January 14, 1978: the Pistols play the last date of their US tour at San Francisco's Winterland Ballroom



Amazingly, the Rodeo was fully primed for punk. Gold-painted safety pins were on sale for a dollar, there were several freaks around with made-up faces and the sound system was playing "Police And Thieves" and "I'm So Bored With The USA" in-between albums by the Ramones and Alice Cooper.

There were even guys with old Sex Pistols T-shirts. But just to emphasise that this was Texas, brown-shirted security police were stationed watchfully around the hall. That tap, tap, tap of the night stick again.

This was an aggressive audience, and almost from the first bars of "God Save The Queen" with Paul Cook and guitarist Steve Jones kicking the song along, it make its own presence felt. Paper cups of Coco-Cola, familiar from Memphis, were replaced by beer cans, which came pelting across the lights, catching the band round the body and forcing them to bob away.

"'Ello, cowboys," Rotten snarled, making the very name sound a gross libel. "You're real men, aren't you?" he went on, brushing the beer suds from his face. "Is this what made Texas great?"

Vicious, whose new bodily adornment was the word "Gimme" in black ink across his chest, looked even more unstable than on the previous gigs, but bristling with malice, prepared to take on the whole bloody posse if need be.

"You're all fucking faggots, all of you," he hurled into the microphone and then stepped back to grin provocatively.

"Shut up!" said Rotten, rounding on him with a furious look. That pale, loony face pouted before Vicious resumed his particularly insinuating smile.

The beer cans flew faster and the whistles increased. "You bunch of wankers!" a guy behind me repeated, proving that a new word is finally entering the American vocabulary, thanks to punk rock.

It was Steve Jones, beefy and impassive, who kept steering the group back to the music. He showed no emotion. But Vicious couldn't let it alone, and when he was hit on the lip by a can he suddenly raised his bass and bought it down on the offender's head.

Then the howls went up, and all the cowboys were reaching for their weapons as the roadies and bodyguards came running to the front of the stage. Vicious stepped back with a self-satisfied look as the front rows started to climb on stage for vengeance.

It was too much for the victim. He got so far, struggled into the arms of police and bodyguards and was then handcuffed by a cop and led away to be charged with being drunk and disorderly, leaving him with the option of bringing a counter-suit of assault against Vicious.

"Oh dear," sighed Rotten, as the band readied their instruments again, "Sid's guitar fell off." He began dancing around, like a prize fighter inviting more missiles. "You can get fucking lost, cowboys. You've paid and it's your money."

Fearless, the lot of them.

The cans kept coming, but the band built on the atmosphere, even though the vibes were petering on the edge of real hostility. Sid grinned and grimaced, Rotten was rabid, Jones looked almost bored, and Cook did the only thing he knew, which was to keep pounding away.

This was what they were about, forcing the audience to react. Sheer, naked aggression, with no pretence of showmanship, art or even inclination to lead them into any area but confrontation. But this was theatre, oh yes.

They wound up with "Anarchy In The UK" and Rotten fired another salvo. "Give us a chance and we'll do 'America' for you," he sneered. They returned to do "No Fun," a cracking version which Rotten dedicated to the cowboys.

"You're a bunch of fucking statues," he abused them. "I've never seen people stand so still in all my life. What 'ave you people got between your legs, then?"

But then it was over, and San Antonio could only ponder what it has seen. I think most of them will be back next time.

Now the Pistols continue on their way across America. And the US papers are searching for the right comparisons, previous landmarks in socio-musical history, and keep coming up with the Stones and, yes, poor Elvis, who never quite made it to his 43rd birthday.

The Pistols have made many Americans think again about the role of rock, just as they have done in England. Most are appalled by the violent overtones and confused by the musical inexpertise; but then they are drawn to the undoubted excitement the band seems to generate wherever it goes, and they return once more to the figure of Johnny Rotten. I've met no one here who doesn't think he's a star.

It's going to be a story for the '70s: how four London hooligans make a name for themselves by verbal and physical abuse, are chosen as the Young Businessmen of 1977, and then get a crack at an American Dream they say they don't want anyway. Robert Stigwood might even end up filming it. *Michael Watts*

RICHARD E. AARON / GETTY (3)

— MELODY MAKER JANUARY 21 —

THE SEX PISTOLS' first tour of the States, which ended last Saturday at San Francisco's Winterland Ballroom, occasioned enormous national publicity but hardly resolved the question of their own future or that of the British new wave in America.

Broadly, the Pistols ought not to fail, such has been the media response; and yet misgivings persist. *Newsweek* was negative in its report on the first show at Atlanta's Great Southeast Music Hall, and *Time* magazine also thought the Pistols quite tame. Robert Christgau, trying hard to justify his enthusiasm in the New York *Village Voice*, still wrote that "the concert as a whole was less than transcendent"; and even such a committed guy as John Holmstrom of New York's *Punk* mag was disappointed by the performance in Memphis, although he raved about them in San Antonio and at Baton Rouge's Kingfish club.

Time and *Newsweek*, of course, are establishment organs whose views should be treated with proper caution, except insofar as they reflect the outlook of conservative, middle-class America.

But there was a commonly held opinion everywhere the band played that, as in the now notorious case of Bruce Springsteen, rock critics were doing their utmost to represent them as The Next Big Thing.

Certainly the Pistols had an impossible task in that they were being measured by their advance publicity; as Christgau put it, Rotten has "gotten further on print than any rock star in history – the sheer volume of his myth guarantees a shortfall, albeit from a titanic standard."

Audiences undoubtedly expected to be outraged, hence the atmosphere at Randy's Rodeo in San Antonio which led to Sid Vicious assaulting a guy near the stage with his bass guitar. Yet at all the performances there was a high percentage of people, perhaps as far as 50 per cent, who couldn't have cared less; their curiosity had been piqued by reports, and now they felt indifferent rather than shocked by what they were seeing.

In the absence of audience participation as existed at San Antonio, the Pistols have to strive mightily to succeed as musicians; for at Randy's Rodeo, which threatens to become a cause célèbre in punk history, Rotten and Vicious, with miraculous cheek, were outfacing 2,000 cowboys who wanted blood. The music became almost incidental to the spectacle.

When, as happened at all the other gigs I saw, there was no strong element of hostility or sympathy, except from those clustered around the stage, then the performances were distinctly patchy.

Paul Cook and Steve Jones are learning fast but as yet are no more than adequate, and Vicious was so swept up in his newly found self-importance as a preening rock star that by the time of the Longhorn Ballroom in Dallas even Jones couldn't hold the music together.

More pertinently, however, the Sex Pistols only catch fire when Johnny Rotten is at the top of his form. In Baton Rouge, where he looked peaky from a heavy cold – and in fact had been lying down in the dressing room with a coat over his head just before taking the stage – the band was awfully average.

Rotten, I firmly believe, is still the justification for the Sex Pistols, and even the songs, some of which are great ("I'm A Lazy Sod", "God Save The Queen" and "Pretty Vacant", to take three), need his personal imprimatur to work, although it may well be that Jones has been most responsible for their actual creation.

Informed observers of the tour thought the Pistols would succeed in the States, but several believed that success would be short-lived, that the band just weren't capable of ringing enough musical changes for a mass audience that is firmly plugged into Boston and Foreigner.

In support of this view is the fact that the Pistols are allegedly receiving only moderate airplay – less, in fact, than Elvis Costello, who toured briefly just before Christmas. According to George Mier, the editor and publisher of *Walrus*, a newsletter which analyses radio playlists, the Pistols are about even with Eddie & The Hot Rods: "The strongest response has come in the North-East, but even there it is not overwhelming. The South and Midwest are light, with the West somewhere in-between."

The Pistols' album, *Never Mind The Bollocks*, released in America right after Christmas, had sold 150,000 copies up to a week ago, but has yet to enter the American Top 50 chart. "Pretty Vacant", their first American single, has just been put out by Warner Bros.

THERE WAS ALSO general scepticism about the nature of the audiences to whom the Pistols played. Rotten's desire to perform before "the poor people of America" was hardly realised, despite the low price of tickets at around £1.75.

Poor whites and kids from the black and Hispanic ghettos were little in evidence; partly, one suspects, because they are less attuned than their more affluent contemporaries to the publicity the Pistols are generating, and partly because it is natural to espouse a music which offers an escape from those ghettos rather than one which seeks to emphasise bad social conditions – and which exist in different form across the Atlantic, furthermore.

In Baton Rouge, a campus town about an hour's drive from New Orleans, the audience was patently composed of college kids, and even in Texas the kids seemed brighter, less like downer freaks, than the blue-collar workers who tend to form the audience for boogie and heavy-metal bashes.

A poll, indeed, carried out at the Atlanta gig by sociologists Dr Richard Dixon of the University of Carolina and Dr Richard Levinson of Emory, established that the mean age of the audience was 24, that only half of them worked full-time, that a quarter were students, and a third indicated a family income of more than £13,000 a year.

About two-thirds were familiar with the Pistols' records, and one-fifth were confirmed fans of punk rock. These statistics do not suggest under-educated, disenfranchised people, and actually, one of my memories of Texas, whose vast, open spaces ensure a great reliance upon the automobile, is of kids rolling up to Randy's Rodeo and the Longhorn Ballroom in flashy wheels.

For this and other reasons, Pistols manager Malcolm McLaren was professing that he was "not really pleased" with the whole tour just prior to reaching San Francisco.

"I thought San Antonio was great," he told me, "but at Baton Rouge we ended up playing to Louisiana State University students. They told me it was gonna be dockers, but it could've been Central Poly."

> "Fucking statues... I've never seen people stand so still"

A deceptively waif-like figure, who, in his little turquoise beret and red scarf looks alarmingly like an Enid Blyton book illustration, McLaren is actually tough-minded and fiercely independent.

He's definitely unlike any other rock manager in my experience: not only does he claim a political objective, he is also bitterly critical of the Pistols for not always sustaining this politique.

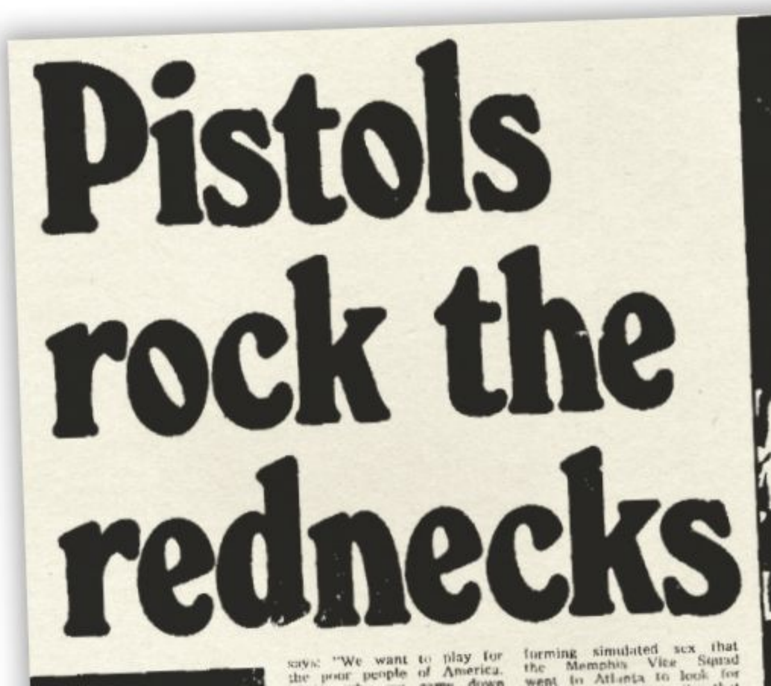
In essence, McLaren sees himself as an agent provocateur within society, committed to a campaign of stirring hornets' nests. Neither an ideologue nor an enthusiast of the British political party system, he is nevertheless fundamentally political.

He admires change for its own sake (because it "makes life more interesting"), and wants the situation of the Pistols to be constantly fluctuating. If he is to be believed, the Pistols are not just the latest example of outlaw rock music trying to be a little more outrageous than their predecessors in attaining the same goal; they have been conceived for a purpose, to chip away at society.

Hence the need for a continuous succession of "Pistol outrages", which are designed to force the public into having an attitude. Expect the next single, for instance, to be "Belsen Is A Gas".

Revolutionary stuff, especially as it's coming not from dour politicos like Henry Cow, but from a rock band with national newspaper clout; and, of course, McLaren knows all about using the media.

On the tour he effectively stage-managed five British daily newspapers by »


Pistols rock the rednecks

says: "We want to play for the poor people of America. forming simulated sex that the Memphis Vice Squad went to Atlanta to look for

making Warner Bros seem responsible for the Pistols' non-cooperation and representing himself as caught up, like them, in Warner Bros' paranoia about security.

THE PISTOLS APPARENT need for protection did begin to assume sinister proportions, however, as McLaren repeatedly asserted they were being watched by the FBI or CIA. He claims that in Memphis the band and their entourage had to leave in a hurry their hotel, the Holiday Inn (motto: "At every Holiday Inn the best surprise is no surprise"), when the hotel manager tipped them off that they were about to be busted.

McLaren is convinced that certain people were out to set them up and then get them thrown out of the country: "We were very lucky in Memphis, I feel. There were cops on every floor, and there was a guy grabbing hold of Sid and trying to pass him drugs.

"It got so chaotic. There was fighting between Sid and some guys, and the manager finally told us to get out for our own sake."

This is why, adds McLaren, the band was two hours late going on stage at the local Taliesyn Ballroom; and why, after the gig was over, they quickly left town in Evel Knievel's bus.

Further mystery surrounded two 30-ish cowboy "outlaws" whose omnipresence baffled everyone and heightened Warners' paranoia. These guys, both wearing Western suits and Stetsons, but of whom one was tall and garrulous with long hair, the other shorter, silent and hidden behind impenetrable shades, always appeared at gigs with a film crew, although McLaren had hired his own unit for a film of the tour he is making.

Seemingly wealthy, but disconcertingly evasive about the reason for their presence, the two were put down as big-time dealers. Inevitably, too, there was talk of them being CIA informants.

In Baton Rouge the patience of tour manager Noel Monk snapped. Monk, a brusque Vietnam vet who had been promised a permanent job with Warners if the tour went off well, ordered the taller cowboy to be thrown out of the gig.

Next night, this guy returned with a short, muscular black man, and indirectly informed the Pistols' roadies via his business card that this was a black-belt karate expert from New York. A short while later another karate "bodyguard", from the same New York school, turned up. The cowboys were left alone after that.

But early one morning, in the grand surroundings of Dallas' Fairmont Hotel, nursing a drink bought me by this man – let's call him Michael – I'm casually informed that he's a major stockholder in Warner Bros and he'd wanted to put pressure on the tour organisers.

"Don't quote me," he says genially, leaning across the table, "'cos I'll be over to see you if you do."

To sue me, I ask innocently?

"No, I always like to do it in person."

There was a general air of concern on McLaren's face as we sat later that day beneath the same looming chandeliers of the Fairmont. He kept passing his hand across his forehead as he explained why some aspects of the tour bothered him.

He was depressed, he said, by the degree of security Warners had thrown around the Pistols – it appeared to some on the tour that the record company had taken too literally Malcolm's and the band's mistrust of the British press. The Pistols, already disorientated by their first visit to the States, were closeted away from what was happening.

Vicious and Cook, in fact, made it their practice to go out into the audience after the gig was over, Vicious always accompanied by his minder, Duane, a biker type from Atlanta. Jones was always looking out for birds, but Rotten seldom showed himself.

At the Longhorn Ballroom in Dallas, where Bob Willis was once the king and Merle Haggard was playing just a few days after the Pistols departed, Cook, the most open member of the band, shyly allowed himself to be photographed with his hand down the black-gartered thigh of a local lovely; while one of several punkettes who had driven down from Los Angeles, 1,500 miles away, screwed up her impossibly acned face in envy and suggested, "Show them your thigh, honey." And then, "Why don't you buy them?" as Cook's arm was fleetingly embracing another girl.

Meanwhile, Sid and Duane were backed against the bar by curious fans and local newsmen, Duane surlily warning reporters not to stick their microphones up his nose or else.

Vicious, whose impulse to reach out and grab America increased the more Rotten retired into himself, could never be dissuaded by Duane, Monk or the rest of the retinue from his chats with the kids as they straggled home.

"I want to talk to the people," he would say, as though he were some glad-handing senator from Oshkosh. Then he was jumping down from the stage, his "I'm A Mess" badge pinned to his leather-and-zips jacket, telling the kids what it was like to be an English punk…

"When I was 12, I was just a kid. Between 13 and 15, I was a skinhead. From 15 to 20, I've been a punk. A punk is a street kid." All in that goofy cockney voice.

It was power, omnipotence, everything that a street kid could want: to have Americans gob-tied at every North London vowel, to have the media taking down every opinion, no matter how daft. Next day, the local *Dallas Morning News* headlines its piece "A bunch of wankers, says Pistols' Vicious" – a reference to Texan audiences, as it transpired – and then explains how earlier that night Sid had been injured by a fan.

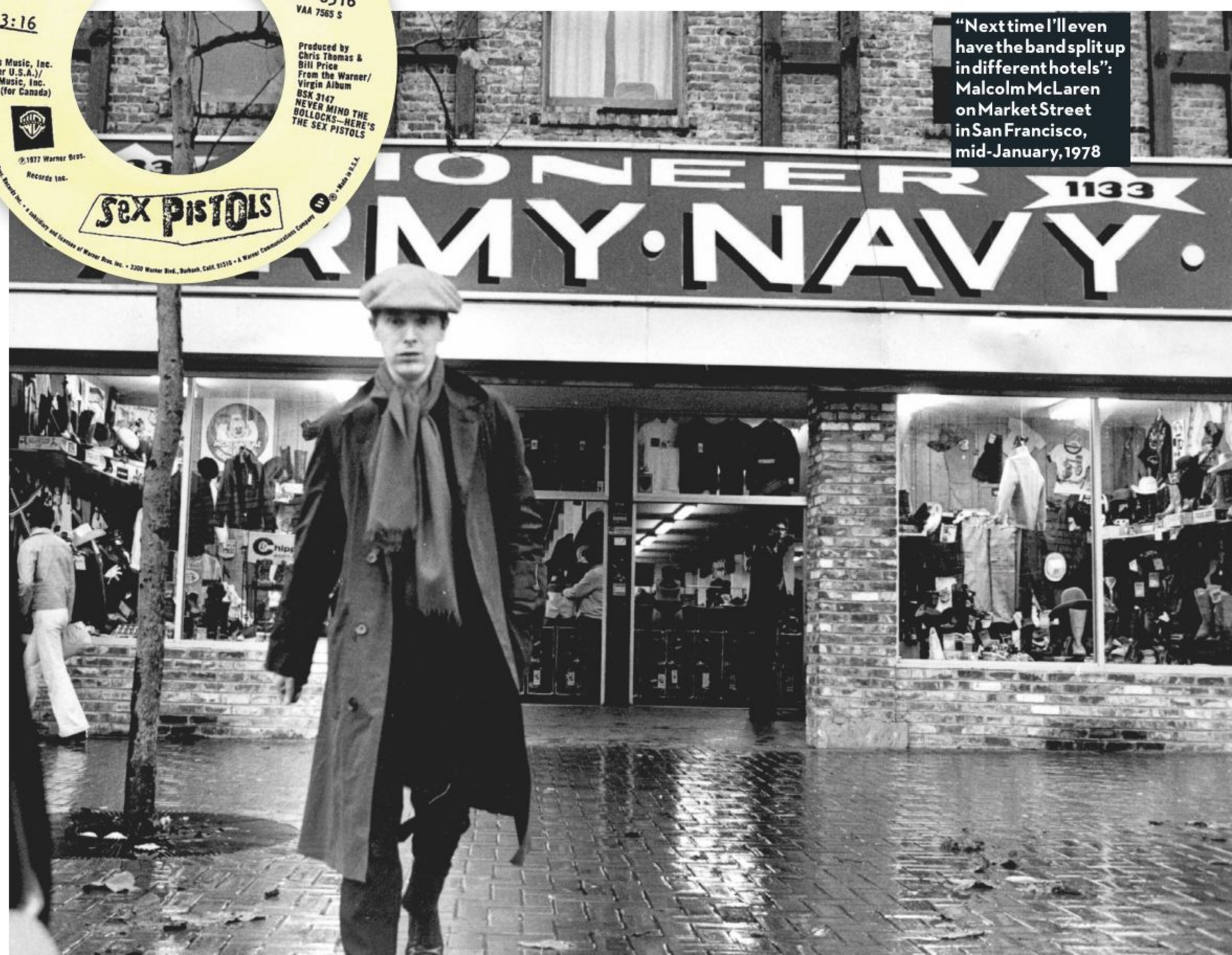
That incident had happened so quickly it made my palms sweaty. Suddenly Vicious was reeling back from the front of the stage with blood gushing from his face. A girl, likely one of the LA punkettes, had caught him across the nose, whether accidently or not I don't know.

But Sid's eyes were lighting up like pinball tables as he lunged for a bottle that was resting on an amp. Without a pause he bust it across the amp and went looking for the girl, until the ever-watchful Mr Monk grabbed hold of him.

And even as he writhed in their grip, the blood was dripping down his chest and onto his bass. Vicious just spat some bloody phlegm, and I saw Warners' advertisement director, a lady from Burbank in California, wince and turn away. We've signed them, I've got to work with them, I could feel her screaming to herself.

Vicious would make anyone twitchy. He's that loveable dope in movies about street gangs whom some poor guy always pushes too far, and then whump! The rest of the gang are fighting to hold him off this guy,





"Next time I'll even have the band split up in different hotels": Malcolm McLaren on Market Street in San Francisco, mid-January, 1978

ROBERTA BAYLEY / GETTY (3)

and it's a near thing. And someday they won't manage it.

The rumours about Vicious are probably true: he makes the rest of the band uneasy. Backstage in Dallas, Steve Jones threatened to punch his face in because he had lost his grip on the music. The band were calling him an egomaniac.

But McLaren wants him in. It doesn't matter that he can barely play; he's wild, and he keeps the rest of them on edge. Stops them settling into a nice musical groove, which, before you know where you are, is spinning off into guitar solos and all the other paraphernalia of rock'n'roll professionalism.

Polish is the last thing Malcolm wants. He will tell you that rock'n'roll is dead: how it was good in the '50s, less so in the '60s, when he gave up listening, and not very good at all in the '70s. "Otherwise it would just be like this," he motioned at the pendulous splendour above us. "Totally redundant culture."

MALCOLM'S GREATEST FEAR is to be redundant – to be fossilised, as he puts it – but deep in his own un-fossilised bones he can see the whole new wave, if it's not careful, winding up like the Stones and the rest of them. "I read their interviews and I don't understand the bullshit they're saying. Do you, 'cos I know I don't?"

So he doesn't worry that the Pistols are very rough with each other; that Sid gets everyone down because he's always whining; that Rotten has a go at Jones for being fat and Cook for being dumb; and they all cuss Rotten out for coming the star – as is obvious from any rehearsal. If they all weren't in a group together, he says, they would be 10 miles apart at least.

"I like the idea that the band really hate each other," McLaren looked very tired as he began explaining. "I think there's a certain compatibility with me and John, 'cos we're both extremists. We bounce off each other.

"But I'm concerned with the whole idea of the Sex Pistols, not the individuals, not the effect Johnny Rotten is having on people – more what's happening to the whole scene. It wouldn't matter to me if we gave up, you see. Rock'n'roll is only a means to an end; it ain't everything. And that end is to see that things don't stagnate.

"The objective is not to get fossilised; it's not to become a fucking act, product. If it were that, we wouldn't be here. I'm only here in order to obstruct that and find a way of destroying it, a way in which people would draw inspiration and create an environment that is real.

"The musical experience is totally irrelevant. I'm not musical. I'm looking for the excitement I get out of it. I'm only concerned that the Pistols' attitude is one people can respond to in some shape and form.

"I brought Sid into the band not 'cos he could play. I knew he'd be disliked, but I thought he'd be necessary to stop them becoming musically sure of themselves, which to me would be boring.

"You know, I think I have to have a hard job, because I stand in-between the record company and the group. Both parties have the same idea of becoming a success – a great rock'n'roll band – and suddenly the record company people are saying to you, 'You're a great guitarist', and suddenly you think how good you are. I don't want that.

"I think it could be great if Rotten becomes an obvious success without also becoming an egotistical asshole like most rock idols are. In England now people are coming to something other than a rock'n'roll show and they're getting disappointed that it's not more of a rock'n'roll show."

The difficulty is, of course, that what McLaren says he wants from the Pistols may not be shared by the band. Rock fame is seductive. Vicious seems to be feeding off it, and Cook and Jones are shaping up as better musicians than propagandists for a new lifestyle – they may not hold out for an intangible ideal (OK, Paul, Steve – what the band is about is change, got it? "I don't 'ave any"). Perhaps Rotten sees it the same way; but his task is the hardest – he's a star already.

Some of the band laughingly refer to McLaren as a "media manipulator". He doesn't bridle at the phrase. "If that's what I am," he shrugs. "If what comes out of all this is healthy, good; and if that's the Pistols, I think I've done a good job."

At the same time he gives the impression of a man who is only just coming to terms with the potential of what he has. He expressed great surprise that the press interest in the tour had been so considerable; even that the Pistols proved such a big draw. Was this disingenuous?

> "Rock'n'roll is only a means to an end – to see that things don't stagnate"

"I had no idea that anyone would care that much in London! I thought we'd be real rookies playing between country bands, and it'd be hard just to get the audience interested. It's just staggering to me."

(In fact, in Baton Rouge they were supported by a very good zydeco band called Good Rockin' Doopie & The Twisters, and in Dallas by a schizophrenic punk/ hard-rock group called The Nervebreakers. The Pistols made a plea for good supports.)

"I didn't think the nationals would come out here," he continued. "I didn't think they cared that much. But obviously I'm living in the past and don't realise how important are the statements the band is making on a worldwide level.

"You see, I never wanted this kind of 'Beatles Entry Into The US'. I wanted them to come in and get lost in the middle of America. I never wanted this whole Sex Pistols' Special Star Trip in America.

"If I'd known what was going to happen, and had come in on a Warner Brothers special package, I'd have been more demonstrative and in New York declared their attitudes.

"You see, it was all done on a very loose level; it wasn't planned months ahead. With the Pistols it's always been done just a few dates here and there, never major tours. If I'd had to do a proper Sex Pistols tour, I'd really have gone to town.

"I chose this way 'cos I thought it would have more heart. Next time I'll even have the band split up in different hotels."

Next time may be the spring, and it may include a gig at that seedy New York palace on 43rd Street, the Hotel Diplomat, where the New York Dolls used to play. But right now Malcolm is thinking Brazil. He's thinking Ronnie Biggs, to be exact. McLaren wants the Pistols to play in a restaurant he's heard Biggs runs there.

My final image of the tour, though, comes from Baton Rouge. A big blow-up of that corrupt Louisiana governor, Huey "Kingfish" Long, winks on the wall behind the stage, on which nickels and dimes are raining from the audience.

Vicious yells out, "I want $100 bills!" and the greenbacks are being flung at them. Rotten and Vicious are bending to pick them up, and Vicious is stuffing them in his mouth. All the time, Huey's sausage fingers are forked in a big, fat V. No wonder he's winking. *Michael Watts*

— MELODY MAKER JANUARY 21 —

THE SEX PISTOLS have broken up – maybe. Confusion still surrounds the position of the group's management company, which confirmed the rift within the band and blamed distortion and manipulation by the press in America for forcing this decision on the Pistols.

The statement followed the cancellation of the band's planned tour of Scandinavia. Yet there is still doubt about the immediate future of the members of the Pistols, and they are still contracted individually and as a band to Virgin Records in Britain and abroad, and Warner Bros in America. Under Virgin's contract there are still several Sex Pistols albums to me made and there is no unreleased material.

The official announcement of the split, following a bust-up last week at the end of the band's debut American tour, came from Pistols road manager John Tiberi at Glitterbest, the band's management company. "They have split up. What it means is that the idea of the band is continuing, and the personalities involved will be continuing that idea.

"The band worked in a situation which was the only way kids, or anybody else, could really express themselves. They are not going to do that in the same way any more. The way they have been reported and manipulated has led to the break-up and America was the place that brought it to a head.

"San Francisco [the last date on the tour] was really the turning point. Standing in front of 5,000 people, meeting Warner Bros and Bill Graham, the promoter – it seemed like they were pulling the strings and not Malcolm McLaren," said Tiberi, who helped organise the American tour.

"As the Sex Pistols they are no longer a group; they were not a group in the first place. They didn't have the will to continue."

But when Johnny Rotten flew in to London on Monday, he told newsmen, "It's all a publicity stunt." •

"Me like the punk"

"'God save the Queen, her fascist regime', that true..." After "Punky Reggae Party", Miami-based BOB MARLEY talks UK politics, racism and Rastafarianism. Later, a return to Jamaica suggests the possibility of a brighter future.

— MELODY MAKER FEBRUARY 11 —

"WE'RE GOING BACK to our own land – it says so in the Bible," said the soused Irishman on the tube to no one in particular. Which may not seem very significant to you, but coming as a postscript to an afternoon with Bob Marley, I found it positively unnerving, as if 'im Up There was giving me a stern warning that everything Marley had said had been right, and woe betide me if I expressed a different opinion.

But I'll just have to take my chances with hellfire, because some of what the Wailer had told me was little short of crazy. We talked in his Kensington flat, part of an incredibly plush block complete with intercom door, Roman balcony, receptionists with the high-fashion nonchalance of loose-fitting easy chic, and art nouveau pictures on walls clothed with suede rather than paper.

Everything just so, with different shades of brown fusing tastefully. One small step for a white rich kid, perhaps, but a giant leap for an illegitimate half-caste from the slums of Trenchtown.

The first shock about Marley was his sheer incomprehensibility. I was amazed, because if anyone's pointed it out before, then they certainly haven't done so with enough force. As he ushered me down the corridor and through his door, colourfully clad in a robe, and a red woollen hat locking up his dreadful hair (sorry), he spouted two or three sentences at me, presumably of welcome, of which I understood not one word.

That set a precedent for the whole interview – his words tumble over and slur into one another in careless defiance of conventional tense and syntax. I suppose he must have considerably diluted the Jamaican patois in my honour, but even on tape some passages are indecipherable, and while he was sitting opposite me I couldn't have understood more than about a third of what he was saying – just enough to get his drift and feign comprehension.

That in itself was unsettling, making me feel very much an alien, especially when Marley's friends started to arrive in force and sat and smoked over the other side of the room.

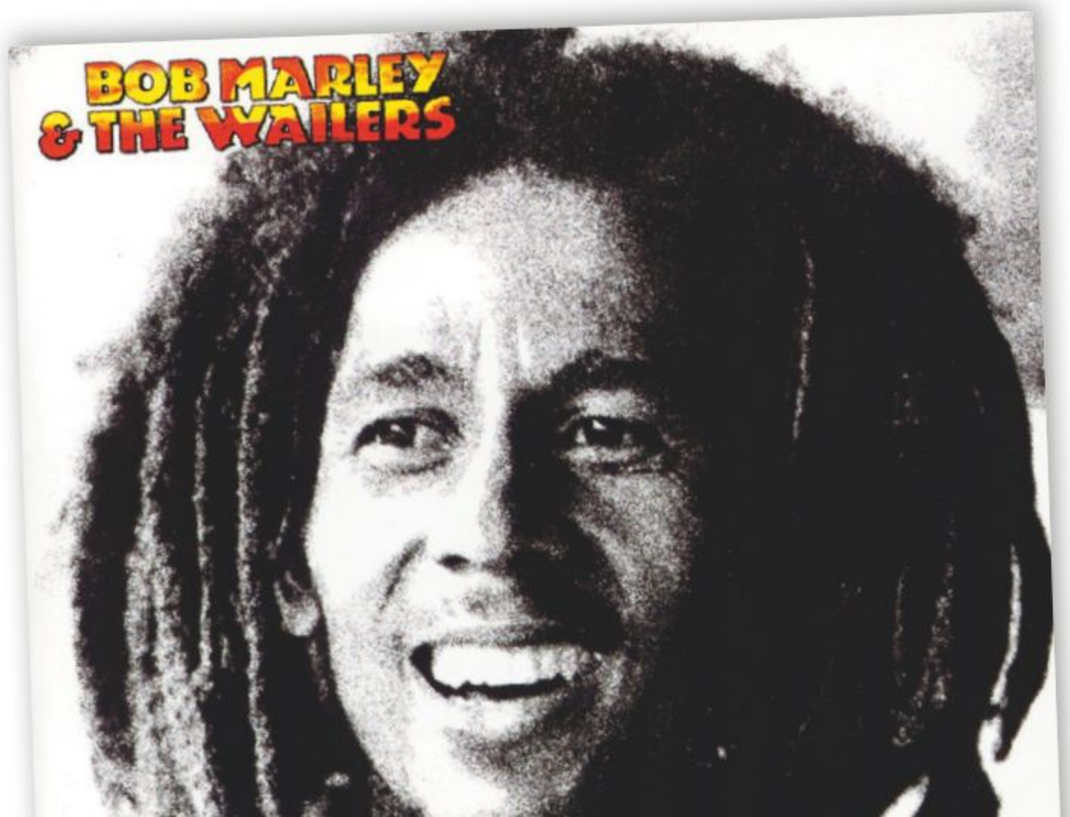
The second surprising thing was his volubility. I'd somehow expected a kind of quiet sage, exuding a serenity won both by the believed perception of an ultimate (and peaceful) truth, and by the constant inhalation of the sacred herb.

Instead, I was confronted by a passionate bundle of garrulousness who left me conscious of the absurdity of some of his thinking, rather than impressing with his general perception.

Because, you see, his verbosity is completely one-dimensional, emerging entirely out of his bottomless faith in Rastafarianism (which, for the uninitiated, sees black people as a kind of modern equivalent of the Israelites, their Canaan being Africa, and their God being incarnated in the form of the late Emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie).

No matter what question I asked, his reply would always veer back towards Rasta, simply because he sees that faith as holding the ultimate answer to every doubt or query.

As he said when I asked if he thought being born of a black mother and a white father (a Liverpudlian sailor) had had much of an effect upon his consciousness: "It make me fully Rasta, nothing else but Rasta. »



LYNN GOLDSMITH / GETTY

June 15, 1978: Bob Marley at the Waldorf Astoria New York to accept a United Nations Peace Medal Of The Third World



Because me depend not on the white man's side nor the black man's side but Rasta. Me just completely committed to Rasta."

He's the exact equivalent of a newly converted but devoted Christian, or of a committed Communist – people who believe they've discovered the only important truth and are virtually incapable of talking about anything else. His monomania is at times quite frightening, perhaps because, as Joseph Conrad claimed, "a man haunted by a fixed idea is insane".

But it is disturbing mainly because, to these ears at least (and, just possibly, I'm merely falling victim to the long-established middle-class tradition of narrow-minded distrust of fervour), he believes so wholeheartedly in ideas which seem quite absurd.

Now I don't want to knock the Rastafarian faith just for the sake of it, since without it many Jamaicans probably wouldn't have "stood up for their rights" but the deification of Haile Selassie in itself has always struck me as ridiculous.

So Bob and I don't exactly have much common ground. At one point during the interview, Marley stood to attention in front of a portrait of Selassie which was propped up against the wall, a scene that drove home the absurdity at the same time as it made me feel uncomfortable, wondering if I was expected to follow suit.

A lot of what he said, particularly early on, was both true and acute. But, for me, the madness of some of his statements had thrown doubt upon the rest.

Routine questions first, I asked whether the new album, *Kaya*, to be released in March, was very different to *Exodus*.

"Yeah, it sound a bit different, but not that much different, same musicians an' everyt'ing."

Are there any love songs on it this time?

"Yeah, man, couple-a love songs… Tree."

Are those love songs part of your overall message?

"Yeah, love is all is the message. Love on life. People's personal feelings towards love an' all them t'ing. If we sing like 'Rastaman Vibration' all the time, everythin' get too political an' the people don't really wanna be that much political, y'know.

"Them wanna understand where we're going still, but them still wanna live a normal life – that mean they wanna hear about love. The politics really not important to them, but love come a bit easier. It more easier for people."

But do you see yourself writing more love songs as you get older, becoming less obviously radical?

"Nah, not really – I get more spiritual. Like this one, 'Time Will Tell' – more spiritual." (*He points to the last song on the new lyric sheet.*)

Does that mean you'll be less militant? "No. You see, you sing a song like 'Get Up Stand Up', a protest song, it was like three years ago. If today me sing a song with the same meaning as 'Get Up Stand Up', then me singing same song, repeating myself.

"The young-young don't wanna hear nothing about politics an' them t'ing, they wanna hear 'bout Rastafari, somethin' that can 'elp 'im.

"Pure politics can hurt certain people, so you 'ave to get hard, get soft, 'cos guns don't argue, an' if you talk too much an' get too strong they'll kill ya, because Babylon set up own system an' it no want nobody come change it.

"So is not everyt'ing you can talk 'bout, 'cos them kill ya. So you have to sing a 'true love' song an' then go back to what you wanna sing, otherwise them kill ya. Yeah, man.

"The system want pure love songs like ol' Frank Sinatra, they don't want not 'in wit' no protest, it make too much trouble."

Sounds remarkably like the power-pop syndrome to me. I explained to Marley how the current men of the moment in Britain are wearing suits, scrubbing their faces, and singing pretty slush for the family.

"AH, THEM FORCED to do it," he commented. Oh? Who by? "The system, man. But that no gon' work." He did elucidate, but I couldn't suss out what he said.

So you'd never make a whole album full of love songs? "No, man, we never do that. One or two love songs for the people who need to know 'bout Rasta. Them buy the record for the love song an' them will automatically learn 'bout Rasta.

"The young-young lickle girl buy this for 'Is This Love', but in the meanwhile she can hear, '*Jah would never give the power to a baldhead*', 'Running Away'. 'Sun Is Shining', and 'The Crisis'.

"So it still have the message, but it go to more people. We don't specialise in people – if Arabs and Chinese wanna buy it, we are glad. We know that all people is Rasta, but them don't know because the education change that, education tell you what them want you to be."

Since he thought there was a danger of repeating himself in his protest songs even now, I wondered if he still imagined himself singing in 20 years' time.

"I see myself settled in Africa in eight years' time. We will settle an' all place like England, Ireland, start run good. Everything change, everybody does know the truth an' everybody does live it. It gonna be a big t'ing, 'cos we gonna be united – we don't want no 'if'. My people will be united."

At this point, the burning idealism seems desperate – Utopia in eight years or bust. The man is so totally sincere that he's carried me with him up to now. But around here things start getting a little screwy.

"We never just say Africa because we wan' a land to live in or somet'ing like that, we say Africa because it's really true. It's not the people that are the trouble, y'know? It's the lies, the lies.

"Y'know, His Majesty come to England, an' when He come here them treat 'im good, good, good. But how them treat the Rastaman? We His Majesty's soldiers, but them try kill me.

"When Haile Selassie come, he given great welcome, but when we say we defend Rastfari, them people kill ya. That is a nasty t'ing, y'know, because when you check out on the Bible it say that God shall return King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Conqueror, Lion of Judah – Him our God but them treat Rastaman bad. All the police, them weird."

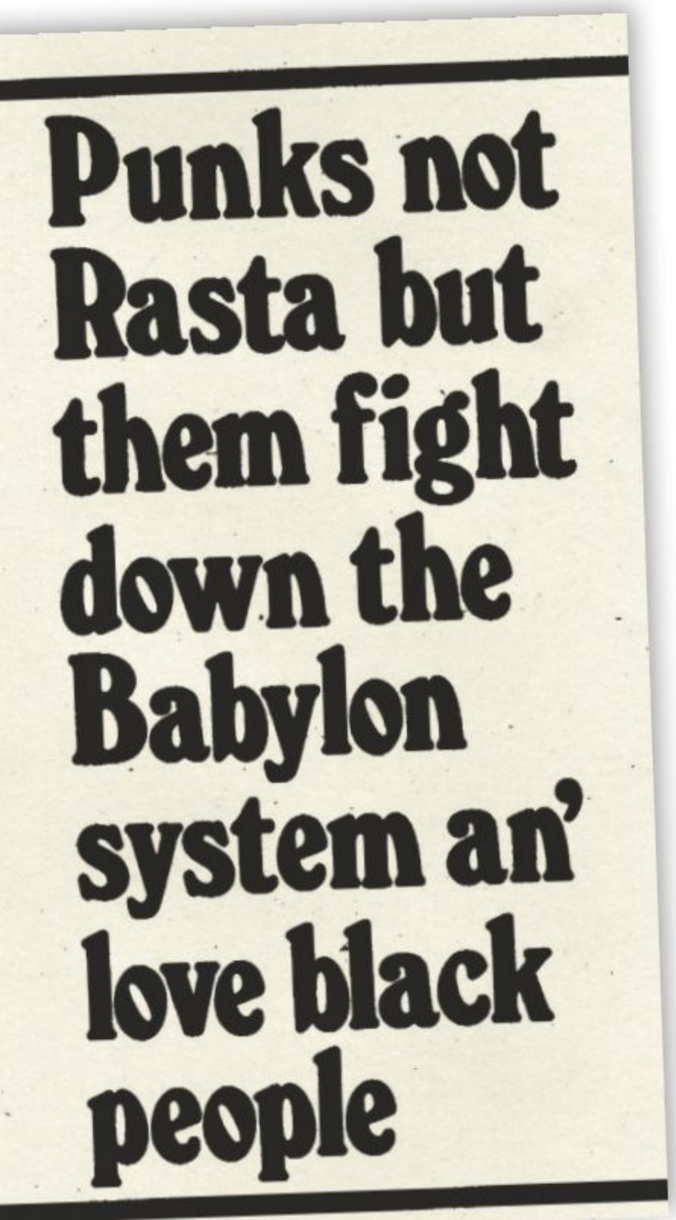
Note the apparent paranoiac exaggeration – the "system" is out to kill black people by means of a calculated plot. This is a constant theme of Marley's. Could it perhaps have its origin in the shooting incident of 1976, when someone attempted to murder him, probably for seeming to lend his support to socialist premier Michael Manley's election campaign? I pointed out to him that, on the evidence of the recent riot in Wolverhampton alone, Rastas are not the only black people facing problems in Britain now.

"All black people are Rasta. The reason them not is 'cos them need t'ings to eat, an' need to work. If you could still go in a place an' get work as Rasta then everyone is Rasta. But like it is you won't get no work, an' if you not talented then you can't be like this, you forced to be somet'ing else. If everybody was free to be what them want, man, then everyone be Rasta."

Which is a pretty… um… debatable point. But Marley sincerely believes it, and almost unbelievably, seemed to regard what follows as an adequate justification of his point, a demonstration of the innate superiority of Rastafarianism to Catholicism (there appear to be no other possibilities open to us, not even Protestantism).

"What you need to understand," he explained, "is that you 'ave Rome an' you 'ave Ethiopia. Rome deal wit' force, Rome force you to do what it want. But the ways of His Majesty is natural ways; He never come stick a gun at

> "If you get too strong they'll kill ya, 'cos Babylon set up own system"





June 30, 1978: on stage at Gröna Lund, a concert venue and amusement park on the outskirts of Stockholm

you an' say, 'You must say Our Father's prayers.' But Rome will come stick you up an' search an' terrorise ya an' say Our Father's prayers. When you pray to the Babylon God, you pray to Rome. That means all your imagination is when you walk in the street an' t'ink of a great pretty city. So Et'iopia right an' Rome wrong."

Whaaat! Conjures up some pretty pictures, though, doesn't it? Cardinals with knives between their teeth, priests with bandoliers, Sten guns in the Vatican… Too many Inquisition horror stories at an impressionable age?

LET'S COME DOWN to something a bit more concrete, Bob. What do you think of the National Front? "Some prejudiced people who no want the black man here. Let me ask you somet'ing – who encourage this t'ing?"

No one encourages it. "Yes, man, yeah. Somebody encourage it. There's not'ing happening out there that somebody don't encourage. If you see somebody getting' up a fight against black people, you know that this guy got orders from big, big place or from low, low place. But if them look on us as inferior species, we look on them as not'ing. Them got no right to look on people as inferior. That nasty – the people who run the country should know they're wrong."

Oh, they know they're wrong… "I no wanna talk 'bout English Government, you know why? The English Government is good an' it is bad." [Totally incomprehensible rant for at least a minute.]

"And now them come an' say we gonna kick you out an' it's them who brought you to that bloodclaat land as slaves. Them'll get fokked. Them can't deal wit' black people like that, they gon fok' themselves. Y'know, England should go on better than that, that bloodclaat dumb – why them no work as slaves for us in return? Really bad men, bad people, bullies.

"The ways of the black man is right, an' the ways of the white man wrong. The way the white man set up him system is wrong – the only right t'ing is Haile Selassie." [Followed by another indecipherable outburst. "Bloodclaat", incidentally, is a cute Jamaican obscenity derived from the blood-cloth or sanitary towel.]

"This guy, them National Front, them not please the people – it's just politics, man, making the politics a bit more hotter."

So they don't worry you? (*Outraged rant*) "Worry me? Bloodclaat them won't fok wit' me, them bloodclaat, I'll give them pure war an' if it's pure war then it' pure riot, so them better stop that. Fok them. Me personally not agree wit' no one fighting one another – me no agree wit' a white man fight a white man, no a white man go fight a black man, no a black man go fight a black man.

"But the police don't pass by a murder on the street. The National Front, them do bad things, why nobody no stop them? That mean them agree wit' it."

But Bob… "Middle-class white people no like black people. One or two of them like black people. They gonna fok them bloodclaat selves again. We come into the West as slaves an' after we done slavery them say, 'Take the chain offa them but don't give them enough money.'

"They make it so that them don't have enough money to go back to Africa. Black people is Rasta, 'cos if you go to Queen Elizabeth, or any one of them big guys here wit' intelligence an' ask them properly, 'Who really is Haile Selassie?' then them tell ya."

What will they tell me?

"Them gon' say him come from Solomon an' David, him the King of Et'iopia, the same as God."

What! You mean you honestly think they believe Haile Selassie is God?

"Them will no say he's God, but you can understand it from what they say."

But… but… surely they'd just think of him as King of Ethiopia? "Yeah, but the King of Ethiopia is God." To you maybe, but not to them or to me…

"Not to the Queen? You never can tell. His Majesty went to school wit' King George, an' at school His Majesty draw bird an' the bird fly off the paper an' him say, 'Hey, I gonna free the black people.'"

IT'S STILL A little difficult to believe that Marley could be so deluded by his obsession as to think that anyone with intelligence, even old Lizzie, knows deep down that Haile Selassie is God. If ever I was given a warning about the dangers of single-minded commitment, then this was it.

It was time for a change of tack. In the light of the B-side of "Jammin", "Punky Reggae Party", I asked him how much sympathy he had felt with punk.

"Listen, punk love reggae. Punk love reggae music an' some of them say t'ings that Babylon no like, right. I thought them was badness first, but them right! Me give them 900 per cent right! »

HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY



March 16, 1978: Marley at the Plaza Hotel, New York City

"Because them can do it. Them no hard like we, them no tough like we, them couldn't see what we sees, but they resist the society an' say, 'Me a punk 'cos I don't want you to shove me where I don't like it, it no good for me, I gon' be something different.'

"Them not as much followers of Babylon, make up their mind for themselves – that great. While other people go on under the same system, go on like everyday people. I no care 'bout them. But the punk now different. He come on a different t'ing – freaky freaky different. If them were black them were Rasta, if them were white them were punk. Them is no Rasta, but them fight down the Babylon system an' them love black people an' reggae an' hate the National Front.

"Check the National Front an' check the punk. Which of them defending the right thing? To me, the punk. The National Front are fokry, they are people who get pay for doin' them t'ing."

Who pays them? "The Government pay them to do it, man. It's planned. Somebody tell them to fock up black people."

Hmmm… full circle. What do you think of the actual punk music? "Well, me like the punk. The music – me no listen t'everyt'ing, but certain t'ings me like."

For instance. "For instance, '*God save the Queen, fascist regime*' – me like that." He laughs. "I don't wanna encourage a certain type of foolishness, but '*God save the Queen, her fascist regime*', that true. Ah dig the punk for that.

"Me like 'Police And T'ieves' too. Them different, y'know. Them wanna get together wit' Rastaman an' get working together instead of him feel inferior.

"Because him no feel like we inferior – white man feel inferior to the black man, that's why him try kill the black man. An' the punk say, 'No! We wanna join wit' the Rastaman an' get somet'ing outta life'.

"Y'know, white people come to our concerts, so when them come out of the street an' find them separated from black people again they need a Rasta friend whom they can talk to an' hear 'bout the real t'ing. We know everyt'ing 'bout England and America but not Africa."

At which point he skids back into Rasta via another incomprehensible spurt, ending up with a lecture on the 12 tribes of Israel and the ethnic significance of the three sons of Noah (!).

All very enlightening, but what do you think of the explosion of young British reggae bands? "More reggae, mon. More power for the people, that's what it mean."

But some of those bands are avoiding singing about Rastafari… He stares at me in disbelief for a second. "You don't sing 'bout Rastafari, nobody wanna hear ya, we no interested in ya."

Maybe the Jamaican public wouldn't be, but why shouldn't the English? "But everyt'ing a man do mas' have meaning behind it, man."

But Rastafari isn't the only possible meaning. " Yeh, is the only meaning until the consciousness come true. Tell them 'bout Rastafari, man."

But aren't protest songs like "Get Up, Stand Up" valid independently of Rasta? "No – if they sing them then they must belong to a political group."

But they don't. "Then they must be Rasta. Otherwise what rights they gon' stand up for?"

And the rights you talk about are the rights to be a natural man? "Yeah, natural man. An' a natural man in touch wit' God is a Rastaman. Because truth is truth, earth is earth, an' a natural man is a Rastaman – you can't get away from that."

Rasta has gained something of a reputation for antipathy to the liberation of women. So what do you think of the Women's Movement, Bob? "The one t'ing you need to know: man is man, woman is woman. The Devil tried colour prejudice, now he try woman against man."

But do you regard women as equal to men? "I don't see women as equal or unequal – woman is woman. She no equal to me because she can 'ave children an' I cannot 'ave."

Is that her only function in life to you? "That's how she function. Me know no man who 'ave big belly an' have child (*predictable laughter*). Woman must always be respected an' dear. It not even somet'ing we must talk of. 'Cos me have a mother who is a woman. (*Adds, laughing*) But me 'ave a father who is God."

Can you conceive of a female God? (*Adamant*) Woman can't be God. It just not natural, it no happen."

YOU HAVEN'T BEEN back to Jamaica for a long time – why not? "Jamaica important but my life more important. Me no gonna go back to set myself up as a target again, for the Government, the opposition, or anyone else. My life mean more than that."

So you've been living in Miami?

"Yeah, me live wit' my mother. You see, the people in Jamaica love me too much. And should the politicians find that out now, them try to get close to me, to use me an' stop Rasta spreading at the same time.

"You know *Rastaman Vibration* banned in Jamaica? Bloodclaat. England should have banned it, not Jamaica. But them can't stop Rasta."

Yawn. But in white, middle-aged, upper-class Miami can you still feel in touch with Trenchtown slum-dwellers who have always meant so much to you? "Me always live, but not among the people. As long as me 'ave my herb an' my guitar me can live anywhere, it make no difference."

But doesn't living in luxury make any difference? "Me no see things lush or posh here. If this were a hillside wit' sun an' grass, that me call lush 'n' posh, that me really love."

Does money mean anything to you? "The only t'ing money mean right now is if you 'ave enough you can build a school. Nothing more than that"

What do you think of "Up Town Top Ranking"? "Them little girl all right, them lucky. It's what I try to encourage. 'Top Ranking' nice but it say nothing."

Sounds like the power-pop syndrome again… "That's it. Yeah, man, that's it."

Which just about wound up the conversation. On the way out, it occurred to me to clarity one point. You say you'll be settled in Africa within eight years? "Rastafari say by 1983 Africa must be free. His Majesty say that." And if it isn't? "If not, the whole world must perish."

You really believe that? "Yeah – all Him say must come true."

So what would you do if, in 1985, Africa wasn't free and the whole world hadn't perished? "I would perish it myself."

It may have been as much at the ridiculousness of the idea that Haile Selassie could be wrong as at anything else, but at least he laughed when he said that. *Chris Brazier* •

> "The National Front are people who get pay for doin' them t'ing"

BOBBY BANK / GETTY



Marley and the Wailers on stage with Jamaican prime minister Michael Manley (far left) and rival Edward Seaga (third left) during the finale of the One Love Peace Concert

Guns, ganja, love

NME APR 29 Bob Marley returns to Jamaica for a huge concert that aims to end the island's political civil war. The Rastafari movement gets a boost, too.

NATIONAL STADIUM KINGSTON LIVE! APRIL 22

BENEATH RASTAFARIAN BANNERS and a full Caribbean moon, Jamaica's two leading politicians – Prime Minister Michael Manley and opposition leader Edward Seaga – shook hands on stage at Saturday's "One Love" peace concert headed by Bob Marley. Assembled for the sight were nearly 200 of the world's press, including camera crews and journalists from America, Europe and Cuba, and upwards of 20,000 people, who half-filled the massive National Stadium where the concert took place under heavy police and military guard.

Held to commemorate the 12th anniversary of the visit of Emperor Haile Selassie to Jamaica, and to raise funds for the Peace Movement, the concert took place in an atmosphere of devotion and optimism, an emotion given further dimension by the massive nationalist slogans surrounding the arena: "Build Jamaica With Discipline", "Unite Struggle Produce", etc.

Besides the politicians going through what was evidently a prearranged ritual, the audience was also witness to the sight of the top-ranking gunmen from the previously warring ghettos of West Kingston embracing each other and dancing together like excited football fans. These were two men like Bucky Marshall and Claude Massop, who a few months ago were facing each other down over gun barrels. Since last January, when suddenly "peace broke out", they have been working together in the Peace Movement, and these last few days had given press conferences at Marley's former home in Hope Road, Kingston, where the singer himself had been gunned down in December 1976.



This was the first time Marley had set foot in Jamaica since that incident. On the bill were some of the cream of Jamaica's musicians. First off, Lloyd Parks and We People provided the backing for a stunning salvo of talent as The Meditations, Dillinger, The Mighty Diamonds, Culture, Dennis Brown, Trinity, Leroy Smart and 10-year-old Junior Tucker all delivered excellent sets, with the zany Culture outstanding. Althea & Donna also came on to sing... guess what!

Around this time the only disturbance of any real size took place, when a number of people decided to storm the McDonald tunnel entrance. An hour of violent skirmishes followed before the police and heavily armed soldiers sealed the entrance, but not before about 200 people had entered.

The next two acts – Jacob Miller & Inner Circle and Big Youth – provided completely different interpretations of the Rasta and reggae heritage. Miller was wildly energetic, lewd and comic with his populist anthems; Youth, cool, elegant and devotional.

During Miller's set, Marley and Seaga arrived and, shortly after, Killer Miller donned a riot policeman's helmet and paraded along the stage smoking a spliff and singing "Peace Treaty Is Coming Home Hurrah" to the tune of "When Johnny Comes Marching Home".

It's unlikely that any of the political dignitaries present took exception to Miller's buffoonery, but many were evidently ill-at-ease during a Peter Tosh set that was strictly "no jesterin'".

The former Wailer, clad in a black judo suit and guerrilla beret, interspersed his set with lengthy oratorical denunciations of social injustice and paeans to black pride, and directed a harangue at Prime Minister Manley personally on the subject of Jamaica's ganja laws before playing "Legalize It", which he dedicated to "all those who have been humiliated for an ickle draw of jah herb".

Marley put in an energetic, almost desperate performance for the media

Just to rub salt in establishment wounds, he smoked a spliff on stage while a dread blew clouds of ganja from a chalice stage front, defying arrest by the many assembled soldiers and policemen. The ferocity of Tosh's malevolent and obscenity-studded diatribes were more than matched by the set he played, with Tosh standards like "400 Years", "Burial" and "Stepping Razor" being given dazzling workouts by a band which boasted the finest rhythm section on the island in Sly Dunbar (drums) and Robbie Shakespeare (bass), who was this critic's choice as man of the match.

Recently signed to Rolling Stones Records in the US, Tosh was watched from the wings by Mick Jagger, who witnessed that the Stones have acquired a dangerously powerful foil for their upcoming American tour. The previous day, Jagger described the peace concert as "very important".

It was left to Ras Michael and the Sons Of Negus to consecrate the stage with a stately set of Rasta drums and chanting before Bob Marley & The Wailers belatedly took the stage for the finale. It was interesting that, of the three original Wailers, Tosh was adopting a vigorous rebel image, Marley was working alongside the establishment, and Bunny Wailer was conspicuous by his absence.

Clearly under some strain, Marley put in an energetic and almost desperate performance for the assembled media host. After opening with two Rastafarian hymns, he ran through a selection of "Natural Mystic", "Natty Dread", "Rastaman Vibration", "War", "Jamming" and "Trenchtown Rock" before the ritual of joining together the politicians.

In many ways it was a moment of paradox and anticlimax, but besides attracting welcome funds for the Peace Movement – a movement which clearly matters enormously to ordinary Jamaicans – the concert proves that Jamaica's future is intimately bound up with the doctrine of Rastafari. *Neil Spencer*

ECHOES / REDFERNS / GETTY



Fierce commitment: Sham 69 – (l–r) Mark Cain, Jimmy Pursey, Dave Tregunna and Dave Parsons

ALBUMS REVIEW 1978

ALBUMS

Sham 69 Tell Us The Truth POLYDOR

Really, it all depends on how much trust you're willing to invest. If all you want from a record is leisure listening which does little more than reinforce a cosy rut, read no further. Sham 69 will be anathema. They will make incensed jackals sound like puppies who do naughty things with toilet rolls. And that would be a criminal shame.

Even the title and cover throw a battered brick through the window. The four Sham men stand pinioned in the corner of a kind of interrogation room/detention centre, fists clenched and snarling at an accusing finger that emerges from a pin-striped sleeve. Maybe you think the image is simplistic and naive. But is also sums up what the band are all about: fierce commitment and honesty.

Therein lies the contradictions of head person Jimmy Pursey. Above all, he wants to entertain; but to achieve that end, he has to act directly from his own experience. That means looking directly at his home life in Hersham, where his dad was a plumber and his mum a cleaner, his long periods of truancy from school, Saturday afternoons at football and dead-end jobs.

This isn't supposed to be some dewy-eyed, patronising, working-class flag day appeal; it's simply what happened. All the frustration, disillusion, anger, fear, confusion and (don't ever forget, as a lot of people seem to) the laughs. The band's enjoyment is the result of the audience's enjoyment, though the process is fraught.

It comes through loud and clear on the live first side. The more an audience enjoys itself, the more it jostles for a part of the action, and as the dedication indicates ("special thanks to all our mates who appear on this side"), they virtually get equal billing. The side ends with a football chant of "Knees Up Mother Brown". Once involvement is ensured, then questioning can follow. The lyrics are of paramount importance, and though Jimmy has tried to mix them up as far as possible, they are still annoyingly cloudy in too many instances.

They are the straightforward catchphrases from off the street: "*Everything we say and do/So many people laugh at you*"; "*You never had no pity 'cos you always take the mickey.*"

Out of context, you may think the sentiments are pathetically innocent, but they are as applicable as they are vulnerable. Like the portrait of the kid in "Ulster" who throws potties and ends up in hospital; like the barking assertion in "George Davis Is Innocent"; like the fury behind "They Don't Understand".

Naturally, the sound is raw; it would be stupid to expect anything else. The same feelings (a sustained, breeze-block onslaught is the key) carry over to the second studio side, where Sham indicate their willingness, albeit stumbling at times, to experiment. "Family Life" starts off with a typical tussle between mum and son: "*Your dinner's burnt and you'll stay in till your father comes home.*"

Kitchen sink, but the exchange is real. Out of interest, compare it with the Ramones' "We're A Happy Family", and note that Dave Parsons stretches out more.

The most surprising track, however, is "Whose Generation!". Sham used to do a version of Townshend's indestructible song, but the kinship between the two is now very distant. It opens with a type of heartbeat bassline, which is then joined by what sounds like phased vocal cross-currents, grinding feedback, air-raid siren effects and, finally, three ominous tolling bells.

The significance? Your guess is as good as mine. Ringing out the old generation and ushering in the new? Closing the chapter on this phase of Sham? I don't know.

Tell Us The Truth is bludgeoning and, in the words of Tom Robinson, won't take no for an answer. Put aside the notions that Jimmy cannot sing in any conventional manner and that the band aren't "properly" accomplished. What matters here is the effect and the excitement.

Anyway, it contains a live version of one of the best punk singles this year, "Borstal Breakout". The lock's been picked and they are looking over your shoulder. *Ian Birch, MM Feb 18*

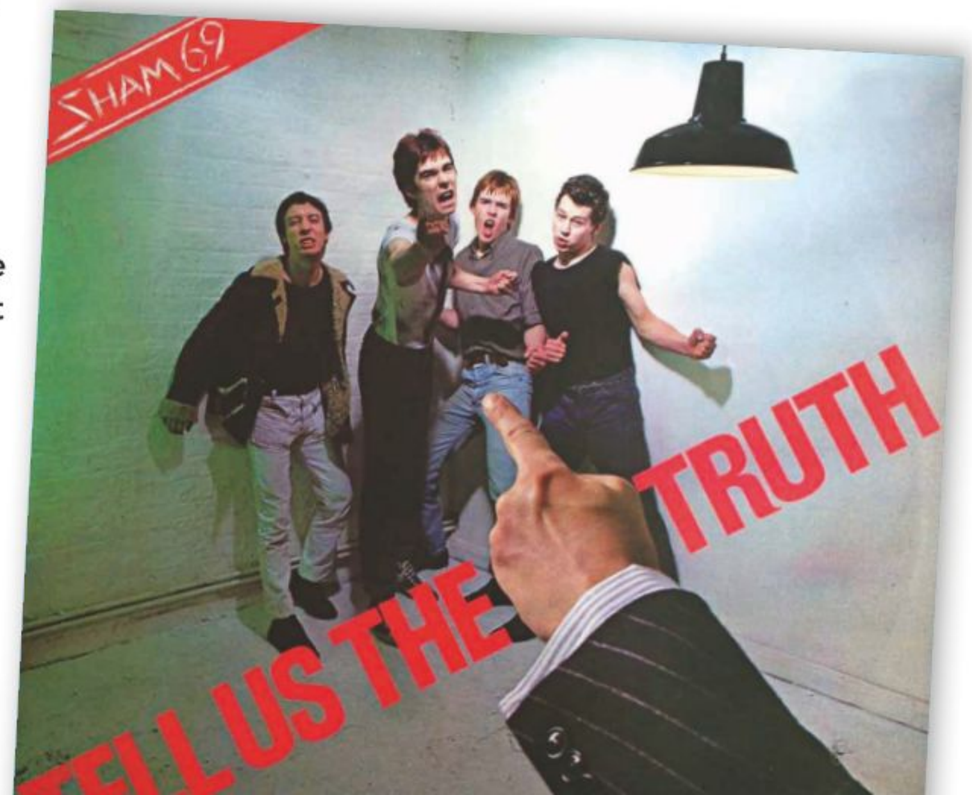
The Adverts Crossing The Red Sea With The Adverts BRIGHT

Once upon a time, the fastest way of revealing yourself as an Old Fart Who Didn't Understand The New Wave was to allege – in even the mildest and most non-derisive terms – that occasionally the musicianship left something to be desired.

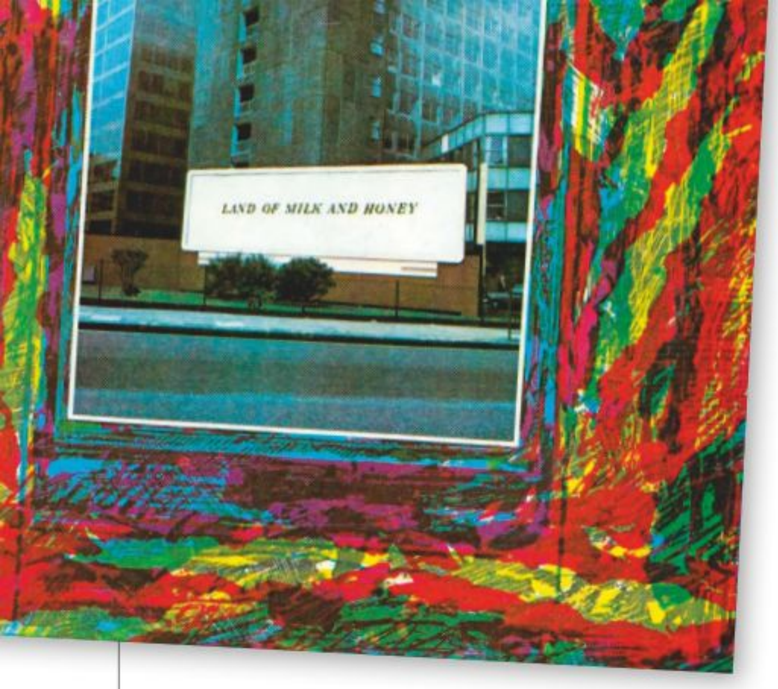
It is now – by my reckoning, at least – late February of 1978, and most of the new-wave bands who're still around have obtained a sufficient command of their instruments to do justice to their material. The Clash and the late lamented Pistols got to be very good very fast. The Damned and The Stranglers and The Jam played good right from the beginning. The likes of XTC and Magazine cheated by having been good musicians before the new wave even got started.

The Adverts are in the curious position of having one of the best lead singers currently functioning, and a repertoire of some highly interesting songs (good words, good chewns, nifty chord changes) while still being total musical featherweights despite having gigged solidly for well over a year.

I don't know how they do it. They even open the album with "One Chord Wonders", a reprise of their first single for Stiff, which deals rather sardonically with this problem. The fact that the intervening period between the Stiff session and this one



GEORGE WILKES ARCHIVE / GETTY



hasn't improved their rather ramshackle playing by one iota could be interpreted as some kind of amusingly ironic gesture, or simply as an indication of loyalty to old ideas of determined amateurism.

Laurie Driver (drums) thumps away enthusiastically, the very lovely Gaye Advert (bass) thumps away somewhat less so, with the result that she drags the beat ever so slightly all the way through, a state of affairs not particularly improved by guitarist Howard Pickup's rather Mickey Mouse sound. The end result is more Garage Band Purist than anything else, especially when you take the sophistication of the material into account.

As stated above, TV Smith writes and sings very well indeed, "One Chord Wonders" is a song of more than a little wit, and "Gary Gilmore's Eyes" (regrettably not included here, though its B-side, "Bored Teenagers", puts in an appearance) was truly excellent.

"No Time To Be 21", the current single, "The Great British Mistake", "Drowning Men", "On Wheels", "New Boys"; all fine songs with an odd tint of fluorescent psychedelia infiltrating the monochrome.

If The Adverts could learn to play these songs in any manner other than the most totally obvious bang-their-way-through-the-chords manner – or at least bang their way through the chords with one quarter of the zap and flair of the Ramones or the Pistols – they'd be one of the most exciting bands around.

Can you imagine these songs played with the kind of raunch that Steve Jones and Paul Cook could bring to them? Gaye's certainly no worse a bass player than Sid Vicious.

Unless the Adverts can be ramshackle and unmusical in as exciting a manner as The Velvet Underground, they'll be in the unusual position of having a repertoire to which they are simply not competent to do full musical justice.

Weird one. Be glad it ain't your problem (unless you're TV, Gaye, Howard or Laurie, in which case – hi!!!).

Charles Shaar Murray, NME Feb 25

Meatloaf Bat Out Of Hell EPIC

Not since Jim Morrison has there been such a self-conscious writer of rock songs as poetry as Jim Steinman, who has penned all the material on this album.

His words almost leap right off the lyric sheet and screech in your ear, 'This is Art!', so eager is he to impress with his knowledge of the various forms of verse. Thus we get the three-part "Paradise By The Dashboard Light", which includes alternate stanzas by "Boy" and "Girl". And there's a snatch of spoken verse before "You Took The Words Right Out Of My Mouth" that appears to be there for no reason in particular.

Sounds like some kind of elaborate joke, doesn't it? Yeah, that's what I think, especially on examining the lyrics closely and discovering that at least two of the songs betray an impish sense of humour; "You Took The Words Right Out Of My Mouth" and "For Crying Out Loud" are both based on literal interpretations of those two phrases.

But the clincher is that Todd Rundgren is at the controls, arranging everything in the most overblown manner possible. He and his band, Utopia, also supply most of the instrumentation; if it had been left to Steinman, one suspects that they wouldn't have had much to do, as the tunes aren't up to much; Rundgren, however, finds work for all by filling up every space in the music with sound.

However, there is a saving grace in this pretentious rubbish – the title track, an aggressive song about a motorcycle crash (into which Steinman injects every urban nightmare cliche in the book) which goes so far over the top one can only marvel.

Not for nothing is this album on the Epic label. *Michael Oldfield, MM Feb 18*




ABBA: bludgeoning pop at its best

SINGLES REVIEW 1978

SINGLES

ABBA
Take A Chance On Me EPIC

A new ABBA single should herald a bank holiday for the rest of rock'n'roll, especially when it's of this class. On the one hand they are two cosy couples who define affluence in the Western World. On the other they are an extraordinary Europop conglomerate/institution, not completely real. Marionettes imbued with unsettling talent. Fantasy over. The single erupts in a multi-decked a-cappella bonanza only to settle on an utterly simple rhythm that is bludgeoning pop at its best. *MM Jan 14*

Kate Bush
Wuthering Heights EMI

Bizarre. Kate is a complete newcomer, is 19, was first unearthed by Dave Gilmour and has spent time with mime coach to the stars Lindsay Kemp. The theatre influence comes through strongly, from the cover (all Chinese Cracker exotica) to every aspect of Kate's song. The orchestration is ornate and densely packed but never overflows its banks. Kate's extraordinary vocals skating in and out, over and above.

Reference points are tricky, but possibly a cross between Linda Lewis and *Macbeth*'s three witches is closest. She turns the famous examination text by Emily Brontë into glorious soap-opera trauma. "*It's me... Cathy... come home... so cold... let me in*". Could it be the rustle of the wind on the window sill? *MM Jan 14*

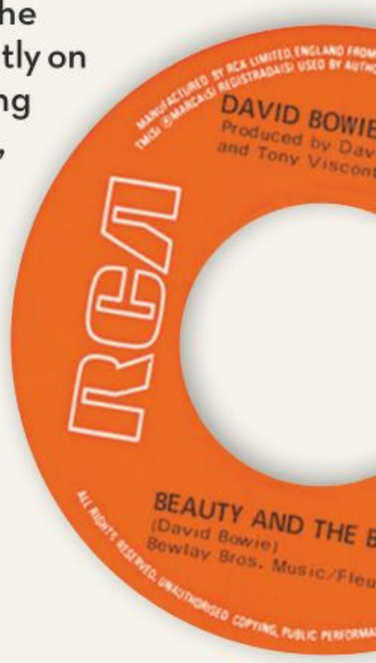
David Bowie
Beauty And The Beast RCA

The advertising campaign goes: There's Old Wave, There's New Wave, And There's David Bowie. I hate to agree with such straplines, but in this case, the RCA publicity department are right. You will know the track already as the album "*Heroes*" (whence it comes) will be second nature by now. Less accessible in a *TOTP* sense than the single "Heroes", it still stands a slight commercial chance. A metallic stridency. A mutated brashness. "*Someone fetch a priest/You can't say no to the Beauty and the Beast...*" *MM Jan 14*

Pere Ubu
The Modern Dance/Heaven IMPORT

More Ohio exotica from one of *the* cult bands of the moment, apparently on the verge of signing with Mercury. It is, in fact, their fourth single (hunt out the previous "Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo", "Final Solution" and "Street Waves") and their level of controlled experimentation continues to sharpen and transform. The band claim the music is closely linked to Cleveland, Ohio, itself: bleak open spaces, consuming steel mills and industrial waste. "Heaven" has a reggae lilt, background whispers, a muted synthesizer wash, lively metallic guitar break and rough-edged vocals. "Dance" starts on bird-like squeaks, developing into a bizarre call-and-response format. The vocals this time are like a hybrid of Roger Chapman and factory grime.

A one-dimensional, unsettling melody interspersed with the stuff of distant night-mares. Totally unique. *MM Jan 14*





PETER BISCHOFF / GETTY

1978

JANUARY—MARCH

“I’m a girl, and they’re not used to that”

BLONDIE fever is mounting, and revealing a quantity of sexist attitudes. However, DEBBIE HARRY, 32, shows no sign of strain. “The reason I don’t look as old as I really am is because of the junk and the yoga,” she reveals.

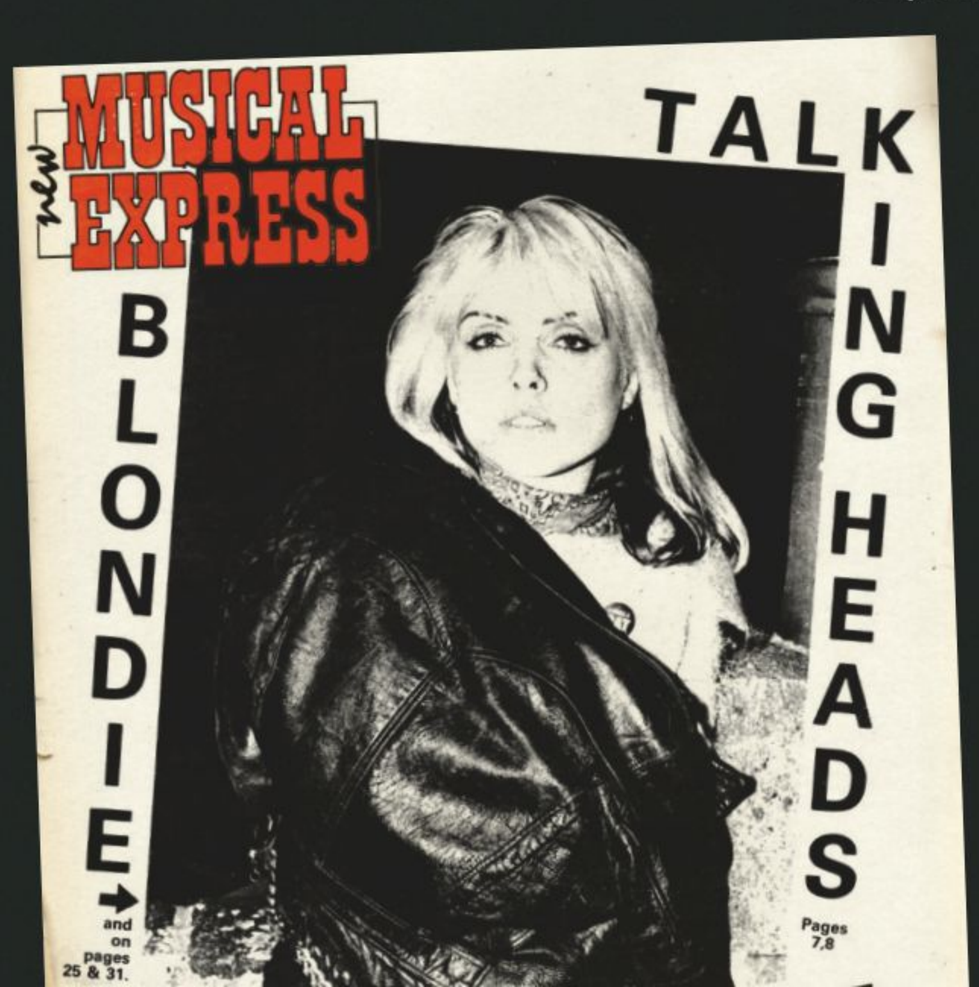
— NME FEBRUARY 4 —

EXCESSIVE HYPOCRITICAL BLISS is the ultimate rock’n’roll lifestyle. Sometimes you wonder if musicians wouldn’t swallow a cesspit if that’s what it took to keep royalty cheques pouring in. Joe “White Mansion, I Wanna Mansion” Strummer rooms with lisping debs in accommodation suitable for cropped-heirs of the Habitat fortunes; John Lydon crooned Sid’s “Belsen Was A Gas” before Uncle Mal’s verbal excrement became so profuse that even Lester Bangs wouldn’t have been able to digest it; Bob “Credibility By Association” Geldof regards the inclusion of Tory-Rock classic “Looking After No 1” on K-Tel’s *Disco Explosion* album as (smirk) “ultimate subversion”…

And so it goes, so it goes, and where it’s heading everyone knows, is a numbered Swiss wank account. Or as Fee Waybill of The Tubes defines it: “I’ll do anything for our audience. I’ll kiss their ass if only they’ll buy our albums. Then when we’ve sold a million, I’ll shit over everyone!”

You just gotta concede, when it comes to jaded cynicism – it’s gotta be hippy menopause. And Debbie Harry (Blondie by any other name remains the same) traded integrity for ingratiating self-abuse at the tail-end of 1977 when headlining the pseudo-prestigious Finsbury Park Rainbow. The chauvinistic Boys Club tosspots in the audience had been at Blondie’s gigs in the UK right from her debut supporting Television back in the spring of ’76, of course, but in those days Debbie treated the perennial locker-room jock-schlock syndrome with the contempt it deserves.

“Yeah, same problem here as everywhere else,” she sneered at the buddy-buddy Man Must Have His Mate misogyny, her voice thick with vitriolic contempt, proud and feisty as she rejected the servile role expected from her gender. She blew Verlaine and co off stage and sent the Boys Club scurrying home with their macho talcum powder spilling out of their padded Y-Fronts. »



CHRIS GABRIN / GETTY



"In New York they just sit at their tables and stare blankly at the stage": Debbie Harry fronts Blondie in the US in 1978

ALBUMS REVIEW 1978

Blonder, blander

NME FEB 4 Vying egos mar Blondie's second.

Blondie Plastic Letters CHRYSALIS

Bearing in mind that "you might just as well fall flat on your face as lean over too far backward", it's a good job Blondie aren't out on the edge.

Old, cold and cuddly Debbie Harry fails to raise that dangerous rhythm within Blondie's new "democratic" pose. The bassist has been replaced and a superfluous guitar added, leading Blondie's hired enthusiasts to tout the product as "a deeper and infinitely more substantial sound that allows for repeated listening".

For the wide-eyed and earless, maybe. The lead guitarist has swooned to too many Lita Ford axe binges, while the little twiddles of "deeper" and "substantial" electric progress niggle at my patience with all the allure of crumbs in the bed.

Gone is the soft-focus cameo clarity skimming the waterfront of a blonde's lifestyle – surfing, vice raps, gang warfare, Chinese girls, giant ants and catfights. Instead *Plastic Letters* broods over lechers, crushes and misery in finely graded grey. Awkward echoes of The Beach Boys, B-feature cliches and Iggy Pop, these sources are milked in desperation, by no means indelibly stamped even after three decades of media memories and teenage awe.

Almost every song in Blondie's first collection could have been written 15 years ago (what higher praise?). Here, only the cover version and imminent single "Denis" could survive in the jukebox jungle. Efforts such as "I Am Always Touched By Your Presence, Dear", "Contact In Red Square" and "I Didn't Have The Nerve To Say No" choke on their own cute narrowness, at once both indulgent and throwaway.

The new egalitarianism does not unite the band but shatter it, each member making his bid for stardom, bursting fervently into fruition whenever Debbie takes a break. Their attempts to so impress their personalities have somehow blurred Debbie's own irresistible caricature of a voice that reflects the shades of Nico, Siouxsie Sue and Patti Smith. Her emotion-by-numbers tones and Destri's pure and tawdry Farfisa organ wallow in the mediocrity of the levelling mix and the nose-to-the-grindstone pose the posse now strike.

That singularly antiseptic crispness of sound and diction are as dead and buried as the leader of the pack; one-syllable words are tugged into three-beat yawns. "Denis" is the exception, a Spectoresque reject spliced with a verse of French dressing, which Debbie swallows in one gulp.

Plastic Letters is a blander, blonder version of another New Jersey girl who didn't get the chance to record her heroes, roots and American dreams until she'd sat it out for 30 years. The first rites boiled over with suppressed energy and imagery. Fun, fun, fun till her ego takes her talent away.

"*I sold my one vision for a piece of cake*"... Blondie scurried in on the crest of an alternative ticket to the tiresome Awopbopatowerblock tirades already angling for a strangehold last summer, but the longest lingering aftertaste of *Plastic Letters* is a plea To Be Taken Seriously, no different from all the other dole-queue diplomats.

Debbie Harry turned stylistics into an art form and thought that "Getting it together in three minutes" was the whole point – that's why at Hammersmith Odeon on her first English visit she made Tom Verlaine about as relevant to rock'n'roll as Whistling Jack Smith. But now she's surrounded by too many people too ambitious on their own behalf.

"Sit down, man. You're a bloody tragedy," said James Maxton as Ramsay MacDonald addressed the House of Commons for the last time. Debbie Blondie might be wise to give her consorts the same advice.

Julie Burchill

"The lingering aftertaste is a plea To Be Taken Seriously"



So different six months on from that gig when Blondie headlined at the Rainbow. When the putrid cat-calls came on that night, Debbie was content to swallow them smiling.

"Get 'em off!" bawled some pathetic shit-head, and all Debbie could come back with was a coy curtsey, cute pinky-finger modestly placed under chin and bashful lowering of eyelashes. Then she purred, "I didn't have the nerve to say no," and went into the song of the same name. Less than half a year before she would have made them choke on it; now she could be warming up a Stranglers crowd, her demeanour sucking up to the dumb Johns for the length of nothing but the show, but that was more than enough to shatter to smithereens any initial illusions concerning the future of Debbie Blondie.

It was tragic. She could have given Cilla Black lessons in tugging forelocks... WHAT HAPPENED, DEBBIE???

"I'd sooner have hecklers than no reaction at all," Debbie smiles glibly over her Kensington hotel pea soup and salad. "In New York they just sit at their tables and stare blankly at the stage. I hate that..."

Yeah, but you can't like the taste of that shit, and I ain't talking about your lettuce, Debbie. The sweet celluloid visage melts into grudging admission. She's become accustomed – too accustomed – to hacks coming over their carbon paper at the mention of her moniker, but she is refreshingly open when she doth suss that your humble hero has no intention of using a Blondie feature to get his leg over his Imperial Good Companion typewriter.

But, as she sings on the opening cut of her new *Plastic Letters* album, "*I sold my one vision for a piece of the cake/ I haven't ate in days*"...

"The difference in the media's attitude to a boy or a girl on stage infuriates me," she seethes. "If a band full of men is on stage and an audience of girls are screaming at them, then everything is as it should be... but if it's a girl on stage, then suddenly everything is cheap. Reaction to me has to be cheap because I'm a girl and they're not used to that. If it was the Bay City Rollers up there, then everything would be cool."

Debbie hisses through capped Ultrabrite dentures. "The attitude to women in rock is totally sexist," she affirms, and then shrugs with revealing finality, faintly resentful, white-flag resignation. "I might not like it when a crowd shouts at me," she asserts, "but I certainly *thrive* on it. I accept that it's something that is always gonna be there..."

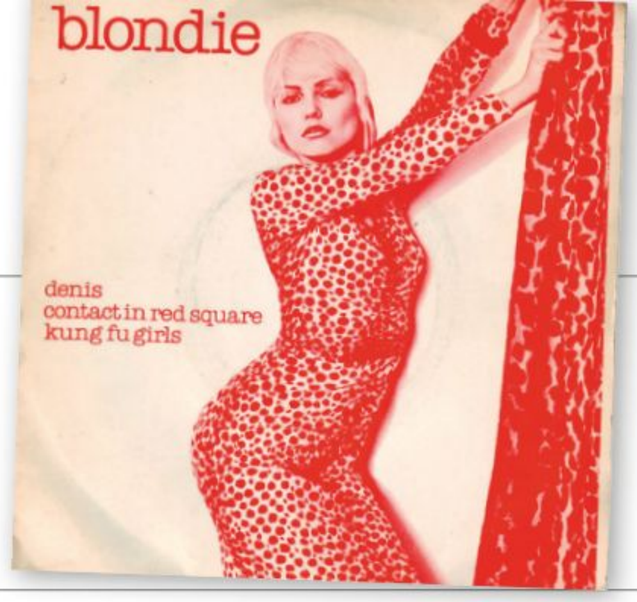
Because you didn't have the nerve to say no? Is it any wonder, then, that your record company posts ads in the rock trade papers with nudge-nudge, say-no-more corny innuendos, like the most recent one with the caption "Wouldn't You Like To Rip Her To Shreds?"

"I was *furious* when I saw that!"

Like, The Youth/Rock Culture (ha ha ha!) is as obviously willing to bow in subordination to the massive Team Game closet market as any other grey-flannel industry lusting for the quick buck, and with the current Boys Night Out atmosphere purveying the gig-circuit changing rooms – Sham 69 dating "The Lewisham Boys", The Stranglers going steady with "The Hell's Angels" and sometimes "The Finchley Boys", etcetera, one can most effortlessly gauge the considerable, uh, units such a reactionary element of the lumpenprole (*uh-oh – Cliche City – Ed*) explosion could consume. But to come on with this "Wouldn't You Like To Rip Her To Shreds?" bullshit, ain't your motives oh so pretty blatant?£?£?£???

"Listen, I was *furious* when I saw that fuckin' ad! I told them not to fuckin' put it out any more – and they didn't!"

Debbie says that the thing that cuts deepest is when she hurts her parents. "When I first started getting interviewed and talked about being a junkie and a groupie – which is the truth, right? – when my mom and dad saw it in print it



really hurt them, and I hated that more than anything." Debbie sighs. "But it was the truth."

She looks up from the pea soup hopefully. "Do you like Donna Summer? It's commercial, but it's good, it says something… 'I Feel Love'… that's the kind of stuff that I want to do."

THE INFLATABLE DOLL seems to smile, like it's constantly saying "cheese". Never mind the dignity. Three-and-a-half decades in the USA is gonna erode any starlet's self-esteem.

"I managed to remain looking so young because I'm mentally retarded," Debbie quips lamely, her insecurity caused by the steadily advancing years and the knowledge that a pretty face may last a year or two but blonde bombshells in their thirties wake up one day to the realisation that sooner or later they won't be able to promote themselves forever through the luxury of their looks.

"I'm mentally retarded… actually, I think the reason that I don't look as old as I really am is because of the junk and the yoga. There's something about junk that seems to kinda freeze the way you look, but, of course, it's only applicable if you've got some degree of physical fitness – which I got through yoga and, say, Johnny Thunders got through being a pro baseball player before he got involved in rock'n'roll."

But every junkie's like a setting sun… the glorification of smack in rock'n'roll strikes me as the same self-pitying martyrdom that Lenny Bruce defined in an astounding display of verbal wanking as, "I'll die young but it's like kissing God." If you hadn't been strung out on junk, Debbie, you might have been at this stage in your career when you were 15 years younger.

"Sure," she nods. "The only reason I'm doing all this at a much older age than most people is simply because for so many years I was just so totally fucked up… I knew that this was what I always wanted to do, but I was just too much of a physical and mental wreck to get it together…"

Were there any times when you thought you'd never manage to overcome all those self-induced problems? "Plenty," she says.

The cost of the pre-Blondie years has left Debbie Harry with the tendency to compromise that made the Rainbow show such an anticlimax after the stunning Hammersmith debuts earlier last year… from the fervent soul-shoes of a Peppermint Lounge suffragette to inanimate, photogenic, lip-smacking victim. "I didn't dance at all at the Rainbow because I thought the English kids would consider that to be too… frivolous."

No threats, ma babe, but she'd come up from worse than nowhere and was willing to play it straight with the dumb Johns if that's what she had to do to avoid going back to where she once belonged. The waste of initial potential was tempered with the bitter irony that, despite the sublime '70s AM radio pop classics on her first album, Blondie Debbie possessed infinitely more street-life credentials than all those art-school punks still living at home with the folks put together.

ESCAPING FROM HER cosy New Jersey silver-spoon college-education background, the ex-cheerleader took off for the promise of bright-light New York, first spending her nights with the avant-garde jazz musicians in St Mark's Place and later, in the summer of '67, dropping acid and clinking finger cymbals in a band of rancid hippies known as The Wind In The Willows. After the band split she waited tables for the Warhol crowd at Max's Kansas City and says that the highlight of the job was getting laid in the tiny phone booth upstairs.

Leaving the streets of Babylon to become some old millionaire's sexual trophy in Bel-Air [Harry worked as a Playboy Bunny], she pined for the junk of New York after just four weeks and was soon immersed once more in the heroin substrata, keeping her habit going in the customary junkie's evening job. "I was stoned for most of the time and I wanted the money," she reflects. "It was pretty disgusting work. When I stopped doing junk, I didn't need the money any more…"

She went cold turkey at a Woodstock art commune and, in New York in the early '70s, she was hanging out at the Mercer Arts Centre, where the New York Dolls were the resident house band.

"I was a groupie," Debbie states. "I loved the Dolls, knew them ever well, and I was starting to think that it was about time that girls should do

> "Talking about being a junkie and a groupie really hurt my mom and dad"

something in rock'n'roll… So me and my boyfriend Chris Stein – who I'm still with and who's the guitarist in the band now, right? – formed The Stilettos, which later became Blondie."

Debbie reckons that the initial sense of community among the NYC bands to come out of the Max's/CBGB breeding ground – Ramones, Talking Heads, Richard Hell, Heartbreakers, Television, Blondie and others – has been totally lost as the lust for success overruled the early camaraderie and resulted in much bitching, jealousy and outright hostility. "Hey, have you heard the latest gossip from New York?" she bubbles. "David Johansen and his wife have split up! They only just got married! She ripped up all David's clothes and ran off with Steven Tyler of Aerosmith! I think David's a great guy, but *her*…"

Who made the decision to play Dingwalls? Was it because the Rainbow was so disappointing and you wanted to get back to doing small gaffs? "Yeah, it's the first small club that Blondie have played in three years. I think that maybe it was too small, and the sound was certainly terrible, wasn't it? We only did it because our record company told us that the press like going to Dingwalls… so that's why we did it."

The band seem much more into democracy these days – both live and on record, all the members getting a turn in the limelight doing solos (yawn), the overall effect being to distract from the power that Debbie had wielded over her audience the first time I saw her. She agrees with this but asserts that she prefers it this way. "The new album is much more… electronic."

She find the new lineup of Blondie a lot happier than the version of the band that cut the first album, out of which only Chris Stein and Debbie herself remain. I ask her if it's much of a strain living with a member of her band. "Not any more, although me and Chris did used to fight all the time when we were in The Stilettos… but we have a great relationship now."

I can't help noticing just how camp the Blondie camp appears to be these days and wonder how much that's got to do with it. "I'm very much into psychic exploration and psychic communication," reveals Debbie, anxious to shrug off the Dumb Blonde tag. "Once, in bed, Chris asked a question and I gave him the answer… in my sleep." I am suitably awed. "I'm rilly into psychic communication and psychic exploration."

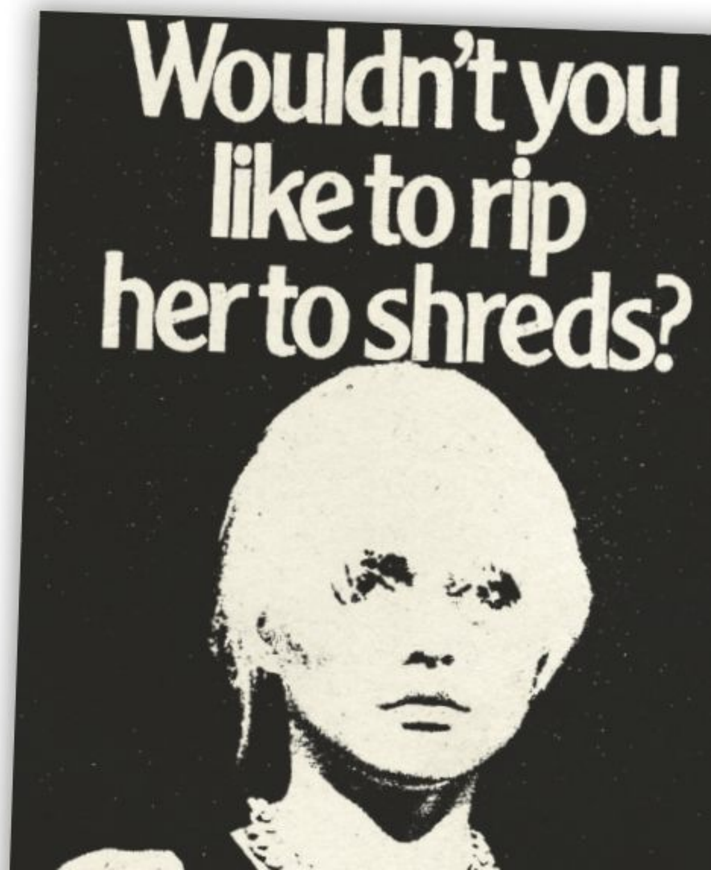
AS I'M LEAVING, Debbie gives me a couple of Lenin badges that she picked up when Blondie stopped off at Moscow on their way back from their recent tour of the Far East.

"I'm not a communist, I'm a humanist," Debbie tells me. "That's what the attraction is to Lenin… Once, the FBI were tapping my phone because this left-wing film director who was making a movie about who really killed John F Kennedy was coming round to my apartment to smoke dope… You could hear that they were listening in every time you picked up the phone. It's funny, they don't care about communism so much in England, do they?"

Maybe the reason they're so sensitive about it in the States is because of the extremities of wealth and poverty and the people on the top of the heap don't like the idea of any redistribution. Debbie flashes her pearly-whites and her blue eyes sparkle. "Your name's already on the list," she smiles.

When I get back to the office there's a copy of the new "Rip Her To Shreds" single and enclosed with it is a personally autographed letter from Debbie Harry in Tokyo that was posted in Los Angeles and written in finest press-officer colloquialism meant to convey an atmosphere of warmth, friendship and understanding between the receiver and The Star.

The letter was mass-produced, of course, and although the forged Debbie Harry signature was quite a good imitation, the Gift From Tokyo with an LA postmark was a commercially crass dead giveaway. You're probably expected to keep it forever. *Tony Parsons* •



"Very cleverly worded"

Come woodwind, brass or fire! HOWARD DEVOTO explains the origins of what *NME*'s man calls the first "post-punk" group, MAGAZINE. Wired and theatrical, Devoto is an engaging presence on stage, trying to give as much "density" as he can. "I do tend to get a little oblivious," he says.

— NME FEBRUARY 25 —

HOWARD DEVOTO GIVES good face. Unlined and triangular, topped with a vast expanse of forehead; the kind that popular folklore maintains is the unmistakeable dead-giveaway telltale characteristic of The Intellectual. With such a forehead, a man could establish his credentials in that arena just by standing around and looking enigmatic. Check it: having a high forehead (never say "receding hairline": it's cruel to mock) gave Brian Eno intellectual credibility long before his music did.

Devoto's face fits his music as if they'd been designed to match by some bright art student: he could be a 2,000-year-old man who'd discovered the secret of eternal youth in his early twenties. He has the air of a man who's been *somewhere else*: on stage he gives the impression that he's just been somewhere other than a sleazy dressing room, that he's arrived at the gig by time/space warp and that the fact doesn't bother him unduly.

And it's all down to face and demeanour – simultaneously fierce and abstracted. When he sings he grips his microphone like it was the only thing between him and annihilation; when he's finished his verse or song he relinquishes it contemptuously as if it were some totally useless appendage, a crutch he no longer needs because he can walk again unaided.

The effect is impressive: his demeanour lends authority to his music, a direct reversal of the usual scam whereby the music lends authority and justification to the antics of the performer. It was seeing him on *So It Goes* last year that got me interested; never having seen him with Buzzcocks (admission of first omission) or even heard the *Spiral Scratch* eepee that is the only recorded documentation of his period with the band (admission of second omission), I was unprepared and therefore impressed with the personal power and authority with which he carried himself.

That TV spot was taped on his second gig with Magazine.

Magazine is Devoto's new band: straight from the off they were a band to watch. The new wave has changed a lot of people's ideas about a lot of things, notably the amount of time which a band has to spend slogging around before media people take notice of them – the most extreme case being a group who got an interview and picture in *Snouds* before they'd even bought all their gear, let alone done anything as vulgar and futile as play – but even so it was unusual for a band to get on TV with their second gig before they'd even released their first single.

Saying that Howard Devoto has a cult following is like saying that King Kong was a big hairy gorilla: it's superficially accurate »



GUS STEWART / GETTY



"I'm a very responsible person": Howard Devoto on stage with Magazine in 1978

but doesn't really convey the full-scale picture. On that *So It Goes* he came on with the most powerful presence I'd seen since the first time I clapped eyes on Johnny Rotten or Elvis Costello or Ian Dury. The kind of guy who's going to get a big hoopla but who deserves it.

Wham, a first single: the darkly powerful "Shot By Both Sides" – thunderous, melodramatic, richly textured, naggingly memorable, paranoiac, self-important, an adolescent fantasy captured and expressed with adult power – bam, a first hit and a curiously unimpressive and unexpressive *Top Of The Pops* where Devoto appeared too static and sluggish behind rather silly eye makeup and where John McGeoch's guitar solo came out and said what Devoto's vocal performance merely hinted at. By next week they'll be a big deal. The most convincing post-punk band so far. The true inheritors of the mantle of the original Roxy Music.

THE "F" CLUB in Leeds is a reggae/punk crossover no-man's-land. Small, grimy and lively, with a spattering of incongruous tables and chairs provided for the benefit of those unwilling to get pogoed on but who want to get – to co-opt Mr Zimmerman's felicitous phrase – just far enough in to be able to say that they've been there, it plays music compounded of equal parts of reggae, new wave and David Bowie.

The customers vote with their asses as to what they want to dance to, and "Heroes" emerges as something of a clear winner. In between records, forthcoming gigs at this and other venues are announced.

The instrumental members of Magazine – guitarist John McGeoch, bassist Barry Adamson, drummer Martin Jackson and newest addition Dave Formula (keyboards) had spent the period between the soundcheck and the gig sitting around in a Chinese restaurant waiting for a large and expensive paid-for-by-visiting-firemen-from-Virgin-Records-type meal.

It arrived just in time for the assembled company to eat the first course and then light out. Devoto didn't join us for dinner. It's his habit to lock himself up in a room by himself before performing. This solitary sequestering is but one of his eccentricities: another is never doing interviews on the same day as gigs or recording (when he does do interviews, that is).

Does he meditate, read or cloister himself in the bog to take painful giant shits? "It's just to clear my head, stamp up and down the room a bit and to sleep. I frequently sleep. I'm trying to get out of the habit now, but it's a bit like I'm conditioned to it at the moment. I just sleep for half an hour to an hour. It's impossible to arrange things so that I can get in about eight hours and then walk onto the stage. That's just not possible, but I've been able to get in the odd hour.

"I don't know whether it's a good thing either. It got to the point where it was all part of a ritual. This had to happen and then this had to happen and then I had to have a sleep and then this and this would happen and it'd be the gig. At one of the gigs none of that happened, and it was one of the… it was a good gig."

More prosaically, Devoto probably spends a certain amount of his meditation hour putting on his eye makeup.

Does he find ritual comforting or worrying? "I don't really indulge in it very much. I suppose only at important moments, and I suppose in that way it is comforting, but I'd become worried if I was living a ritual all the time…"

The opening of Magazine's set is an excellent double-bluff, one that will undoubtedly achieve the status of ritual if they keep using it. Of course, then it'll become like a conjuror's trick when the audience knows how it's done; a favourite bedtime story to which all the kiddies know the ending.

See, what happens is this: the band all come on and launch into a near-instrumental with Devoto standing on the extreme left of the stage playing rhythm guitar and wearing a flat 'at pulled down to hide what he describes – wryly, I hope – as his "distinguishing feature". He sings a few bars towards the end, but not enough for an audience unfamiliar to him to suss him instantaneously. Then at the end everyone's looking around expectantly wondering from which end of the stage Devoto is going to appear.

Suddenly – surprise! – the unassuming figure on the end doffs headgear, jacket and guitar and stands revealed in red pants and T-shirt and gleaming scalp as Howard Devoto!

Wowee Howie! And he didn't even have to change in a phone booth! He moves the mic to stage front'n'centre and crashes into "Shot By Both Sides".

The band are excellent: no novices or passengers. McGeoch alternates hard, slamming rhythm with hyper-thyroid screaming lead and menacing riffs, Adamson's bass is an agile anchor, Formula's keyboards add texture, depth and witty, adept solos and special effects, and Jackson never lets the pressure drop for an instant.

Owing to the layout of the club, it's impossible to decipher much that Devoto sings or says if you're standing right at the front. If you're hearing material with which you're familiar from records under such circumstances it's not much of a problem – after all, as someone once said, at gigs one doesn't so much wish to hear lyrics as to be reminded of them – but when dealing with unfamiliar songs it can be somewhat annoying.

The only numbers thus recognisable, therefore, were "Shot By Both Sides", which as well as opening the set proper also closed it, the old Buzzcocks chewn "Boredom", and the set's sole non-original, John Barry's "Goldfinger" from – natcho – the movie of the same name.

Devoto gives the impression of being slightly offended when I ask him if "Goldfinger" is included for its "amusement potential.

"Thank you very much! No, it was not supposed to be a pisstake of anything. It's a song that I like very much, and I like the version that we've got together of it. I wanted to do a song from that sort of stable of songs and that one just fitted in very well with what the rest of the songs are about."

Which isn't quite as absurd as it sounds. John Barry would seem to be a hilariously unlikely "influence" for a Modern-World band like Magazine, but those menacing tempos and eerie Duane Eddy guitar licks and red-alert horn parts (expertly evoked by Formula's synthesizer) are oddly echoed in much of the rest of Magazine's work, as a casual aural glance at "Shot By Both Sides" should suffice to illustrate.

Howard Devoto sings Shirley Bassey? Why not? It's certainly no weirder than, say, the mayhem wrought by Alex Harvey upon numbers like "Delilah" and "The Impossible Dream".

Their pace and attack (not to mention their clothes) bag them firmly as an outgrowth of the new wave, but their depth, solidity and invention give them a musical strength which should make it worthwhile for people with no taste for ramalamadolequeue and one-two-free-faw to invest a generous quantity of ear-time.

Devoto's dry, crackling vocals are never less than half-buried in the enmeshing drive of the band (an arm and a leg sticking out, you might say) even on record, and maybe they should stay there until he develops more confidence and

> "I'm really not interested in being recognised"



Devoto on stage with Magazine in 1978 alongside John McGeogh (left) and Barry Adamson

ALAMY



power as a vocalist. Remember, he notched up barely a dozen gigs as the Buzzcocks' vocalist, and – Magazine excepted – he had no other performing experience.

At present, he has his moves and expressions down better than his singing. Hopefully, his singing can retain its idiosyncrasies of style and phrasing while gaining in strength and precision.

The kids in Leeds had a strenuous and enjoyable time, leaping and weaving and rocketing in the grand manner without actually seeming to have had their minds totally blown. When Magazine have released a few more sides and everyone knows the songs – learned the words and picked out a few as special faves – that'll change. It's still early on, and Magazine have a lot to learn about the practicalities of performance before they can be said to have reached any kind of peak.

DEVOTO FORMED THE group virtually from scratch after leaving the Buzzcocks, and it is to his credit that he's selected four musicians who are not only gifted individual instrumentalists but who are well on the way to being A Band in the classic sense. Clearly, a man of some taste and imagination.

"They all fell into place very conveniently. I met John through somebody I know, because at that time – it must've been around May – I was just playing around with very vague thoughts. I met him and we got on quite well, worked on about three or four numbers and then he went away for the summer.

"During the summer I decided that I was getting a bit fed up with waiting for him to come back, so I decided that I would try and find the rest of a band so that when he returned we could go straight into rehearsal. And so I stuck up a notice in Virgin Records in Manchester and Barry and Martin and a guy called Bob Dickinson – he was our first keyboard player – answered it. I didn't get a lot of replies to the ad.

"It was very cleverly worded, designed to screen out all sorts of people that I might not want to meet… something like 'Howard Devoto seeks other musicians to perform and record fast and slow music. Punk mentality not essential. Come woodwind, brass or fire.' Something like that, anyway. But I didn't see very many people.

"I saw some people who I was surprised bothered to answer, but I never held any auditions. I just met people and thought, 'I won't call you and cross-fingers you won't call me.' Barry was the first bass player that I tried anything with and Martin was the first drummer.

"It all fell into shape quite easily. Barry decided that I was just the sort of person who needed just the sort of help that he could provide, Martin knew me from the olden days – no, not personally – and it was all really quite easy. Everything just fell into place and John returned."

Did he have any specific vision at the beginning of the kind of group he wanted to be in? "I haven't got specific sounds in my head, but once I start working I discover that I've got impressions of them and (*in comic extra-thick Mancunoid accent*) I know what I like and I know what I don't like."

Devoto's own tastes in music incline towards Bowie and Can, though he also expresses a fondness for Sly & The Family Stone, Bob Dylan and Ornette Coleman ("So you see, I could be quite versatile if I wanted to be").

Does he regard writing, recording and performing as being separate entities or simply different aspects of the same thing? "I tend to see performing as a bit of a different thing. For me the writing comes first, definitely. There again, once you've done the writing, you have a responsibility to yourself to get that over and develop it in its best form for writing and performing…"

Indeed. If nobody had invented rock'n'roll, Devoto would probably have been a poet of the ascetic bohemian variety, and if you think I'm going to drag Samuel Beckett into this, you're crazy. On stage, it seemed that he was moving with remarkable freedom considering the intensely limited stage area available to him. "Well, that's just trying to give as much density and space to a performance as possible. I do tend to get a little… oblivious… on stage. I feel that I'm a very cramped performer, actually.



"I never felt that I was very expansive. If you think about it, it was always… I may move around a lot, but it's always well on the spot."

What does Devoto feel "cramped" by? His own limitations or circumstances imposed by others? "I'm a very responsible person. I always lay it pretty squarely on the line to myself. I find it quite hard to blame other people… so it's me."

So what particular aspects of yourself are you trying to transcend?

"Errrrrrrrrhhhhhmmmmmm…"

The pause is deafening.

"I don't really feel anything like that. I don't really feel that there's something there that I've got to get over. I suppose I'm just feeling around to see if there is anything there that I'm trying to get over."

Devoto professes a fierce aversion to The Rock Business, an aversion that extends to a total boycott of all aspects thereof that don't concern him directly. "I don't really feel a part of it," he says. "I feel a part of my own bit of it, but…"

You won't, therefore, see him listed in T-Zerz as having attended a vast list of gigs or functions, or – for that matter – any at all. The selective awareness that causes him to switch on and off almost visibly when he's performing and which sends him into a locked room by himself before he goes on stage is applied to – ahem – social life as well. I mean, I've heard of reclusive, introvert performers, but this guy's the outside edge of that particular zone.

Virgin Records' PR man, international legend Al Clark, was almost childishly gleeful in Leeds because Devoto – on their third meeting – actually came up and said hello to him without having been previously addressed. "He must be feeling unusually expansive," remarked Droning Al happily.

That's right, you've guessed right. Howard Devoto does not want to be a Star. "I think it's… if I understand what we mean by stardom… do you mean the image?"

No, I mean stardom as a creative endeavour à la Bowie circa '72/'73.

"You mean going through all the motions that say, 'I am a star whether you think so or not and this is quite indisputable by virtue of the fact that I'm in a limousine and the best hotels and I'm surrounded by 50 people at all times'? Is that what you mean?"

No, not quite. I mean stardom as an integral part of the creative process of rock'n'roll. When Devoto fields a difficult question he'll preface his reply or stall for time with what almost amounts to a whimper.

"I can't pin this down… I'm sorry, I can't quite see what you're trying to get at."

OK, let's rephrase it. Are you interested in experimenting with the techniques and processes of stardom?

"Ahhhhhhhmmmmmmm, I am to the extent that it interests me; the whole way the bits other than the music go out to people, but the way the other bits go out – and I'm thinking in terms of image – for some people it would seem to be a very large part of it. I think you have to face up to the way things are down and the way things have been done and the way people see those things, like the ritual of a live performance and…"

Another lengthy and agonised pause. "…because a lot of that determines the way your music is seen, I think. So that if you turn a blind eye to that, you're not precisely cutting off your nose but…"

Playing hell with your complexion? "Yes."

Yeah, but Howard, do you actually want to be a star? "I can't think sensibly about that question at all. What does it mean? What does it mean to be a star? I'm really not interested in being recognised in public places. I'm only interested in it insofar as it does tie in with the songs.

"Ahhhhh, shit! I'm coming out with all the boring shit that I hate reading in other interviews. I love to hear people shooting their mouths off," he announces caustically, "making extravagant claims for themselves, being offensive to people…"

Whether or not Howard Devoto is, in fact, too sensitive to live is a debatable point. To me he's that most irritating of human personality types, the infinitely arrogant introvert, the man who illustrates his contempt not by the bellowed insult but by turning his back. During the photo session which followed our interview, he turned out to be the most uncooperative subject I've yet seen in several years of sitting in on photo sessions. He is in the odd position of courting the world via rock'n'roll, and at the same time punishing it for its shallowness and insensitivity by retreating into reclusion at the slightest provocation.

A couple more things you might like to know about Howard Devoto. His manager is Andrew Graham-Stuart, whose other principal client is Tangerine Dream.

And his real name is Howard Trevor. *Charles Shaar Murray* •



Too samey: Poly Styrene with X-Ray Spex at the Roundhouse, 1978



ROUNDHOUSE LONDON
LIVE!
JANUARY 15

"Weirder than usual"

MM JAN 21 A benefit for the National Abortion Campaign, with X-Ray Spex.

SUNDAY AT LONDON'S Roundhouse, a benefit for the National Abortion Campaign, and a beautifully positive evening. Unless, that is, The Sadista Sisters' satire tumbled into nihilism, which I doubt. I only caught their last number, but they were certainly the most bizarre sight of the evening: eight women in very various stages of exotic and perverse array and disarray.

Dead Fingers Talk were a good choice for the gig, partly because their work is so socially concerned anyway, and partly because it marks the outset of their onslaught on the New Year – their first performance since signing to Pye. Despite linking up with such a traditional company they shouldn't have much trouble picking up interested listeners – they stand quite a long distance away from ragged frenzy music. Jeff Parsons' too fast, too flashy guitar at the end of the encore "Sweet Jane" could, for instance, have staggered out of any hard-rock horror movie.

But it's unfair to focus on that when they put their obvious instrumental ability to such considered, devastating use elsewhere. Their lyrics were usually indistinguishable here, which is a pity, considering their affinity with the Tom Robinson campaigning style, but musically and visually they were so strong that it didn't matter. Vocalist Bobo Phoenix, in particular, was utterly, strangely compelling, whether throwing himself about wildly or hunching his back and dancing manically like a insane insect.

Black Slate I find more difficult to judge. Their performance was, as they said, more like a carnival, but then every reggae gig is a joyous celebration, isn't it?

If DFT were the best group of the evening, Black Slate the most enjoyable, and the National Abortion Campaign the most worthwhile, then what were X-ray Spex? Colourful but monotonous, and piercing as ever. Poly Styrene looked even weirder than usual – very plump, with a red ribbon and staid middle-aged skirt and jacket.

Honestly, I loved the single, but this was all too samey, and there's not enough in the music to compensate for not hearing a word of Poly's lyrics. Except... the climax was good, incorporating a new, slower, more tuneful song, "The Day The World Turned Day-Glo", and "Oh Bondage Up Yours!". And it was great to see women dominating the final stage invasion for a change. *Chris Brazier*

The climax was good. It was great to see women dominating the final stage invasion

REX FEATURES

Short, sharp bursts of power

MM JAN 28/FEB 25 Adam & The Ants overfamiliar; Rush triumphant.

MARQUEE LONDON
LIVE!
JANUARY 19

THE GRAFFITI AT my local station whiles away the loose minutes quite entertainingly with its amalgam of crude jokes, heartfelt messages and propaganda for bands. "Sally is a whore" coexists with "Long live punk but fuck The Clash – they have sold out and are middle-class shit", but all are overruled by the one word "Ants" which stares up at you wherever you turn. That made me want to see the band more than anything I'd heard about them. For a start, they seemed associated with the Kings Road trendi-punks, the I-can-wear-more-depraved-bondage-suits-than-you-aren't-I-cool? set via their manager Jordan, who was hot behind Siouxsie as Fleet Street's favourite rent-a-monster in the early days and went on to star in McLaren/Westwood's Sex/Seditionaries.

That and songs like "Whip In My Valise" suggested just another messy S&M blow-job. But at London's Marquee last week, they weren't so bad. Adam Ant is said to believe so completely in himself and his ability that he acts as a rigorous musical dictator to the rest of the band. He does have a certain presence to back that up – jagged makeup to break up awareness, the occasional Rottenesque intonation, a convincing enough focus for sub-world savagery.

The music is patchy, often descending, as with "Concentration" and "Beat My Guest", into all-too-familiar thoroughly ordinary quickstep drones. But there are as many moments of interest. The spartan dark-wing opening, for instance, on "It Doesn't Matter", slower and more assertive than the norm, trailing rhythmic originality and an appropriate solo from Johnny Bivouac.

"Send A Letter To Jordan" is a bizarre love song veering into the ditch, casting Jordan as a '78 Monroe, an ultimate beauty to whom the message is "Tell her she's a lady". What!

That song is absurd, because Jordan actually goes out of her way to make herself as ugly as possible, setting her hair into long nightmare spikes, and she still has the desired shock-effect even when I know what to expect. She sings just one song, which is either called "Lou" or "New York Coke Joke" and is the Ants' centrepiece. Actually, she doesn't sing it; she bawls and bellows with an incredible throat-tearing screech and a total disregard for the tune. The barrage has immense disorientating impact, and though any more would be agonisingly unbearable, for one song it's a real coup. There is something there, even if I don't know quite what. *Chris Brazier*

RUSH'S ALBUMS BETRAY a band with a sight more erudition than could reasonably be expected from a heavy-metal trio, particularly of the Canadian School, whose pupils' intellect has in the past appeared restricted to counting up to three for the chords. Rush titled their live album *All The World's A Stage*, and quote liberally from *Kubla Khan* in "Xanadu" on their latest, *A Farewell To Kings*.

The audience at London's Hammersmith Odeon on Sunday night didn't, however, look the sort who would appreciate the finer points of the Swan Of Avon or Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Scattered around the stairs on beer-soaked carpets like bundles of denim rags waiting for the wash, they poured into the auditorium at lights-out with all the grace of stampeding buffalo.

At the sound of the first chord being struck, they turned into a pack of baying hounds, streaming down to the front on espying their quarry, and there proceeded to twitch, strum imaginary guitars, shake clenched fists, flash peace signs, and generally display all the symptoms of a crowd of headbangers reaching nirvana.

The audience turned into a pack of baying hounds... headbangers reaching nirvana

HAMMERMSITH ODEON LONDON
LIVE!
FEBRUARY 20

Rush, to their credit, refused to be drawn. Their music, naturally, contains all the elements necessary to smelt heavy metal, but they vary the alloy by mixing in more uncommon ingredients. Alex Lifeson gets to strum an acoustic guitar occasionally, Neil Peart selects tubular bells and triangles from his magnificent array of percussive devices, and Geddy Lee coaxes suitably mystic sounds from a synthesizer.

Their songs, too, veer from short, sharp burst of power, like "Lakeside Park" and "Closer To The Heart" to multi-section pieces like "Xanadu" (which, unfortunately, chopped and changed a little too much for comfort) and "2112". In a word, they have flair. There is confident, thoughtful playing from Lifeson; there are Lee's eerie, high-pitched vocals (he runs Pavlov's Dog's David Surkamp close); and Peart's solid underpinning, undemonstrative but crucial in a band without a full-time bassist (a shame he had to spoil it with a gratuitous drum solo at the end – but that's showbiz).

Their stage show, too, avoids the usual excesses of the genre: intelligent use of lighting rather than the customary three-ring circus, though they did show a proclivity for setting off thunder-flashes at dramatic moments. Still, I'm sure Shakespeare would have bunged a few into *As You Like It* if they'd been available. They'd have loved that down at the Globe. *Michael Oldfield*



Avoiding the usual excesses of the genre: Rush at Hammersmith Odeon, 1978

PETER STILL / GETTY

1978

JANUARY—MARCH

“I prefer to take a risk”

Introducing KATE BUSH, the most original voice of 1978. From mime and Lindsay Kemp, to her introduction by a family friend to the music business, the singer is following a unique path. “I’d like my music to intrude,” the stealth new-wave fan says. “It’s got to.”

— MELODY MAKER MARCH 4 —

BY NOW, THE voice of Kate Bush will have made a full-frontal attack on the brains of the nation. Attack? Not an unreasonable word when you consider the strange, weird quality of Ms Bush’s vocal, captured in all its resonant glory on her first single, “Wuthering Heights”.

Whether attack is construed as compliment or insult is down to the individual, but after an initial reaction of shock – as one reacts to all things foreign – I’ve grown to like “Wuthering Heights” and am presently engaged in learning the finer delights of her competent, if occasionally erratic, first album, *The Kick Inside*.

But first – an introduction to the unknown name and face that is suddenly being hailed as a major new singer- songwriter in Britain. Kate Bush is 19, comes from Kent, is now resident in South-East London, has a pretty face with curves to match, and is more intelligent than the usual singers who have emanated from EMI in such dramatic fashion in the past. The girl has a mind of her own and is not averse to forcefully presenting an opinion (an asset in itself).

She comes from a “good” family. Her father is a GP and she had quite a comfortable childhood. The family itself was always musical, specialising in English and Irish traditional and playing around local folk clubs.

Kate, however, never performed outside the confines of home and was content to learn the basics, starting piano at the age of 11 and quickly finding that she could write her own songs. School was St Joseph’s Grammar School, in Abbey Wood, but apart from her early period in the classroom, it held little fascination.

The explanation in hindsight: “I found it wasn’t helping me. I became introvert. »



BEVERLEY GOODWAY / REX FEATURES

"When I write songs I really like to explore the mental area, the emotional values": the 19-year-old Kate Bush in 1978



June 1978: in a hotel room in Tokyo before performing "Moving" – a No 1 hit in Japan, the only country in which it was released as a single – at a music festival staged in the Budokan



Lindsay Kemp in the title role in his 1977 production of *Salome* at London's Roundhouse. His former pupil Kate Bush helped create the costumes

I guess it was the teachers' system, the way they react to pupils, and I wasn't quite responsive to that."

Nonetheless, Kate quit school at the age of 16 with 10 O-levels, specialising in English and Music and showing an unusual interest in Latin, although she found it an incredibly difficult language to master.

"The reason I left was that I felt I could do something more in tune with my purpose – music."

This she was able to do with the help of an inheritance from an aunt who died. Effectively the money gave her the security to become her own boss and follow her own mind. At one time, just before leaving school, there was an ambition to become either a psychiatrist or a social worker. Both careers made sense to her as an alternative to her first love.

"I guess it's the thinking bit, trying to communicate with people and help them out. The emotional aspect. It's so sad to see good, nice people emotionally dis-served, screwed up, when they could be so happy."

She couldn't have pursued the ambition because she was lousy at physics, chemistry and maths. She agreed that the careers she fancied, psychiatry, social work or music, were in direct contrast. Music is completely self-indulgent and the other is almost charitable.

"I know what you mean. The only reason in the first place that I did think of those things was that I in no way thought that my music could be a career because it's so difficult to make it. It's all a matter of timing and contacts and talent… and luck. I never thought I would have a chance to do that, so I deliberately tried to have a career-orientated ambition, something I could hold on to.

"The reason I chose those sort of things is that they are, in a way, the things I do with music. When I write songs I really like to explore the mental area, the emotional values. Although in a way you can say that being a psychiatrist is more purposeful than writing music, in many ways it isn't, because a lot of people take a great deal of comfort from music. I know I do. It makes you feel good.

"The really important thing about music is that all it is, is a vehicle for a message, whatever your message is. I'm probably a lot better at being a songwriter than I would be a psychiatrist, for instance. I might have people jumping out of windows now."

She thinks, then, that her music is a therapy?

"Oh yes, it's very much a therapeutic thing, not only for me. That's a really good word. It really is like a therapy. The message I would like people to receive is that if they hear it and accept it, that's fantastic.

"If they let it into their ears that is all I can ask for, and if they think about it afterwards or during it, that is even more fantastic. There are so many writers and so many messages, to be chosen out of all of them is something very special. The messages? Things that maybe could help people, like observing the situation where an emotional game is being played and maybe making people think about it again."

It's very glamorous to make a statement like that but how true did she think it was?

"It's easy to say everything. Really, all I do when I write songs is try and write something that affects me – something that I feel does have a solution or something that is unexplored. It really is just self-expression, and although I know that a lot of people will just say it's a load of rubbish, I would like to think that there is a message and maybe people will hear it."

On leaving school, Kate took up dancing, because she felt it was an art parallel to music, "another pure art form inasmuch as it's free". The show that inspired her was *Flowers*, a Lindsay Kemp performance at the Collegiate Theatre, London, three years ago. Kemp's mime attracted her and the next day a perusal through *Time Out* magazine uncovered an advertisement for classes by Kemp.

Kemp made an instant impression on Kate, displaying an ease in communication that she had never experienced before. He taught her the importance of disciplining the body before attempting to mime. The association with Kemp lasted only six months; he went off to perform professionally in Australia and she moved on to another class.

She reacts vehemently but positively to my comment that mime appeared to be an upper-class art.

"No, I wouldn't call it an upper-class thing at all. It's probably further away from the upper class than anything else, because they probably find it hard to be free as they are so caught up in all their status problems, and the same probably goes for working-class people in a lot of ways because they always feel this alienation from other people."

Because of her inheritance, Kate didn't have the trauma of desperately searching for a job on leaving school. However, she had decided her career would focus on music… long before.

"The money did enable me to think that I could do it, because I was obviously worried about leaving school and finding myself nowhere. I had strong feelings in not having little securities like a nice little job. I wanted to try and do what I wanted and if it went wrong, OK, but at least try to do it."

During this time, Kate had been staying at home writing songs and accompanying herself on either guitar or piano but not daring to let anyone outside the sphere of family hear her work. Then a friend of the family, Ricky Hopper, who had worked in the music business, heard her material, took an interest and started flogging tapes around the music

KOH HASEBE / GETTY, FRANK BARRATT / GETTY



biz, with little luck. The big break came when Hopper contacted an old friend of his from Cambridge, Pink Floyd's Dave Gilmour.

Gilmour came and heard and liked. Gilmour suggested recording proper demo tapes. He put up the money – "an amazing thing" – for the studio, found Kate a good arranger and the songs were recorded properly. From there it grew. Gilmour introduced Kate to a friend, Andrew Powell, noted for his work with Alan Parsons, and he was to produce the album.

The voice? Ah yes, that voice. Kate is genuinely bewildered at the response her vocal has evoked. She refutes suggestions that she deliberately "cultivated" the voice. "Honest, I just opened my mouth and it came out."

And then came the album. "Wuthering Heights", by the way, emphasises her unique high-pitched vocal more than any other track. Usually, she comes across as a stranger concoction that resembles a Joni Mitchell-Noosha Fox mongrel, which is a fascination in itself. It's a very promising debut, and that it has spawned a hit single already is a surprise to Kate.

"I was so involved with all my artistic frustrations that I never thought of having a hit. I was thinking of all the things that I wanted to be there musically that weren't and vice versa.

"The battle is with yourself, because there's your expression going down there and there's no way you can change it. It's there forever. It is very frustrating to see something that you have been keeping transient for years just suddenly become solid. It's a little disconcerting… but exciting."

At this early stage in her career, Kate appears uncannily aware of the dangers of an early hit. She is determined that her work in music remains an art.

"You see people who are into the glamour and the ego of it and not the work, and really work's what it's all about. It's not anything to do with ego.

"Music is like being a bank clerk. It's still work, only a different channel of energy." *Harry Doherty*

> "Work's what it's all about. It's not anything to do with ego"

— MELODY MAKER JUNE 3 —

THIS WEEK, FRIENDS, we find ourselves in a 350-year-old home enjoying the company of a girl called Kate Bush and a dog named Piggy. Outside, we have her doctor father's surgery and a barn-cum-studio, in a secluded Kent pastoral setting.

This Kate Bush is 19 years old and a budding beauty, though she'd prefer it if you ignore the sex-symbol stakes. She is exquisitely mannered and articulate. In six short months, via a single, "Wuthering Heights", and album, *The Kick Inside*, both of which stayed in the chart for 12 weeks, she has shed the anonymity of a beginner and become, for want of a better word, a star.

Kate Bush is doubtless the success of '78. Should you have difficulty in swallowing the talent of Ms Bush, then consider that she counts many established songwriters and new-wave leaders among her early fans. Bob Geldof, not usually noted for dishing out praise elsewhere, swears by her.

Kate Bush is taking a break from the arduous task of writing songs for her second album. It is not coming along too well. She is finding it a bit stifling to write to demand, but is sure that once the intensity of sitting at her piano returns, so will the songs.

The trouble, of course, stems from the rush of acclaim that greeted *The Kick Inside*, which, with half-a-dozen examples of classic writing and singing, was more a sign of potential than actual realisation of it. "Wuthering Heights" was the proverbial smash, and suddenly the whole world went crazy. Kate made a valiant and successful attempt at keeping it all under control.

The songs for the debut had been written over a period of three years. Because of a number of fortunate encounters, first an inheritance and then the record company (EMI) advance, she could concentrate solely on her writing and dancing without worrying about finance. Dave Gilmour, of Pink Floyd, was impressed enough by her potential to put up the money for proper demos, and Andrew Powell, usually noted for his orchestral arrangements, stepped in to produce her album. With all the business taken care of, Kate was able to "educate" herself.

"Train myself for the… ah… Coming, I guess. I really felt that I wanted to get some sort of bodily expression together to go with the music. Music is a very emotional thing, and there's always a message, and your purpose as a performer is to get it across to the people in as many ways as you can."

The "Coming" came and Kate Bush took everybody by surprise, including herself and EMI, by breaking through immediately. She had insisted that "Wuthering Heights" be the first single, as much for business reasons as artistic ones.

"I felt that to actually get your name anywhere, you've got to do something that is unusual, because there's so much good music around and it's all in a similar vein. It was, musically, for me, one of my strongest songs. It had the high pitch and it also had a very English storyline which everyone would know because it was a classic book."

EMI had wanted to go with another track, "James And The Cold Gun", a more traditional rock'n'roll song. But Kate was reluctant, just as EMI were with the new single, "The Man With the Child In His Eyes", which, musically, is a complete contrast to her first hit. The record company would have opted for a more obvious follow-up in "Them Heavy People".

"I so want 'The Man With The Child In His Eyes' to do well. I'd like people to listen to it as a songwriting song, as opposed to something weird, which was the reaction to 'Wuthering Heights'. That's why it's important. If the next song had been similar, straight away I would have been labelled, and that's something I really don't want. As soon as you've got a label, you can't do anything. I prefer to take a risk."

The relationship with EMI has been good. Kate has been astonished that they've allowed her so much say. But she was very insistent that she should be involved in every facet of her career, to the point where, at such a young age, she has almost been self-managed, with help from friends and family.

"I've always had an attitude about managers. Unless they're really needed, they just confuse matters. They obviously have their own impressions of a direction and an image that is theirs, and surely it should come from within the actual structure rather than from outside. I often think that generally they're more of a hindrance than a help."

Ideally, she would like to exert control over every area to ensure that she is projected as she wants to be. Strangely, very strangely, the pressure and frightening newness of the music business hasn't upset her at all, and she reveals shyly that she somehow feels she has been through it all before. "I wonder if it has to do with the concept of time in some way, in that everything you do, you've done before." (Refer to "Strange Phenomena" on *The Kick Inside*.)

For her, there is an unreal aspect to all that's happened. That she has had a No 1 single, a gold album, television »



September 26, 1978: Kate Bush with her mother, Hannah Daly, and brothers Paddy and John (right) at their home in East Wickham, South-East London

CHRIS MOORHOUSE / GETTY

appearances, interviews, attention. She has held a reasonable balance throughout and generally got through all the hubbub as she would have liked. Disasters were her first television appearances in Germany and England, on *Top Of The Pops*. "It was like watching myself… die. It was a bloody awful performance."

I remember watching with some shock when she appeared on *Saturday Night At The Mill*, hardly the most inspiring rock programme, and thinking those people didn't have a clue what she was about. To them she was a curvy little girl who contorted her figure erotically to a song they didn't give a damn about. Another weird programme to do was *Tonight*. Both, Kate points out, were at peak viewing time.

She doesn't know how she ended up on them. They probably phoned EMI, but there was no way she would be averse to appearing on programmes like that.

"I was reaching an audience that was a little wider spread, and that's incredible. That's what I'm really into. I'm into reaching more than the ordinary market, because I think it's very… not snobby, but something similar, when you're choosing your public, and I think your public should choose you and you should get to as many people as you can, so that as many people as possible can choose you.

"I'm reaching people that have maybe had a totally different life from me and are well ahead of me in many standards, but yet they're accepting me. A lot of older people won't listen to pop music because they have a biased idea of what it is, and that's wrong because a lot of them would really get into some of the music that's around. It's not all punk, and if you can get music to them that they like, then you're achieving something. You're getting into people's homes who have been shut off from that sort of music for years. They're into their Bach… 'Bach is wonderful, but I don't like that pop music.'

"Maybe they do, but they're never given the option. They're always given the music that people might think they like. But I think they're really into exploring."

She would, then, like to be more than just a young people's musician?

"I'd really like to think that there is no age barrier, because that's a shame, and I'd like to think that there's a message in my music for everyone. That's the greatest reward I could get – to get different people getting into different tracks. It really means a lot to think that I'm not just hitting on an area that may be just identified with me, that people are actually identifying with what the songs are about. I'm really not sure where my music is hitting, although I think it is mainly hitting younger people."

All of this involvement – she'd also like to learn to produce – mounts up. At times, the pressure must be unbearable, especially as all Kate's successes have come so fast. But no, she assures me again, the pressures don't come from the hits. She feels more pressure from the future, the fact that she has another album to do and there is so much to live up to.

"It's a great challenge. There's always something good in whatever pressure is around. There's an incredible challenge, and if you can do it and if you come out the other side and even if you lose, you've done it. I think that makes you stronger. The songs for the first album were written over a two-to-three-year period, and now I've got a two-to-three-month period for this one. It's ridiculous, and my admiration for people like David Bowie and Elton John, and Queen – although I'm not into their music – grows all the time. It's incredible how they do it. They do it all. They record and tour and promote.

"That's awesome to me. Incredibly so. I mean, I'm on a little level compared to that. It amazes me that they can keep their brains in a logical order without their speech getting all tangled because there's so much going on."

So what happens when you reach that situation? (There are plans to tour next year.)

"I don't know how I'll cope, but when you're in the situation it's very different. I would have thought it impossible to do what I'm doing now a few years ago, but now I'm here, it doesn't seem that amazing because, really, it's just doing your work on whichever level it is, and I'm really lucky for all the work I've been given."

But you've not had to struggle?

"Yeah, that's true, and it's a little frightening. There was only a struggle within myself. But even if your work is so important to you, it's not actually your life. It's only part of your life, so if your work goes, you're still a human being. You're still living. You can always get a job in Woolworths or something.

"I suppose I would find it very hard to let go, because for me it's the only thing that I'm here to do. I don't really know what else I could do that I would be particularly good at. I could take a typing course, loads of things, but I wouldn't actually feel that I'd be giving anything.

"I think you can kid yourself into destiny. I have never done another job. It's a little frightening, because it's the only thing I've really explored, but then again, so many things are similar. They all tie in. I really feel that what I'm doing is what everyone else is doing in their jobs.

"It's really sad that pressures are put on some musicians. It's essential for them to be human beings, because that's where all the creativity comes from, and if it's taken away from them and everybody starts kneeling and kissing their feet and that, they're gonna grow in the wrong areas."

Everybody associates the whole star trip with material gains.

"But it's wrong. Again, the only reason that you get such material gains from it is because it's so media-orientated. If it wasn't, you'd get the same as a plumber.

"I worry, of course, that it's going to burn out, because I didn't expect it to happen so quickly and it has. For me, it's just the beginning. I'm on a completely different learning process now. I've climbed one wall and now I've got another 15 to climb, and to keep going while you're in such demand is very hard. It would be different if I had stayed unknown, because then it would be progressing."

Kate Bush is a frequently sensuous woman but she has no wish to be hooked as a sex symbol or anything concerned with selling her body (metaphorically speaking) to achieve ambitions. She has, for instance, taken a meticulous interest in EMI's promotional campaign to ensure that the sex angle isn't played.

"The sex-symbol thing didn't really occur to me until I noticed that in nearly every interview I did, people were asking, 'Do you feel like a sex symbol?' It's only because I'm female and publicly seen. The woman is tended to be seen on that level because it gets them through quicker, like the actress who sleeps with the producer makes it.

"That seems so dated, because we're all shifting to a different level now. The woman's position in music is really incredible now. It's getting more and more accepted, if not more than men at the moment. God, there's so many females in the charts.

"I felt very flattered that those people should think of me in those sex symbol terms. That was my first reaction, but it can be very destructive.

For a start, there are so many incredibly good-looking women around, and their craft is in that. They're either models or acting, so their physical image is important. What I really want to come across as is as a musician, and I think that sort of thing can distract, because people will only see you on a superficial level."

She would like to think, too, that being female has nothing to do with her success and that she is being judged primarily as an artist. She has very strong views on the matter.

"When I'm at the piano writing a song, I like to think I'm a man, not physically but in the areas that they explore. Rock'n'roll and punk, you know, they're both really male music, and I'm not sure that I understand them yet, but I'm really trying.

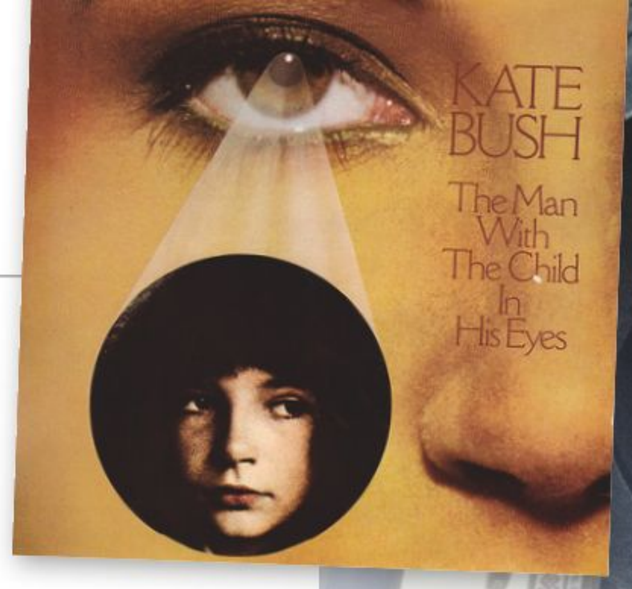
"When I'm at the piano I hate to think that I'm a female, because I automatically get a

> "I really enjoy seeing people do something that isn't normal"



David Gilmour – who funded Kate Bush's first proper demo tape – in Los Angeles, 1978

JEFFREY MAYER / GETTY



preconception. Every female you see at the piano is either Lynsey de Paul, Carole King… that lot. And it's a very female style.

"That sort of stuff is sweet and lyrical, but it doesn't push it on you, and most male music – not all of it, but the good stuff – really lays it on you. It's like an interrogation. It really puts you against the wall, and that's what I'd like to do. I'd like my music to intrude. It's got to. I think that anything you do that you believe in, you should club people over the head with it!

"Not many females succeed with that. Patti Smith does, but that's because she takes a male attitude. I'm not really aware of it as a male attitude. I just think I identify more with male musicians than female musicians, because I tend to think of female musicians as… ah… females. It's hard to explain. I'd just rather be a male songwriter than a female. What it is, basically, is that all the songwriters I admire and listen to are male."

She loves Steely Dan and David Bowie ("I wish I could write constructions like his.") But she was probably most influenced by Bryan Ferry, during his days with Roxy Music and Eno: "It was the moods of the songs. They had a very strong effect on me, because they had such atmospheres.

"I really enjoy some female writers, like Joni Mitchell, but it's just that I feel closer to male writers. Maybe I want to be a man," she laughs. "I like the guts that men have in performing and singing – like the punks. Like the way Johnny Rotten would use his voice was so original, and you get very few females even having the guts to do that, because they unfortunately tend to get stereotyped if they make it.

"I really enjoy seeing people doing something that isn't normal, you know. It's so refreshing. It's like that guy, you know, *'Cor baby, that's really free.'* John Otway. It was amazing watching him perform, and you just don't get females like that."


June 1978: taking time out in Tokyo to visit the city's Zojoji temple

WHAT SURPRISED ME most about Kate, and it shouldn't have because she's only 19, was her awareness of the new wave. She seemed to regard new-wave bands as contemporaries, and her comments about those bands in relation to her work seems to emphasise that.

"I don't regard myself as a rock'n'roll writer. I'd love it if someone said they thought I wrote rock'n'roll songs. That'd be great, but I don't think I am. Some of the punk and new-wave songs are so clever. Quite amazing, really. It's a modern poetry idiom. Some of the lyrics are fantastic, so imaginative, not sticking to a reality level, shooting off and coming back again."

She mentioned The Boomtown Rats as "amazing" and was genuinely ecstatic when I told her of the Rats' fondness for her music.

"Do they? Really? Oh, I didn't think they'd be into me. Great! Fantastic! I wonder if really beautiful punk groups like that – I think The Stranglers are really good, too, there are so many – I wonder if they think I'm… not so much square, but whether they think… ah… square… Sort of oblong.

"I really admire those bands, and I really admired the Sex Pistols tremendously. I don't know if I liked them that much, but some of their songs were great. I admired them so much just for the freshness and the guts, although I did get a hypey vibe off it, and that they were, in fact, being pushed around, because it seemed more an image that was being forced upon them, from what people were expecting.

"I feel apart from those bands, because I feel I'm in a different area, but I really like to think that they get off on me like I do them. That's why I don't see them as contemporaries, because I'm apart. It's not a matter of being above or below them, but if it was, I think I'd be below them.

"I think they're on a new level, inasmuch as… it's hard to explain. They're definitely hitting people that need stimulation. They're hitting tired, bored people that want to pull their hair out and paint their face green. They're giving people the stimulation to do what they want, and I think I'm maybe just making people think about it, if I'm doing anything."

Do you see that as the main difference between your role and others'?

"Yeah. I'm probably, if anything, stimulating the emotional end, the intellect, and they're stimulating the guts, the body. They're getting the guts jumping around. That's a much more direct way to hit people. A punch is more effective than a look. Teachers always give you looks."

Would you like to have that effect on people?

"I don't think I could, because…" She stumbles over the next bit. "…it's not what… I'm… here to… do. I really love rock'n'roll. I think it's an incredible force, but there's something about it that I don't get on with when I write it, maybe because I'm very concerned about melodies in my music, and generally I find rock'n'roll tends to neglect it a bit because it's got so much rhythm and voice that you don't need so much music.

"Some of the new wave, though, is so melodic. Like the Rich Kids [early EMI-produced new-wave band led by Midge Ure]. I'm not really a rock'n'roll writer yet. I'd like to be, though, and I hope I'll become more that way orientated.

"Mind you, I identify with new-wave music. We're both trying to stir something in the attitudes we've got, but I honestly don't know if I'm doing it. I guess I'm more interested in stirring people's intellects. It's longer lasting but not so much fun as new wave.

"The good thing about people like The Boomtown Rats is that not only is it really good, but it's really exciting and fun, and maybe my things are sometimes a bit too intricate to become fun. They're more picking pieces out and examining them. There's very little music on my album that will make you want to stamp your feet violently and hit your head against the wall.

"To actually understand what I'm about you have to hear the lyrics, which is a lot to expect; whereas in something like The Boomtown Rats, it's the complete energy that knocks you over."

Would it upset you if you missed the mark, and people totally misread what you're about?

"It's a lot to expect people to sit down and read my lyrics, and I'd be amazed if many people did. Not many people read poetry, and it's a similar effort. No, it doesn't worry me that much if they don't. That's what I'd like them to do, because that's why I do it.

"But really, I think I've had enough response from people to make me have done enough to fade away now. I've had much more of a chance than most people to get through with a message. From some of the letters I get, it seems that people have understood, and it seems to have helped them a bit. That's all I could wish for." *Harry Doherty* •

KOH HASEBE / GETTY

"Everyone's so extreme"

Always a chaotic ride, THE DAMNED are on the point of coming off the rails. A disappointing tour, backstage barbarity, dropped by Stiff... no wonder Captain Sensible is sounding the death knell of punk.

— NME JANUARY 7 —

LIGHT A CANDLE (black, of course) for the souls of The Damned… It's 4.15 at Stiff Records the day after the final gig of The Damned's less than spectacularly successful tour of Britain, and the Captain Sensible Show is still in full swing.

He's been at it for most of the day and he won't go home. He been answering the phones in his own inimitable manner and driving both incoming callers and the switchboard totally, utterly and completely pineapples in the process. There is a steadily increasing desperation quotient in the Captain's determined assaults on the consciousness of everybody who passes through the portals of Stiff Records and proportional increments of desperation are being displayed by his audience.

Mind you, it ain't necessarily Sensible's fault. Whenever someone new wanders through the door (and in this instance it's a passel of kids from some 'zine or other) they immediately lamp the Captain in mute expectation of some form of deluxe weirdness from him.

Just as long as someone else is the Captain's victim, that is. Then it's cool. Then you can sit around and giggle at the crazy man. Safely. Not to worry. This afternoon, the Captain's dementia is turned strictly against himself, as – ultimately – it always has been. His throat is caked with something that looks like blood. No one cares enough to ask him whether it is. I didn't either. It'd've kinda spoiled the magic, you know?

This time he's wearing a badge – home-made scrawl-over felt-tip job – announcing "The Damned: The Queen Gives Good Blow Jobs" and backing it up with a rap of spectacular asininity in a sort of post-Derek-&-Clive vein (as in jugular) about how the Queen – right? – is gonna be coming round any moment – right? – she wants everybody to be *ready* – right?

And he's in the middle of this inane rant when he suddenly yells, "Your Majesty!" and leapfrogs out into Alexander Street. He stands there in the cold, hauls his jeans and greasy Y-fronts down around his ankles, still yelling. Finally he gets dressed again and comes back in, but by now the company appears embarrassed/compassionate rather than amused/scared/outraged.

Sensible doesn't seem to be having a good time, but he's putting himself on the line for absolutely nothing at all. Another footnote for the Captain Sensible myth – anyfing for a la-a-a-a-rf as long as the beers keep comin'.

Eventually Brian James arrives – *red* shirt *black* levver *blue* jeans *white* shoes – and an expression which resembles a tentative smile that's trying to force its way past a studied scowl. Alternatively, it's a tentative scowl infiltrating a studied smile.

I've known Brian James longer than any of his colleagues: met him a long time ago round Nick Kent's place when he and the Big K were in a band called The Subterraneans (he had long hair in those days, if it matters, but then so did Kent and so did I). They were raving and drooling about this incrrrrrrred-ible drummer they'd just latched onto, name of Chris, and James struck me as a fairly pleasant and positive sort of bloke, but it'd have to have been a hot day in January before I'd've pegged him as the future of rock'n'roll. »

SHEILA ROCK / REX FEATURES

Captain Sensible on stage with The Damned in late 1977, before swapping bass for guitar when the band split up temporarily in February 1978

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The Damned's brief early-'78 lineup: (l–r) Captain Sensible, Brian James, Dave Vanian, Jon Moss and Lu Edmunds

A few months later – presto! change-o! – Brian James plus The Subterraneans' rhythm section plus Dave Vanian were The Damned: the first Britnewwave band to get an album out, the first to get hit singles – albeit minor hit singles – the first to plaster their punims across TV screens via a teenybop wonderland fantasy like *Supersonic* – the first to tour with a ranking star band like T Rex – the first to make it to (if not in) the States. And the first to screw up in a big way.

Golden boys around a year ago, about as hip as glittery platforms and dry ice right now, dazed, confused and pissed off. Popular media figure and human outrage Rat Scabies is out of the band and firing off stab-yor-back verbal fusillades in his vapour trail. Their initial sponsor and Mr Fixit Jake Riviera is off and running with Elvis Costello and Nick Lowe, Stiff having proved as much of a stepping stone to greater things for Jake as it was initially intended to be for its acts.

And the other half of Stiff Records – in the person of noted Paddy entrepreneur Dave Robinson – has washed his hands of The Damned after the mutual freezeout bust the mercury right out of the thermometer.

Sans management, sans Scabies, sans record company, sans everything… everything except themselves, their skills, their future and whatever reputation they have at the moment.

OK, so what the hell happened? At the time when it seemed The Damned were out in front, aiming for the mass rock audience, they were in fact zooming straight to Oblivion Central.

The audience they were after succumbed to The Stranglers instead, who maintained far more "punk credibility" (whatever that is) while playing a music far more acceptable to the denizens of Mainstreamland. Over on the other wing, the Sex Pistols and The Clash (far more The Damned's contemporaries, having sprung from the same jamming circles as James and co) reached and maintained their positions simply by being the best and the most copied.

Their singles – clever, taut and witty – nevertheless didn't get high enough to stay in the public consciousness the way The Stranglers' singles did, or The Jam's, or the Pistols'.

Their first album – darkly explosive and garnished with a couple of good songs here and there – simply wasn't as manically playable as The Clash's or the Ramones'. The songs weren't all strong enough, and Dave Vanian – even though he sings in tune – simply didn't sound as good as he looked.

In America, they bombed. Their interviews in US rock rags demonstrate the clumsiness and dullness with which they laid punk platitudes on writers who found them totally uninteresting. Word filtered back of Scabies making a total idiot of himself over the redoubtable Joan Jett, and of backstage bully-boy nastiness. (Heard the one about the New York groupie and the Fender bass? If you laughed, you're an asshole.)

No one seriously objected to The Damned's avoidance of political cliches except the real nurd-core Ramalamadolequeue Orthodox school – but behaving exactly like the jaded old creeps they were supposed to be displacing was Not On.

ROBERTA BAYLEY / GETTY

WRONG PLACE, WRONG time. During periods when it was assumed that they were Laying Back and Keeping A Low Profile – as Sensible, somewhat ruefully, points out – they were playing on the Continent, working their bollocks off, in Sensible's case literally if you take what happened to him at Mont De Marsan into account, getting things thrown at them by unruly audiences. When punk was a big deal for the nationals and a target for the dailies, The Damned were always somewhere else when the spotlight hit.

"Everyone seems to think we've sold out," moaned Rat Scabies shortly before his departure from the band, "but if we've sold out, how come we ain't got no money?"

Judging from the desperation with which he was cadging drinks, he wasn't joking. Despite his later claims that The Damned's troubles started when he departed their serried ranks, there was already a feeling that there was an Ongoing Blowing-It Non-Achievement Situation.

The *Music For Pleasure* album featured new guitarist Lu ("If he stays I go!" howled Sensible before he changed his mind), a guest appearance by Lol Coxhill and production by Nick Mason. In general, the playing was better than the first album and the songs were worse. Far from reminding everyone of how wonderful they said The Damned were at the beginning of 1977, it just provided another opportunity for rapid insertion of the critical boot.

> "If we've sold out, how come we ain't got no money?"

Their just-completed British tour, on which they were supported by CBGB hotshots The Dead Boys, wasn't so much a triumphal round-Britain procession like The Clash's tour as a glorified wake. The attendances were dismal. The crowds were enthusiastic but small.

"Kids were coming round to see us after the gigs and saying, 'What's this we keep reading about you being finished?'" says Brian James. "If they were telling us they thought we were rubbish it'd be one thing, but they're not."

Dave Robinson – their manager until a fortnight ago – felt they should have toured as someone's support group. Nick Lowe – who produced the *Damned Damned Damned* album – proclaimed that he thought they were finished. The errant Scabies no sooner hit dry land than he proclaimed that he thought The Damned were finished.

Brian James blames the band's apparent decline on unsympathetic press and misguided management. He and Sensible maintain that "about 75 per cent of the energy went out of Stiff when Jake left. Now it doesn't seem as if there's much being done for us. We didn't have a single out for the summer…"

Predictably, The Damned are upset at having received more attention for their antics – the massed tales of outrageous-things-Scabies-and-Sensible-did-at-parties are more than legion – than for their music. The new album was an earnest attempt to progress. Nick Mason was The Chosen One to produce because – in James' words – "I listened to the Floyd's albums and they sounded as if he knew his way around a studio."

Their choice of producer and the addition of Lu on alternate-choice guitar was to enable the group to produce better and more varied music. After his initial shock and horror – hence the oft-quoted remark

reproduced above – Sensible is now an ardent admirer of Lu's playing. "It's like working with a saxophone player or something. It's hardly like a guitar at all, what he plays. I said all of that before I really heard him play properly. Now I think he's great." Plus there's drummer John Moss from London (the band not the town, schnurdo) in the band and he's – quote – fitting in really well – unquote.

James and Sensible, therefore, display nothing but optimism for their musical future. They feel that they've been treated unfairly, but they don't seem bitter. Well and good. Fine, in fact. Good for them.

Then six days later the roof falls in. Scabies is heard muttering round town that Stiff and Dave Robinson have dropped The Damned. Check it out: phone call to Dave at Stiff and sure 'nuff 'n' yes they have.

What it is: Dave Robinson didn't feel that The Damned trusted him as their manager. The Damned didn't feel that Dave Robinson had faith in them as a band. Dave Robinson felt that he couldn't manage a band who wanted Complete Control but in fact only exercised a right of veto. The Damned felt that Dave Robinson was more concerned with breaking Graham Parker and ligging in the States than with doing too much for them; Dave Robinson felt that The Damned didn't appreciate that he was splitting his time three ways – as equally as possible – between them, GP and Stiff in general.

Deadlock. No trust, no faith, no confidence, no fun. It was felt best to call it a day. Robinson emphasises that his disillusionment with The Damned is purely as a manager. "I always found them very exciting on stage and I still do. I expect to go and seem them again when they're playing. I just found them… unexciting off stage."

He'd actually like to see them continue to record on Stiff if they want to and if they can get themselves a manager who – in his capacity as record company mainman – Robinson feels that he could work with. He also anticipates that they could find other recording deals quite easily if – again – they are managed by a manager who will manage them properly.

An On-Going Crisis Of Confidence Scenario, in fact.

The Damned are still slugging on regardless. Keeping on playing to whoever wants to see them, carrying on in whatever direction takes their fancy, fuelled principally by their unshakeable belief that The Damned are the greatest rock'n'roll band on the surface of the Earth. Pretty much the way they started out, in fact. *Charles Shaar Murray*

— MELODY MAKER MARCH 4 —

CAPTAIN SENSIBLE WAS clearly in need of someone with whom to share his heartbreak last Wednesday at London's Lyceum. "Buy me a drink," he insisted. And then proceeded to inform us that only that afternoon The Damned had been consigned to the dumper by their lead founder and lead guitarist, Brian James.

The Captain thought the moment chosen by James for his announcement that he was dissolving the group was rather ill-timed: several leading record companies, he claimed, were still fighting for their signatures. James, however, was convinced that The Damned – who were dropped by Stiff last December – had no viable future. "He wants to form another group, but he's too old," reflected Sensible with his usual generosity.

James, he added, had expressed an interest in working with Johnny Thunders and Jerry Nolan, former members of the Heartbreakers, who split recently.

The Captain was unsure of his own future. He was undecided as to whether he should continue with the remnant of The Damned or form a new group. Whatever, he had given up playing bass and would now concentrate on guitar. And he was much preoccupied with discovering the exact whereabouts of Johnny Rotten, recently returned from the Indies, with whom he wanted to discuss the possibility of forming a band.

"He asked me hundreds of times to join the Pistols," claimed the Captain. "But I couldn't have replaced Sid. Sid is the greatest rock'n'roll bass player. I know, 'cos I taught him everything."

The Captain stressed that he had always got on very well with Rotten, though he was currently disturbed by Rotten's infatuation with reggae: "That's all he listens to. I'd have to put a stop to that."

He also told us that he was sure that The Clash would split within the next month. "Strummer and Mick Jones hate each other. They don't speak to each other. They'll never play together again."

Why, we wondered, was the erstwhile punk vanguard falling apart? "'Cos everyone's so extreme," the Captain argued. "All the real extremists formed groups together. Strummer and Mick Jones. Rotten and Sid. Me, Brian and Rat."

Ah! Mr Scabies. How was dear Ratty, we enquired (having recently heard that he's at last decided upon the lineup of his new combo). "They've chucked him out," replied the Captain with a shake of the head. "His own group. Thrown him out. It's all very sad."

The Cap'n perked up later when he accompanied the *MM* to the XTC après-gig bash up the road from the Lyceum at Crawford's. The Swindon band (how long have they been together, Harry?) were presented with a cake at the party to celebrate the chart success of their debut album.

A very silly move with the likes of Sensible on the premises. Whether it was his influence or their own slapstick temperament we're not sure, but the inevitable occurred and innocent bystanders were coated with icing and sticky bits of confectionery as the lads hurled lumps of cake about the room. Silly boys. *Allan Jones*

— MELODY MAKER MARCH 4 —

THE DAMNED, ONE of the founding bands of the British punk scene, have broken up after guitarist Brian James decided he wanted to form his own band to play his own material.

The break-up of the band is described by the members as amicable, but follows a growing rift within The Damned as founding member James became increasingly unhappy with the musical direction and songs of the other group members. Despite the rift, there is a strong likelihood of a farewell appearance by the band at a major London venue – probably the Roundhouse – within the next few weeks.

James, who was responsible for Damned favourites such as "Neat Neat Neat" and "New Rose", is planning to put a new band together, and it is likely that Johnny Thunders and Heartbreakers drummer Jerry Nolan will be among his first choices as musical partners.

It is not yet clear whether Damned men Jon Moss, Lu and Captain Sensible will stay together as a unit. If they do, it is unlikely that they will be able to continue with the name Damned.

The band's bass player, Captain Sensible, has been playing guitar with Johnny Moped at recent concerts, and a more permanent working relationship is possible, although Sensible has expressed a desire to form a band with Johnny Rotten.

Singer Dave Vanian is rumoured to be contemplating teaming up with the Doctors Of Madness, who recently lost violinist Urban Blitz.

The Damned, who came to the forefront of London's burgeoning punk scene at the end of 1976, produced two albums – *Damned Damned Damned* and *Music For Pleasure* – and five singles. Among the "firsts" claimed by the band are the first British punk band to tour America. •



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Earth, Wind & Fire's Verdine White, bassist and brother of band founder Maurice, and percussionist and vocalist Ralph Johnson at the Empire Pool, Wembley, in 1978



“Music is medicine”

EARTH, WIND & FIRE are the biggest soul group in the world. And then there’s the pyramids, the levitation and Mayan philosophy. “People have hard lives,” says Maurice White. “The positive intensity of this music is intended to serve them.”

— MELODY MAKER FEBRUARY 25 —

1. “The blues ain’t nothing but a good man feeling bad.”

SUNDAY LUNCHTIME IN Atlanta, Georgia, and the winter sun stiffens the blank-faced skyscrapers. Symbols of the prosperity of Jimmy Carter’s New South, they corral a small, undulating, grassy park at the downtown end of Peachtree Street, Atlanta’s spinal column.

In the shade of these latter-day tombstones of Ozymandias, three old black winos confer on a low brick wall by a bus stop. They share the sacrament from a crumpled brown paper bag. Approaching them is a fourth black man, somewhat younger and neater, around whose two-tone grey jersey suit is slung a cheap black acoustic guitar.

The fourth man begins to talk to the trio, who sit slumped and mumbling. The stiff breeze gusts, catching his words and carrying them away.

“…All over the world, there’s brothers stealin’ other men’s wives, sisters likin’ other women’s husbands…”

His voice rises. His scuffed white fake-leathers begin to stamp on the pavement.

“…I was married. I had a good wife. But I didn’t listen to what my mom and dad tol’ me…” He spins round, gesticulating wildly to attract the few passers-by.

“But I shoulda listened!” One of the winos rises, shuffles a couple of paces, bawls “Amen!” and sinks down again.

“I shoulda listened better,” the preacher continues, mollified by the interruption. “We should listen to the old people sometimes.”

“Thank you, Jesus!” yells another wino.

Twisting the guitar from around his back, the preacher strums a tune-up chord and begins to play, hammering out an urgent two-chord blues pattern. He sings:

“He will see us through
He will see us through
Jes’ listen to His word
An’ He will see us through”

A long silver bus pulls up at the stop. Half-a-dozen young black girls step down, all corn-rowed plaits and combat-zone chic, on their way to a matinee showing of Richard Pryor’s *Which Way Is Up?* down the block. They stop, listen for a moment, and giggle conspiratorially at the group before hustling off down the street. And so, in the shadow of Bert Lance’s National Bank Of Georgia, a tradition is laid »

ANDRE CSILLAG / REX FEATURES

to rest: the tradition of the Piedmont Blues, whose history embraces Blind Willie McTell, the Reverend Gary Davis, and Blind Boy Fuller.

A gentler and more versatile music than the harsher, more uncouth sounds of Chicago or Mississippi, time and change are wiping its traces away.

2. "Come to see, victory, in the land called Fantasy."

LATER THAT SAME day, shortly after dusk, around 15,000 people cluster around the several entrances to Atlanta's OMNI Centre, a complex which includes a shopping mall, skating rink, restaurants and the Coliseum, home of the Flames ice hockey team. Tonight the Coliseum is a station on the route of Earth, Wind & Fire during their Tour Of The Universe '77/'78.

Earth, Wind & Fire are now the biggest soul group in America, which means the biggest in the world. Of their nine albums, three are double platinum, one is simply platinum, and two are plain gold. Their latest, *All 'N All*, has been sitting at the top of the US Soul charts for what seems like months; it bids fair to become a black *Rumours*.

Their audience in Atlanta is 95 per cent black, as it is across America. They have reached this pinnacle seemingly without the assistance of the white audience, or the white communications media (*Rolling Stone*, for instance, has only recently acknowledged their existence) – and yet their music contains minimal "blackness".

The OMNI Coliseum is in the style of all modern American indoor stadia. A bright bowl of awesome size, it would make the Empire Pool in Wembley seem intimate. Over the rink, now covered with seating, hangs an electronic scoreboard; over the temporary stage are suspended huge PA assemblages, like bunches of black grapes, and – away up near the roof – some more puzzling items: a small silver pyramid and nine, man-sized perspex cylinders with black caps at each end, like see-through cigar tubes.

The audience mills around during the warm-up performances by Pockets, a nine-piece funk band in the style of the Commodores, and Deniece Williams – who, in a floaty salmon-pink couture gown secured around her ankles, runs prettily through her hit, "Free", and gushes in the current black nouveau-riche style on "We Have Love For You". One almost expects a commercial for whichever brand of Southern Californian group therapy she patronises.

Pockets and Williams are both protégés of Kalimba Productions, formed by Earth, Wind & Fire's Maurice White. He produces Williams (and The Emotions, the female soul trio), while his brother Verdine – EW&F's bassist – produces Pockets. To date, they haven't missed.

After Williams' set there's a short break while a posse of roadies switch drum kits, pull covers off a variety of keyboard instruments and arrange microphones. (All the roadies are white longhairs; ever seen a black roadie?)

Suddenly, there's a hush as the lights dim, to be replaced by a red glow which suffuses the stage. The sound of a rushing, mighty wind issues from the PA, swirling and growing louder.

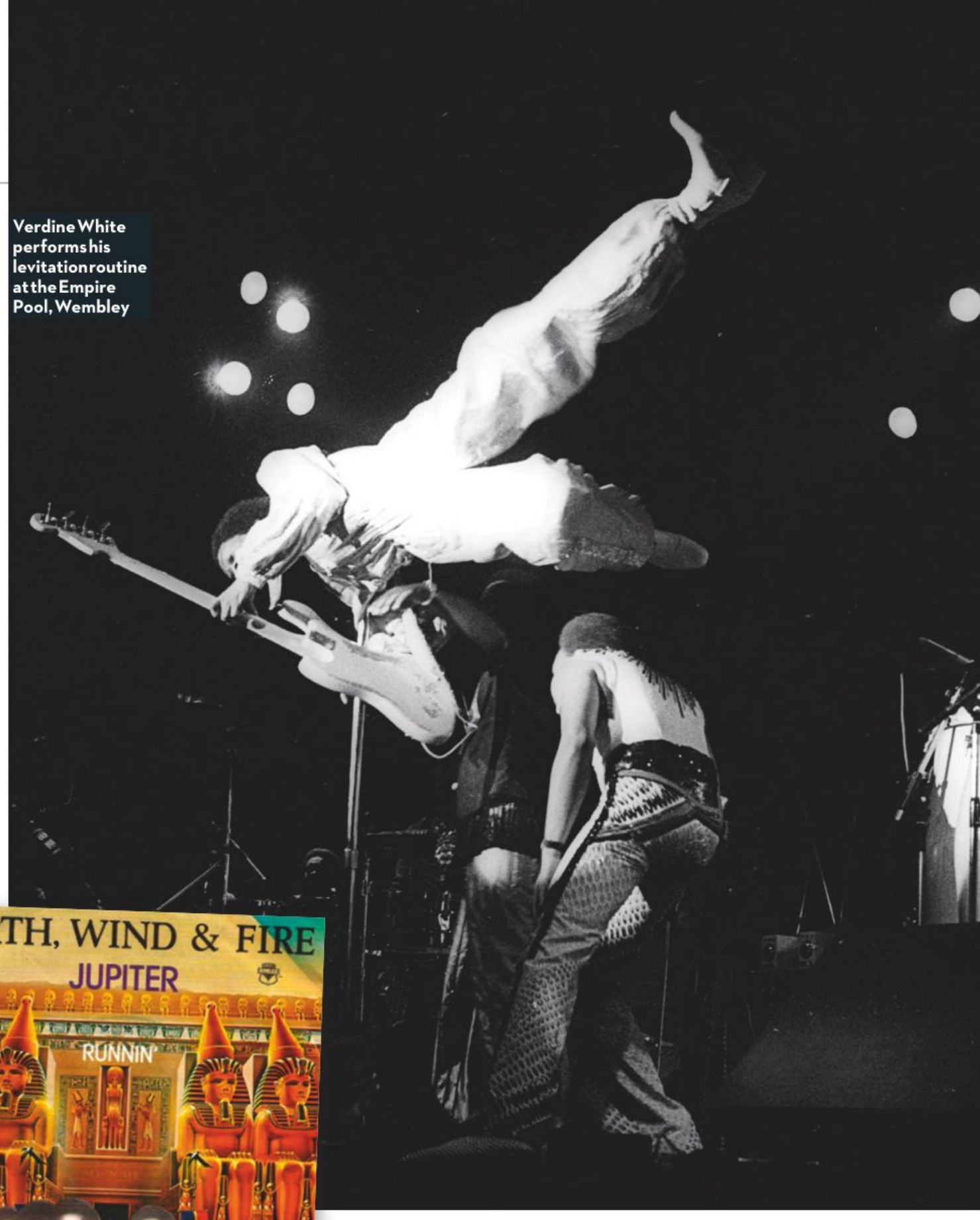
Two figures take the stage from opposite sides. As the eyes become accustomed to the red murk, they reveal themselves as two pharoahs, dressed in headdresses which reproduce the death mask of Tutankhamun.

In perfect unison they take their places beside two huge gongs, pick up massive beaters, and in the manner of J Arthur Rank's Nubian, deliver crashing slow-motion blows.

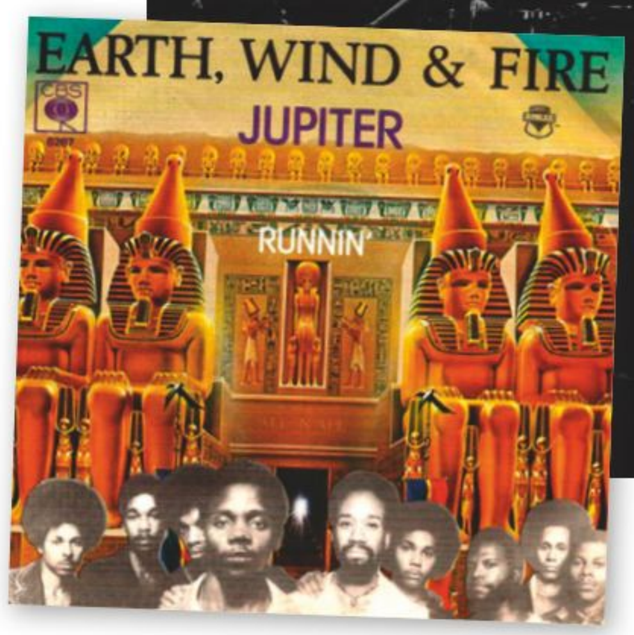
The shimmering noise dissipates; they tilt their heads and raise their eyes to the roof – to the nine cylinders, which descend, lowered on block-and-tackle.

As they alight at the back of the stage, all hell breaks loose: smoke, explosions, more wind, more gongs.

Gradually, through the smoke, inside the cylinders – the empty cylinders – figures appear. Honest to God, they materialise; like Count Dracula in the virgin's bedroom as midnight strikes.



Verdine White performs his levitation routine at the Empire Pool, Wembley



Within each of the cylinders, a man appears in a red cloak. The twin Tutankhamuns hold up their hands in wonder as the nine cloaked men open their cylinders and march, in perfect step, down to centre-stage.

Around them, 15,000 people go ape.

What we have here is a cross between Billy Graham in the Bible Belt and the winning touchdown at the Super Bowl: the audience is screaming.

And nobody has yet played a note of music.

The cloaked men range across the stage. The noise, off stage and on, reaches a crescendo. They stand immobile.

Then, without any apparent signal, all nine throw off their cloaks, revealing garishly patterned costumes, and fling themselves into abandoned dervish dances as the music starts.

While they dance they pick up instruments and join in until the full band is assembled. The "concert" has begun.

For the next 90 minutes, we hear the slickest medley imaginable of contemporary soul techniques: a horn section which 20 years ago would have cut the Jazz Messengers, a rhythm section utterly secure in its precision at high velocity, and two singers – Maurice White and Philip Bailey – of expressive power.

The million-sellers roll by: "Shining Star", "Fantasy", "Sing A Song", "Getaway", "Serpentine Fire". All sleek as a '77 Cadillac, fuelled by virtuosity and by the audience's unquenchable euphoria.

A few musical moments stand out: Bailey's soaring falsetto vocal (like a more muscular version of The Stylistics' Russell Thompkins Jr) on "I'll Write A Song For You"; Andrew Woolfolk's fervent solos, on soprano and tenor saxes; Al McKay's thoughtfully textured solo guitar passage; Maurice White's unaccompanied manipulation of the kalimba, an amplified African thumb-piano; and Verdine White's bass solo.

Ah, yes. Verdine. Now heaven only knows which song the rest of the band is playing when Verdine does his thing. It hardly matters.

But there he is, dressed in a white boiler-suit, playing a perfectly respectable P-funk bass solo to wild acclaim (if there's one thing that gets to the young ladies, it's a P-funk bass solo) when suddenly he's approached by his brother, Maurice, and by Woolfolk.

He's still playing away as they lift him, one by the shoulders and the other by his feet, until he's lying horizontally about five feet above the

REX FEATURES

stage. Then they let him go. And he doesn't fall down. Instead, ludicrously, levitated and with no visible means of support, face down, he carries on putting out the P-funk.

One had heard beforehand about the tricks, the theatrics (including the revolving drummer who provided the highlight of their show at Hammersmith Odeon in 1975) but one is not prepared for this, and one is stunned. One does not know whether to laugh, or to cry, or to keep an eye open for Coco The Clown.

However, Finale Time approaches and with it the entrance of six additional figures all clad in silver costumes with smooth, domed helmets and black facemasks. "Androids," Maurice calls them. They cluster at centre-stage as the band plays, and watch motionlessly as the aforementioned pyramid is winched down onto a small table.

The androids disperse around the various musicians, assisting several to lay down their instruments and approach the pyramid. One by one they climb a short flight of steps, wave to the audience, and enter the structure through a trapdoor.

Six of them enter the pyramid even though the eyes say it could hold only two or three.

Once again the winds blow, the smoke rolls across the stage, and the crowd scream as the pyramid ascends to the heavens. The six androids assemble at the front of the stage, standing in line.

BANG.

The pyramid collapses in mid-air, its sides hanging open like a Chinese box. It is empty.

Slowly, the androids lift away their headdresses: they reveal themselves to be the six musicians who entered the pyramid.

Phew. Well, next they pretend that the set is over and leave the stage, only to appear a minute later for the "encore" – at the end of which they reverse the opening sequence by ceremonially entering the cylinders and dematerialising.

All that's left, when the lights go up, is a vestige of smoke dribbling down from the stage, across the popcorn packets and the soft-drink cans.

The roadies and technicians regroup backstage, ready to tidy up the hardware, for tomorrow night they will have to do it all again. Cecil B DeMille and George Lucas had it easy.

3. "The blues is about a certain generation."

MAURICE WHITE IS building an empire. He has the world champion soul group; he's building two recording studios; pretty soon his production company will be a fully fledged record label. He's trim and self-assured. He's also extremely polite. Under pressure to justify the cosmic baloney of EW&F's lyrics ("*Wisdom's gentle rain / Immensely crown the brain*", etc) he provides what sounds like common sense.

Born 33 years ago, he was raised in Chicago and attended the Conservatory of Music, studying percussion and composition. Between lessons he moonlighted, picking up experience in clubs and studios: he played with John Coltrane during an engagement at McKee's Club, when Elvin Jones was off sick; he idolised jazz drummers like Elvin Jones, Art Blakey, and Roy Haynes ("At that time I simply wanted to be the world's greatest drummer"); and eventually found his way into Chicago's busy R&B recording scene, where he appeared on countless hits by the likes of Billy Stewart and The Impressions.

In the studios, he took over from the brilliant veteran Al Duncan. "When I came out of school, he was *the* drummer locally. But he had a drinking problem, so I started getting dates – and I was 'young blood'. Of course, I learned a lot from being around him."

He grew up with a generation of brilliant young Chicago musicians, many of whom are now staples of the Loft Jazz scene in New York: pianist Richard Abrams, tenorist Maurice McIntyre and drummer Steve McCall, a particular friend.

But he gravitated away from jazz, particularly when he met a brilliant young arranger called Charles Stepney, who was serving an apprenticeship at the Chess studios before moving up to create his innovatory productions for The Dells and Rotary Connection.

"Charles was a very big fan of Burt Bacharach – you can hear it in his music. He also listened to classical composers, and he evolved through jazz. I think Eddie Harris turned him on to Bud Powell, who became his idol."

White and Stepney stayed close, with the latter contributing arrangements and compositions to Earth, Wind & Fire's repertoire until his death from a heart attack a couple of years ago. It's interesting that, although the band is based in Los Angeles, White then chose to use another Chicago arranger, Tom Washington (credited on the records as Tom-Tom 84).

"I've known Tom-Tom since school," says White. "Actually, Charles recommended him a while ago. I feel compatible with musicians from Chicago, with their sound and the relaxed way they do things, and with the intensity they incorporate. People in LA play a different way."

White played with the Ramsey Lewis Trio for several years up to 1970, when he formed the first version of EW&F, recording for Warner Brothers.

Lack of success forced a reappraisal, and when he put together a new band they were signed by Clive Davis to Columbia. Four years later, in 1975, they had their first hit album with their fourth effort for the label, *That's The Way Of The World*.

> "The positive intensity of this music is intended to serve people"

White has been quoted as saying that he created the band in order to perform "a service to mankind". He happily defends that assertion.

"Music is medicine. It's soothing and it cools you out. Many people have hard and tiring lives, and the positive intensity of this music is intended to serve them. It also exposes them to new things, beautiful things.

"Everybody knows about pain. The blues is about a certain generation. I heard enough of the blues from my mother and my grandmother to last me a lifetime."

White says that Coltrane first alerted him to the idea that music could incorporate elements of other cultures and could embody mysticism: "He spread that, by studying Indian music and so forth, and by making a great spiritual contribution to music."

Today, White follows similar patterns, studying extinct civilisations like the Mayans and the pharoahs, and even visiting the ancient Inca remains in Peru: "I went to Machu Pichu, way up in the mountains of Peru. Fantastic. The most beautiful thing I've ever seen.

"I'm interested in the origins and history of man. Religiously, though, I'm not tied to one denomination that I could characterise. I have conceptions of right and wrong."

As for using his studies to enhance the theatrical appeal of the band, White claims that he sees music and theatre as synonymous.

"If you go to the movies, the music works with the visuals. It's not a novelty… it's a state of mind that I'm trying to emanate. I've been studying Egyptology for three or four years, and everything I feel right now has to do with that: what we talk about in the songs has to do with what we're living at the time. As we move on, it evolves."

4. "The Blues And The Abstract Truth."

SITTING IN A hotel suite, talking to Maurice White about Coltrane, Chicago, and ancient Egypt, a revelation strikes: surely all the inspiration for Earth, Wind & Fire's current show comes from one man, a jazz pianist and composer who has led his mysterious Intergalactic Research Arkestra for more than two decades in almost complete obscurity. Sonny Blount. Alias Sun Ra ("Sun God").

Who has played concerts by the Nile, in the shade of the Sphinx. Who uses theatrical effects on stage. Who writes pieces with titles like "Outer Spaceways Incorporated", "Ancient Aiethopia", "Pyramids", "Outer Nothingness" and "Watusi: Egyptian March".

Sun Ra, who lived and worked in Chicago throughout the '50s.

"Sun Ra?" says Maurice White. "Yes, I saw him in Chicago. He had a light on top of his head. I thought he was crazy." *Richard Williams* •



1978

JANUARY – MARCH

Dire Straits in Amsterdam, 1978: (l–r) John Illsley, Mark Knopfler, Pick Withers and Dave Knopfler

Sultans of swing

Though genuinely grateful out his plectra in various tionably impressive. For all ing the first album.

"We're not traditional"

DIRE STRAITS are a band quite unlike others in the new wave, who want to be classic in the way a novel might be. "There's a big difference between good laidback music," says MARK KNOPFLER, "and music that drags after you like a giant turd."

— MELODY MAKER MARCH 11 —

THEY SEEMED TO come out of nowhere: Dire Straits, that is. Suddenly last year, London's bitter-and-No 6 grapevine was buzzing with the name. Everyone wanted to see the band. But what had happened to create such a stir?

The tale is now almost nudging legendary status. Rock'n'roll, never forget, wastes no time in transforming whatever it can into myth – usually (and understandably) to the band's extreme… uh… chagrin.

Though genuinely grateful for the chain of events that had led to constantly growing audiences and a contract with Phonogram, the Straits want to lay past skeletons to courteous rest. They stand at the other end of the spectrum from snotty 18-year-olds who mistake outrage in a vacuum (with not a decent song in the repertoire) for some kind of revolutionary statement. However, before the curtains close and immolation begins, a brief recap.

Dire Straits are Mark Knopfler (frontman/main songwriter/vocalist/Fender Strat magician), his younger brother Dave (rhythm guitar), John Illsley (bass) and Pick Withers (drums). Centre point is Mark, who formed the band last summer, primarily as an outlet for the numerous songs he had been stockpiling.

After getting a top-notch degree in English from Leeds University, he headed in a southerly direction to Essex, where he taught English at Loughton Tech. In between lessons he tried out his plectra in various pub/club bands like the little-heralded Cafe Racers. Valuable experience but hardly fulfilling.

Then came the Straits, and Mark gave up teaching. He and Dave had been playing together ever since they were knee-high to fretboards, and John happened to be sharing a flat with Dave. The links were being forged.

Neither Dave nor John had any so-called professional pedigree to speak of, but they had flair and determination aplenty. Pick was recruited and he can boast a certain musical trophy gallery. A veteran session man, he was once resident drummer at Dave Edmunds' Rockfield studio and has supported the likes of Michael Chapman and Bert Jansch. »



REX FEATURES

They practised hard in Deptford front rooms and managed to raise about £160 to subsidise a frenetic weekend in a cheap demo studio. By this time they had done only a handful of gigs. The weekend produced a five-track tape which, though obviously rough, was unquestionably impressive. For all detail freaks, the songs were "Walking In The Wild West End", "Sultans Of Swing" – possibly their two trademark numbers to date – "Down To The Waterline", "Sacred Loving" and "Water Of Love".

Somewhat unsure of the next move, they sent a copy to celebrated rock'n'roll chronicler Charlie Gillett, who also hosts a show every Sunday morning on Radio London. The story goes that Charlie had already decided on that week's playlist but was so knocked out by the tape that he reshuffled an item or two to be able to slip it in.

Reaction to the tape was staggering, though some of the acclamations that have since been reported are (how you say?) a little on the florid side. More importantly, the record company scouts heard the transmission, and by the end of 1977, the Straits had signed with Phonogram. The New Year saw a major British tour with Talking Heads, while at this very moment the band are recording their first album.

History lesson over and down to the music. They have been compared to a pretty awesome and diverse batch of latter-day heroes. Try no less than JJ Cale, Lou Reed, Dylan, Randy Newman, Clapton and Ry Cooder. Mark commented: "We're not traditional as a band in terms of what we're producing. I don't think we're traditional in the way we think. If you write a good novel, it's considered a good novel for 1978 and the future in terms of good novels of the past."

Dave is especially fed up with the back references. "Suppose we were writers for another band and we had to do something that was on a totally different wavelength to anything else that we've done, it would still come out with all sorts of guitar licks that Mark would inevitably bring to bear on it and still people would say that's got something from somewhere else in it."

Mark began: "We're not unconscious of image…"

Dave dived in: "Let me rephrase that. I think we're very conscious that other people are going to impose images upon us as opposed to being conscious of images within ourselves. Especially in Britain, where you get the feeling that the music press have identified something within a matter of minutes of it being public, and a week later the mystery has been plucked out of it so they say, 'Well, thank you and good night.' But if you started worrying about that, you'd be doing somersaults all over the place."

> "Most songs don't deliver the goods, as far as I'm concerned"

Mark returned: "If you're confident of the substance, that should in itself be – if you like – an image. What we try and do is preserve a certain vibe. Get across a certain spirit, and the spirit is the most important thing.

"Albums to come will perhaps be musically more innovative without really dealing in the area of advanced R&B, if you like. I'm interested in what everybody's doing, in life, and I just hope to reflect that all the time."

The Talking Heads connection is important. Both the Heads and the Straits (sorry about that) are victims of blurred images: the Heads are seen as part of the New York loft bohemia: all intellectual juggling and no emotion; while the Straits, on the other hand, are backdated to the previous musical generation, taking up the mantle left by some of the giants. All self-conscious back-porch cool.

Both approaches are major travesties. The Heads hiss with emotion, while the Straits are as aware and forward-looking as front-league punkywavers. They combine excellent technique with authentic emotion which is neither complacent, middle-aged nor self-centred.

"Walking In The Wild West End" is a guided tour round the Big Smoke, a wry but well-intentioned blend of narrative and sharp observation.

"Sultans Of Swing" describes a Friday-night jazz band in terms that have to raise a warm smirk. There's Guitar George who "*knows all the chords*" and Mike who is strictly rhythm. Harry has a daytime job and doesn't mind if he doesn't make the scene. Watching from the sideline is a crowd of young boys in best brown baggies and platform shoes: "*They don't give a damn about any trumpet-playing band / It ain't what they call rock'n'roll.*"

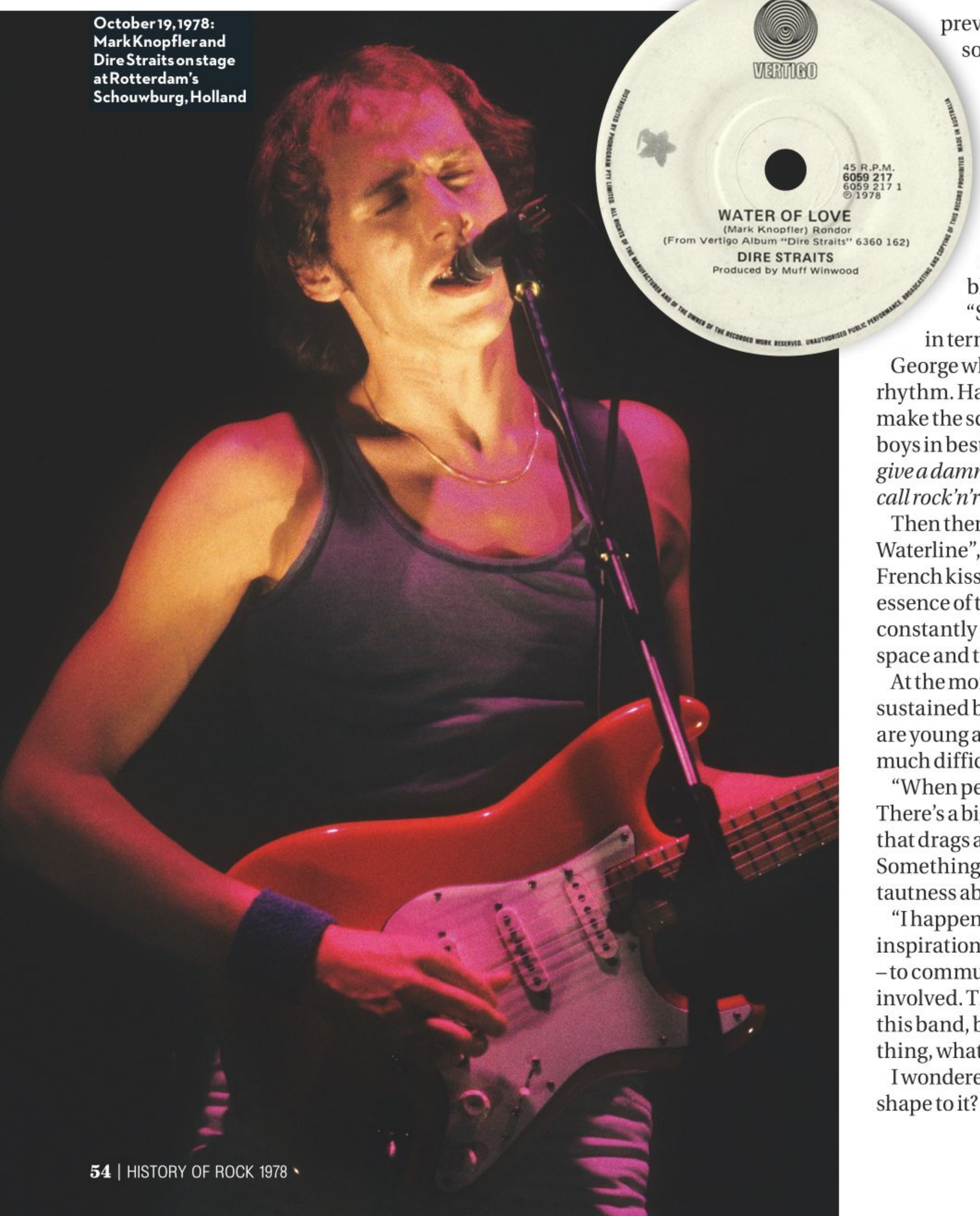
Then there's the relaxed sensuality of "Down On The Waterline", a tale of sweet surrender down on the quayside and French kisses in darkened doorways. It seems to me that the essence of the DS sound is to creatively understate, keep matters constantly simmering so that there is always movement, change, space and tension.

At the moment this comes over too often as pleasantly sustained but hardly that challenging a flow. However, the band are young and such obstacles should be worked out without too much difficulty. Mark agreed and proceeded.

"When people use words like laidback, it's really interesting. There's a big difference between good laidback music and music that drags after you like a giant turd. You gotta find that balance. Something may appear low-key, but it's still gotta have that tautness about it.

"I happen to think that craft is very important in the area of inspiration. If you're trying to inspire people, and that's the aim – to communicate – there are all sorts of qualities that are involved. The quality of craft isn't the most important quality in this band, but it is highly instrumental in producing that inspired thing, whatever it is."

I wondered about the album. Would there be any particular shape to it?



ROB VERHORST / GETTY

October 19, 1978: Mark Knopfler and Dire Straits on stage at Rotterdam's Schouwburg, Holland

Subtle textures

MM JUNE 17 Dire Straits' debut is a mature, lyrically acute affair.

Dire Straits Dire Straits VERTIGO

For a moment back there I was worried. Dire Straits, the finest new band to hit London's club trail last year, made a disappointing start to their recording career with "Eastbound Train" on the *Front Row Festival* compilation.

True, circumstances weren't ideal, but the question had to be posed: would the Straits ever be able to get the subtlety and seductiveness of their music across on record?

The answer, thank God, is a resounding yes; in this debut album, producer Muff Winwood has captured them at their very best. For a band in existence for less than a year it's a supreme achievement; it bears no comparison with the "Eastbound Train" Straits, though there were a mere couple of months between the two recordings.

What shines through the album is the maturity of the music. The band has completely ignored all the usual attention-getters of the young and raw: the gratuitous solos, the metallic riffs, the grinding simplicity and repetition.

The Straits deal in moods and shadings; their superb songs never rush into false climaxes, but cruise smoothly along, mostly at mid-tempo, on deep, rich melodies.

Mark Knopfler, the band's amazingly talented lead guitarist (and singer, and writer) never resorts to the crass, but picks at melody, sometimes delicately, sometimes aggressively, until he has extracted the juice.

The effect of this is to win over the listener by deception (in the best possible way) rather than battering him/her into submission; once you've got the hang of the melody, you sit back and enjoy it. Every single note of Mark's guitar (or so it seems) can be savoured at leisure, every slight change in vocal expression takes on significance.

This, of course, is more the sort of music we usually associate with American bands; with Dire Straits there can be no confusion. Their lyrics are distinctively British, none more so than the joyful love affair with the more seedy area of central London, "Wild West End" – "*Stepping out to Angellucci's for my coffee beans/ Checking out the movies and the magazines/Waitress she watches me crossing from the Barocco Bar/I'm getting a pick-up for my steel guitar...*"

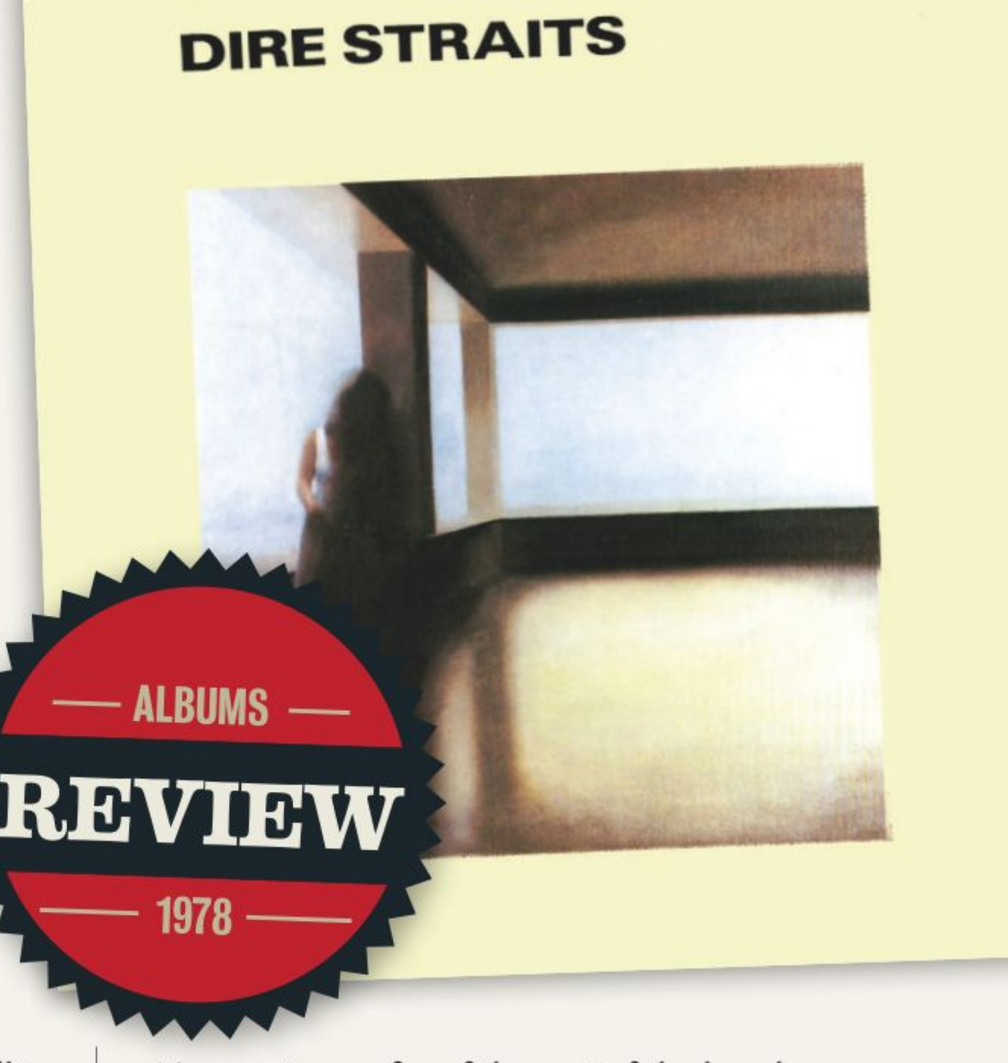
Sharpness of observation and an ability to express it in intelligent and comprehensible language are two important assets of the writing; the songs are full of examples, but I particularly like this, from "Lions": "*Church bell clinging on trying to get a crowd for Evensong/Nobody cares to depend upon the chime it plays/They're all in the station praying for trains.*"

But far and away the most important aspect of the writing is the way it's matched with music and performance. Any of the album's songs would do as an example, so three favourites. "Six Blade Knife" is thick with menace, lead guitar cutting and stabbing (appropriately enough) into the gorgeous rhythm, voice alternately slurring and snarling the lyrics. A sinister, eerie, almost frightening number this.

"Sultans Of Swing" has, for some bizarre reason best known to Phonogram executives, been recut as a single.

It's difficult to imagine a better version than this bittersweet one, with its acutely observed lyrics about a trad band playing in South London. Unlike "*Guitar George*", who's strictly rhythm, "*he doesn't want to make it cry or sing*", Mark does just that in two magnificent solos.

"In The Gallery" is the band's most aggressive performance. Lead guitar is in vicious form, biting and scratching at the jerky reggae rhythm, while vituperative vocals lay into an art establishment that lauds the untalented while ignoring the gifted.



No mention so far of the rest of the band – an occupational hazard when you're led by such a multi-talented musician. Yet their role is crucial to the success of this album: not one of the songs would be worth a damn without their imaginative work on the nuts and bolts of the music. The Straits deal in subtle textures; they are the indispensable weavers. So, ladies and gentlemen, a round of applause for the often unheralded but never forgotten Dave Knopfler (rhythm guitar), John Illsley (bass) and Pick Withers (drums). The empathy between all four musicians, in fact, is remarkable for a band so young.

"Superb songs never rush into false climaxes, but cruise smoothly along"

We've now reached the point where the superlatives should be laid on thick, in the time-honoured tradition of rock journalism. Somehow, though, it doesn't seem appropriate – though they're richly deserved – to go over the top about a band that had consciously avoided in its music all the cheap tricks and ego-tripping of rock.

All I can do is recommend the discerning to ignore the fatuous advertising campaign and go directly to the heart of Dire Straits: the music. See if you can find what I have conspicuously failed to – one fault.

Michael Oldfield

Mark: "Partly it will be getting rid of that history I talked of. In a way it goes from Newcastle to Leeds to London, from side one right the way to the end. It's not exactly a diary, because musically we're always discovering, but I hope the songs are vaguely in a sequence that is related to reality, to what actually happened.

"I hope it doesn't sound inflated, but I do think that the songs smack of something more universally than just my own little world. That's why I hesitate to call it a diary. 'Sultans Of Swing', I hope, works on a number of different perspectives."

What then did he think about the current state of play in music? Unless I'm totally mistaken, Mark winced in the most gentlemanly, discreet manner.

"It's the same as anything else. As buildings or photographs. Most songs don't deliver the goods, as far as I'm concerned. Most music sucks. Most music is awful. Maybe rubbish is the wrong word to use, because for whatever purpose it's being produced, it's all right. But in terms of music that is supposed to be meaningful, there is too much which says, 'I am oh-so sensitive'. Or the opposite for that matter."

John returned to the arena: "Essentially, music is very reflective of what a society's actually about. In a sense, punk music is not relevant on one level to us, but on another it is. It's very hard to say whether you hate it or love it."

Ball back to Mark: "There's no point in asking me what I think of the Sex Pistols, because what I think of them is not really relevant.

"Particularly in Britain, we have a situation where most people think if a guy is playing a grand piano – short of it being Jerry Lee Lewis – it is sensitive. So that people think that Gilbert O'Sullivan, and on a more sophisticated level Elton John, are classy. And they are in a direct line from Liberace! And you can *feel* that.

"Elton accentuates all that in a quirky kind of way and creates something in itself out of it. But the whole thing becomes very badly bent in all sorts of ways. People are getting by with totally weak-minded rubbish and it's being lauded as highly moving stuff. In other words, a lot of people aren't in tune.

"They give images of sensitivity. As a grand piano is associated with sensitivity with a capital S, so smoke bombs are associated with heavy rock. It's just the same and all that is a necessary part of the performance. The paraphernalia become very important, and I feel that's very much the case in Britain."

Consult gig lists regularly and place an order for that debut album. An antidote always has to be available. Sham 69 for Saturday nights. Dire Straits for Sunday mornings. Possibly. Those kids in the baggy brown trousers and platforms didn't know what they were missing. *Ian Birch* •

“We must have seemed like real geeks”

Bowie and Eno are fans of a new US band, DEVO. In person, the band’s quirky mania isn’t a hit with everyone, while Bowie has been unable to contribute to the project. “David, being David,” they say, “made commitments he couldn’t keep.”

— MELODY MAKER MARCH 18 —

DEVO ARE UP to their space-cadet ankles in Liverpool’s miserable drizzle. Thursday evening on Merseyside and the city’s been wrapped in a damp blanket and left for dead.

The De-Evolution boys are dancing the poot outside Eric’s in Mathew Street, Liverpool 2. The Cavern once grooved on the empty lot across the cobblestones. No one seems overwhelmed by this information. It’s now just another roadside attraction. The chaps have beamed in from Manchester, where, that afternoon, they had recorded a brief appearance on a local tube show.

We are introduced. The traditional Blighty handshake is offered and provokes a flurry of salutes and semaphore hand signals. It’s like hoofing into Freemasons on the beat. Gee, they say, its swell in Liverpool, it reminds them of home. Akron, Ohio, is so much like The ’Pool. Rain. Fog. Dereliction. Industrial wastelands. They’d probably love Luton, too.

They were less enamoured of their treatment at the hands of Granada’s hacks. Jerry Casale (voice/bass/philosophical asides) and Mark Mothersbaugh (voice/guitar/keyboards/more philosophical asides) are the first in the queue with complaints.

“They treated us like weirdos,” announces Jerry, who has the wizened features of a deadbeat gnome. “We were squeezed in before the performing dogs. We must have seemed like real geeks.”

I wondered, as we ambled into Eric’s, whether Mark had enjoyed the more incongruous aspects of the experience. He replies with a look of startled disgust, as if I had insulted his mother »


I see the cranks roll in

RICHARD E AARON / GETTY

Devo in 1978; (l–r) Gerald Casale, Bob Mothersbaugh, Bob Casale, Alan Myers and (front) Mark Mothersbaugh



May 25, 1977: Jerry Casale and Bob Mothersbaugh with Devo at Max's Kansas City, NYC

and stolen his Dinky toys. Mark reminds me of Hiram Holiday. Eric's reminds me of the Hope & Anchor with headroom.

It is perhaps an inauspicious venue for the European debut of a band who have recently captured the hearts of Brian Eno, David Bowie and most of the hacks in the Western Hemisphere, as well as winding up the majority of record companies, all of whom are still dangling on Devo's coat-tails, desperate for their signatures on (allegedly) multi-million-dollar contracts.

Still, they have been persuaded to appear here by the boys and girls at Stiff who, although unable through a lack of bunce and clout to match the offers of the major companies, have licensed them to a three-singles package (the first of which, "Jocko Homo"/"Mongoloid", has just been released).

The hysterical clamour for a definite reply to these various, and ridiculously lucrative offers and the considerable claims already advanced for their apparently unique talent are confronted with a rare equanimity. It does not seem to surprise them that they are being touted as the darlings of tomorrow's music.

They are, after all, very smart boys, fully prepared to exploit the demands of the music biz for a new sensation. With perfect timing, they are about to leap into the sudden void created by the faltering impetus of punk (which power pop is surely unlikely to fill). They have already tailored an effective mystique, based around their philosophy of De-Evolution (essentially K-Tel Dada affectations meet Fritz Lang's scenario for *Metropolis* with special effects by Walt Disney – ie, so much beating of the air with vacuous verbal broadsides that confuse and conquer).

It's a neat line in marketing, clearly enhanced by their association with Bowie and Eno. And more blah to their elbow, champ. It's an amusing diversion, and if they can screw some hapless record company empire for a couple million greenbacks, good luck to them.

Meanwhile, back at the soundcheck, Devo are carefully supervising the preparations for their debut. Their eventual appearance will be prefaced by the short film they made with Chuck Statler, simply (he guffawed) *Devo – The Truth About De-Evolution*.

The trick is that the final credits will give way neatly to the band slumming into the opening bars of their rearrangement (in the style of the Magic Band) of "Satisfaction". A quick run-through is proposed and cocked up because the trusty road crew forget to drop the screen on cue. Jerry momentarily loses his Devo cool and hollers them out.

"I told you to keep the film running," he declares, his face colouring with exasperation, "but I said nothing about keeping the screen up!" Jerry's quite the little martinet, eh, kids.

It's an uncharacteristic blunder. Devo, for the most part, maintain a rigid facade of quiet, alien intensity. Their manner is not untouched by humour, but even at their most relaxed and informal they project an air of superiority that lends to their conversation the kind of noble weight and unusual eloquence most often attributed to benevolent Martian interlopers in '40s sci-fi flicks.

Their own home movies underline this observation. *Devo – The Truth About De-Evolution* includes the chaps posing as an interplanetary cabaret combo in space cadet fatigues clomping through a piece called "Secret Agent Man" (it ends with a caricature of Kennedy with a bullet hole in his temple); and the principal sequence involves one of our heroes in the role of "Booji Boy" bringing to a character known only as The General a secret despatch.

"Come in, Booji Boy, you're late," booms The Gen (who's played by Mothersbaugh Snr). "Do you have the papers the Chinaman gave you?" He has!

"The time has come," the Gen continues to boom, "for every man, woman and mutant to learn the truth about De-Evolution!"

I fully expected Flash Gordon to wing in through the bathroom window to chuck in a few vocal harmonies on the following rendition of "Jocko Homo" (catchy song, that one).

This moviette, when it is finally shown at Eric's, is completely obscured by the pogoing hordes clamped tight around the stage front, and the group, too, is little more than a rumour in the crush. They will prove altogether more impressive at London's Roundhouse when their madcap choreography has a greater impact.

Here, though, you're lucky to catch the top of Mark's head as he stalks about the stage like a super-animated Mr Natural in a boiler suit. The music, divorced from the visuals and with its lyrics blurred in the mix, sounds not at all like the vehicle for a supposedly complex philosophy. I mean, "Mongoloid" sounds like The Troggs and no other.

> "Brian [Eno] gets up at 10 o'clock and is prepared for his work"

Much of the rest is pure Magic Band-era Beefheart, diluted with contemporary general weirdness, courtesy of Mark's guitar chomping and keyboard thumping.

In the dressing room after the performance I innocently ask Jerry whether he considered Eric's a reasonably Devo audience. Fifteen minutes later, we're still negotiating a tricky passage through the multiple contradictions of Devo philosophy.

Jerry proves to be most adept at thinking fast on his feet and sailing nonchalantly around the most basic discrepancies in the design of his arguments and theories. The hack Dada dialectic is trundled out in his insistence upon the juxtaposition of opposites and suchlike, and so far so simple.

We do get a little bogged down, however, on the social consequences of accepting the philosophy of De-Evolution. He repeats his belief in the priority of the group above the individual – "The idea of the individual has gone as far as it can be taken, and the individual still hasn't achieved anything" – but denies that there is any oppressive consideration in the scheme.

Basically (and as far as I'm able to determine from all the waffle), he believes that we're split into High Devos and Low Devos – the latter he also refers to as "spuds". We're most of us Low on the Devo rating, living in a squalid stupor, ruled by the High Guys, who have the knowledge and the intelligence to alleviate our condition, but choose instead to oppress us. So we're all Devo, but some are more fortunately placed.

How did you get along with Brian Eno, I ask, attempting to scramble through the rubble of the conversation. "Eno thinks we're cute," Jerry replies.

He explains that once Devo had straightened out Brian on a few of the pertinent facts, the boy was well on the case and their relationship was without flaw. Bowie's involvement in the album they have now completed was slight, although he was originally to have produced them.



EBET ROBERTS/GETTY

Joyfully insistent

MM SEPT 2 Devo's Eno-produced debut album is provocative fun.

DEVO
Q: Are We Not Men? A: We Are Devo! VIRGIN

Well, here it is at last. The eagerly awaited first 12-inch slice from that Akron workforce known as Devo. So many promotional gimmicks have been mounted (the album, for instance, comes in no less than FIVE separate vinyl colourings), so many legal wrangles have had to be ironed out, so many claims and counterclaims have been made both by journalists and the Booji Boys themselves that even the starting point becomes bewildering.

Hence the only feasible way to approach the situation is to try and forget most of the column inches that have gone before.

Devo may be experts at myth-making and media manipulation with their constantly evasive concepts, but the proof of a good spud always lies in the consumption. And let me say straight away that this is one helluva fine debut. It may not seem so at first. You'll have to play it loud and often for the power and surprising intricacies to strike home.

Also don't get annoyed when you see that the tracklisting includes the four songs that began the whole Devo craze. "Satisfaction", "Mongoloid", "Sloppy (I Saw My Baby Gettin')" and "Jocko Homo" have been remade and remodelled in such a way that, although they might not always be as effective as the original versions, are forcefully DIFFERENT.

What impresses immediately is the QUALITY of the sound that the band together with producer Brian Eno (yes, him again!) have achieved. If you're expecting the artfully contrived inaccessibility of, say, The Residents, you'd be very wrong. Devo work on a powerful, abrasive cut and thrust, which also happens to be utterly danceable. It may be fanciful, but they remind me of an updated and mutated version of The Yardbirds circa '65 (remember them?). The guitar sound frequently recalls the early full-bloodied shriek of Jeff Beck and the stop-start nature of some of the songs finds a loose parallel in ancient Yardbird anthems like "Heart Full Of Soul" and the double A-sided "Evil Hearted You"/"Still I'm Sad". That is just a thought and not a cast-iron reference point in any way whatsoever.

They locate everything in rough-edged rock'n'roll with the result that what is in fact pretty complex can sound exasperatingly simple and joyfully insistent. The deliciously jerky rhythms, the weird time signatures, the sense of pinhead theatricality, the deliberately questionable images (which come from a mixture of infantile abuse, domestic Americans, the urban mire we apparently inhabit and pseudo-science) plus Mark's wildly declamatory vocals all manage to mesh into a compact unit. They can even be very funny.

So in a song like "Too Much Paranoias" the synthesized breaks (imagine possibly the sound of a thousand rusty mattress springs) become part and parcel of the number's juddering momentum (here I go again). I guess you could say that the style complements the content as Mark yelps with deadpan hysteria: "*There's too much paranoias/My mother's afraid to tell me the things she is afraid of.*"

It all surges along, throwing in surprises at unexpected junctures while being firmly welded together by fat-slap drums (mixed well to the fore) and a pneumatic bass in particular. Somehow the effect is crazy, tough, nimble, alert and provocative all at the same time. Really, I'm not kidding!

You can best see the process in operation on the new versions of the two singles. They are generally faster, sharper and more drilled, with that packing-case drum sound once again up in the foreground. Sometimes it's for the best, sometimes not.

As far as I'm concerned, nothing can equal the original garage version of "Satisfaction", however cleverly synchronised the Mark II effect might be. "Jocko Homo", on the other hand, is easily on a par with its predecessor.

However, current fave of the new material has to be "Gut Feeling", which starts on a beautifully ringing guitar pattern only then to build layer upon layer. Mark enters with typically disdainful words (beware of taking ANY of them too seriously): "*Something about the way you taste makes me want to clear my throat...*" The song continues to expand until it lurches into a second thrash called "Slap Your Mammy". Pure petulance, it's designed simply and solely to annoy, I'm sure.

Call them puerile, call them pig-headed, call them distasteful, call them wilfully calculating. All these criticisms will be made, and this is enough potential ammunition for any silver-tongued shaman to build an acid case for the prosecution. I'm on the defence, and enthusiastically so. Devo may not monitor reality as suburban robots, but they still are a smart patrol. *Ian Birch*



ALBUMS REVIEW 1978

"David, being David, made commitments he couldn't keep," Jerry comments. "Brian was probably better for us. He's more disciplined. He gets up at 10 o'clock and is prepared for his work."

Did Bowie appear on the album? "On the album? Our album? Why should David appear on our album? Do you think we needed him? We don't need anyone. No, he didn't play anything on our album."

Fine. Thank you.

They play me a tantalising fragment of the platter on the way back to the hotel that night. A new version of "Satisfaction" that sounds like The Beach Boys whacking through an out-to-lunch arrangement of Eno's "Baby's On Fire", and a fetching reading of "Praying Hands". I suddenly appreciate the possibilities of Eno's forthcoming liaison with Talking Heads.

Anyway, back at the hotel we're having coffee and a nightcap, and Jerry is telling us about the hostility Devo faced in their early days from audiences in the Midwest, more into "shag haircuts and Led Zeppelin" than manifestations of De-Evolutionary philosophy.

He recalls one occasion at the University of Cleveland on Halloween, 1975; Jerry was fielding beer bottles with his bass. A full bottle of vodka skimmed off someone's head and smashed against the drums.

One irate fellow jumped on stage and demanded to know whether his pals in the audience were merely going to stand there and take such crap from this group of degenerates.

"They're prostituting themselves," he yelled. "You are Devo," Devo replied, thus winning their day with their wacky humour!

Jerry also has a word on one or two of their contemporaries. Pere Ubu he digs. Suicide he does not. "Listening to that record, it's like a low joke."

Time is getting on and Devo are tired. So off they troop.

Some 45 minutes later your correspondent and Stiff representatives Paul Conroy and Pete Frame decide to follow them. We're met at the lift by Mark. Mark is wearing what appears to be a suit tailored originally for a small child or an organ grinder's monkey. He is also wearing a latex Booji Boy mask.

"Where is Devo?" he asks in a voice that squeaks and cheeps. "Where IS Devo?" I feel like screaming. This I can do without at 4am.

"Where is Devo?" he repeats. We direct him toward a group of blockheads across the lounge. They bravely ignore him. Mark spots the night porter emerging from the kitchens.

"Where is Devo?" he squeaks. The night porter looks at him carefully. "Haven't I seen yer on *New Faces*?" he asks.

Mark joins us in the lift.

"I've got Jerry's key," he cheeps. "Jerry's gonna be scared... I've got his key. Oh boy, is he gonna be scared." He squats down in a corner. "When the doors open, Jerry will think I'm doing poo-poos in the elevator."

Oh boy, what a crank, we Blighty fellows are thinking as we dash to our rooms, locking the doors firmly behind us.

I recall a typical Devo maxim: "Either you make it or you eat it. We make it."

So did my mother. I always left it on the side of the plate. Good night.

Allan Jones •

1978

JANUARY—MARCH

“Wealth, power... a private army”

These are the stated goals of XTC’s ANDY PARTRIDGE. From their outpost in smalltown Swindon, the band are developing a unique and eccentric take on the new wave. “It’s not until you play with other people that you learn things for yourself,” explains their main songwriter.

FIN COSTELLO / GETTY

XTC

new wave art rock

records

XTC: "The name suggested every-

The result was that XTC played their

one. Unlike city bands, they didn't have

In Barry Andrews, a 20-year-old veteran of a couple of other down-and-out local bands, they discovered not

Singles:
"White Music" (Virgin VS201).

XTC in 1978: (l–r) Barry Andrews, Terry Chambers, Colin Moulding and Andy Partridge

— MELODY MAKER MARCH 18 —

IT WAS WHEN XTC teamed with Ian Reid, manager of their local Swindon haunt, the Affair, that the band began to make the ambitious transition from small provincial entity to nationwide commercial viability.

Reid had been booking XTC and other bands into his club, and when the band approached him to become their manager, he turned to Dennis Detheridge, an *MM* correspondent, who promptly offered to step in and handle their affairs.

The problem, however, was breaking XTC into the London circuit, and Reid did this by offering London agents' bands a gig at the Affair if they would return the gesture by putting his band into the London venues.

The result was that XTC played their first London gig last year supporting Nasty Pop at the Nashville and soon graduated to headlining at the established pub venues like the Rochester Castle, rock clubs like the Marquee and new-wave hideouts like the Roxy.

They stepped into the London limelight at a time when every young new-wave band was being looked at with licking lips by major record companies. XTC were no exception. They were first of all turned down by EMI, who didn't think their lyrics suited the punk identity of violence and rebellion, but demo tapes were demanded by Pye, Decca, CBS, Island, Beserkley and Virgin.

CBS looked favourites to sign them after putting the band into the studio twice to work out, but after the A&R squad saw the band play at the Marquee – it apparently wasn't a very good night – they gracefully declined.

Virgin, riding high on their successful coup with the Sex Pistols and quickly establishing themselves as *the* new wave label, stepped in and sealed the deal. But XTC's apprenticeship in the relative wastes of Swindon wasn't an easy one. Unlike city bands, they didn't have the venues to ensure they kept solvent and were often reduced to playing working men's clubs. In fact, their first gig in the format of XTC was at an RAF base in the North.

"We prostituted ourselves by playing other peoples' numbers, although we always tried to make them interesting," Andy Partridge recalled. "We learned something from playing those sorts of gigs – like how to read bingo tickets."

The band had gone through several personnel changes in its early days, although the basic framework of Partridge (guitar), Moulding (bass) and Chambers (drums) remained intact from the start.

The rhythm section of Moulding and Chambers had been playing together for a couple of years before Partridge came on the scene. At one stage they had a second guitarist, Dave Cartner, a vocalist, Steve Hutchins, and another keyboards player, Johnny Perkins.

By the time Star Park had changed to the Helium Kids and metamorphosed into XTC, these members hadn't suited the style liked by Partridge, Moulding and Chambers and had subsequently gone their own merry ways.

In Barry Andrews, a 20-year-old veteran of a couple of other down-and-out local bands, they discovered not only an adequate keyboards player but also a perfect ploy for their unique brand of humour.

Andrews fitted in nicely. He had classical influence. Partridge was heavily into adapting the time signatures of jazz into a rock format. Moulding was an R&B freak and Chambers was very much the heavy-metal merchant, citing the Pink Fairies as a major influence.

The four combined to produce a unique music that was strangely experimental but somehow retained a commerciality that was inherent from the original sources. Another asset was that all four members were conscious of a need to progress and not repeat the tried-and-tested formulas of the day. They have a motto that goes something like: "Thinking in cliches messes you up."

They have now released one EP, one single and an album, *White Music*, and have established themselves with a wide rock audience within six months. "World Domination" is scheduled for November release.

"I'M AFRAID IT'S my lot in life to be the jester…"

Andy Partridge: guitarist, singer, writer / 24 years old / born in Malta / bred in Swindon.

Andy Partridge thinks school stinks. Hated sports and anything to do with facts and figures. Loved English and art because "you could fantasise and invent and write". School was a blank period in his life.

Andy Partridge left school aged 15, with no qualifications, no "bits of paper" to recommend his intelligence. Work was as a tea-boy in a local newspaper. That lasted until he was 18, when he wasn't a boy any more and the paper couldn't pay him a man's wages. There were spells as a shop assistant and even longer spells on the dole.

"I am not one of the worriers of our time. I'm quite easily packaged up and I'll make the best of what it's like being a package."

Andy Partridge's father had a guitar. In his many periods of boredom, Andy would lift the guitar and "tinker" at it but used it mostly for miming purposes, eventually becoming more engrossed with the instrument.

"Art wasn't giving me the kick that playing the guitar was. Guitar took over. It may go the other way again after a couple of years. I'll probably really get fed up with guitar and consider playing it a job and go back to art. I want to do other things apart from playing. I want to make films and write books. I'd like to do kids' books, because I could illustrate them well."

Andy Partridge has plans.

"XTC is a vehicle to accumulate wealth, position, power… a private army. It's a vehicle at the moment. I'm enjoying it but obviously it doesn't go on forever and when you start to burn out, you've got to step back. Hopefully you've made your packet by then to say, 'OK, it's time I moved on to something else.'

"It's through not having pieces of paper and not being good with figures and facts that this is the only vehicle I've got to get on, and as soon as this state of getting on has been achieved, I shall be able to slow myself down internally and say, 'Well, I've got on, what else do I want to do?'

"It's a process of going up the ladder to the top and getting the choice. This is the only ladder I can climb."

Andy Partridge does not consider himself a good guitar player. It was only when he started playing with Moulding and Chambers that he improved.

"Until then I was a very much a sit-in-the-bedroom type. It's not until you play with other people that you learn things for yourself and invent rather than copy. You get to a stage where you listen to the other instruments and give them a bit of leeway, and in that way improve your own style."

Andy Partridge's initial influences were Jimi Hendrix, The Beatles, The Monkees and the Small Faces. Then he heard of jazz, decided to investigate and struck on an idea for creating his own style.

"When I left school and started to work, I met up with a chap who was very much into beat poetry and William Burroughs and jazz, and I used to borrow his albums. I wanted to know what jazz was about. My old man had played a bit of

> "Put words together and they have a magnetic field of suggestion"





January 1978: XTC play one of many club and college dates to promote their debut album



trad, but I started to get into Sonny Rollins and John Coltrane and thought it would be good to play that sort of thing on the guitar. It had a freedom I wanted to express through guitar.

"I had gone through the stage of learning everybody else's runs and I wanted a style of my own that would be a bit different. I used to listen to a lot of avant-garde jazz at the time, stuff that only had acoustic drums, bass and maybe a saxophone. It would be very sparse and I liked that.

"My favourite album at that time was one by Sonny Rollins called *East Broadway Rundown*. The actual title track takes up the whole of one side and it's so sparse. It's just drums occasionally rumbling and bass occasionally sliding and then great big holes and then you'd get an egg of sound burping out of the saxophone. I found that fascinating, playing these little scattered runs.

"Around that time it was Jimi Hendrix, who wasn't that different to Jeff Beck, who wasn't that different to Eric Clapton, who wasn't that different to Rory Gallagher. I must mention the man who gave me the biggest kick in the pants, because he was playing very fluently and very well in the way I wanted to at the time, and that was Ollie Halsall, who was playing with Patto then.

"I had their first two albums, which knocked me out. There was this bitch of a man playing exactly how I wanted to get. I'd like to meet him, so if you can arrange an introduction…

"Anyway, I would listen to these jazz albums and think that it would be nice to make guitar sounds like that. That got mashed in with the pop background of The Beatles, Stones and later Small Faces, and ended up as a pretty odd mixture.

"The rest of the band have their influences. Colin is R&B and Terry is basically heavy stuff. There was this weird triangle of influences then and we rubbed off on each other, but we were all learning at the same time. I've often thought that it would be nice to make an album of guitar, bass and drums that wasn't a heavy album."

Andy Partridge is currently the major writer in XTC. His style is directly connected to his passion with essay writing and art. The three names that XTC have touted under, first Star Park, then The Helium kids and now You Know What all point to his preoccupation with puns and slick strings of words.

"I started writing very early on, but the material was shit sort of attempts at mimicking other people's songs, taking their ingredients and re-stewing them into a song of my own.

"I didn't start coming up with any worthwhile songs until about '73. That's when I started getting interested in groups for fame and fortune, success and money…

"Most of my songs are whimsical affairs, all based on the titles rather than the substance of the song. Like back at school when a teacher would give you a title and tell you to write a composition around it, using your imagination in that way. I'd get a title and start to build on that. That's how I still do it.

"I like plays on words and puns. You put one or two words together and they suddenly have a whole magnetic field of suggestion. For instance, the words star and park have so many associated images.

"We used to have great titles like 'My Baby Was A Reptile', 'Little Gold Runner' and 'Escalator Out Of Hell'. Comics and science fiction are also influential, but it's normally titles that spark off the songs."

"I **COME FROM THE** respectable working class," says 21-year-old keyboard player Barry Andrews. He has a smalltown band and consciousness, a result of moving from West Norwood, to Swindon at the age of seven.

Barry was a bright child – "a swotty little fucker, actually" – and specialised in music and writing at school. Mater et Pater had aspirations for their boy to go on to university and thought he was well on the way when he drifted through O-levels with 10 passes.

"I suddenly became more of a drunk and a dosser and started getting into rock music. I had very limited horizons. It was drummed into you from an early age that the Holy Grail in life was to go to university. I never knew what I was going to do with all these qualifications."

Barry Andrews got part-time jobs in hotels and discovered "the real world, mate". That directly led to the life of debauchery and downfall that horrified his parents. »

HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY

"It made school look a bit wet in comparison. Somebody lent me *Pin Ups* and that was my first rock album. I had become heavily into classical music. I wanted to be a classical composer. I used to do these scores. I had visions of being a child prodigy; I still listen to a lot of classical, divided 50/50 between rock and classical.

"I had never seen the connection with rock music. Rock was for the herberts smoking behind the bike shed, and then these jobs opened my mind. In the sixth form, I mixed more with the yobbos than the intellectuals, who I had less and less in common with.

"I like the immediacy of rock, and there were also the sexual hang-ups. 'You get girls if you play in a rock group.' My parents were shocked. I was hooked."

Barry Andrews taught himself to play piano on an old upright left by his grandfather, taking the basics of his clarinet lessons at school and adapting them to the keyboard. He was more attracted to piano.

"The piano was a purer medium because you could concentrate totally on the effect without worrying about the means of producing it, which you had to do with the clarinet."

Barry's first band was an amateurish bunch called Bone Idle and it was with a local pop group called Breeze that he first played for money. This he affectionately describes as "my bourgeois period", when he got a job as trainee manager with Radio Rentals.

"That was my first exposure to the company mentality. It was so false and mechanical. The idea is that you work up the ladder and become the messiah of the company. I suppose you get the same little sycophants in the music business, though not with Virgin.

"I was well depressed with that. I left the job after four months and was thrown out of the band after six months for playing 'too loud'."

Barry Andrews sought out the *MM* classifieds every week to find a full-time post with a band, and this he did with a Devon group called Dice.

"I was getting really bored with it. I thought, 'Well, if this is rock'n'roll, then I'm not really interested.' It was this serious musicians' stance, you know, where you get bands like Meal Ticket and the stuff they write about being on the road and sing something great about eating in motorway service stations all the time. That pissed me off. I don't subscribe to that at all."

Barry Andrews returned home to Swindon, hungry and disillusioned, worked in a factory for some time and occasionally went on the dole.

"It was then that I started thinking about being a working-class hero. Have a factory job, turn off in the evening and be a writer, get myself a motorbike and start going out with my steady girlfriend again."

Barry Andrews joined a local new-wave band that eventually became Urban Disturbance and felt the excitement of having keyboards in a punk band because "the whole punk thing of simplifying and getting back to the basics appealed to me, and I thought you could do that and still be tuneful."

A little while later, he heard that XTC were looking for a keyboards player, and though he had seem them once and was bored, he decided to give it a go, principally because a record deal with CBS was in the offing.

"The way keyboards were played in the band before was conventional. I have always thought that cliches mess you up, because it means you're not really thinking about what you're doing.

"The classics influenced my style as well. One way of taking classical music is superficially like Rick Wakeman and the ELO do, getting the gloss of what is classical music, but the essential feeling of form of orchestration is something that hasn't been used.

"The great composers were interested in experimentation. What I do is very much into the classical sort of square forms. I like things to revolve. My style complements the other members of the band and vice versa. Musically, we relate very well."

"I REALLY GET OFF on maps…"

Colin Moulding: bass player, singer, writer / 22 years old / born in Swindon.

"I enjoyed geography at school. If I could look at maps every day I'd be very happy, but I don't think there is a job like that. I just love looking at where I am on a map."

Colin Moulding, like Andy Partridge, wasn't the brightest kid in class. He left school with two O-levels, in physics and geography, hence his rather strange hobby, and no career ambitions.

"It was either I was going to do this or I would be in a job I wasn't very happy in. I was a milkman's assistant for two years, which wasn't too good because I'd come in smashed at four in the morning and have to get up an hour later to go to work."

— ALBUMS —
REVIEW
1978

Interesting twists

MM FEB 4 XTC's confident first album manages to seem both experimental and commercial.

XTC White Music VIRGIN

XTC have it in them to become a major band, certainly one of the most artistically important in the new wave/power pop (call it what you will) glut. That much alone is evident from the very promising debut album.

There's a lot of quality here; the overall impression is of a bunch of confident musicians with incredibly accurately defined aims. And then there's the basic simplicity in their music that is so often lost by the apparent complexities of the arrangements.

There is most definitely nothing that has been heard yet in popular music to compare XTC's music to (a veritable asset), apart from gentle similarities with Roxy Music in Andy Partridge's vocal acrobatics, which hark spasmodically back to Brian Ferry on speed. It is at times painfully experimental but, concurrently, blatantly commercial.

"Radios In Motion", "This Is Pop", "Statue Of Liberty", "Atom Age" and "Neon Shuffle" all have wonderful hook-lines and are likely to tickle your tonsils at any given moment. Pure pop.

XTC manage to use their unique whimsy to add some interesting twists. But the danger in treading this plank of adventure is that the band draw a fine line between authenticity and pretentiousness, and, regrettably, XTC occasionally lapse into the latter category, when a couple of tracks, like "X Wires", "I'm Bugged" and "Newton Animal" take on a cold, clinical, methodical air.

That aside, take a listen to Colin Moulding's bass work and especially Terry Chambers' drumming – excellent throughout – brought out as lead instruments to counterpoint the frequently odd playing of guitarist Andy Partridge and Barry Andrews' concentrated organ pieces.

Therein you have the ingredients for a fine first album and potential for an outstanding follow-up – proper caution taken.

Harry Doherty

"There is nothing that has been heard yet in pop to compare XTC's music to"





Andy Partridge: "I used to listen to a lot of avant-garde jazz"

Colin Moulding, however, was up to no good, and to subsidise his earnings he and a friend decided one night to collect the milk cheques from one run, not their own, and cash them in the following morning. The Long Arm Of The Law intervened as this nasty business was going on and Moulding was fined £40 and dismissed from the job.

After six weeks on the dole, he got a job labouring on a building site. At 19, he met a girlfriend, Carol, "started messin' around, a little 'un popped up" and he got married, in that order.

"We did the logical thing and got married. We now have two children and live happily in Swindon Town. Having the baby did change my life a bit. I was on this council job cutting grass and generally poncing about with dirt, and we were living in a grotty flat near the bus station, mice and all that in it. Then I thought, 'Fuck this. We must buy a house.'

"The main thing was to get the money for something decent, so I went to my missus' parents and asked for a loan of some money. I was very favourable with them at that time. They said, 'How much do you want?' and I said, 'Give us £1,000', so they did and we used it as the deposit for the house."

Colin Moulding bought a bass guitar and set about learning how to play it, invariably practising with either Terry Chambers or Andy Partridge, who lived on the same estate.

"It seemed easy to play bass. It was easier to play four thick strings than six thin ones, to my reckoning. I just couldn't take a fancy to lead guitar. It was when we changed from The Helium Kids to XTC that I started thinking about rock as a career. I was on the dole and I thought it was great fun getting up on stage and making an ass of yourself.

"As a bass player, I didn't have any real influences, just general R&B. I don't like flash bass playing. I used to listen to a lot of Rory Gallagher, particularly all the Taste stuff, and I went through me Black Sabbath stage; I don't suppose anybody hasn't gone through that. It's very different from what XTC do, but we decided that we wanted to do something different, not for the sake of it. You've gotta progress, do something else."

Colin Moulding suggested that XTC get the hell out of Swindon and head for London.

"It was desperation. It was getting to the stage where we were playing stuff that we didn't want to play, and so we might as well get a job and get good money for it."

> "We had to develop our own style – we had nobody to learn from"

"I REALLY DON'T KNOW why I bought the drumkit; I just fancied having a bash…"

Twenty-two-year-old drummer Terry Chambers' vagueness about exactly what his function within XTC is and the band's image itself is sometimes irritating and other times a little disconcerting. "I don't know that Colin and I are such a different rhythm section, are we?"

He takes such a suggestion as an insult when the opposite is intended. "We just try to play as tightly as we can."

His reaction to the suggestion that XTC intentionally veer away from the tried-and-tested routes of rock: "I don't know if we do that or not. I think the reason we're different is that we don't come from London. Our influences are not high-rise flats and we don't have to poach ideas off other bands, because we didn't get the chance to see them. We had to develop our own style, because we had nobody to see and learn from.

"I remember once that we took some tapes up to EMI. They were really rough but the best we could do at the time. This was around the time that they had signed the Pistols and the A&R was saying, 'You're not singing the kind of lyrics we want today.' You know – violence and anarchy. Our response was, 'Well, if the Sex Pistols are doing it, there's no point in us repeating it.' They didn't sign us."

Terry Chambers has bitter memories of schooldays in Swindon, something to do with the fact that he was suspended at the age of 15, just as he was about to sit his O-level examinations.

Apparently, during a break before exams, Chambers and some friends got slightly inebriated on a couple of bottles of potent cider, decided to relieve themselves in a garage near the school, were nabbed by the female proprietor, who reported them to the school headmaster (she had seen their uniforms), and at the ensuring identity parade the culprits were fingered and immediately suspended.

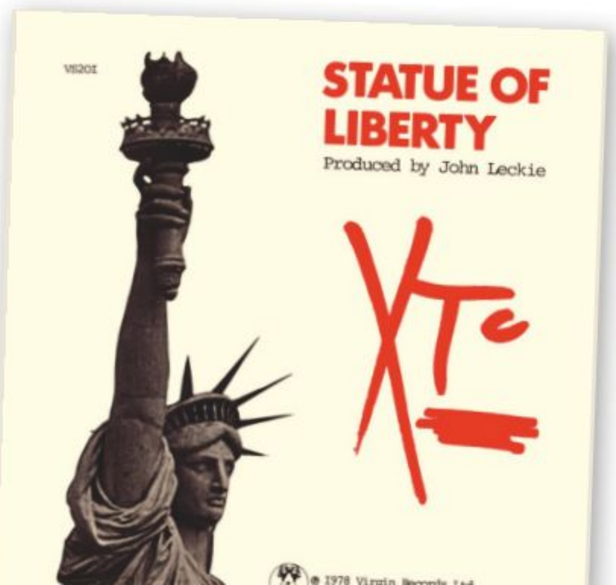
"We spent years studying for those exams and then they suspend us, and that's the reason I haven't got any qualifications. I was pissed off with it anyway, to be honest. Actually, I wanted to be a footballer but I was never good enough. When I got more involved with playing drums and being in a group, I had to give football up because one clashed with the other."

Terry Chambers joined the dole queue when he left school, but after three months found a job with a builders' merchant. It was during this time that he became more engrossed with drumming, after he met Colin Moulding.

"I had first got interested when I was 14. There was always music going on."

His major influence at that time was the Pink Fairies, primarily, he now thinks, because their two-drummer format impressed him greatly.

"I've been thinking a lot recently about getting lessons, but I've got so many bad habits that it would be really difficult to learn the correct way to do it. I suppose I'm getting by…" *Harry Doherty* •



FIN COSTELLO / GETTY

"Riots, the whole thing"

For five years, ALAN VEGA and MARTIN REV have been SUICIDE, now finally getting some respect. Still, it's not been an easy ride in "hostile" New York. "We'll die trying," says Alan Vega, "and if we die trying, that's all right, 'cos then it's cool, y'know."

— MELODY MAKER MARCH 11 —

"**IT'S VERY RELEVANT,** man. Like, it was just what we were feeling. We were just sitting… and suddenly the name Suicide popped up. And we knew it, man. We knew it. It meant everything, man. We were sitting in a room with all these junkies sitting round, and we were just, like, uh, talking, and suddenly the name came.

"We just said 'Suicide', and we looked around this room and they were all artists, man, y'know, great jazz heads and great painters, and great this and that, writers and whatever, and they're all sitting in this room, man, just shooting up, man, trying, like, to off themselves, and we just kinda said 'SUICIDE', and one look around, and we said, 'Of course, of course.' And that was it."

FRANKIE TEARDROP IS 20 years old. Got a wife and kid. Works in a factory from seven to five. Can't make enough money to buy enough food.

Frankie's getting evicted. Let's hear it for Frankie. He's so desperate he's gonna kill his wife and kid. He's picked up his gun… aaahhhh.

Now Frankie's put the gun to his head aaaahhhh. Frankie's dead. Let's hear it for Frankie. Frankie's lying in hell. We're all Frankies. WE'RE ALL LYING IN HELL!…

Yeah, welcome to Suicide.

The saga of Frankie Teardrop climaxes Suicide's first album. Imagine the story told in breathless tormented vocals over a relentlessly moronic electronic barrage of machine-gun rhythms, the agony spread over 10 minutes. Manic. Tortured. Desperate. Suicide is anything but painless.

Those who assert that the role of art is to entertain, purely and simply, will find little in the stark music of Suicide to amuse them. But it must also be said that the grim sketches and barren musical surroundings have a compelling fascination.

They inspire hate, depression and contempt, but to inspire any sort of reaction is, they claim, »

GEORGE WILKES / GETTY





Travelling light, Martin Rev (left) and Alan Vega turn up in a patch of 1978 London

an achievement. Comparisons can perhaps be made with The Velvet Underground, Iggy, The Doors, even Can, but basically they're way out on their own.

After years of angry, often violent reactions, their cult following is fast growing in the States; while, though only available on import, their first album, *Suicide*, is arousing considerable interest this side of the water.

THERE'S A MAGAZINE on a desk – *The News World* – containing an article on Suicide, under the heading 'WHAT MAKES SUICIDE SICK'. It describes them as "the top new-wave hostility group" and liberally sprays the article with words like "shattering," "frightening" and "paranoia". The writer's pious conclusion is that Suicide are "a minor phenomenon playing to a sick impulse: surely people can find better ways to expend their energies?"

Suddenly a small guy wearing a sailor's tunic and black beret that makes him look a cross between an IRA recruiting sergeant and a member of a press gang bursts in. "Hi man I'm Alan man how ya doin' man hey man ya got the same sneakers as me man where's Martin?"

This is Alan Vega, vocalist with Suicide and voluble gentleman. A few minutes later he is joined by synthesizer-player Martin Rev, a tall, morose character who merely nods in my direction as he enters. Rev looks a little like Graham Gouldman of 10cc.

From New York City, the two have been together for over five years – in the early days there was a third member but they don't talk about him – and have an unshakeable belief in what they're doing. It has to be unshakeable to survive almost constant audience hostility, and they are now quite bemused to find people actually applauding them, as has begun to happen in the last nine months.

"It's been a complete change, man," Alan tells me, leaping forward with enthusiasm. "Even in New York nine months ago there was a lot of hostility. New York's supposed to be the big hip city. Bullshit! Now it's all positive we don't know how to deal with it after all these years of negative.

"Before, they were all into throwing things, man – they were throwing everything at us, including themselves. Riots, the whole thing. We been through the whole thing. Every gig. Three-quarters of the places would run out screaming and the last quarter staying but just… y'know… be like Hell's Angels or somethin', man, just give us the treatment. And finally there's only two nuts left who're really digging it.

"For a while we had to come out like… knights in armour or somethin'… na, not really… but it was a lot of shit!"

So what was it, I wondered curiously, that had caused this transformation in their fortunes?

"Oh, the world's changing man," is Vega's swift response. "Things are so bad that the insanity is being allowed in and people are coming out to look at the insanity. There's just more insanity around.

"And other groups have opened it up for us, too, in a sense. We used to come out and there was nothin' around. There wasn't any Ramones and there wasn't any, uh, Sex Pistols. There wasn't any kinda sound that had any kinda theatricality drama about it.

"So we came outta nowhere and people were, uh, lost man. Six or seven years ago we were talking about being broke and living on the streets and the future in the '70s, and that emptiness, and nobody wanted to hear it. All that which people are beginning to see now, we felt it then, we saw it all around us, we were living in it then. Now it's, uh, like a cancer thing, it's spreading everywhere, it's hitting everybody."

On more than one occasion throughout the interview they describe themselves – one suspects not entirely seriously – as a bubblegum group, but they freely acknowledge the influence and pioneering importance of others. Velvet Underground, Iggy, Question Mark were all important, says Alan, though Martin Rev had more of a jazz background, with John Coltrane as his particular god.

"Oh, what about the Dolls, man?" shouts Alan helpfully. "They were really beautiful, man, really beautiful. They really opened up a lot. In fact, man, THEY REALLY OPENED UP A LOT.

"And Iggy… Iggy should have become like… Elvis. I mean, in my eyes, man, I thought he was gonna go all the way. But he got caught in between the times, and the Dolls came in after that and picked up the slack again when Iggy fell right out."

Their own backgrounds are firmly working class, but they have lofty ambitions to achieve lower-middle class. They describe themselves as "normal lunatics". Says their manager/producer Marty Thau, "How can you have a group that's been going for five years making 10 cents a year and not be a little fucked up?" Vega: "Waddya mean, make 10 cents a year?"

Once they went for eight months without getting a gig. They've been asked for references before clubs would let them play. Many places have avoided paying them after a set. One club blamed them for a fire which occurred after a gig, telling them it had been caused by "that song you did about Jesus". And it became second nature avoiding flying missiles – from tables and bottles to fists.

Suicide possibly deserve to make it on endurance alone. "Oh, we have a suicide pact," says Alan. "We'll go on right to the end and die trying, and if we die trying, that's all right, 'cos then it's cool, y'know. We, y'know, we'll just keep going regardless. We don't even think about making it or whatever, we're just gonna do it. It's important for us. We've given up our own lives just to do this trip." I giggle slightly. "Seriously, man."

Their music, they say, is a reflection of a world they see as increasingly self-destructive and insane. An overpopulated world full of rats, where depression dominates most people's lives.

"There're too many people, man," Vega says earnestly. "There's no food, and there's no energy. It's like rats, man – as soon as they start overpopulating they start killing themselves off.

"Too many bombs. The generals have got to have bombs to play with, they've got to have wars to play with. They're stockpiling and they're getting out of hand. They're overflowing. That's why they have Vietnam. No reason for it 'cept that."

This kind of talk has already alienated people in the States. It's been the lock-up-your-daughters-they'll-come-home-and-hang-themselves syndrome. After remaining silent for most of the first half hour of the interview, Martin Rev suddenly dives into the action.

"If that's what we cause," he says, "then right away we're succeeding in one sense. If a group start up and cause people to get suicidal, then just the impact of the performance alone is successful, even though the effect may not be what you want. How many groups can do that?"

But Alan doesn't agree. "No, no, no," he scolds. "It's just making people aware of their suicidal tendencies.

"It's like… a group can get up on stage and show them something about themselves. They go see Suicide and, whatever we do, whatever we sound like, it makes them flash on that thing that's inside them. And as soon as they're aware of it they can start dealing with it."

Rev thinks that's fair enough, but not to be outdone, he comes up with a startling revelation.

"People tell us that before they saw us they never screwed for three months, and then after they saw us they couldn't stop for days."

It still seems incredible that Suicide or anybody so comparatively unknown could evoke such consistently extreme responses. How do they generate the intense dislike?

Rev: "Oh we're just singing the blues, man, the new blues, and the blues scares people, that's all. It's making the people aware of somethin' they might not be in the mood to be aware of.

"What's happening now is that people are coming to see us who're actually in the mood. They really wanna hear that sound, man. Way down South, why are all those blues singers so heavy, and why are all those people coming out to hear them?

"Country singers today, depressing people. Songs of cryin' and boozin' and dyin' and killin' and whatever, man, and they pack the joints and people'll flip out. They're God down there, those country singers. That's their blues."

Yes, I say, but I still can't see why people should react so violently.

"I tell you, man, I couldn't understand that either," says Vega. "Until not long ago, 'bout six months ago.

"One night I walked into CBGB's, I was really in a peaceful head – or I thought I was. I was feeling good and I just wanted not to hear too much sound or anythin', and I was just feelin' loose. And the Dead Boys came out. They started playing real hot and real heavy, and they really went to another place that night with the sound.

"And halfway through their thing, man, I got crazy. I wanted to beat up somebody. It'd never happened to me before, it was just that I didn't

> "We've given up our lives to do this trip. Seriously, man"



ALBUMS
REVIEW
1978

New possibilities

MM JAN 21 Suicide's spare debut LP fashions the new from the old.

Suicide Suicide RED STAR RS1, IMPORT

In what may be the ultimate fusion of '70s influences, Suicide have constructed an album which proposes yet another way out of the much-publicised new-wave impasse.

(It's surely significant that, while Britain is still stuck in the crash-bash cul-de-sac, Americans are coming up almost weekly with solutions: Television, Talking Heads, Devo... the answers are there, for any artist with the brain and the spirit to confront the problems.)

A duo from NYC, Suicide aptly find their inspiration within one of the seminal works of the new wave: *White Light/White Heat*, The Velvet Underground's second album. They do not, however, fall into the easy trap of imitating the mannerisms of the title track, so profitably borrowed by David Bowie and others ("Suffragette City", "Re-make/ Re-model", etc).

Instead, they take their cue from the dramatically cut-up vocals of "Lady Godiva's Operation"; from the unusual sound elements exploited in that song (which dealt with the physical and emotional preliminaries to a lobotomy) to reconstruct the sucking, bubbling and throbbing of life-support systems; from the keyboards of John Cale and the procedures of Kraftwerk – and thereby from the Terry Riley/Steve Reich/ LaMonte Young axis – and from the drumming of Maureen Tucker.

Such are their "givens," deployed with an intelligence and precision allowing them to create something of the stature of the lengthy "Frankie Teardrop", a work fit to stand in the catalogue of post-psychedelic classics – alongside "Heroin", "In Every Dream Home, A Heartache", "Venus De Milo", and precious few others. These are all pieces which balance adventurous content with adventurous form.

"Frankie Teardrop" is the story of a young factory worker with a wife and infant: he can't make it on his seven-to-five wage, so shoots his family and then himself. End of story.

Enacted over simple two-note synthesizer riff and pattering drum machine, it is delivered in tense segments separated by acres of unsettling space. The singer bleakly stutters the words, adding at suitable points an assortment of sobs, whimpers, half-choked cries and screams which startlingly mimic the state of the man's mind.

It is, perhaps, the most disturbing creation since "Heroin": several dozen listens later, one is still desolated by its evocation of a small and insignificant tragedy. Lester Bangs has already likened it to "Ballad Of Hollis Brown", and he is right – although this modern urban version manages without Dylan's mythic-romantic setting, and therefore has more integrity and immediacy.

Martin Rev uses limited means to create fascinating landscapes

Elsewhere, Suicide deal with idealised fantasy girls ("Cheree"), with idealised revolutionaries ("Che"), perhaps with Evel Knievel ("Ghost Rider") and (metaphorically) with life in America ("Rocket USA").

More surprising are the backgrounds, which apply the aforementioned methods to a variety of source materials. "Che", a disquieting requiem, employs the bass pattern from the MJQ's "Softly As In A Morning Sunrise" to create the textures of a Bach organ piece.

"Cheree" recalls "Louie Louie" sung by Reg Presley, or the central portion of "You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling", with pretty filigree fake-glockenspiel decorations. "Girl" recreates the atmosphere of the intro to Marvin Gaye's "One More Heartache" – disembodied bass and unearthly snare-drum/handclaps – before a Tommy James-style vocal is accompanied by a keyboard sounding very like Miles Davis' recent organ-playing.

In these ways Martin Rev uses his limited means to create fascinating landscapes, equally notable for their attention to detail. Listen closely, and beyond the foreground figures appear tiny details placed around the deep horizon. There is even humour, in the appropriation of the venerable "Don't Be Cruel" riff as the basis of "Johnny".

Through these achievements, new possibilities appear. The Sex Pistols and the Tom Robinson Band are, for all their virtues, very old-fashioned groups; in no sense do they represent a New Music. Even Alternative TV, despite their theoretical promise, deliver the same old warmed-over pie and mash. Why is it that in this country only "veterans" like Bowie and Eno connect with the fresh attitudes of Düsseldorf and New York?

Be the first one on your block to wear this T-shirt: "We're ALL Frankies."

(Readers who imagine that the references to the MJQ and Miles Davis are fanciful should bear in mind Tom Verlaine's familiarity with Albert Ayler and Eric Dolphy and MX-80's apparent conversance with Ornette Coleman's work.) *Richard Williams*

wanna hear it that night. And I think that's what happens with us, man. They get really hostile, too. They feel the things I was feeling that night and they react, 'cept they don't walk out, they don't keep any cool. They just pick up whatever and throw it at us."

Rev describes it as a form of "audience participation". Straight up. "They're saying, 'We just don't wanna let you be on stage and be that pompous to do your trip – you're doing it that heavy that you're making us feel we gotta do somethin' too, so screw you, we'll walk out on you — that's our statement.'"

The recent transformation has been such that when audiences throw things now, they feel it's a sign of affection. They make sure the bottles don't hit them and they put out cigarettes before they throw them, says Alan.

They'd still be in obscurity but for a home-made demo single Marty Thau heard by chance on a jukebox. He went and saw them and was so bowled over that he asked them to make an album on the Red Star label he was setting up.

At that point in the conversation Thau flourishes the current copy of *Village Voice*, which contains a negative review of the album, and they discuss unpleasant ways of dismembering Robert Christgau, author of the review. The American press have almost unanimously dismissed them, whether on stage or on record, which leads them to the belief that their future lies in Europe. They say they felt before they recorded the album their music was better suited to British audiences, and the initial cult reaction to the record here (Thau is hoping to set up a British distribution deal for Red Star very shortly) would seem to vindicate that. In any case, they identify spiritually with the British new wave.

"I like the English groups," says Vega. "I really dig the Pistols. And The Clash – great. I like Eater, Cortinas, all those. I've followed it all much more closely than the American thing."

I ask somewhat doubtfully whether in that case they support the classic principles so popularly touted by the British punk movement. They're not sure about the denial of money ("What's wrong with money, man?") but definitely go along with attacking the complacency of the dinosaurs and BOFs. For some reason, ELP are especially singled out.

"I mean, ELP are talking about nothing, nothing that relates to a kid in the '70s. When they come out on stage, all you see is the fact that they're working and making a lot of money and you get pissed off – especially if you're not making it yourself.

"They're not saying anything about you, and they're raking in all this bread, and you get pretty resentful. If a group is that idealistic about it – like, if the Pistols make money – why shouldn't they give it to places that can change the whole structure of government? Don't keep it for yourself, use it, like, for revolutionary purposes."

The discussion continues for quite a bit longer – an increasingly disjointed conversation about wars, various tales of death and destruction, and the "naivete" of America.

Vega, apparently drained, slumps further into his seat, while Rev – a man transformed – now dominates the verbals with surprising energy. I head desperately for the nearest bar. *Colin Irwin* •



1978

APRIL – JUNE

PUBLIC IMAGE LTD, BOB DYLAN, THE ONLY ONES, THE JAM AND MORE

April 30, 1978: The Clash rally against the far right and set about "winning their reputation back" in front of 70,000 in East London's Victoria Park

Britain's premier politpunk band

MM MAY 6 The Clash, Steel Pulse and Tom Robinson play an Anti-Nazi League gig.

IF YOU'VE NEVER been to a political demonstration before, Sunday's hugely successful Anti-Nazi League rally would have been your perfect introduction: emotional anti-fascist speeches in Trafalgar Square, a spectacularly colourful parade (five miles long) from London's West End to Victoria Park, Hackney, and then the cream of the cake, a rock concert, headlined by the "politically conscious" Tom Robinson Band, in front of 70,000 people. Everything, in fact, an activist would want out of a Bank Holiday.

The purpose of this unparalleled show of force (the biggest anti-fascist rally in Britain since 1933, Alistair Burnett told the nation) was to counter and check the horrific rise and proposed policies (deportation of immigrants) of the sinister National Front. On all fronts (no pun intended), the rally achieved its objectives, though the Front will hardly cease its cancerous ways.

Coming from Northern Ireland and having reported locally and participated in many of the civil rights marches towards the end of the '60s, I entered Trafalgar Square as a seasoned campaigner. Even so, when you get so many thousands of people congregated in one spot with one positive aim, there is still an overwhelming psychic surge that completely envelops you in a warm embrace, erasing any little impartiality that might have been there to begin with.

The common theme of this rally was Smash The Front. This headline was occasionally complemented by sub-headings donated by the more extreme elements in our midst, which went along the lines of "Kill the cunts". Those infrequent bursts, possibly caused by the emotion of such a vast and totally unexpected turnout, raised my doubts as to just how un-National Front the Anti-Nazi League is. They call for the NF to be wiped out. Surely, in a true democracy, the Front, or any party, has as much right to freedom of speech as anybody else, whether or not you agree with their evil policies?

What is important is that the people are made aware of all the issues so that they can weigh them up and make up their own minds. I'm sure, though, that the Anti-Nazi League are aware of the pitfalls of politicking, because if they're not, Sunday's endorsement will have been in vain.

At 11.30am on April 30, Trafalgar Square was a splash of colour, banners and skin. Tourist coaches nipped in and out to give the customers a glimpse of good ol' Blighty demo-ing at its best.

In the centre of the Square, various speakers were screaming themselves hoarse, to be heard only by a couple of hundred people owing to the poor sound.

At the fringes, rock, reggae and steel bands were entertaining the masses on the backs of lorries, while left-wingers had a field day selling *Socialist Worker*, etc, etc. Parties gathered under respective banners (there was even one from Clanna hÉireann) to prepare for the march to Hackney. Why »





REX FEATURES

Hackney? Well, that's where John Tyndall, National Front chairman, is Prospective Parliamentary Candidate.

Humour was good (and stayed good) as the rally headed east, flanked by police, and a couple of hours later it wound into the pleasant landscape of Victoria Park. As the first contingent entered the park, the tail of the march was still going through Ludgate Circus, in the City.

Those marchers, then, were lucky enough to miss the opening band of the concert, X-Ray Spex, who perhaps suffered more than the other bands (The Clash, Steel Pulse and the TRB) through poor sound. Still, the Specs went down moderately well with the leg-weary audience, amused more by singer Poly Styrene than the music, methinks.

Poor Patrik Fitzgerald, the "king" of folk-punk, didn't earn the same appreciation. Though his songs are rather clumsy and inauspicious, and his singing a mite poor, he didn't deserve to be plastered with cans by a couple of idiots in the audience.

Among all the war-mongering with the NF, little Patrik offered the most pertinent observation of the day: "If you all hate the National Front as much as you hated my set, you'll be well away." After an appeal from the MC for the 70,000 people to fall on the can-throwers, there was no further aggravation.

The Clash, the TRB and, to a lesser extent, Steel Pulse are all recognised for the political content in their songs, and so their presence at the rally was fairly predictable, although in the cases of The Clash and the TRB, it made them look a little bit like a parody.

Having lost a bit of credibility recently, The Clash set about winning their reputations back. Joe Strummer's throat troubles didn't help but the band went down amazingly well and their title as Britain's premier politpunk band was intact when Sham 69's Jimmy Pursey joined them on stage to sing "White Riot". Musically, I still think they're dogs.

Steel Pulse were, for me, the band of the day. Despite the problems with sound, Birmingham's favourite reggae band grooved beautifully and contributed a song to mark the occasion, "Rock Against Racism".

They scored over the TRB, I think, because of their ability to conceal the heaviness of their lyrics with more subtlety than Robinson. Tom Robinson has got to choose what he wants to be a politician or a rock singer/writer.

His lyrical style at the moment veers dangerously towards the hysteria of a politician's speeches, exaggerating for effect. I know he means well, but songs like "Power In The Darkness", "Winter Of '79", "Up Against The Wall" and a new one, "Let My People Go", are too gloomy. Sunday's attendance showed us light. Tom should do that in his songs.

Mind you, he found disciples in the budding Che Guevaras in the audience.

All in all, Sunday was a great day. Leaving Victoria Park and noticing the wide array of berets on display the one person missing, I thought, where was our friend from the Tooting Popular Front, Citizen Smith.

Power to the people! *Harry Doherty*

EBET ROBERTS / GETTY



March 2, 1978: Pere Ubu's (l–r) David Thomas, Allen Ravenstine and Tony Maimone on stage at CBGB

"All noise is created equal"

MM MAY 13 Introducing Ohio's latest export... Pere Ubu.

EVERY WEEK THERE'S a new arrival in the leftfield arena. At the moment the States is a major breeding ground, throwing up Suicide and Devo, while Cleveland is garnering a reputation for producing music for the industrialised '80s.

Prepare now for Pere Ubu who – much like Suicide and Devo – have taken years to become an "overnight sensation". In short, they are an astounding band. The original moves began about four years ago in – you've guessed it – Cleveland. Vocalist David Thomas used to be a rock critic with a local paper called *The Scene* (he worked under the weird name of Crocus Behemoth) and together with another writer, Peter Laughner (now sadly dead), formed the little-known Rocket From The Tombs. Very much in the Stooges/Troggs tradition, it also numbered in its ranks Cheetah Crome and Johnny Blitz, now of the Dead Boys.

Compare Ubu with the Dead Boys, and you can easily see how "personality differences" soon loomed large. The band split around September '75. Thomas decided to form a band simply to record one single, which was "30 Seconds Over Tokyo"/"Heart Of Darkness" on their own Hearthan label. The lineup was Thomas, Laughner (guitar), Tim Wright (bass), Scott Krauss (drums) and Allen Ravenstine (synthesizer). Reaction was healthy, so they decided to stick together and push forward.

Their first performance was on December 31, '75, with personnel problems already underway. Dave Taylor (temporarily, as it turned out) replaced Ravenstine, but this lineup managed to stay steady till around June of '76. As well as playing locally, they unveiled themselves at Max's in New York around May.

They recorded a second single, "Final Solution"/"Cloud 149", which was included on the recently re-released *Max's Kansas City* compilation. As a result, the media began to prick up its ears, however tentatively.

Personnel problems continued over the next 18 months or so, with Ravenstine returning, Tim Wright dropping out and a brief sojourn by Alan Greenblatt on guitar. All this chopping and changing had bizarre repercussions. It seemed that every time the band had a photo taken of them, disaster would strike, either in the form of someone dying or someone leaving. The astral planes in malevolent aspect? The band are now ultra-wary of posing for pictures.

The lineup finally stabilised late last year, with Thomas, Ravenstine, Krauss, Herman and newcomer Tony Maimone on bass. Two more Hearthan singles appeared: "Street Waves"/"My Dark Ages" in December '76 and "The Modern Dance"/"Heaven" in September '77, of which only 1,000 copies were pressed.

They signed with the Phonogram subsidiary, Blank, and recorded their debut album, *The Modern Dance*, last October.

> **"We think of songs as pictures. We try to transmit a whole series of images"**

Almost all the single cuts are available either on the Blank album or on Radar's *Datapanik In The Year Zero* EP.

So what's so special about them? Trying to pin down Thomas over the transatlantic phone is not an easy task. First, they experiment with sound: ("All noise is created equal," quipped David) but locate this technique within traditional rock forms.

So, on the one hand you have the urgent, implosive and impassioned underlay of a full-blooded rock band, and on the other, breathless conjuring with chunks of white noise.



It may sound pretentious on paper, but on vinyl it's just the opposite. At the core there are Thomas' extraordinary vocals and Ravenstine's synthesizer work. Thomas ransacks the words for their every emotion as he whoops and hollers and seethes and mumbles.

Ravenstine uses a tone dial (something like a modern press-button phone) on his synthesizer, playing it like a fully fledged instrument rather than just a source of background colouring.

The overall mood may at first strike you as strident and doomy, but Ubu know what affection and humour are. They relate directly to their environment, giving voice to what dislocation, hysteria and loneliness are like in the industrial inner city.

But over to David: "All the songs cover separate territory, though they are all Ubu songs. Environment is an important factor. We think of the songs as pictures. We try to transmit a whole series of images. We deal with sound, and music is incidental.

"Built into Ubu is that we always have to take chances in a spontaneous way. So we build accidents into the structure. The only thing that matters is experimentation."

"The band is anarchistically run. All decisions have to go through a series of approval. All the music is done communally – it's a democratic system that doesn't work! But it's real fun."

What about the name itself? They borrowed it from a grotesque character in a turn-of-the-century play written by Alfred Jarry (a Frenchman). Called *Ubu Roi*, it shocked Paris at the time with its unholy satirical humour.

David finds the whole Cleveland "scene" an amusing media-creation. "The Cleveland sound is a misnomer. But there is a skeleton, a basis. In Cleveland there are hundreds of Top 40 bands because they don't want to work in the factories.

"There's the underground, but there's literally no place to play. The lucky ones go to the sleazo-dive warzones and they play for four or five drunks off the street.

"Cleveland works in a vacuum. There's Cleveland and the rest of the world. Two or three gigs a year there is a lot! There's no escape from Cleveland. To go out into the outside world is a very strange thing.

"Failure is built into everything here. Everyone outside thinks you're stupid and everything inside supports that." *Ian Birch*


Throbbing Gristle: to play an "anti-rock group" in *Millions Like Us*

The disintegration of Great Britain

NME JUNE 3 A new film, starring Throbbing Gristle, is planned.

EAST END INDUSTRIAL art rock recluses Throbbing Gristle are to provide the score for a film currently being produced and directed by Fred and Judy Vermorel, the husband-and-wife team who wrote the "definitive" Pistols' biography *The Sex Pistols: The Inside Story*.

Their movie is to be titled *Millions Like Us*, and will come in two parts. The first, "Concrete And Blood", will take the form of a German documentary detailing the disintegration of Great Britain since the War. Genesis P Orridge and his merry pals in the Gristle play the part of an "anti-rock group" called Millions who destroy rock'n'roll. The second part, "Blue Skies Over England", is apparently a "suburban pop idyll". It features a bland MOR band called Susan And Her Feelings, who are being put together for the movie by former Alternative TV guitarist Alex Fergusson. The film footage in this part will emphasise the "positive and attractive" aspects of London suburbs in the spring.

At the moment the Vermorels are unsure when the film will be completed, though they are hoping to finish by the autumn. First they'll have to get financial backing; negotiations are proceeding with several record labels. They also need a Susan – "a wholesome, girl-next-door, English rose type," Judy Vermorel told Thrills. If that sounds like you, call Judy on 01-580 5842. *Phil McNeill*



Respected

NME APRIL 29 RIP Sandy Denny.

SANDY DENNY, ONE of Britain's top contemporary folk singers, died last Friday (21). Earlier in the week, she fell down a flight of stairs and suffered a brain haemorrhage. She went into a coma, from which she never recovered. After working with The Strawbs in their early days, she first established herself when she joined Fairport Convention in 1968. Two years later, she formed her own band Fotheringay, rejoining Fairport in 1974. She left again two years later to pursue a solo career, and last year headlined some concerts under the banner of Sandy Denny & Friends. All her albums – solo and with Fairport – received a varying degree of acclaim. She recorded several solo sets for Island, and was married to ex-Fairport member Trevor Lucas.

No Johnny Rotten

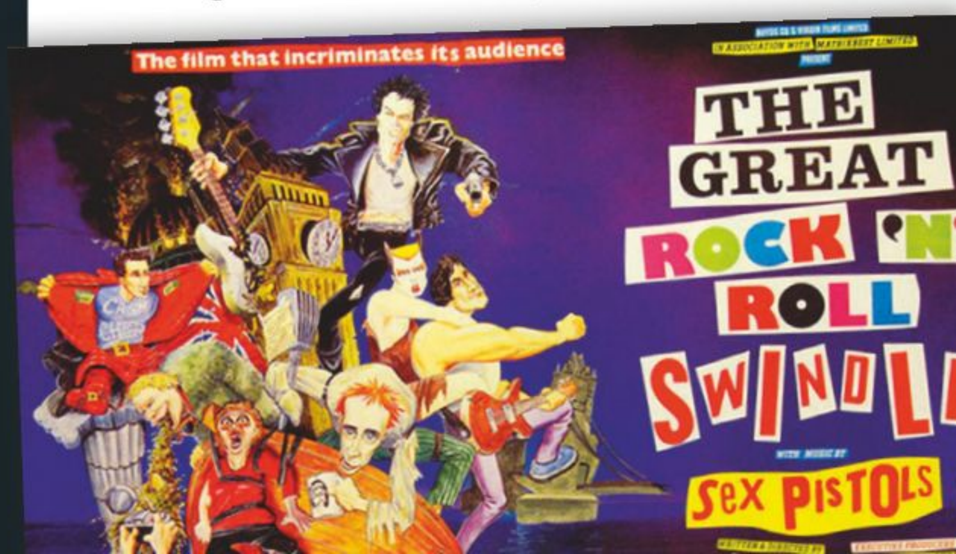
MM JUNE 3 The post-Rotten Sex Pistols carry on with McLaren.

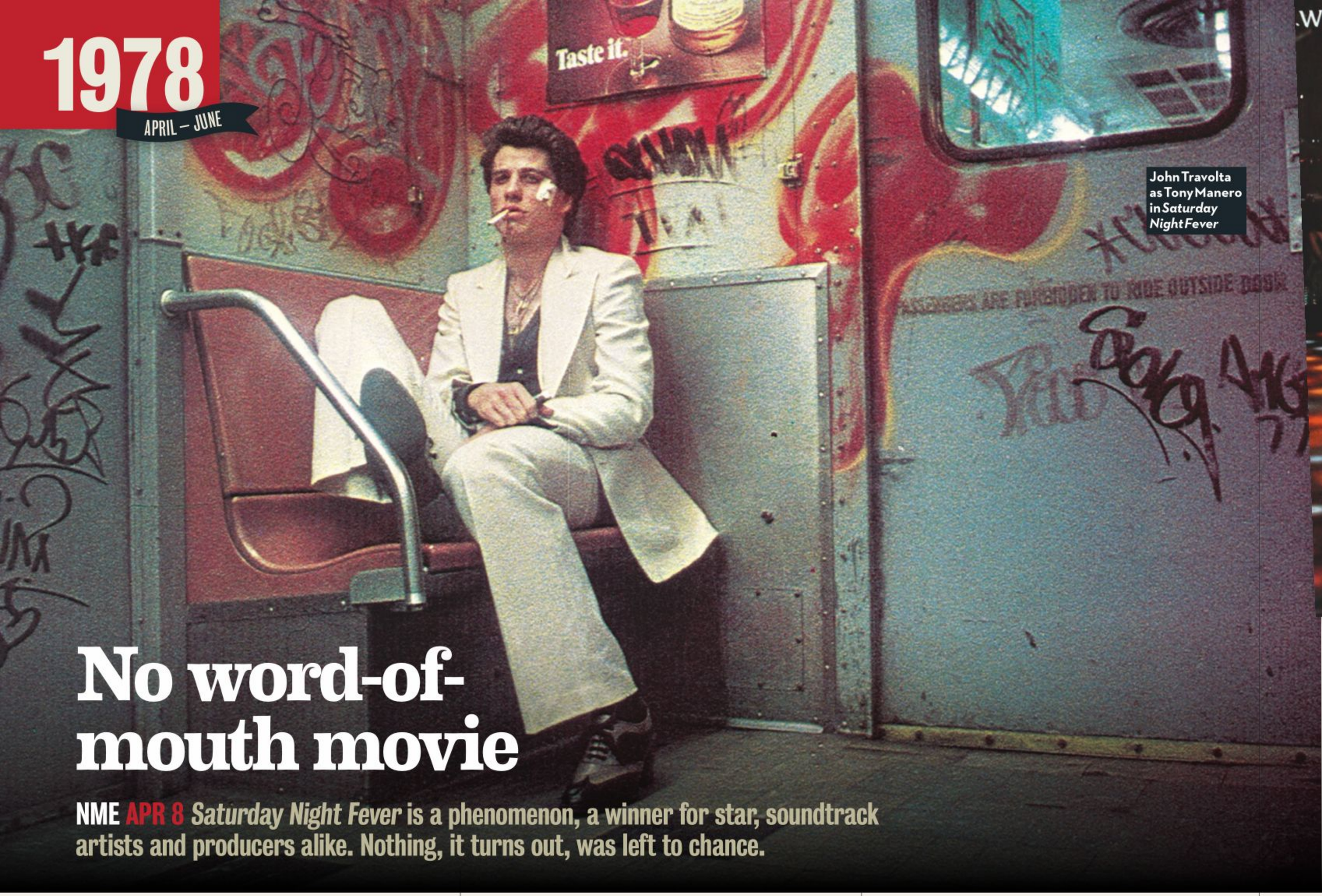
THE SEX PISTOLS are back with a single, an album and a film – but no Johnny Rotten. The group has been kept intact as a three-piece by manager Malcolm McLaren and a new double-A-side single, featuring Great Train Robber Ronnie Biggs, is released in a fortnight. Out on June 16, it features "God Bless The Sex Pistols" sung by Biggs and "My Way", with lead vocals taken by Sid Vicious.

Both tracks are taken from an album that will be released in September as a soundtrack to a Pistols film, due for showing at the same time. McLaren described the film as "a feature film with some documentary material tracing the early lives of the Sex Pistols." The album will feature mainly new studio recordings plus some live tracks. Vocals are currently being shared by all three members of the band.

"The Pistols trio have been auditioning for a new singer for about a month," said McLaren.

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES / GETTY, MICHAEL PUTLAND / GETTY





John Travolta as Tony Manero in *Saturday Night Fever*

No word-of-mouth movie

NME APR 8 ***Saturday Night Fever*** **is a phenomenon, a winner for star, soundtrack artists and producers alike. Nothing, it turns out, was left to chance.**

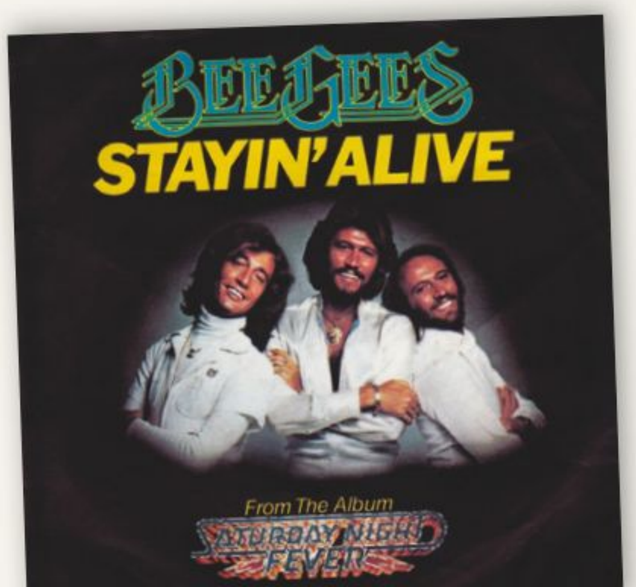
THE STARTLING RISE to popularity of *Saturday Night Fever* has been widely portrayed as a traditional success story – the rise of a brand-new superstar in the form of John Travolta, whose mugshot currently adorns the front covers of publications as adverse as US gossip rag *The Star* and the political heavyweight *Time*.

Far more interesting in many ways, however, is the story of how *Fever* was developed into a media goldmine which is now, according to *Variety*, "building into a music industry all by itself".

As Thrills predicted in January, music movies have come of age with a vengeance in 1978. In recent weeks in America, *Fever* has topped the film charts, with five tracks from the album taking up no less than half the US Top 10 singles in one recent week.

The financial facts are staggering. Leaving aside the astronomical amounts of money the movie itself is grossing, the album has already sold six million copies, and is now selling at the rate of a million copies a week, with a projected final sale in sight of 12 million copies – which would make the double-record set the biggest-grossing album of all time (*The Sound of Music* is still holding the record for biggest-selling soundtrack album at 16 million copies to date, but that is only a single album).

Fever is a precursor of things to come: the industrialisation of popular culture



WARING ABBOTT / GETTY

All the album tracks (the Bee Gees and other RSO artists aside) were licensed from other companies on a deal which means that if *Fever* does reach the 12 million mark, the licensees will walk away with a cool $360,000 per track.

For those artists this is only the beginning, of course. Many of these tracks, like "Boogie Shoes" by KC & The Sunshine Band, have been re-released as singles and are now themselves climbing the charts. Obviously the album will also stimulate sales of each artist's other recordings. Apparently a number of companies refused to license songs for inclusion in the soundtrack album. They must be kicking themselves right now.

The Bee Gees, who wrote eight tracks for the album, stand to split $1 million on publishing rights alone. Between them they also sang, wrote or produced all the five *Fever* singles recently residing in the US Top 10, a feat which betters even The Beatles at the peak and which should allow the Gibb brothers to retire for life should they wish to.

The mastermind behind this financial bonanza is Robert Stigwood, who has managed the Bee Gees since their career began in the mid-'60s and is now poised to become one of the most powerful figures in the music business. *Saturday Night Fever* was handled with consummate marketing skill. This was no word-of-mouth movie. Travolta was already a small-screen star via his Fonzie-like role in the American sitcom *Welcome Back, Kotter*. This, combined with the movie's eminently commercial disco music, backed by some extremely hard-sell advertising techniques, enabled the package to scale new financial heights of *Jaws*-like proportions.

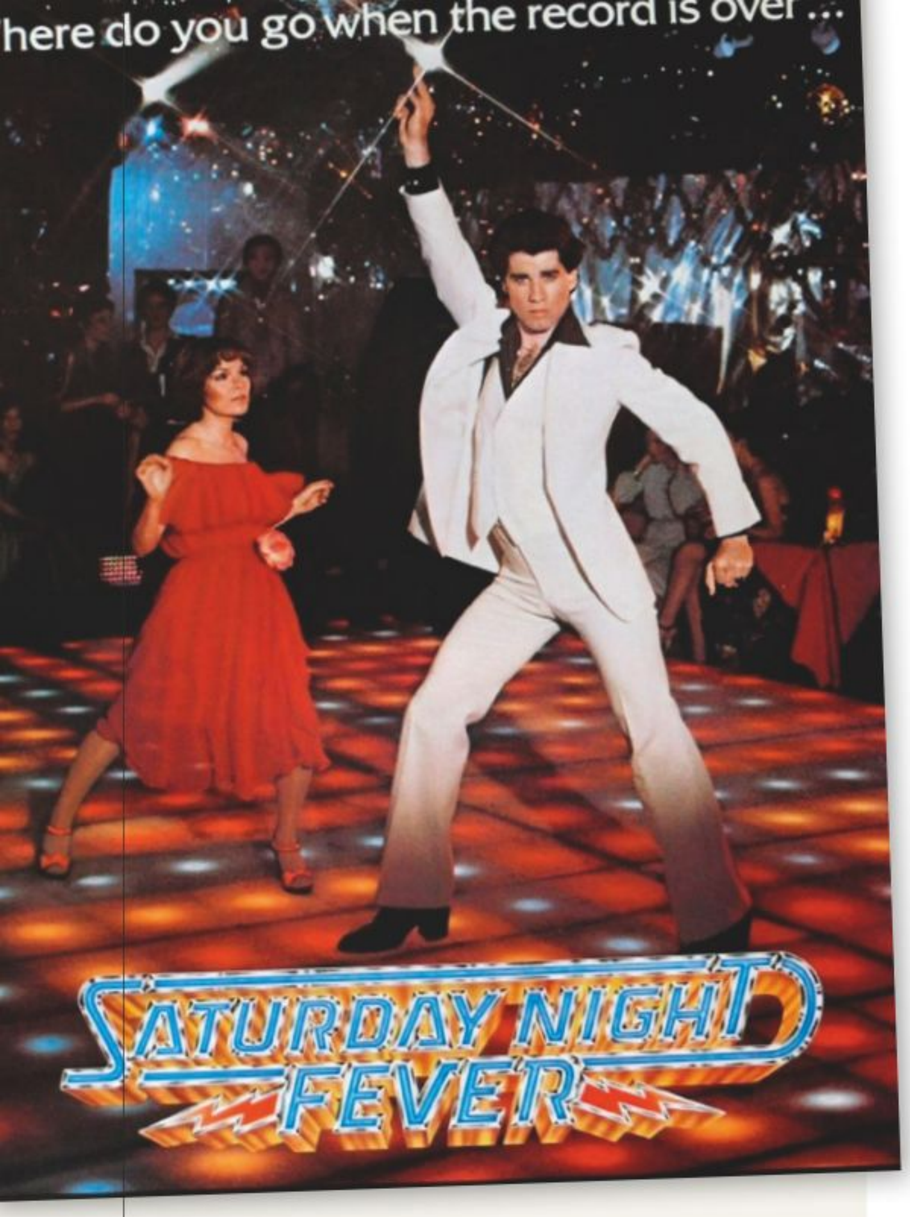
Having successfully launched the film via a massive in-cinema campaign, the Stigwood organisation went on to spend a phenomenal amount on TV advertising for the album – a quarter of a million dollars in Europe alone.

This reflects current industry trends – movies sell albums and singles, which in turn sell movies. Soundtrack albums dominated the recent Grammy awards (America's music-biz equivalent of Oscars), and are currently making huge dents in the "straight" album market. Biggies to date are the two *Star Wars* albums (soundtrack and spoken word) and *Close Encounters*, all of which are currently approaching platinum status.

Nobody understands this present shift in the industry better than Robert Stigwood, and he is now about to capitalise on it in a way that is going to make even the *Fever* earnings look like chicken feed.

For a start, he has two more major music movies all ready for release later this year. First will be *Grease*, an *American Graffiti*-style '50s pastiche based on a long-running Broadway smash, which once again stars John Travolta, this time teamed with Olivia Newton-John.

Shortly afterwards will follow *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, which features the Bee Gees and Peter Frampton



(to name but two), and which will be accompanied by a double-album package of 30 Beatles songs recycled for mass public consumption.

As if those two potential money mountains were not enough, Stigwood has even more tricks up his sleeve. With the *Saturday Night Fever* and Bee Gees money flowing in, he is now moving into American TV.

He is developing six new television projects, mostly written by writers new to the medium and each one full of crossover possibilities for feature film, record or book developments.

Three of these are specifically music-orientated.

Baby Needs Shoes, a two-hour musical comedy specially designed as a perennial Christmas item, is scripted by Ian La Frenais and Dick Clement of *Porridge* fame, and features music and lyrics by Paul Williams, who will also act. The songs from the show will be released as an album on RSO.

Music Inc is a four-hour mini-series on the music industry, focusing on the saga of a fictional group and featuring original music. Due to begin production in August for 1979 release.

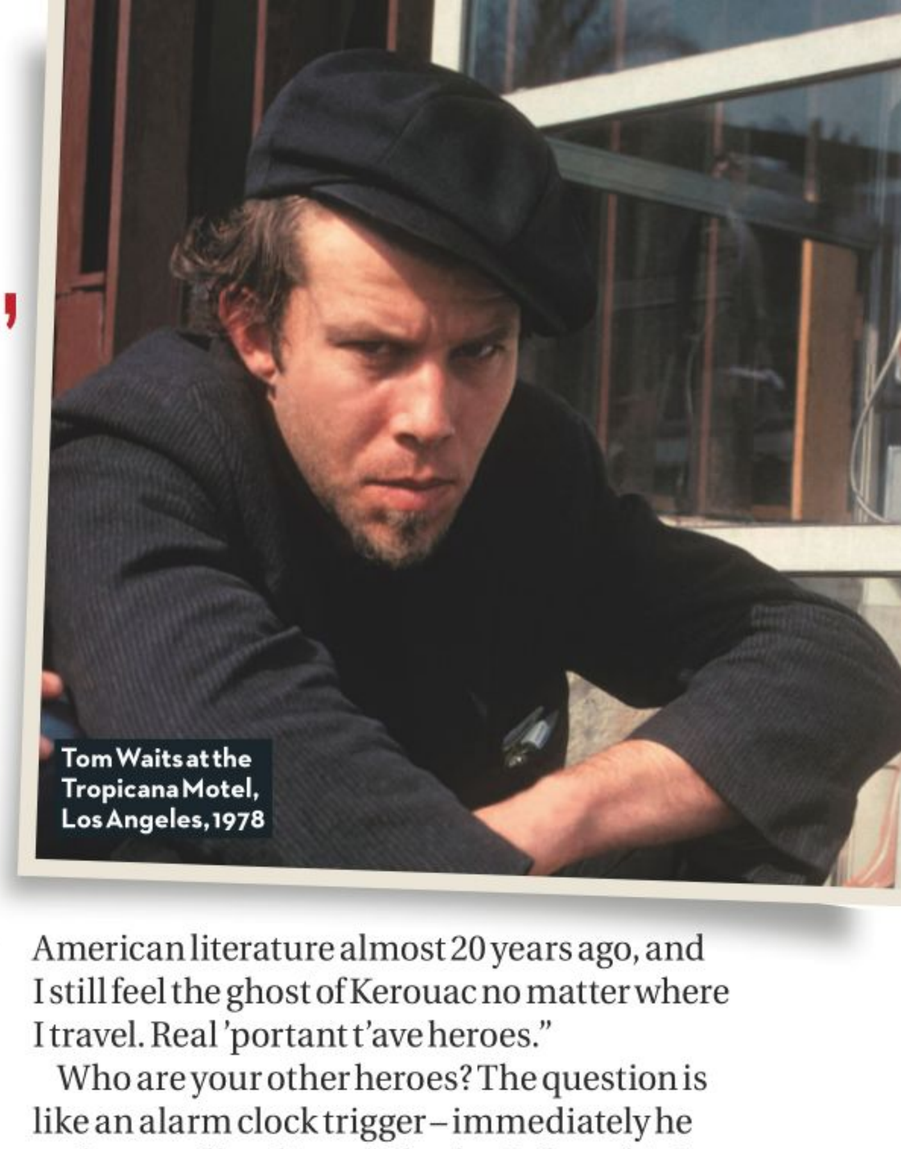
The Golden Oldies is a half-hour sitcom created and written by Henry Edwards, who wrote the screenplay for the *Sgt Pepper* movie. It's about a senior citizens' rock band and is described as a kind of *Happy Days* for the Geritol set.

Whether any of these will provide any worthwhile music is doubtful. But we have now entered an era where large corporations are increasingly intent upon developing entertainment packages which appeal to the lowest common denominator and can readily be translated from film to TV to record to book. Stigwood is blazing a trail which all the other corporations are eagerly following.

In this respect, *Saturday Night Fever* should be seen for what it is – a new mass-market innovation and a precursor of things to come: the industrialisation of popular culture. *Dick Tracy*

"I ain't eccentric"

MM APRIL 29 Tom Waits updates his followers on a book project about US heroes and a movie with Sly Stallone.


Tom Waits at the Tropicana Motel, Los Angeles, 1978

FORGIVE THE BLASPHEMY, but I reckon God must have been way out of his little box when he deposited Tom Waits among us. Mr Waits is, irrefutably, one of the Almighty's more bizarre and inspired creations. That he also happens to make records which sell in respectable (if not gargantuan) quantities, is a coincidence that makes him an irresistible subject for interviews during a one-day visit to Britain this week…

Employees of Warners, his record label, giggle slyly as they discover the purpose of your visit. "He's going to interview Tom Waits," they whisper, nudging and pointing as you pass. A walk to the scaffold must be more enticing.

Waits is located in a room near the top of the building, and my first reaction is to wonder whether he's actually alive, and second to bolt for the door. He's decorated entirely in black, from pork-pie hat to sinister cloak to winkle-picker shoes; and he's slouched awkwardly and apparently unconscious on a couch.

His body is a tangle of limbs. Long arms thread forever around knees, under ankles and inside calves like Hampton Court maze. The pallor is white and there's a three- or four-day growth of beard, which makes him look like a spare-time bodysnatcher.

"I live in a hotel in West Hollywood and I watch *Bonanza*"

The only sign of life is a gentle rocking back and forth; looking at this uninviting figure in black, draped around himself in a misshapen ball, just rocking, the recollection is of one of the inmates of *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*.

A cool nod of greeting seems in place, but Tom knows his manners, and somewhere from the centre of his apparition emerges a thin white hand. "Hi, how are you?" I say doubtfully. A pause, two eyes focus penetratingly on you for the first time, and there's an alarming hiss and throaty growl, like King Kong being woken up suddenly with a colossus of a hangover.

Gradually he cranks into life, and inform us he's come to Europe to discuss plans for a book with *Rock Dreams* artist Guy Peellaert in Paris. Peellaert is doing 80 paintings of American heroes and Waits will supply the text.

"It'll be… uh… big… uh… hardbound book… doing lottawork on it now… uh… reading and stuff. It's 'bout American heroes from Jimmy Durante to Jimmy Hoffa. It's got… uh… Marlene Dietrich and Jack Benny and Mario Lanza and Elvis Presley and Milton Burrell and Lenny Bruce and… uh… stories t'company each painting, my own perspective, not a biography."

Waits himself is straight out of a Kerouac-Steinbeck mould, and even comes within spitting distance of animation when the magic name of Kerouac is mentioned.

"Kerouac," he groans mournfully," died 1969 in St Petersburg, Florida, of a liver disorder… uh… nat'ral causes. Always admired him. He was at the helm of… uh… contemporary American literature almost 20 years ago, and I still feel the ghost of Kerouac no matter where I travel. Real 'portant t'ave heroes."

Who are your other heroes? The question is like an alarm clock trigger – immediately he reels an endless list… "Charles Bukowski, Sam Cooke, George 'Crying In The Rain' Perkins, Rodney Dangerfield, Abe Jefferson, Chuck Weiss, Thelonious Monk, Louis Armstrong, John Coltrane, Fran Landesman, Jon Hendricks, Victor Borge, who are your heroes?"

I modestly offer Woody Guthrie, Johnny Haynes and Jimmie Rodgers, and he nods, apparently satisfied. He reveals more of his current exploits – he's been making a movie called *Paradise Alley* with Sylvester Stallone of *Rocky* fame. "S'about New York City in the '40s, three 'talian brothers… I play a drunk in an Irish bar" – a beady eye appears from beneath the hat to gauge reaction. "Character's called Mumbles… never spent so much time in a bar without a drink." There's a faint hint of an asthmatic guffaw from the man at this. He also wrote the music for the film and got on well with Stallone – "very creative cat".

Future plans include touring with Bette Midler, including the possibility of dates in the autumn at the London Palladium ("I get a little tired of doing beer joints") and an opera. Not, mind, any old opera: "I been thinkin' long time 'bout using a used car lot; conducting with the dipstick, an' using a used car lot as an orchestra… uh… I'm writing a piece for that but I'm still formulating my ideas."

He also tells, with great amusement, of a trip to Las Vegas where he lost 300 bucks at a crap table and got thrown out of his hotel into the bargain. He was just minding his own business watching the girls, he says innocently, and they tapped him on the shoulder, took his photograph, made him sign an affidavit swearing he's never enter the place again and was escorted out by security guards. Well, he does seem a trifle eccentric, I tell him delicately. Quite dramatically, he shoots up straight for the first time.

"I'M NOT ECCENTRIC… I think I'm a real normal sorta guy. Not a pervert or anythin'. I'm not an axe murderer or a homicidal maniac. I live in a hotel in West Hollywood and I watch *The Rifleman* and *Bonanza* and *Twilight Zone*. I have the kinda image that's damned if you do and damned if you don't but I ain't ECCENTRIC."

But your image… "The image I have is of a lush and a drunkard… I'm a good American." Sorry we spoke. *Colin Irwin*

BRAD ELTERMAN /GETTY

“There’s things we ain’t done yet”

A tour with Blue Öyster Cult isn’t much fun, but it’ll take a lot to dent THE JAM or Paul Weller’s self-confidence. “I don’t feel I’ve got any contemporaries,” he says. Arrogant? “I think I’m modest,” he adds, laughing.

— NME APRIL 1 —

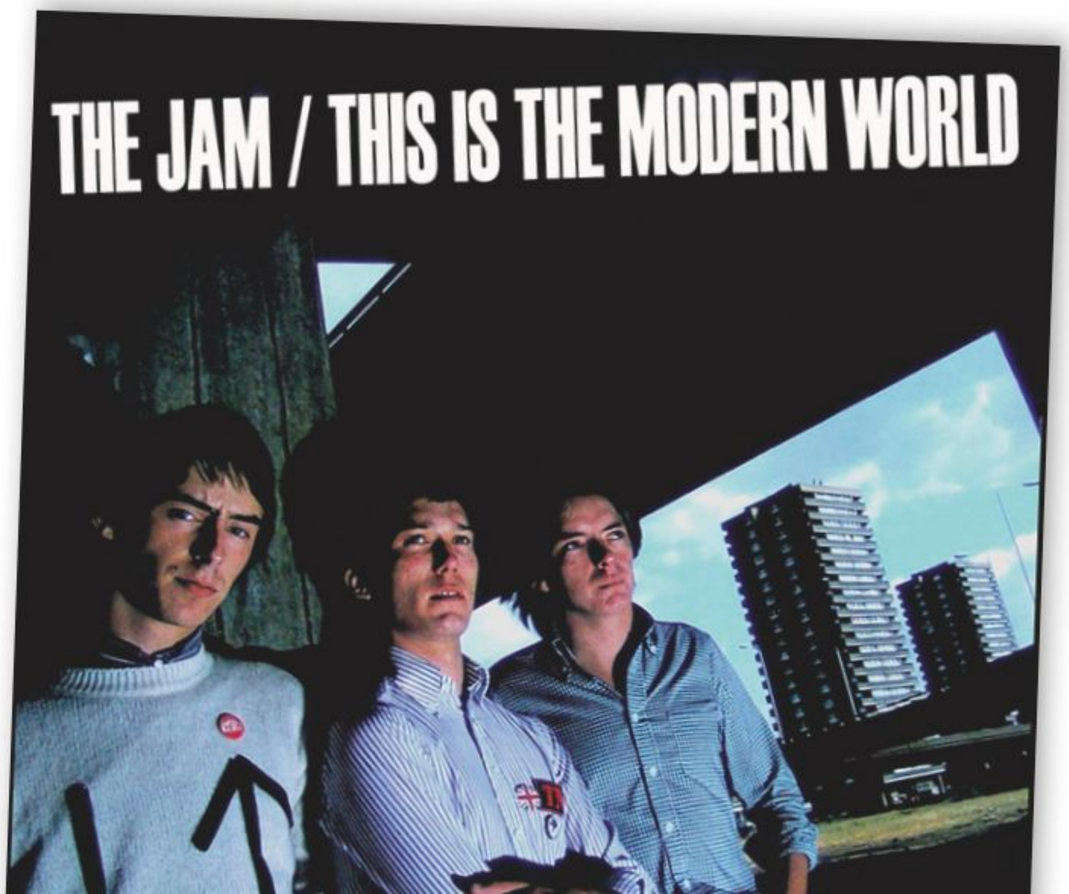
“FAGGOTS!” IS NOT a word with which to start a feature lightly, but when it is being yelled at the top of his lungs by an “all-American clean-cut long-haired filthy hippy” type, male, complete with waist-length ponytail (!), and when this individual is yelling “Faggots!!” at the ambassadors of all that’s Great about Britain Today, the one and only The Jam – well, I can tell you, it’s enough to make a chap forget that he’s only over here in the “New World” in the role of neutral observer, and damn well get up there and sort this grubby hippy specimen out!

Except he’s with his mates. Hundreds of them. All hollering for The Jam’s blood.

Hardly the best start to a five-week tour, this – stuck out in blizzard-torn Bridgeport, Connecticut, surrounded by hostile natives who seem to have banded together in some unholy New England alliance to give Our Boys the most decisive thumbs-down I can recall since Paul Jones unveiled his abortive Big Band at the 1967 Windsor Festival (whaddaya mean, you missed it? Believe me, he got the bird.)

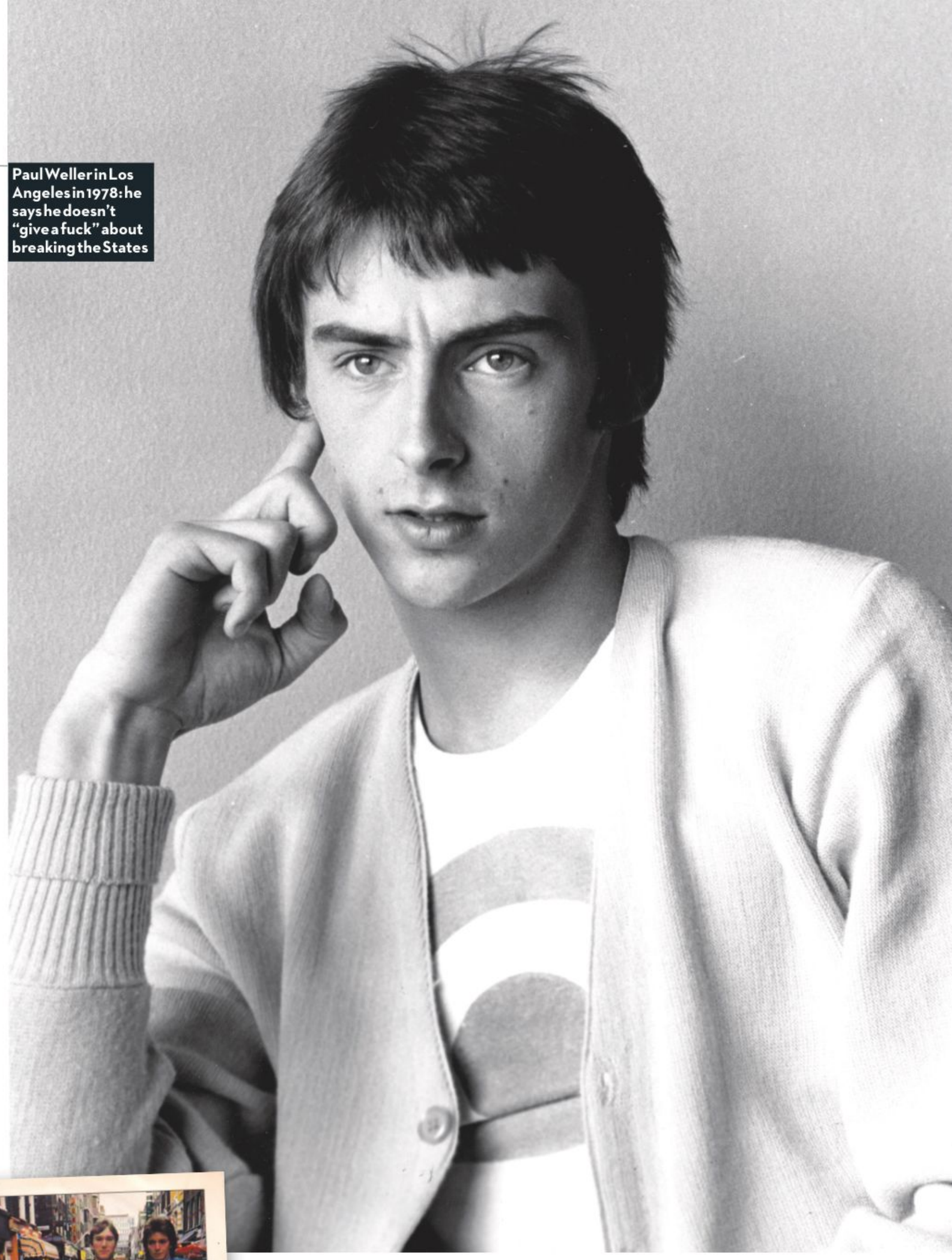
Well, this is worse. What is so surprising about it is that The Jam are performing an absolutely stunning set. The sound is great, the lighting is good, the execution is faultless.

It wouldn’t surprise me if this was, in a way, The Jam’s best gig ever; the one to film and record, to capture the glory of the music unmarred by the excited emotions their shows usually arouse. The only emotion they’re exciting tonight is derision. Playing unbilled support to Blue Öyster Cult, »



ALAMY

The Jam in Frank's Cafe, Beak Street, Soho, London, in 1978: (l–r) Bruce Foxton, Rick Buckler and Paul Weller



Paul Weller in Los Angeles in 1978: he says he doesn't "give a fuck" about breaking the States

coming on late (not the band's fault) to a sell-out gymnasium full of doped-up college kids, The Jam and their audience go from instant culture shock – Suits?!! What is this, some kind of Bay City Rollers concert? – through puzzlement, to open antagonism.

If The Jam were a folk group it would be easy to understand. If they were an Aztec reggae combo, the audience's loathing and impatience would be perfectly excusable. That's not what all these people came for, bub – they came to get on their feet and on their knees to cities on flame with rock'n'roll!!! Which, albeit in a less spectacular form, is precisely what The Jam deliver.

Ultimately, the audience reaction is simply a commentary upon the Cult's success in moving into the bland-rock platinum-album market. Whereas us Brits tend, I think, to associate Mr Lanier with Ms Smith, see nothing surprising in Sandy Pearlman producing The Clash, and view the Cult's oeuvre as that point where bondage meets braggadocio, where Satanism and Spectacle do mortal battle at the crossroads of decadence and heavy metal – well, it's evident on the other hand that this Connecticut audience, at least, see only the BÖC's new populist image, and are consequently somewhat more enamoured of the grandeur than the guts of rock'n'roll.

Whatever, they don't like The Jam – and The Jam aren't too struck on them. Paul Weller is positively surly, even during the intervals between the first few songs, when the audience haven't yet decided whether to laugh, cheer or jeer. Not that they can understand a word he mumbled, but – good grief! – ordering them to get up out of their canvas gym seats, grind out the joint butts and dance! The sole respondents are a couple of members of The Dictators who've come up to see the Cult and generously bop around by the side of the stage in a fierce show of support for The Jam.

But it just won't wash. "Modern World", "News Of The World", "All Around The World", "Whicker's World" (*Very droll – Ed*), "I Need You", "Bricks And Mortar", "The Combine" – it's sheerly sensational, and all it receives is a hail of abuse… though not, significantly, of missiles.

Glad you came, boys? Me too.



PAUL WELLER, HIS girlfriend tied inseparably to his side, disconsolately signs another autograph on another free album, mutters a terse reply to another formula question, and looks disinterestedly at his off-duty pumps. Your replies, I remark, are incredibly monosyllabic.

"I dunno what that means, Phil, quite honestly," he answers – and he's not being awkward. I tell him he seems to have come over to the States with a distinctly hostile attitude: he doesn't exactly enter into casual conversation with great vigour.

"I don't think I'm very intelligent," he replies, to my surprise. "My IQ's really dropped in the last year. I dunno – I think it's terrible, y'know. I can't speak properly to people any more."

Is that because he's on the spot all the time?

"I dunno. I think it's because I don't read so much any more. Reading does a lot for your brain."

Nonetheless, Weller's interest in this tour is hardly all-consuming. He hasn't the least idea of where the band is heading after the next town, for instance; and asked whether he's met Blue Öyster Cult, who The Jam are supporting on half a dozen more gigs, replies, "I dunno. They all look alike, don't they?"

Here he is now, doing a personal appearance at the National Convention of the IBS – America's network of college radio stations – in one of the biggest and most central hotels in New York, a city completely immobilised by enormous St Patrick's Day parades, and he's totally browned off.

Isn't he interested in seeing New York, seeing the sights?

"Nah, I've seen 'em all in history books."

Would he rather have stayed at home?

"Yeah, I think so."

So why has he come?

"A lot of reasons, really. I signed a contract to the effect that I'd come over here and play – and there's some kids over 'ere wanna see us…"

But is he actually interested in "breaking" the States?

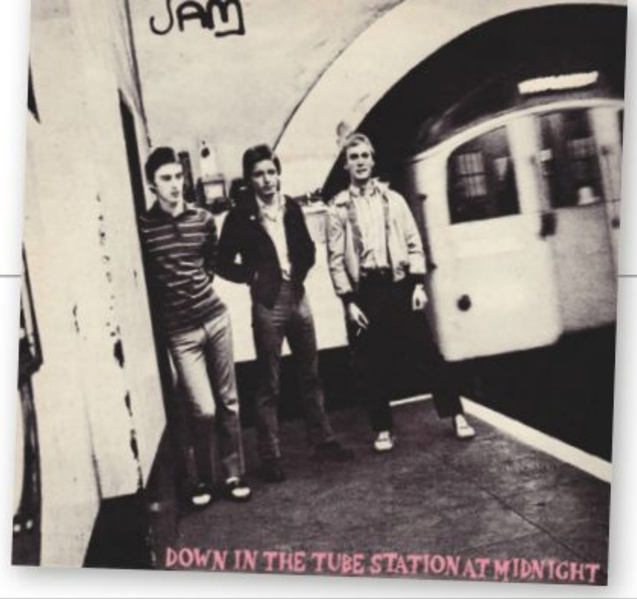
"I don't give a fuck, really," he answers succinctly.

> "I don't think I'm very intelligent. My IQ's really dropped"

In this, Weller is a little isolated within the Jam camp: Bruce Foxton and Rick Buckler are both evidently enjoying the tour. Foxton says he'll be "pleased" if they break in the States. As for Rick, who gave us the "all-American" quote at the beginning, he was asleep when his turn came to be interviewed, so we can only surmise…

Whatever The Jam's ambitions, Polydor USA seem pretty determined to make this one the big one. All the band are full of praise for the work and enthusiasm the company is putting out – especially compared to Polydor UK, whose recent efforts, according to Weller and Foxton, leave much to be desired.

CHRIS WALTER / GETTY



The main bone of contention is the second album, *This Is The Modern World*, which the band firmly believe was a complete neglected classic. "In a few years' time," asserts Weller, "people will realise how good it was. I really expected two-page reviews of that album – I really thought it would be No 1."

Instead, it reached about 22 and dropped.

"It's disgusting," Weller complains. "It should be a big occasion when we release a record – not just poxy half-ads. The whole of Great Britain should know about it."

"Yeah, obviously," Foxton expands, "we was all pissed off about it. The promotion on the last tour – they just didn't do enough for it."

Certainly, the band have my sympathy. … *Modern World* was nothing like the occasion it should have been, and consequently it has been sorely underestimated. Polydor's tendency to advertise Jam product in the most unimaginative way possible – by using the cover of the record in the ads – is merely a symptom of how chronically out of step with their new bands the major record companies are.

Stiff and Radar are virtually the only people guaranteed to come up with advertising that conveys the excitement or the wit of the artist concerned. And it's an important thing. No matter how immune to such things you may consider yourself, it's inevitable that your own image of a band is conditioned at least subliminally by the image put across by the type and quantity of advertising they receive.

"At the moment," Foxton estimates, "We've got about 50 or so thousand kids that buy the stuff. We're almost guaranteed to sell about 50,000 records, but that's about it up to now. 'All Around The World' was the exception – that done about 120 – but we played it (*Modern World*) enough on tour, we played it at every gig, so it must be down to the promotion." (On the other hand, of course, "All Around The World" was an exceptional record…)

In America, Foxton's glad to say, they're working the band hard. Personal appearances and radio interviews – which apparently were almost non-existent on the last UK tour – are being scheduled for every city. In New York, as well as the radio station convention, there was the unusual step of "open rehearsals", to which the local press were invited. (Who turned up? "The cleaners, our manager…")

The main problem that Polydor see in America is obviously this confounded "punk" tag. In the US biography, they go to absurd lengths to stress that The Jam are "new wave" – the "logical successor" to punk – and that they "don't abuse audiences and preach mindless destruction for its own sake. The antithesis of the notorious Sex Pistols… While the Pistols demonstrated against the Queen's Jubilee, The Jam did benefits on its behalf! The Jam doesn't need any safety pins to hold their act together."

The barriers to be crossed are enormous simply in terms of mutual reference points and comprehension. Not only does Weller need to shape up and clarify his between-song raps, but some of the interpretations I've seen of the band's lyrics are positively weird.

"Away From The Numbers" is seen as being about the police or ageing rock stars; "Time For Truth" has been seen as a love song, its "*Uncle Jimmy*" line is a reference to Carter rather than Callaghan; the "Art School" line "*the media is washed up*" has universally become "the media as watchdogs"; and the mod suits have been described on occasion as "Italian-style".

Also, great emphasis has been placed on the fact that the first album contains a number of "fucks" – to such an extent that "The Modern World" was put out Stateside with "*I don't give a damn about your reviews*" rather than the doubly disgusting "*two fucks*".

The suits actually present a most interesting point. The fact is that only to the Anglophiles among US audience do they have the same mod connotations as over here. To anyone else, it's a bunch of guys dressing up in dopey suits rather than punk leather, sloppy denim or rock-star satin. So I wonder, shouldn't the band change their image if the suits are hampering acceptance? And if they refuse to do so, isn't it a little absurd – elevating a suit into point of principle?

I put this to both Weller and Foxton, and both of them duck out of it.

"Whaddya want me to say to that?" Bruce returns, seeing the Catch-22 I'm setting him: either he sells out or he strikes a ridiculous stand about his clothes. "Do *you* reckon we should dress differently? They'll remember us for the suits, anyway."

"It's quite interesting," Weller maintains. "It's a challenge to the audience."

Indeed, The Jam *are* quite a challenge, at least to a BÖC audience. Other criticisms I heard that night were that they played too fast (you should have seen them nine months ago, mate!) and too short – you know, stretch out a bit and take more solos.

Culture shock all round. Although large American halls don't feel as big as large British halls, simply because they're more of a norm, The Jam's few large-scale gigs in Britain have not prepared them for this situation. It's totally new to them, playing support, facing audiences who don't want to dance, who haven't come specifically to see *them*. For the moment the watchword is wait and see. If any of the other BÖC gigs turn out to be similar bummers to Bridgeport, they've already decided they'll aim off and do their own tour.

> "I really thought *This Is The Modern World* would be No 1"


The Jam: "There's loads of things we ain't done yet"

NOTICED HOW IT'S getting hard to read a feature in this paper without *Top Of The Pops* featuring as an obligatory interview scenario? Well, before meeting them in the States I decided to renew my acquaintance with The Jam on the occasion of their filming their "News Of The World" slot – a session, incidentally, remarkable both for the band's millimetre-perfect miming and for the way The Jam's song came across like a nuclear attack in the calm, stagnant waters of the rest of the programme. »

GETTY

I arrived to find Paul Weller in his dressing room. "Hello," he sneered, "you've cut your hair. Company policy, is it?"

This exchange was notable primarily for Paul's unexpected display of memory: as far as I was concerned, we'd only ever met once before, a year ago, under the most fleeting of circumstances. Possibly he only remembered me because I work for the rock press – his interest in the press, British at least, is so strong that he actually asked Polydor to hold onto the papers for him for the whole five weeks of the US tour.

Whatever, I was quite unprepared for his next question. With no kind of small talk or any of the usual ways by which one develops a conversation, he asked: "Do you know much about groups like The Creation or The Action?"

It transpires that this is Weller's passion in life: pop-art rock. As far as he is concerned, it is the great untapped rock form. He gets the opportunity to expand upon this during a two-hour drive from New York to Philadelphia, when I put that hardy perennial about how-do-you-see-your-music-going-from-here.

"Musical direction? Well, like we was saying the other day, about the Wire LP – that's got something like 16 tracks, right?"

Twenty-one, actually.

"Has it? I like the idea of that, that's really good. I'd like to be able to write minute-and-a-half, two-minute classics. If I could write a mini-opera in one-and-a-half minutes, that'd be great. I had an idea to write a three-minute song, where you'd got about 15 different tunes in the one song – every line changes. That'd be quite interesting.

"I'd just like to experiment, y'know – but not with fuckin' synthesizers. In a three-piece format. There's a lot of things you can do. Like pop art, that's quite interesting, right? Nobody ever really explored that."

What do you mean by pop art?

"Well, there was only really a couple of songs anyway, like "Anyway Anyhow Anywhere" and "Makin' Time". I like the idea of R&B mixed with sorta pop sounds – and I like the art side to it. I can't really explain it, but there's something in them songs that just sounds really interesting, something that could be explored a lot more – like the sound effects with guitar and that.

"I've got loads of ideas," he shrugs, when I reiterate the misgivings Mick Houghton recently expressed in *Time Out*, that The Jam might be headed up a blind alley. "There's lots of things we ain't done yet. I'd like to do some R&B. I've sort of come full circle: when we started off we were doing loads of stuff like 'Ride Your Pony', R&B standards like that, and then we dropped 'em – but now I've really got back into that."

This I find strange, coming from a 19-year-old. I mean, did he ever see or hear Lee Dorsey performing "Ride Your Pony"?

"I've only 'eard a couple of versions," he replies, his hoarse, nasal cockney rumbling underneath the cacophony of diesel engine and cassette rock-muzak all around us. "There was a good version by The Troggs, on their first LP."

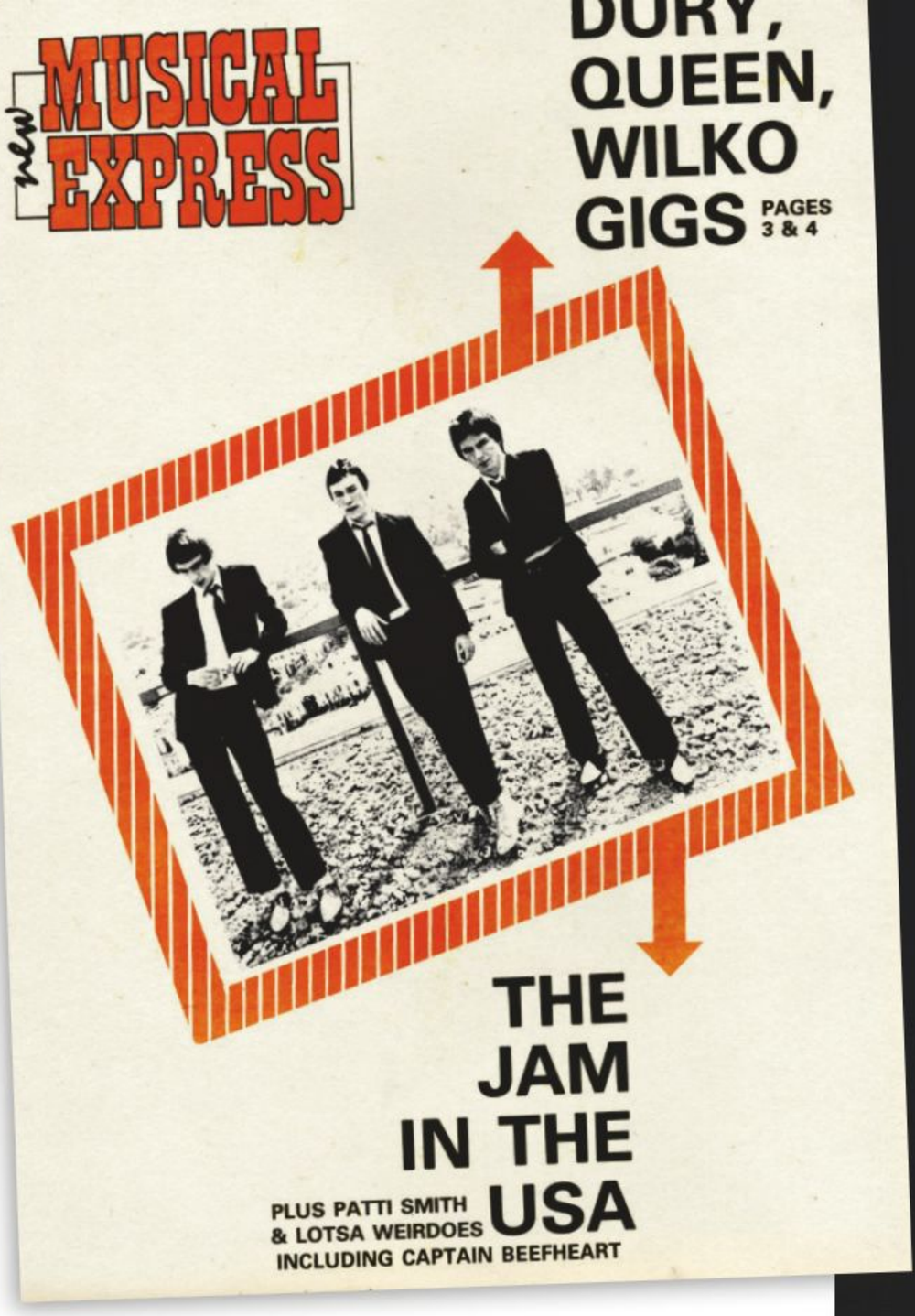
Ah, fond memories… but Weller himself wasn't actually "around" when those records first came out – was he?

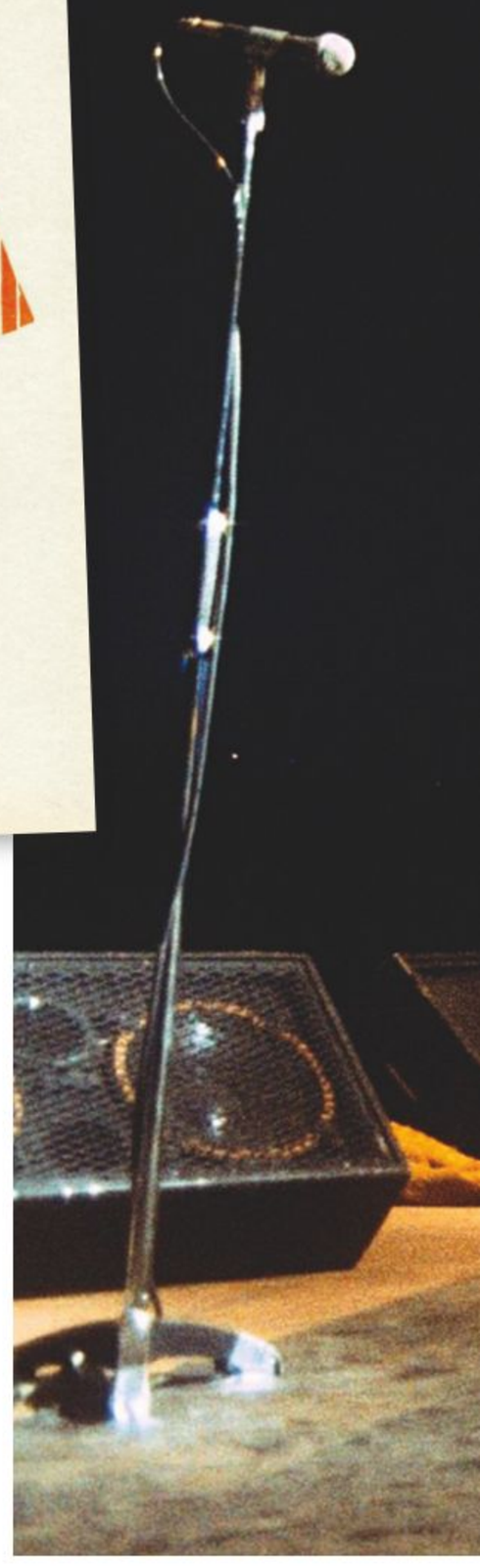
"The only groups I can remember from the '60s are The Troggs, The Beatles, snatches of things like The Kinks, The Young Rascals, bands like that – The Monkees… I only started to buy records in about '68, really. I bought *Sgt Pepper* – that was the first one. I've always been a Beatles fan, since I was a kid – and I used to like The Herd…"

I would have thought, picking up on rock in '68, that his first love would have been psychedelia.

"I like some of that stuff," he avers. "Like the first two Pink Floyd singles are really great. But when it starts getting really far out – like that Jimi Hendrix shit – I can't stand it. I like 'Purple Haze'… I only like short songs. Three minutes is enough."

As if to emphasise all this, we stop over for a personal appearance session at a record store just outside Philadelphia which stocks a huge selection of prime '60s artefacts and '70s punk. While I load up dutifully with albums by the likes of The Diodes, George Thorogood & The Destroyers, Static Disposal and other '78-vintage esoterica which you will observe filtering into the album review pages in the near future, The Jam come out with armfuls of Beatles, Monkees, Who, Kinks, etc, etc. Pride of place in Weller's stash goes to the Roy Carr/CSM Decca compilation, *Hard Up Heroes*.





AT THE SAME time as he is infatuated with the super sound of '65, Weller is also completely despondent about the big beat today's kids go for. As far as he's concerned, 1978 is a washout. This comes to light when I bring up the subject of the band's new-found control over their pacing, now performing at something like half the speed they used to.

"Yeah, much more sophisticated," Weller agrees. "It's better, yeah."

So why have they slowed down – or rather, why did they get too fast in the first place?

"I dunno, it's just that when you're playing in small clubs like the Hope & Anchor you just get caught up in the excitement and it's just bang bang bang. I quite enjoyed that in a way. It was good for that time – it was relevant to that particular period. But things have changed now."

And you don't think they're changing for the better?

"Not at the moment I don't, no. There's lotsa new groups, but… I dunno, it's just my own personal taste, but none of 'em play my type of music."

But were they doing that a year ago?

"Yeah. Like when I saw the Pistols and The Clash at the 'Undred Club, y'know, I enjoyed that. Even though it wasn't the same sort of music *we* was playing, I could still understand it, felt part of it. But I don't really feel part of any music scene these days. I don't feel I've got any contemporaries."

You don't relate to The Clash any more?

"Nah… well, 'cept for Strummer. But only 'cos like he's been playing for years and he's professional. He's a real pro – that's what I like about him. Same as me – I've been playing for like six years, so I'm a pro, ain't I? Quite obviously."

How do you think The Clash have changed, then?

"Dunno, maybe mellowed out a bit. I think all the bands have – including us. It's a good thing in a way – it shows some sort of progress – but whether or not it's the *right* direction I dunno…"

> "I think all the bands have mellowed out a bit – including us"



In the US, Polydor try to distance The Jam from punk, saying they "don't preach mindless destruction for its own sake"

Sounds positively Old Man Of Punk, doesn't he? In his less dour fashion, Bruce Foxton is of the same opinion.

"There's so many sort of punk/new wave power-pop records coming out, and I don't like the majority of 'em."

Did you use to?

"There was a lot more… like, Boys still make good records. I still like The Boys – that's probably maybe the only band I *do* still like now. They've got some really good ideas.

"There's not a lotta bands I'm interested in going to see," he shrugs.

Despite his view of the current state of Brit-rock, Paul Weller still places immense pride in his country. We've been discussing the Japanese, as it happens, a nation who not only embrace Rainbow, Rollers and Runaways, but also send fanmail to The Jam.

"It's funny," Weller observes. "I mean, can you imagine an English audience going to see a Japanese group?

"Britain's very creative. There's nowhere that can match Britain artistically – in *all* arts."

Is Weller very "into" other arts?

"No, I'm not very cultural at all really. I'm too ignorant. I just like some paintings, but I don't know the artists or anything. I don't spend hours in art galleries or browsing through bookshops or whatever – it's more instant art for me. I see a painting, I like it or I don't like it. I'm not affected by colours."

Which puts me in mind of a remark passed yesterday, when I asked him why they displayed the Union Jack on stage. Answer: "Because I like the colours." In revenge, I now ask him which colour's his favourite.

"Being a true-blue Conservative," he deadpans, "I'd have to say I go for the blue. No, I think it looks really great on stage anyway – visually it looks really good."

There speaks a true-blue Tory. God, I bet Weller must regret those remarks he made to Steve Clarke back in April last year, all that stuff about supporting the Queen, voting Conservative and the unions running the country. Nearly a year later, the subject is raised at the one US press interview I sit in on.

"Everyone brings it up," laughs Weller, "every time. Just shows the power of the press, dunnit? It was good, though – it made us a lot of enemies, which we wanted to. I wanted to, anyway

"I mean, the lyrics from the first LP just totally dismiss that anyway… I dunno, maybe I meant it at the time. It was prior to the Clash tour, and things were getting very cosy, y'know – they wanted us to fit into their little niche and be nice and political and left-wing and all this shit, right? And we made lots of enemies on that tour – all the other groups hated us – and I enjoyed that. They were on about complacency, and they all fitted into that anyway!"

The man who loves to be hated? Or a desperate show of bravado? Frankly I don't care either way – nor do I care very much about Weller's "politics". As expressed through his lyrics, there's confusion, resentment, anger – but little coherent direction – and despite the "Uncle Jimmy" reference, they're certainly not paeans to Margaret Thatcher. If anything, he's romantic; and the words on the first album in »

> "They wanted us to be nice and political and left-wing, all this shit"

BOB HOPE / REX FEATURES



"They'll remember us for the suits, anyway": Bruce Foxton reflects on the stagewear that may have hampered widespread acceptance in the US

particular are completely secondary to the music anyway. "I Need You" or "Time For Truth" – it really wouldn't matter if he was singing "Humpty Dumpty", because the guy is a brilliant musician and it's there that he strikes his chords, so to speak.

Weller agrees with me that interviewing him on the subject of politics is stupid – so just erase the past few paragraphs from your memory bank and we'll find something interesting to talk about.

I'm in love with The Jam whether they blank the lyrics out or not.

> Paul says his dad is "just like a manager, it's a professional relationship"

THE JAM ARE a very insular band. They've all known one another for years; on the road, there's just four roadies, three band, one girlfriend and one manager. Daddy. John Weller is a leonine, silver-haired man, one-time boxer and ex-builder, who was pitched into rock management around the time The Jam began to create a stir playing London's third-division venues at the turn of '77.

Spending a couple of days on the road with them is hardly enough time for me to begin spraying around profound insights into The Jam's internal relationships. What I can say is that J Weller's presence as manager has its good and bad points.

The good's easy. He's not any kind of visionary, he didn't *want* to manage a band, so he's no Svengali – which means that the group have complete artistic control. And as Weller P points out, "without mentioning any names, a lotta managers don't [give the band control]."

When I ask when we can expect his album with the Kray twins in Tierra Del Fuego, he just looks bemused: "I can't believe all that…"

Also, of course, one assumes that the band can trust John Weller and that they present a united front to the record company, etc. "Us against the world," as Paul puts it.

Paul also maintains that he is "just like a manager – it's a professional relationship", but here my doubts begin to creep in.

Admittedly, it's hard to think of *any* really fabulous rock managers, but not many would, for instance, let slip the opportunity to put his group's leader in front of an impatient journalist's mic on the band's day off; somewhat to my dismay, that happened on the one night I spent in New York, and I discovered after the event that while I had frittered my time away elsewhere, Paul had been hanging around his hotel room all evening. His father had told me he was going out…

It has been suggested that the father-son relationship means Paul has nobody there to let the air out of his ego; that maybe John Weller's presence contributes to the guitarist's vanity. Obviously, I can't say – though Paul is getting to be notoriously big-headed. At least one *NME* writer has come away from a recent encounter bitching about it, while Paul himself told me that Bob Hart of *The Sun* actually refused to run an interview he did with The Jam because Weller was "too arrogant".

"I don't think I am," he laughs. "I think I'm modest."

On the other hand, it could be that John Weller actually promotes band discipline – thought not necessarily in good ways. For instance, he it is who rushes around after they come off stage, collecting and folding their ties; he it is who collects the plastic cups off the *Top Of The Pops* dressing room floor, because "they may not have us back… and we need them more than they need us".

But the important point remains: he's not going to rip them off. Believe me, you grow accustomed to musicians wearing a look of slight paranoia when they discuss "the management", and the bands who are confident that their earnings aren't lining someone else's pockets are fortunate indeed.

REX FEATURES



EVER SINCE *THIS* *Is The Modern World* received a pasting from Mick Farren on its release back in November, Paul Weller has been trying to hustle a déjà vu job on his meisterwerk. If you think it's stupid to look back on something that's only four months old, skip to the next section – but be warned: this is a CONCEPT album you're missing out on!

When Paul tells me this, I instantly click on the tape recorder, but he won't bite. "That's it. It's got a concept." After a little prompting, it transpires that the concept is fairly broad: life itself and the ironies thereof. Most of the album was written in the space of a week; unfortunately, timing problems meant that the tracks couldn't appear in quite the intended order. Basically, though, it comes down to a confrontation between a nebulous authority figure(s) and the individual(s) in "the crowd".

The two central tracks are "Standards" and "The Combine", the one portraying the authoritarian voice over a crisp variant upon "I Can't Explain", including a line about the Pistols – "*We'll outlaw your voices, do anything we want/We've nothing to fear from the nation*" – and the other describing the panic and pressures to conform of life in the crowd. This track, "The Combine", was inspired in fact by *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*, though you'd never guess from hearing it – the reference evidently comes when the protagonist dreams of escape while accepting the status quo (in the case of the Indian chief in *Cuckoo's Nest*, playing dumb and insane) simply to survive.

"'Standards' was like the people who set the film, who write the scripts and that, and 'The Combine' was like the participants in it – the actors. But it was so subtle," Weller laughs, "no one understood it. For the next LP, we're thinking of having a little booklet in it…"

The dual "voices" have been widely misunderstood. For instance, "Here Comes The Weekend" begins with what I take to be "the authorities'" view – "*Don't hang around and be foolish/Do something constructive with your weekend*" – which people have criticised for its ungainly language, assuming it to be Weller speaking. In fact, Weller would seem to see the weekend as a sop, an opiate, which is why he concludes: "*Here comes the weekend, I'm gonna do my head/Here comes the weekend, the weekend is dead.*"

The album's great strength, though, is the way these generalisations are expressed from such an intensely personal angle, partly via the lyrics and, overwhelmingly, through Weller's brilliant singing, which has that quality of reflective privacy inherent in the greatest of all pop singing, whether it be Ray Davies on "Waterloo Sunset" or Marc Bolan on "The Slider".

No wonder Weller talks about the studio as "more sacred" than live work, and is reluctant to play "Away From The Numbers", "Life From A Window" and "Tonight At Noon" on stage. The latter in particular, with its transcendental quality like a dozen Kinks songs rolled into one – "See My Friends", "So Tired", so many others, they're all there with a depth and tranquility Ray Davies can only locate in his most inspired moments any more – yes, I can see why Weller would consider it sacrilege to play that live. The band has assumed the true mantle of the '60s: the taste, the feeling, the honesty, the soul.

In performance, I reckon The Jam match up to any of the '60s greats. Foxton and Buckler are a faultless rhythm section; Weller and Foxton are possibly the greatest vocal partnership since Lennon/McCartney and the Davies brothers; and as for Paul Weller's guitar playing, his rhythm arsenal is so complete I can even forgive him for calling Hendrix "shit".

Obviously Weller's words – though far more humane and sympathetic than anybody gives him credit for – still have a long way to go before they achieve the magic of Lennon, Townshend and Ray Davies at their peak. Learning the importance of making things rhyme would be a start. But musically I reckon he's almost right up there with the gods – though it's hard to tell without words you can really fall in love with.

It takes a long time to sink in. As recently as a fortnight ago, I was still agreeing with people who said *In The City* was a better album than *This Is The Modern World*. Finally, after a hell of a lot of plays, the scales have fallen from my ears. Paul Weller is right: if you don't make the effort to understand it now, you'll feel pretty foolish later. And like he says, he has no contemporaries.

The band has assumed the true mantle of the '60s: the taste, the soul



SO HERE WE all are back together again. To those who skipped the last bit: you missed out on loads of fab stuff about The True Mantle Of The 1960s and that – but where we're headed for now, the verbiage could hardly be more irrelevant.

The Tower Theatre, Philadelphia, an audience that looks identical to the one in Bridgeport except it's come to see the Ramones, The Runaways and The Jam, and they are *devastating* this crowd.

It's a triumph, and it demonstrates that the audience for this novel kind of music – rock'n'roll – does exist in the States. The acclaim at the end of the set was so protracted, the band could have gone away and changed their suits before encoring.

The Jam have always been an exciting live band, but now they are so much more. They've got depth. Their hand is upon the key, and I don't think they're going to let go until they've opened the door. Then we'll really see something. *Phil McNeill* •



"Careful – the place will burn down!"

MM JULY 1 Bob Dylan plays five nights in London. "Finding these players gave me a chance to develop all the old stuff," he says.

EARLS COURT LONDON
LIVE!
JUNE 20

"I'M GLAD THESE songs mean as much to you as they mean to me." Bob Dylan said that.

He said it to his adoring audience on the final night of his six-concert stretch at Earls Court, London – just after he had sung "It's All Right Ma, I'm Only Bleeding". He got a heroic reception, and he thanked us. Warmly.

The Dylan of old used to treat his songs and his audience with virtual disdain. Ten years ago, to have imagined him admitting any real care for them would have been unthinkable. That comment spoke volumes for the man's maturity.

The same new quality was evident later. An hour or so after that final show, Dylan was talking to my colleague Max Jones and me and one of his remarks ran roughly like this: "Doing these concerts here has made me realise about British audiences. They're really something different – they actually come for the words and for the songs. That's what's missing back home. There, they tend to come for..."

The event?

"Yeah, not so much the music, more the sideshow."

For committed Dylan diehards like me, it was all a little hard to swallow; at all his concerts he had been diplomatically thanking his audience. Tonight, he had confessed that the songs meant a lot to him. Now he was getting close to talking about wonderful British audiences.

My mind floated back to an *MM* interview with David Bowie recently in which David had said he had been disillusioned by Bob's quote to him: "Wait till you hear my new album." Bowie said, in effect, that he could scarcely take that kind of Las Vegas cliche from Dylan, of all people.

All this was a far cry from the monosyllabic Dylan of yore. Ten or more years ago, a "yes" or more likely "no" would have been regarded as a major political speech. Now, he was looser, talking to the *MM* about anything, from his current musical inclinations, reminding us and himself about his roots and registering unmistakably sincere delight at what had happened to him in Britain.

Max Jones, a cohort of Bob's since long before the musician exploded on to the world stage, commented on the extent of the band's involvement in Dylan's stage act today, and Bob expounded immediately with great enthusiasm.

He had taken ages, he said, to find the right musicians, but was now elated at what they'd done for him and for the old material. "They're all the same songs," he said, in what seemed to me a direct quote from his Albert Hall speech in 1966.

"The songs will go on for ever. People like them done over and over, and me, too. But finding these players gave me a chance to develop all the old stuff. I enjoy them this way and people seem to, as well."

If we wanted them sung as on the record, he added, go and listen to the albums. He managed that famous half-smile.

We talked of the soul and blues inflections in certain passages of his act, notably in "Going, Going, Gone", which closed the first half, and "I Shall Be Released", which carried a definite gospel flavour and even theatrical hand gestures by Bob.

"What I like about the band is that I can get everything I want from them – blues, soul, country, Cajun, American mountain music – everything. This is *not* just a rock band. Soul has always been in me and I've been listening to Red Prysock, the greatest horn player I've ever heard. And then years ago I used to go to the Apollo [in Harlem] and listen to Bobby "Blue" Bland – I went there night after night.

"Lonnie Johnson and Muddy – these people are the guys I've come up with, so the soul element is a natural."

Mention of the girl back-up trio of Helena Springs, Jo Ann Harris and Carolyn Dennis – introduced jokingly onstage by Dylan as variously "my cousin, my fiancée, my ex-girlfriend" – seemed to stick a very slight glint in Dylan's eye as he stood talking to us just outside the backstage canteen.

GRAHAM WILTSHIRE / GETTY



Genuinely energised by the reaction: Bob Dylan in concert at London's Earls Court

We commented on their visual appeal, as well as vocal quality, and Dylan said that he was getting round to thinking that that aspect of the show was a "bit Las Vegas".

"But there's nothing wrong with a bit of sex in the show, is there?" asked the painfully honest Max Jones.

"I turned round in Japan and saw a pair of breasts on stage. I thought then that something's gotta be done about this," replied Dylan, enigmatically.

Getting back to the music, he said that on some nights – but not on this final one – he had included "To Ramona", and this was another example of how thrilled he was with the soulful violin-playing of David Mansfield. "I think he's the best guy around on that instrument, but they're all special to me."

He said it had taken him a year to put the band together, and many of his arrangements had been conceived and executed by Steven Soles, the tasteful guitarist/vocalist who also fronts the critically acclaimed Alpha Band.

Throughout the week, Dylanologists had been collecting anecdotes and comparing shows. On his final night, he had been more communicative than ever. His "thank you's" had been voluminous. At the end of Mansfield's mind-blowing solo which ended "All Along The Watchtower", Dylan crept up to the mic amid fantastic applause, and said drily, "I taught him that solo." Before that performance, Dylan said: "This song is dedicated to the late Jimi Hendrix."

Introducing the heavily orchestrated version of "Ballad Of A Thin Man" – which gave him the cue for more animated gestures than ever, acting out the role of interviewer and musician as in the storyline – Dylan said, "I wrote this song 15 years before the ballad of 'Short People' [an aside alluding to Randy Newman's recent hit]." We were left to make what we wished of the remark.

Sparklers, candles stuck into drink cans and cigarette lighters had combined to set Earls Court alight long before the end of the show was in sight on Tuesday, and Dylan was moved to say, "Careful with those lights – the place will burn down."

Musically, this final night was special for many reasons different from those which made every concert remarkable. Different lines of his songs came over with fresh force.

"Tangled Up In Blue", read so majestically under a solo spotlight on nights one and four, was not so dramatic or meaningful on the final show, because Bob's innovative ideas with bonding the notes weren't so hot (but it's worth mentioning here that Dylan below his best is still incomparably superior to his nearest competitor).

Songs that clinched the final night were "Just Like A Woman", handled with every ounce of persuasiveness and delivered with surprising gusto by Bob and the band. Never, if ever, has the song been so brilliantly blown apart and knitted together to make a beautiful, meaningful tapestry of words: "*She makes love just like a woman... and she breaks just like a little girl*," never sounded more potent than in the hands of their author.

There are those who prefer his original, simpler versions. But like Dylan says, a good song should be able to stand redefining, or else it's dead. And his harmonica solo was a riveting joy, bringing the ecstatic crowd to its feet with a mighty roar. "It's All Right Ma, I'm Only Bleeding" was another standout. Again, he shook the old version from the *Bringing It All Back Home* album to the foundations and spat out the song in one hell of a hurry.

It gained urgency from the treatment, and the band rocked away handsomely behind the garrulous storyline, but there was no mistaking his own enjoyment of this recycle, and there was no mistaking the crowd's response to the line that became curiously finger-pointing to himself: "*I got nothing, Ma, to live up to...*" Untrue, of course, but he was doing it with aplomb.

"Shelter From The Storm" was excellent, too – but on this, my third attendance of Dylan at Earls Court, I was struck by the power of one particular song from his new album, *Street-Legal*. This was "Señor (Tales Of Yankee Power)". Brooding and sinister, the lyrics are, on close inspection, as desperately evocative of a mood as anything he's written – "*Can you tell me where we're heading... Is it Lincoln Country Road or Armageddon?*" – and we are left to surmise the target at which he points his finger yet again. At a directionless America, presumably.

It's a haunting, bluesy song, the microphone touching the right spots to wailing effect, and Dylan's voice reminding us of much of his early work. "*This place don't make sense to me no more... Can you tell me what we're waiting for, señor?*"

Splendidly meaty stuff, as is his assumed song of his recent broken marriage, "Baby Stop Crying".

"Lonnie Johnson and Muddy are the guys I came up with, so the soul element is natural"

Musically, then, there were highlights aplenty, and each observer will carry his or her own highlights of Dylan's concerts in the memory for a good few months.

Offstage, and backstage, it seemed a fairly orderly week, with Dylan's much-touted interest in British reggae arousing excitement among the national press.

The singer did no formal interviews; hardly surprising in view of the fact that when he emerged early in the week from the Royal Garden Hotel, Kensington, a national foot-in-the-mouth type yelled, "You're doing it for the money, aren't you, Bob?"

That incredible piece of insensitivity reduced everyone's interview chances from nil to nil-plus. And anyway, oddly enough, most artists do perform for money. Dylan, unlike some, actually earned his.

So Dylan came and conquered, and enjoyed [reggae band] Merger at Dingwalls, propped up by bodyguards, and talked informally to Max Jones and me. Dylan went for dinner with Robert Shelton, the American writer who first noted his appearance at Gerde's Folk City in New York, in 1961, and then gave Dylan the first ever review – in the *New York Times*. (Shelton is still at work on the definitive biography, and plans to complete it after Blackbushe.)

Dylan also phoned Shusha, the discerning Persian folk singer who has recorded some of his songs and who closes her act with "Forever Young", just like Dylan. He told her how much he liked her work, and that she should perform in America.

Shusha, who saw his final concert and was naturally impressed, found Dylan in articulate mood and seemed to have struck up an intelligent friendship with an artist she has studied for a long time.

The only moment in which Dylan made a mistake with an audience was when he said, "Goodnight – see you tomorrow," not realising that most of the people at Earls Court would not in fact be returning the next night.

But if, as I suspect, that was his only error of communication during a stupendous performance, then the world's most important rock artist clinched it impeccably.

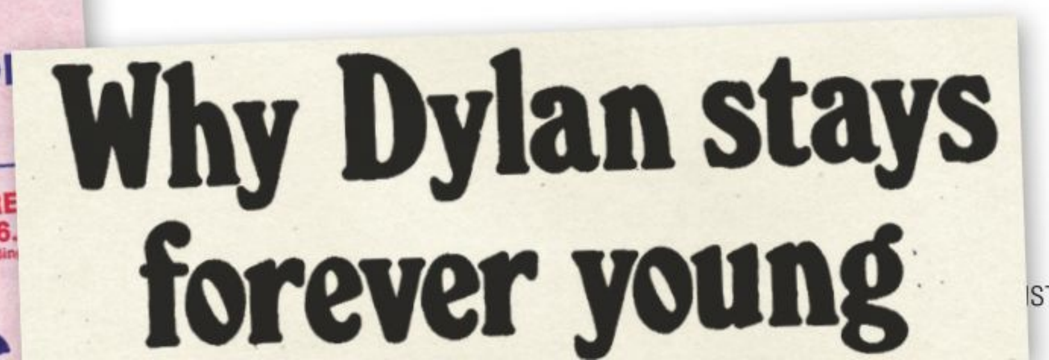
Here were no ordinary occasions. A seer of the '60s, his reputation blurred for some by the mere passing of time, had come to test our patience. And he emerged not just unscathed, but with a greater reputation. Because he risked everything by recycling the songs. And he'd proved they still stand up.

When Dylan said, then, after the final show, to the *MM* that he was genuinely energised by the British reaction, it was patently sincere and no Hollywood jive.

In America, remember, Bob Dylan's records are rarely played on the radio and he does not have the same legendary status as here; it appears that we take musical poets more seriously. A mind-blowing week it had been.

Ray Coleman





1978

APRIL – JUNE

“Rock is obsolete”

Shortly, they will become PUBLIC IMAGE LTD. For now, they are “The Carnivarious Buttockflies”, made up in part of John Lydon’s old mates. “People who say he’s a bastard now should have seen him then,” says bassist Jah Wobble.

PiL in John Lydon’s mother’s flat in Finsbury Park, London (with one of Lydon’s brothers, centre), May 1978: (l–r) Jah Wobble, Jim Walker, Lydon and Keith Levene

JOE STEVENS

— NME MAY 27 —

"HERE, LEND US a fiver Neil." John Lydon's upturned palm pokes toward The Guest Journalist, an expectant eyebrow arching above the famed John Rotten stare. Britain's most famous rock star is tapping me for a hand-out. Is he joking? Is this another arch put-on in the grand Johnny Rotten tradition of arch put-ons?

"I'm broke," he says flatly. "Completely penniless. There's no money coming in at all. Nothing. He has it all…"

The eyes roll in silent reference to well-known and heeled King's Road anarchist and rag-trade magnate Malcolm McLaren, ex-New York Dolls manager, ex-Sex Pistols manager, and currently protagonist of a flurry of lawsuits against Pistols photographer Ray Stevenson and now filmmaker and ex-Roxy Club DJ, Rasta Don Letts.

Presently too, it seems, McLaren and his Glitterbest organisation will be engaged in another legal tussle, this time with his former protégé and Sex Pistols frontman, a situation that under British law precludes all but the vaguest references to and conjecture about relations between the two parties concerned.

Suffice to say that on the Lydon side of the tracks, the wounds inflicted by the Pistols' breakup and subsequent events are deep and bloody. The resentments held are bitter and savage. The resolutions for the future, though, are considered and determined. NO matter what happens, you feel – and as much should be clear from past events – John Lydon is not a man to be kept down.

Which is just as well considering not only the current financial embarrassment of both Lydon and the slightly motley musical trio rehearsing with him, but also the immediate prospects for its relief.

"Frankly," says Wobble, the band's bassman, "with John's business affairs the way they are, I reckon it could be six to 12 months before this band is gigging."

IN THE MEANTIME, the quartet of Lydon (vocals), Jah Wobble (bass), Keith Levene (guitar) and Jim Walker (drums) face the usual precarious hand-to-mouth existence that's the lot of any unsigned rock band, and quite a few signed and successful ones too, come to that. Just because we put these guys on the *NME* cover, it don't necessarily mean that they can afford the time of day.

They do at least have somewhere to live, though. "This," says Lydon with a gesture that takes in the scraggy three-storey terraced house that he bought with Pistols' proceeds and which overlooks a thundering inner-London juggernaut artery, "is all I got out of it… the Pistols. It's very nice, but now I can't afford to pay the bills, the rates, nothing…"

The three other members of the band sit dolefully on the sagging sofa, and Wobble and Levene compare sympathetic notes on the injustices of being struck off the social security as a result of their joining forces with Lydon in this lineup. Jim Walker sits quietly on one side, resisting all attempts by the others to haggle him into going to the off-licence with the ackers dutifully coughed up by The Visiting Journalist.

On the wall "Anarchy" posters are relieved only by the occasional photograph of the Kray Brothers. On the turntable it's reggae. It is not what certain members of the rock press touchingly refer to as an "interview situation" – that comes later once John Lydon is conveniently absent. He's never liked committing himself to tape, least of all now he's faced with a minefield of legal complications.

The conversation roams around, centring mostly – and inevitably disparagingly – on the activities of former Sex Pistols and McLaren. Tales and incidents are related: some sinister, some downright laughable. John – he responds to a passing reference to "Johnny Rotten" with a wry "He's not here" – seems particularly concerned lest the tapes that Paul Cook and Steve Jones apparently made with "great train robber" Ronald Biggs in Rio De Janeiro are released under the Pistols name.

The former Pistol describes Biggs as "someone to avoid at all costs rather than seek out. People seem to have forgotten that that train driver is still a vegetable." (*Actually he's dead – Ed.*)

Lydon also has a small fund of stories to relate about his recent visit to Jamaica and the attempts by Boogie, a former Pistols' roadie, to film him there – attempts which went so far as to involve the hapless cameraman hiding in the bushes by the Sheraton Hotel swimming pool.

Mention of the way some people closely involved with the Pistols have changed their "anarchistic" attitude over recent months spurs me to trot out the old George Orwell adage about "all power corrupting".

"Well, that ain't true," says Wobble. "Just look at John, it ain't corrupted him. He used to be far worse than he is now."

"It's true," agrees Lydon with a cackle. "I was far more corrupt when I started than now. These days I'm not corrupt at all…"

Jah Wobble – he acquired the Jamaican prefix as a result of his obsession with reggae – is better placed than most to pass judgement. He's known John Lydon some five years now, first encountering him when they were enrolling at Kingsway College Of Further Education together. "I thought he was a Led Zeppelin fan," he recalls. "I was queuing up behind him and we had a bit of a quarrel about who was going to put their name down first…

"After that he just started crawling around after me, and I let him be my mate. He used to have to buy me drinks, though, 'cos no one liked him then. He used to wind everyone up, everyone. People who say he's a bastard now should have seen him then."

Wobble himself was still something of a skinhead at the time, fresh up from his native Whitechapel and the terraces of West Ham, which easily outstripped the current rock scene as a source of inspiration. His heroes at the time, he says, were the West Ham team: "Trever Brooking definitely. Not just 'cos he's a good footballer but the way he plays the game… You can relate that to life – style, elegance. Musically, I've always been into black music, always. First soul, then reggae, which I followed through from my skinhead days. Bit of a cliche, but it's true."

It's worth mentioning at this point that Wobble has acquired a reputation in some quarters as something of a bruiser, and there are comparisons drawn between him and Sid Vicious, whom Lydon also met at the Kingsway College and who, of course, also went on to play bass alongside Lydon. Furthermore, it was Wobble who played back-up to Vicious in the seedy fracas at a Pistols gig at the 100 Club in summer '76 when *NME*'s Nick Kent, in the words of Malcolm McLaren, "got what was coming to him" and was "done" by Vicious and his chain.

The Vicious/Wobble comparisons, though, don't really wash. Wobble is not the type to share Vicious' taste either for exotic pharmaceuticals, crazed American ladies of high parentage, or the cranky exhibitions of bloody self-destruction that Vicious has paraded before the world.

Wobble's interest in the rock scene began only with the Pistols' emergence in late '75. Since then he's entertained the notion of playing bass without ever taking up the instrument seriously until a month or so ago.

> "We're not into making statements, just having a laugh"



AT THE OTHER extreme, Keith Levene started playing guitar at the age of seven and received classical training in both guitar and piano well into his teens. He describes his major point of interest in rock Before Pistols as Bowie. "I was a skinhead for four weeks… I was a hippy first, then a skin 'cos I wanted to be different, but all the skinheads I knew were stupid and would just fight all the time, so I became a hippy again, a hippy in skinhead clothes."

A follower of the fledgling punk scene from its earliest inception,



Levene belonged to The Clash in their earliest incarnation, surviving only a matter of weeks before his departure/expulsion for reasons which he says should be "obvious… I wasn't into politics."

A flirtation with drugs was apparently another reason why Levene didn't stay the course with the City Rockers; certainly "Liar" on the The Clash's first album is widely reputed to refer to him at this time, a period when he also met Wobble and Lydon for the first time.

Having flunked his first punk band, Levene weaned himself from his drug habit and concentrated his energies on mixing sound for The Slits, a group whom he describes as currently "about the most exciting group around… like the Sex Pistols used to be in a way".

Drummer Jim Walker is ostensibly the odd man out in the group. A clean-cut Canadian who at 23 is the oldest member of the outfit, he left his native Vancouver six months ago inspired by the wave of imports and excitement coming over from the UK, and disillusioned by the apathetic response meted out to the local combo with whom he was plying his trade, The Furys. His recruitment to the Lydon band came with a rock paper advertisement which had already yielded some 20 sticksmen to the bored ears of the other three before Walker took to the kit and was hired, in his own words, "after about five seconds. Really, I just knew it was the best band I'd ever had."

Together they are… Well, hell, the foursome boast no collective moniker at present, or at least not one they'll publicly admit to beyond a "seven-day biodegradable" tag of The Carnivarious Buttockflies.

The band are hardly less reticent about their raison d'être; they've all had a gutful of the projections and rationalisations shot their way by critics and their ilk, OD'd into stupefaction by the popular-press ballyhoo about punk.

"Music's just a laugh," says Wobble. "Yeah, there ain't no big message or anything," says Levene. "We're just trying to be as honest as possible."

Lydon likewise holds few briefs for the new venture. "Things now are worse than when the Pistols started," he says. "Pathetic. Still, I did try."

It's a feeling that seems common to the band as a whole: the aftermath of post-Pistols, post-punk disillusionment, the feeling that in spite of it all, nothing has really changed… that it's the "same fat old hippy trip"; that the business has accommodated, emasculated.

In the light of this all this, certain truths are held by the band to be self-evident. Like that there'll be no manager – "It's the obvious thing after what's gone down in the last 12 months."

"That ain't catch-22," says Keith. "It's another catch altogether."

But some things have changed, I insist. The new wave stars definitely have a different attitude towards their role and toward their fans.

"Yeah, it's a one per cent change," says Wobble, "but it's an important one – a crucial one. A lot of it's down to the Pistols and Rotten especially… like that Capital Radio programme he did with Tommy Vance (*A Punk And His Music*) – to me that was more important than the Pistols getting the front page of the *Daily Mirror*."

One of the things that alienated a lot of people from the Pistols and punk in general was the way that violence became so glorified for a spell. Like if rock culture can't get itself together on that level…

"Well, put this down," says Wobble "All the violence with the punk thing is very symbolic violence. It's just people posing in a violent way, and if you go down to any pub in Britain on a Friday or Saturday night you're going to see real violence, like glasses hitting people's faces. But people never write about that. There's a murder a day in London that never gets reported."

Yeah but symbolic or not, there was a period in the summer '76 when at every Pistols gig I went to there were scraps. It got very sinister, like the violence was actually being engineered.

"I don't think it was engineered," says Keith. "The violent pose was on though… Maybe some managers of punk bands tried to engineer it…"

It seemed like the karma of that time worked its way back to the Pistols when Paul and John got done over in the street, though.

"Yeah, but that was 35-year-old geezers," says Keith. "National Front blokes… they're the ones who are influenced by what you read in *The Sun* about punk."

"At the time," adds Wobble, "the Pistols' gigs were just a good place to go and listen to some raucous out-of-tune music and have a booze-up and fall about on the floor and knock people over and have a general laugh. Get drunk, pass out, wake up with a hangover and go to the next gig. Watch Rotten take the piss out of everyone, and people take seriously what he said. It was good…"

We talk about the differences between the rock culture and the reggae culture, which I suggest has a good deal more dignity than most rock bands or acts can muster. Both Levene and Wobble agree.

"Rock is obsolete," says Wobble. "But it's our music, our basic culture. People thought we were gonna play reggae, but we ain't gonna be no GT Moore & The Reggae Guitars or nothing. It's just a natural influence – like I play heavy on the bass…"

And more and more rock seems to be copping reggae's influence, like the way the whole of Elvis Costello's act is based on a dub concept – different levels of instruments, bass, drums and voices.

"Yeah, Costello's probably done it better than anyone. The Stranglers are starting to use it now too. But like a lot of rock bands get it wrong – like that 'Wild Dub' that Gen X did; that was just topside dub, it didn't go down to the roots."

Later Keith Levene tells me that he's interested in using his experience as a soundman on "rock dub" in the band's repertoire, and later still I get a chance to hear what he's talking about when the band practise their as-yet limited set in a workaday rehearsal studio somewhere in South London.

What becomes immediately apparent on seeing and hearing what, for want of anything better, we'll term the John Lydon Band is that they aren't going to be any surrogate Sex Pistols. In a fact, once Keith gets across to the vocal console and starts knob-twiddling, what emerges at times sounds more like something from *Electric Ladyland* than your archetypal three-chord punk powerthrash.

There is a quality of deliberation and thought to their music that was apparent only fleetingly with the Pistols. Of course, there is a limit to what a lineup of bass, drums, guitar and vocals can achieve, as Keith readily bears witness after their first number. "What can you do?" he shrugs. "It don't sound like heavy metal, though, does it. Does it?"

No, it doesn't. Levene's guitar style alone precludes any such comparison. Though built on chord sequences and a minimal amount of solo work, Levene seems to have somehow stripped the sound he culls from his Les Paul Junior to stark, streamlined basics.

There's no windmill Townshend power chords, not even Steve Jones' blood-and-thunder attack; just cool precision wielded with unmistakable power. Wobble is evidently limited as to what he can attempt on his Fender Precision bass, but there's no mistaking that the man has a genuine feel for the rhythms of the instrument and should at his present rate of progress be able to see off a sizeable portion of the opposition before the year is out.

He certainly has a rhythm partner to match. Jim Walker plays a rapid, sharp-shooting kit, full of busy flurries and cymbal breaks.

John Lydon, meanwhile, alternately slumps beside the microphone in apparent boredom or hulks over the microphone incanting the lyrics to "Religion" in a painfully deliberate way. His style has also been an unholy combination of reggae DJ and pub carouser; the time I saw him rehearse he seemed intent on projecting anguish as simply and powerfully as possible.

His persona remains as inscrutable as it was with the Pistols: a mercurial visage flitting between outrage, glee, anger and mockery. He's got a strange mug alright; at times he can look like nothing less than a deranged Irish literati out of the James Joyce and Flann O'Brien mould. Other times he wears the glazed trance of a movie psychopath. In reality, of course, he's something else again – actually disarmingly human most (but definitely not all) of the time. His family, incidentally, are real charming folk.

The numbers they play include "Religion", formerly entitled "Sod In Heaven" and a scathing attack on Roman Catholicism such as one might expect from a disillusioned Irish Catholic: "*Suck your host… the holy ghost… Read how many dead in the Irish Post…*"

They also do a song called "Public Image", are toying with the prospect of featuring "EMI", and played "Belsen Is A Gas" – a number in the past that has always considered to be the work of Sid Vicious. They also seem to be fond of playing "My Generation", a number which Wobble introduces as "a vision I had last night". One suspects that its inclusion is somewhat sarcastic. Don Letts also showed up to jam and do some startlingly competent talkovers. "Can you toast on 'Religion', maan?" asks Lydon.

Are they the future of rock'n'roll? Bollocks. The last word is Wobble's: "Talking and analysing and going round in a circle is last year's thing. Things are too obvious now. If people don't know what's going on in the music industry now with the big bands, etc, then they'll never know. We're not into making statements, we're just into having a laugh. We just got a vibe and people in tune are just gonna pick it up." Seen. *Neil Spencer* •



Beautifully varied sounds: The Only Ones – (c/wise from top) Mike Kellie, John Perry, Peter Perrett and Alan Mair

ALBUMS REVIEW 1978

ALBUMS

Only Ones The Only Ones CBS

From the outset, be warned. I rate the Only Ones as one of the most stimulating and original bands around. That word "original" has been sorely taxed of late, but if ever its application was justifiable, it is here and now.

Therein lies both the difficulty and joy of this, their debut album. They manage to pack so much that is deceptively new and inventive that an easy exit route would be to yank out all sorts of obvious or eclectic reference points. But such a course of action would be completely unfair. Peter Perrett's voice, for instance, has been constantly compared to Lou Reed's, but any superficial similarity soon fades after fuller acquaintance, and, it must be pointed out, this offering demands several listens before you even become aware of the underlying intricacies.

They started the album at the end of February and finished it literally hours before heading off to an Amsterdam gig, which was just prior to their UK support jaunt with Television (an inspired match). None of the tracks went beyond three takes, and after sitting through possible producers like Matthew King Kaufman (an early choice, quickly abandoned), Sandy Pearlman and Ed Hollis, they simply decided to do it themselves.

It was the obvious choice. While they are four very distinct personalities, they merge into a creative whole. The mixing, for example, was generally undertaken by Peter and Alan, but, Peter stresses, "everyone contributed by being present".

But in the vinyl in hand, Peter penned all the numbers and most should be familiar to those who have caught the band live. Though, inevitably, some outshine others, all infiltrate and mesmerise through their novel sense of atmosphere, dynamics and overall construction. The sounds are also beautifully varied, a fact borne out by the meticulously arranged running order.

One mood is cleverly replaced by another, but The Only Ones' identity always reigns throughout. And the words are a treat; Peter draws directly on personal experiences/relationships ("*I'm in love with all these affairs of the heart,*" says "No Peace For The Wicked") and translates them into his own verbal style. At times they slip into the broodingly self-obsessive ("*Why do I go through these deep emotional traumas*" manages to work in its context) and at others into the darker recesses, as in "The Beast" ("*Run from the beast, there's danger in his eyes*"), and "Creature Of Doom" (a vastly superior version to that on the recent and dismal Hope & Anchor compilation). Though these titles might suggest Aleister Crowley connotations, they are used strictly as Perrett's own personal imagery.

His voice is tailor-made for their expression. Its flattened tone moves from the right side of strained – "The Whole Of The Law" ("*I used to have the notion I could swim the length of the ocean/If I knew you were waiting for me*") – to a stinging rasp on "City Of Fun" and "Language Problem". Perrett is a modern romantic, savouring emotions in all their contradictions.

Nor, by the by, is he without humour; he can deflate and wryly poke fun at himself.

But the real strength of the album lies in the arrangements and the interaction between all the parts. Almost every track has at least several themes which are both independent and somehow all fuse. Take "Creature Of Doom". After a monolithic opening, it roars into a jagged, angular rhythm which is sharp and impassioned; then it shifts into a thicker, more paced interlude before returning to a staccato feel.

And again, the cataclysmic last track, "The Immortal Story", where Peter's double-tracking is superbly effective. At first, it tears along, and then, momentarily, takes a breath before John Perry's guitar slips out lines like lightbulb filaments – contained, sparse and fiery. The climax begins and the guitar seethes, with muted saxes creeping into the background.

The tension mounts with everyone giving their utmost. The impact becomes ferocious and finally explodes in the literal soundtrack of an atom bomb devastating the wide blue yonder. That may sound cliched, but again, in the context, is quite the opposite.

Throughout, the band are near exemplary. Mike Kellie's drums could anchor the entire Royal Navy, as well as being adventurous in their own right. He plays with almost intuitive, blitzing ease, with a wealth of



FIN COSTELLO / GETTY



experience (from Spooky Tooth to dabbles with Frampton) behind him. Alan Mair's bass is a constant running attack, forthright and assured. And John Perry, who, after some wildly erratic performances during early stage sets, is fast developing into one ace guitarist. He knows the benefits of restraint and full throttle.

Apart from the band itself, the embroidery from session helpers is – yes, again – ideal. Like the compact sax part on "The Whole Of The Law", which comes courtesy of Raphael Ravenscroft (he added the sax colour to Gerry Rafferty's current hit).

And the female back-ups complement Peter's voice exactly. Here, Koulla Kakoulli (16-year-old sister to Only Ones manager Zena) is responsible. What is more amazing is that she had never sung "professionally".

I hope I've made my point. You could write a mini-treatise on this, but we all know the dangers of verbal swamping (of which I'm doubtless already guilty). If you miss out on this album, don't say you weren't warned. I've come full circle. The Only Ones are just beginning. *Ian Birch, MM May 13*

Television Adventure ELEKTRA

Spring again and a young man's fancy turns to product. Yet another American artist with no guilt – I don't know how they do it!

I don't know about you, but I'd rather sit through a Nick Lowe album than listen to the latest lax waxing by yet another 'new wave' American band, with their selfish fantasises of individual reality and desperate desires for the root of all evil.

Well, why do you think Television persist in putting out records tamped on red or green plastic? Is Tom Verlaine's creative genius burning? At least Kiss gives you a free sheet of transfers.

Still, as the Roman Emperor who hid his money in his chamber pot was fond of saying, "*Non olet.*" Money doesn't smell – not like this record anyway.

Drag yourself past the "literary" sleeve – they're not a pretty band and Tom faces up to baldness with bad grace – and what you get is more acid-casualty-type gibberish in the tradition of *Marquee Moon*.

You remember Verlaine sings like a woman from that African tribe where they stretch their necks to giraffe-like lengths by wrapping brass coils around them. There's your usual ponderous and profound musical preening, featuring guitar solos which make Segovia look like a handless man.

The single "Foxhole" is here, but the only good song on the record is "Glory", a clean, simple, unadorned song almost worthy of Talking Heads. It's good because it's the only time Tom doesn't angle for a date with Salvador Dali and use dumb dada-reject imagery.

"*She got mad/She said, 'You're too steep'/Put on her boxing gloves and went to sleep.*"

Now I think that's smart, but the rest is strictly surrealist and often unintentionally funny, like when Tom really gets into his namesake Paul Verlaine's (Rimbaud's possessive boyfriend) skin for the immortal line "*Last night I drifted down to the docks...*"

Verlaine did two years bed-and-breakfast courtesy of the French government when he shot old Artie Rimbaud in the wrist. If there was any justice in the world, Verlaine Reincarnate should do a similar stretch of boulder-breaking for this arty abomination.

If you were auto-suggested into buying *Marquee Moon*, you might be interested in this – but I doubt even that, since the new little piggy isn't getting a page-plus review and a front cover-ridiculous overkill.

Tom's loved one might like it (cheers, Patti Lee!), but *Adventure* is really just wallpaper backing for the Woosome Twosome to read each other French poems to.

"Truth for the poet," said George Santayana "is only a stimulus."

Which means that a poet doesn't give a damn about anyone or anything much beyond his nibs' nib. Stateside new-wave bands have honed this stance to near-perfection, all to the good of their bank balance. But gee whiz, what a state to be in...

Julie Burchill, NME April 8

SINGLES REVIEW 1978



Always in motion: Kraftwerk – (l–r) Karl Bartos, Ralf Hütter, Florian Schneider and Wolfgang Flür

SINGLES

Nick Lowe Little Hitler RADAR

Yes, once again, it's wonderful – to my mind, the best cut on *Jesus Of Cool*. The song is marinated in all the best pop traditions: a deceptive, super-scope production; great words about showbiz paranoia (and parallel ailments); plus back-up harmonies that are as smooth and sweet as Planters Peanut Butter. The flip, "Cruel To Be Kind", is an Ian Gomm/Lowe collaboration and, not unsurprisingly, recalls Brinsley Schwarz. Clean and effervescent, but not much else, unfortunately. *MM May 13*

Kate Bush The Man With The Child In His Eyes EMI
Linda Lewis It's Good ARISTA

A clever follow-up in what must have been a difficult decision. This showcases the softer, more reflective side of Kate Bush – in direct descent from Joni Mitchell's *Blue* period. Should be monstrous, despite a few cringeworthy words. Once again Linda smacks sadly of desperation. A mediocre disco belter taken from that trashy movie *The Stud*, it just isn't good enough for her. *MM Jun 3*

The Residents
Satisfaction RALPH RECORDS

Certainly a timely re-release from '76 what with Devo's version getting even Radio One airplay. Whereas the Akron boys frogmarch out of metropolis, The Residents – those mysterious hooded figures from San Francisco – squirm in some future-shock gutter. *MM May 13*

Kraftwerk
The Robots
CAPITOL

Rinky-dink disco for all aesthetic androids everywhere. From one angle they are hysterical. Humans struggling to be technologically precise showroom dummies. From another angle, they are hypnotic and stimulating. Rather than bother about their man-machine doctrines, turn to the music itself, and let it be the focus. It's remarkably cinematic (and very close to modern German film directors), laying down the basics over which you can paint your own landscapes. Sharp, stainless and always in motion: music under the sodium glare. *MM Jun 3*



Blue Öyster Cult
(Don't Fear) The Reaper CBS

The track from *Agents Of Fortune* that gave the Cult their first big US hit. Could it happen here? Let's hope so. This is a beautiful Donald Roeser song that adapts the sound of The Byrds to that of BÖC, with interweaving guitars, a totally seductive melody, energy held at bay and the usual strange lyrics. *MM May 13*

Talking Heads
Pulled Up SIRE

Prised off the album presumably to keep interest bubbling. They may wear Sta-Prest strides and gleaming white shirts, but they are one fine band. A jubilant underlay with some cardiac bass from Tina Weymouth and optimistic words from David Byrne, who juggles his larynx in happily frenetic fashion. Lovely stuff. *MM, Jun 3*



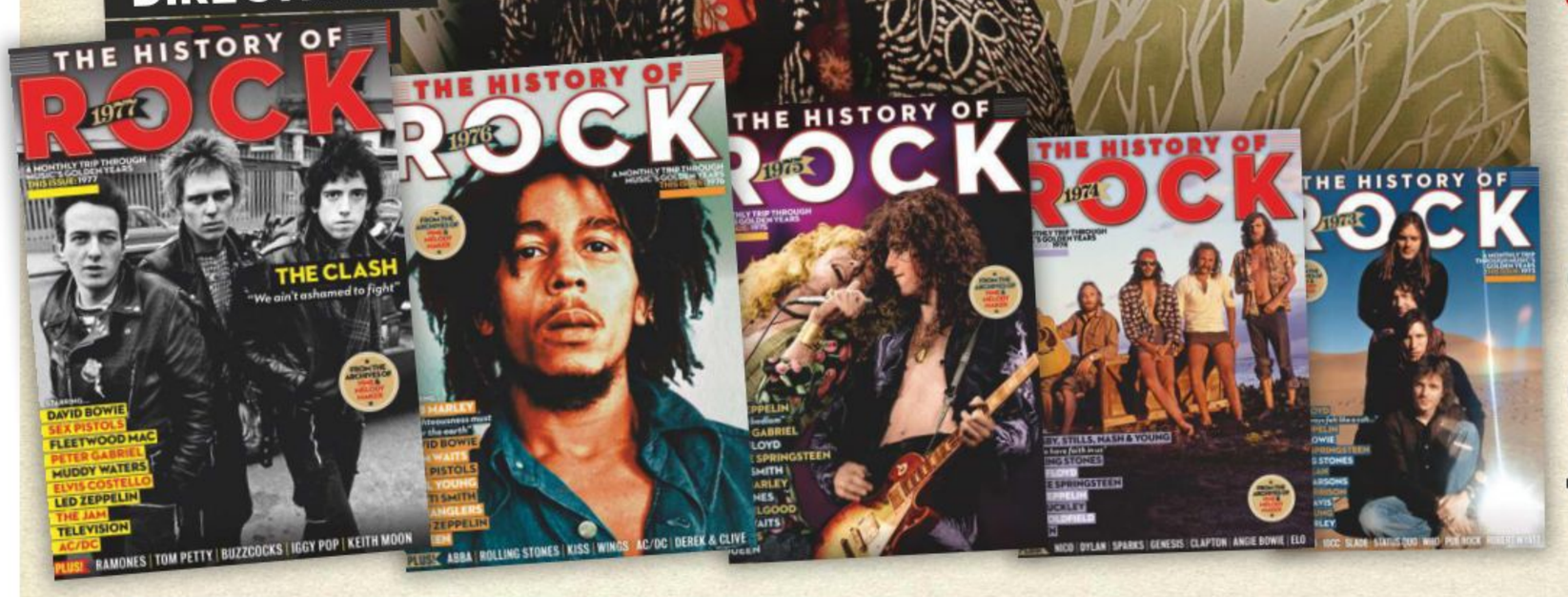
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Readers' letters

MM JAN–JUN Strummer irked, Devo demystified, Rock Against Racism saluted...

Magazine vs Real Life

Having just witnessed the London debut of Magazine at the 100 Club, I say:

Subjectively – I like the sweat/energy/wall of sound.

Objectively – I see the new wave/power pop as a very-easy-to-sell commodity – not to be analysed deeply/taken too seriously, but music for pleasure.

However, we are shot by all sides.

Shot 1 – The Media. It has the power to manipulate. Magazine are previewed on *So It Goes* and are front-page news in the music press, being tipped for the top.

Shot 2 – The Band. They come on at a late hour to play a short set, including two renditions of "Shot By Both Sides", one of which was the encore, serving to increase the audience adrenaline level so they do not go away disappointed.

Shot 3 – The Venue. £1.50 after over an hour in a queue for less than one hour's music

MIKE HARVEY, Tree Tops, Yester Park, Chislehurst, Kent (*MM* Feb 11)



LEX VAN ROSSEN / GETTY

Joe gives Brian enough rope

I'd like to reply to the *MM* Brian James interview where he was advising The Clash to give up.

We have just recorded, sung and mixed 54 minutes of brand-new Clash music as a dry run for our album, and though the whole operation only took 19 hours, if Brian James heard what we got up our sleeves he'd shit his pants and choke on his love beads. Yes, it's back to Bohemian Bournemouth for you, Brian.

People often ask me what the Clash stuff is like, but it's only now that I can really say. It's not dry, humourless, po-faced, gloomy, boring rip-off stuff like Sir Tom Robinson's lyrics, and the music ain't moronic, unintelligent, badly played guitar-trashing with only one tune for both sides, either. I'm not gonna pretend there ain't the odd nick here and there; there are only 12 notes in the entire universe anyway.

We've taken punk and put it where it belongs: way out in front of everything else, and that includes the tedious four-eyed school of Van Morrison imitators. Well, now I told what it ain't like, I better try to tell what it is like. Best way I can describe it is sort of Shakespeare Meets Chuck Berry On The Shepherds Bush Roundabout or even Penthouse Incredibility Meets Commercial Suicide At The Dyed Roots Of Punk.

JOE STRUMMER, Rehearsals Rehearsals, Old Brit Railway Yard, Camden Town, London (*MM* May 20)

2-4-6-8 Tom's way

Having just read Joe Strummer's letter in Mailbag, I cannot understand why he had to knock a group like the Tom Robinson Band, who, for me, are one of the best rock bands Britain has produced in a long time. Perhaps Mr Strummer had better clean the shit from his ears and listen very carefully to the lyrics "Sir" Tom is currently turning out, for his voice is the voice of many and will be heard and remembered by many for a long time, whereas Clash are just a flash in the pan.

JULIE JERAM, Jamaica Road, Bermondsey, London (*MM* Jun 3)

Give Devo the heave-ho

I would like to congratulate Allan Jones on his splendid article about Devo. Having seen the band myself last week in London, and come away suitably impressed, it was enlightening to glimpse behind the Devo façade.

His peremptory dismissal of the Devo myth was almost as curt as his aside on power pop. Perhaps Allan isn't the only Jones from Blighty (geddit?) to have seen the limitations of such a project.

One of the characters in Hunt Emerson's cartoon certainly looks less pleased with his robots than his colleague. Could that be the "reject" button he is pressing (giving it the old Devo heave-ho)?

What irks me most amidst this Devomania is that we seem to be overlooking the evolution of our musical androids. In the post-punk void, why is not more attention paid to the likes of Siouxsie And The Banshees? I have seen them twice this year, and cannot conceive of a more exciting fusion of Teutonic precision with raw energy. They, at least, deserve to share in the current vogueish ballyhoo as much as some of our recent US imports.

Tempting as it may be to sound the death-knell of the new wave in these dread times, we should check its pulse before burying it. If we appreciate its development, there is no need yet to panic search for its successor. Not all punk rock has become a sham.

JOHN REUBEN, John Trundle Court, Barbican, London (*MM* Apr 1)

LP WINNER!

Sham no sham

Everyone knows that Rock Against Racism was set up because certain "rock stars" made racist statements on stage at their concerts, and since then the organisation has successfully put on lots of gigs bringing black and white kids together and breaking down racial barriers.

Well, RAR went one stage further on February 24 at Central London Polytechnic, where Sham 69, Misty and the Desperate Bicycles played on the same bill. Like most punks, I have been scared off from going to Sham 69 gigs because of their skinhead following and the violence that has occurred at their previous London gigs.

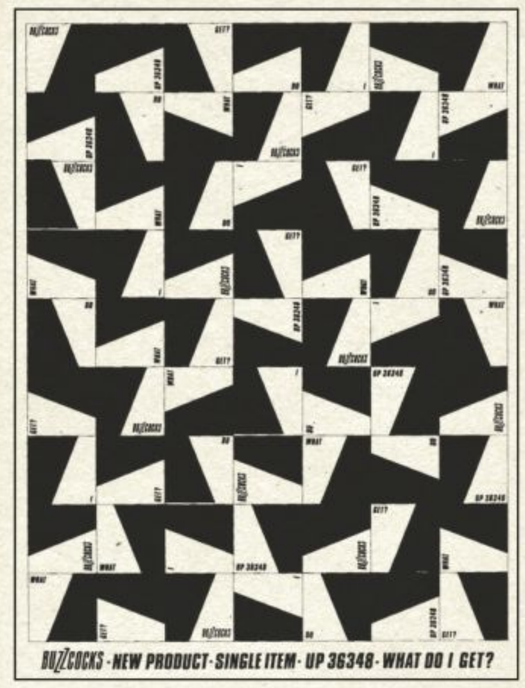
But I went to their gig, everyone was searched at the door, and there were bouncers inside in case of any trouble. But apart from one incident involving a couple of British Movement members who got in and were quickly and effectively dealt with after causing trouble, there was no violence whatsoever!

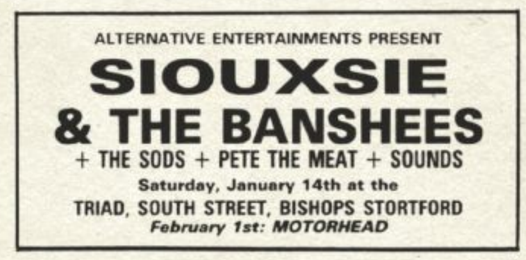
We all had a great time, and there wasn't anyone happier than Jimmy Pursey that night – he made that public and the band came back for four encores.

What I would like to see now is an RAR gig involving a reggae band. I'm sure there would be the same results, and I hope that RAR get the support they deserve from the gig-goers, music lovers and also the music press.

Because as well as breaking down racial barriers, they are breaking down musical barriers, too, and people doing that should get all our backing!

SHARON SPIKE, Richmond Road, Ilford, Essex (*MM* Mar 18)



















1978

JULY – SEPTEMBER

TAMMY WYNETTE, ROLLING STONES, WIRE, RAMONES AND MORE

Keith Moon at home in in Los Angeles, while recording his covers album *Two Sides Of The Moon*, November 1974

"Too much of everything"

MM SEPT 16 RIP Keith Moon, found dead in his Mayfair flat.

AFTER THE DEATH of Keith Moon last Thursday, The Who confirmed this week that they plan to go ahead with their various projects – including the idea of a handful of selected live shows at the end of the year.

They have not decided how they will replace Moon in concert, nor have definite dates been set, but the band have not ruled out the possibility of the shows using a drummer who is close to the group, or session players.

"I think the only thing I can say definitely is that there will not suddenly be an announcement like, 'The Who name their new drummer,'" said the band's press officer, Keith Altham.

"If they decide to go ahead with the concerts, they will have to work out the percussion side, and it is inconceivable at the moment that they would want to enlist a new member. I would think it would be session people, or perhaps someone closely connected with the band."

In the meantime work goes ahead on the various Who projects. The finishing touches are being put to the soundtrack of the movie *The Kids Are Alright*, which traces the Who story and is due for release at the end of the year, and casting has just started for *Quadrophenia*, the film of the album to be directed by Franc Roddam with Pete Townshend as musical supervisor. Townshend may provide music for the film with Roger Daltrey and John Entwistle.

The next plan is the filming of *Lifehouse*, scripted some years ago by Townshend and the inspiration for much of the music on *Who's Next*. Filming is due to start next year.

The inquest on Moon, who was found dead at his Mayfair flat, opened this Monday at Westminster Coroners' Court, and was adjourned for a week. It is understood that the tablets found by his bedside were Heminevrin, prescribed as sedatives and also used in connection with withdrawing from alcoholism and combatting epilepsy.

"Keith used them to help sleep, and it looks as if he took too many of them – he always took too much of everything," said Altham.

MICHAEL OCHS / GETTY



Sheffield-born drama student Graham Fellows, AKA Jilted John, in 1978

"The way kids really speak"

MM SEP 2 Hitmaker Jilted John opens up about girls, and "the mouse business". He hopes for dinner with Kate Bush. "Could you arrange it?"

JILTED JOHN IS sitting in the offices of EMI International, still trying to recover from having been allowed to kiss Debbie Harry on the cheek for a publicity shot at *Top Of The Pops* the night before. That was quite a moment for a bloke who's made a pop legend out of his lack of success with girls. Why don't girls go for you then, John? "I dunno, I must be very boring. I can't relate to them. Maybe I'm too tied up with my mice."

Er, your mice? "Yeah, I like mice, I keep them. For about three years now I've kept a stud of 50, but because of what's happened now I've had to knock it down to about 20."

Knock it down? How? "No, I'm not telling you... people'd think I was cruel. Let's say I let them run free in the countryside." But that isn't true. "No, but whatever I say is going to sound cruel to someone outside the mouse business."

Eh? The mouse business? "Yes, we've got about 400 members in the National Mouse Club." Are you serious? "Perfectly serious. Founded in 1895 by the late Walter Maxie – that's a fact that is well known now." Oh, very well known. What does this club do? "Well, it acts as the voice of the mouse-fanciers."

Pardon? "It's purpose, as written in the year-book of the National Mouse Club – I can't help smiling, 'cos I know you're smiling at me – is to promote the breeding and exhibiting of fancy mice, or show mice. Like a lot of kids, I started off breeding mongrel mice from the pet shop."

Like a lot of kids? "You didn't do it? Oh, I think you're odd there. Or maybe I am. You must have had some kind of animal to relate to?" Well, a dog, a cat, you know, nothing spectacular. Are mice your only true loves then? "Well at the moment, yeah – I find I can relate to them better than to girls, put it that way. I have more success with them – they've won quite a few trophies in the past."

Is it true you have a fantasy about letting mice run all over your body? "Oh, I said that as a joke – I was very upset when it was printed, because it'll give people the wrong idea. Already people must think it's some kind of kinky fad, but it isn't, it's a healthy pastime, I'm positive of that.

"No, it's not a fantasy of mine to let mice run over my body. There is one thing I like doing, though, and that's putting a mouse to your ear and having it breathe very rapidly into your ear – it's great, it's very exciting.

"I won't say it turns me on, 'cos people'll get the wrong idea again, but it just sort of tunes me into life. Hmm, that's a bit profound, innit." Well you could say that. "It inspires me to write songs or poetry or whatever."

He's not sure whether he used the mouse-inspiring technique on the occasion, but his hit single "Jilted John" (his first ever song-writing effort) was written in one afternoon in a fit of inspiration. You must have heard it by now, the captivatingly comic tale of Julie's callous chucking of John in favour of the "cool and trendy" charms of Gordon The Moron.

It plays throughout on how absurd his childish ranting against the pair of them sounds, how ridiculously naive and out-of-place phrases like "*Yeah, yeah it's not fair*", "*I'm so upset*", and "*Gordon is a moron*" seem in this context. In the background there's always the sense that this kind of inarticulately extreme reaction is true to the life of pubescent love affairs, yet I reckoned the whole thing had to be a clever parody of the situation by someone who was laughing at it all with us.

> **"Bowie's started wearing an anorak now, so Gordon The Moron tells me"**



The fact that Jilted John's real identity is Graham Fellows, a 19-year-old from Sheffield who's studying drama in Manchester and sees music as only a stepping stone to an acting career, seemed to make it certain that Jilted John is just a role. Not so, he claims – the story is a real slice of his life. I don't know whether I was

REX FEATURES

laughing at him or he was laughing at me.

"This afternoon I started to think about an experience that happened to me, and I thought it should be made direct and in the vernacular, a song aimed at the kids. I don't want to sound arrogant, but I think maybe I've made a slight breakthrough in the directness of the words, 'cos that's the way kids really speak."

None of this "*I'm so lonesome, baby, without you*". But you do exaggerate for effect? "No, but I know it comes across that way. I wanted it to be a fun record, but at the same time I wanted it to be a song that kids could relate to. Because that's what you're interested in at that age."

So you didn't mean it to be funny? "No, but I think the humour came into it naturally. I don't think they laugh at me. But one of the reasons I don't do gigs is 'cos I get embarrassed telling the world about my lack of success with girls." I can't believe you're serious about all this. "Yeah, I am. I think I must have a self-destruct mechanism that destroys the vibes I give off to girls. They get bad vibes so they pack me in. I'm just a normal youth in a cruel world."

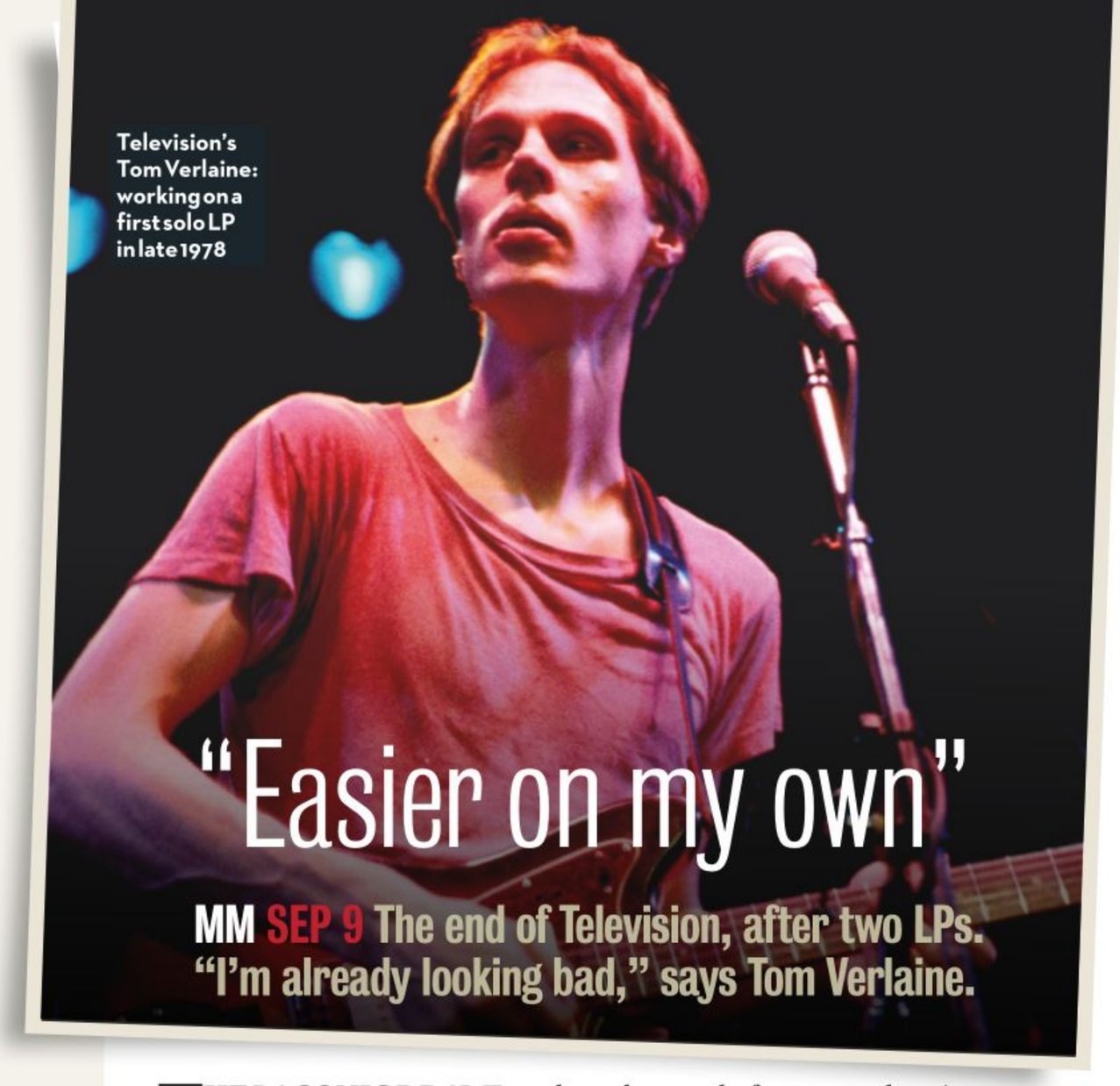
Just a drama student playing a role. "No! Maybe." And you wear quilted anoraks as a costume for the character. "No, I wear them because they hopefully give me new-wave credibility." Whaaat! "Oh yeah, don't you think they do? Dave Bowie's started wearing one now, so Gordon The Moron tells me, and we did it first." So are Jilted John and Graham Fellows confused together? "Yes, I think they're inextricably mixed, like joy and woe."

Eh? "'*Joy and woe are woven fine/Clothing for the soul divine*' – Blake. There's so many mucky magazines lying around here – I don't know what to think of it all. I try to keep sex out of my songs." You seem very moralistic. "I think I am – my mother's had a strong influence on me. But I should think sex is very healthy. Is it? It's no secret that I go to a Christian Youth Camp in Devon yearly – I use it as a sort of pilgrimage or retreat – and we have epilogues at night where the bloke indoctrinates us: 'Sex is a good thing – but only within the institution of marriage.'" Hmm, sounds fun.

"I dunno if you're laughing at me, y'know, you've got such a wide mouth – it's like the *Mona Lisa*'s, you can't see the edges. Well, I'm at your mercy, so I'll just have to plod on. We're making an album. IT'S A CONCEPT ALBUM. A continuation of the theme. There's a song about the mice and one about an older woman."

And after that? "Well everything that's happening in new wave now is short-lived and I think Jilted John is too. I think it's not like Kate Bush, who's immortal. I want to have dinner with her – d'you think you could arrange it for me? I wouldn't molest her or anything, I'd relate to her, I'd be really friendly."

No, you'd just give off bad vibes. "No, I wouldn't." You'd be tongue-tied and nervous. "Maybe, but I'm sure she'd help me through." *Chris Brazier*



Television's Tom Verlaine: working on a first solo LP in late 1978

"Easier on my own"

MM SEP 9 The end of Television, after two LPs. "I'm already looking bad," says Tom Verlaine.

THE LACONIC DRAWL at the other end of a transatlantic telephone line belied the significance of the event under discussion – but then, Tom Verlaine has always reckoned that the serious, aloof tag with which Television is labelled is just a bizarre figment of some journalists' imagination.

Verlaine had been persuaded, with more reluctance than passion, to throw some light on his decision to break up the band after a recorded life of only two albums, but he considers the event to be a natural end to a natural growth and not a headline-grabbing shock.

Although he felt he had little to say on the end of Television, he was happy to set one matter at rest: "The rumours are already spreading around New York saying bad things about the band breaking up and badmouthing me as the cause of it all.

"I had thought of leaving Television for a little while, a month or so, not because of any animosity in the band or anything like that, but because I was finding that it was a lot easier to do things on my own. That is the way I started off, and having been with Television for five years, it was a way of writing and playing I wanted to return to."

The decision to leave and, inevitably, break up the band, came without any sense of upset or histrionics from the rest of Television: "Fred Smith [Television's bass player] was aware of my thoughts for some time, and I told him what I was intending to do about a week before the rest of the guys. I told Richard [Lloyd] and Billy [Ficca] and just said simply that I was going to leave, and that I wanted to split everything as naturally and evenly as possible. Richard said he understood the way I felt.

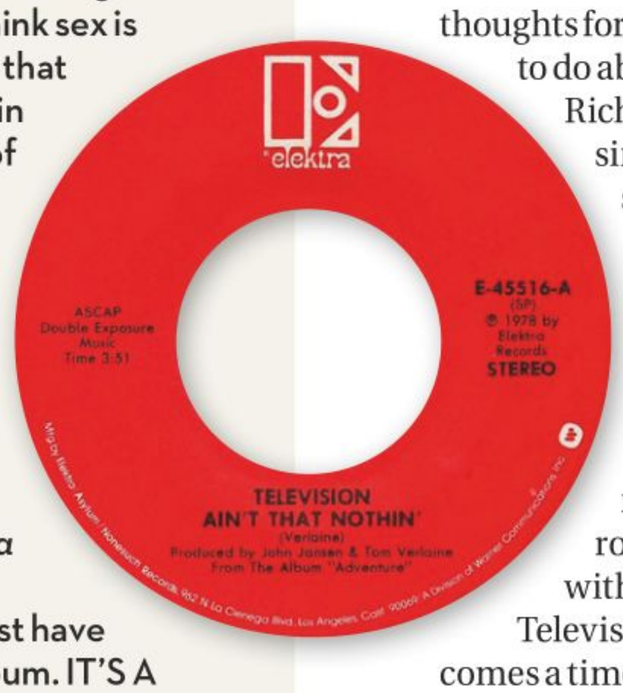
"I am already looking bad as far as the rumours over here are concerned, but it was nothing like that – I just wanted to work with different guys."

Verlaine plans to carry on working with Fred Smith, but hopes to get involved with other musicians on a flexible level: "If you go back to the roots of Television as a band, I had been together with Billy the drummer off and on for 10 years, and Television has been an entity for half that time. There comes a time when you see that a thing can either go on forever or not. That is the decision I made.

"I am now working on a solo record – in fact, I start recording this weekend. It won't be a continuous thing; I shall be working on it in spurts when the people I want to work with are around. Initially I am playing with a couple of old friends who I have never really played with before, and apart from Fred there are a number of people I have in mind. The way I think of it is that I will do the record with whoever is right for the songs – if I do a ballad, I will pick the best ballad drummer."

Verlaine hopes to have the album ready for release on Elektra in January – although he allows himself a cautionary chuckle at trying to be too exact about timing – and by then he plans to be back on the road: "I am definitely going to tour early next year, starting in America."

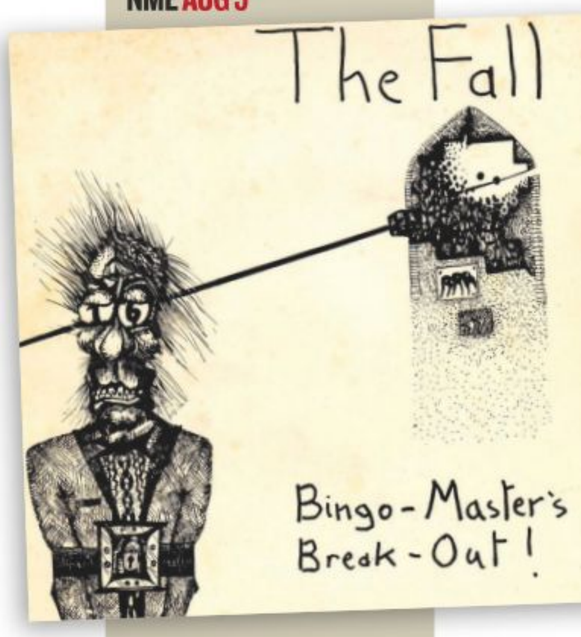
Britain, which has received Verlaine and Television enthusiastically in the past, is also on the cards. *John Orme*



JULY – SEPTEMBER 1978

➤ Johnny Rotten's first single with his new band Public Image is set for September 8 release by Virgin – and that also is called "Public Image". Their debut album is scheduled for late autumn, and they'll be playing a series of British dates at the same time. **NME AUG 5**

➤ Manchester new-wavers The Fall have their debut single issued by Step Forward on August 11. Titled "Bingo-Master's Break-Out!", it comprises three tracks – "Psycho Mafia", "Bingo Master" and "Repetition". They were recorded last autumn, and two of the band's members have now changed. **NME AUG 5**



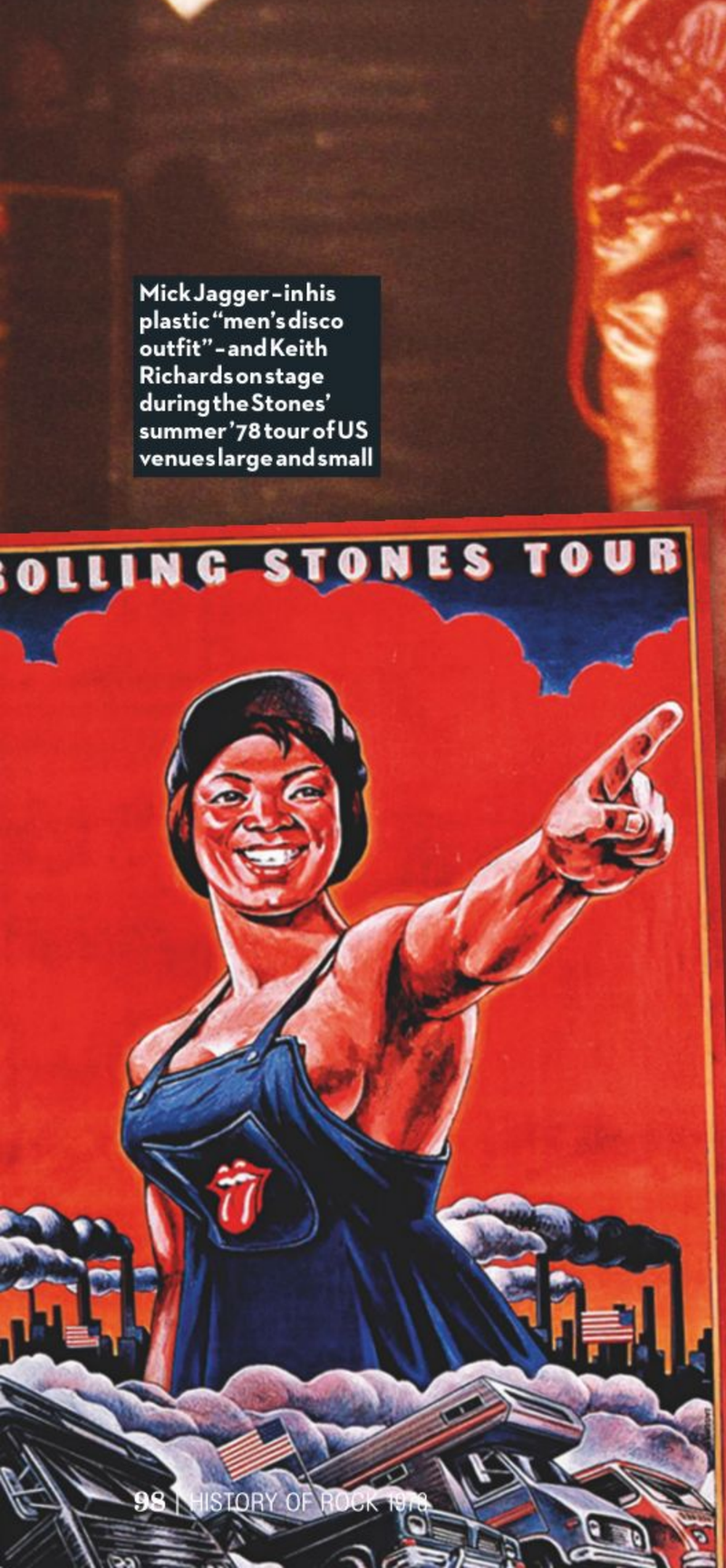
➤ The Rolling Stones' new album, *Some Girls*, which has already sold more than two million copies worldwide, has run into problems over the sleeve, and EMI have been forced to halt printing of the covers until a revised version has been designed. EMI said objections had been made about the cover by some of the people depicted on it. These objections were made in the US, but for the sake of uniformity EMI is halting production worldwide. The *MM* understands that two of the people who objected were Racquel Welch and Lucille Ball. **MM JUL 8**

ROBERTA BAYLEY / GETTY

1978

JULY – SEPTEMBER

Mick Jagger – in his plastic "men's disco outfit" – and Keith Richards on stage during the Stones' summer '78 tour of US venues large and small



“I can get nasty sometimes”

The ROLLING STONES are on top form. After a triumphant New York show, MICK JAGGER opens up about Keith’s legal woes, plastic trousers and his fitness regime. “I’ve got a karate guy,” he confides. “Townshend goes running…”



PALLADIUM
NEW YORK CITY
LIVE!
JUNE 15

— MELODY MAKER JULY 1 —

PROMOTER RON DELSNER walked on stage in a gleaming white suit. “There is a chandelier above you that has not been lit for 32 years, but today the road crew cleaned 50 pounds of dirt off and got it to work. When the Stones play ‘Brown Sugar’ we’ll light it up for you…”

Loud huzzahs greeted this announcement and Ron raised his hands. “There have been a lot of rumours and then no rumours. Let’s get it on – the Stones are here!” And while Charlie, Ronnie, Keith, Bill and friends took up battle stations, out bounded the irrepressible, ageless man-child, “Mick JAG-GRRRR!”

In a street urchin’s white cap, white jacket and red trousers, he lolled, sidled, wriggled, slumped, rolled over, spun round, leapt through the air and twitched with such violence as to shed teeth, hair and fingernails.

Between convulsions that took him to the brink of the stage and into the arms of adoring masses, he sang with tonsil-tearing bravado, played guitar on a brace of numbers and even sat at the piano for “Faraway Eyes”, a country ballad designed to bring tears to the eyes of the most hardened cowpoke.

Although the Stones, augmented by veteran Ian Stewart and Ian McLagan from the Faces, both on keyboards, played with devoted power, it was Jagger’s triumph, in the sense that he injected so much sustained effort into his cheerleading.

To say an artist appears to be “working hard” is usually regarded as an insult, but in Mick’s case he gave everything from sex to violence in the best show I can recall from the Stones since the Richmond Jazz Festival in 1963.

It was almost as long since the Stones first played the Palladium. Said Mick, catching breath, “The last time we played here was in 1964 – but I was too young to remember.”

They played a lot of material from *Some Girls*, which I feel is their best in ages, despite the grumbles of reviewers, and has already proved its appeal by selling more than the last two albums.

Outstanding were “When The Whip Comes Down” – fast and locomotive, and the first natural successor to “Satisfaction” – and “Respectable”, which also retains a fast, simple riff.

It was great to hear the Stones get away from the somewhat ramshackle sound à la “Honky Tonk Women” that dominated their early-’70s output.

The Stones’ rhythm section has definitely perked up and modernised, with Charlie and Bill setting up a spanking pace for the new tunes. Wyman’s »

RICHARD E AARON / GETTY

bassline on "Miss You" is undoubtedly one of the key factors in its success as a danceable riff.

Mick, incidentally, denies suggestions that the Stones are cashing in on the disco boom, having written "Miss You" several moons before John Travolta first contracted his current bout of fever.

Of course they played some old favourites, and the fans gave a special cheer for Keith and Mick's cry of "*New York City*" on "Honky Tony Women". I didn't particularly like "Train At The Station", a rather dreary slow blues salvaged by Ronnie Wood's bottleneck and enlivened by Keith pouring beer over Charlie's drum rostrum.

You could sense Mick's anxiety to get into the new album and he said, "I'd like to play old ones but I'd really like to play new ones, so we'll play as many as we know."

They mixed in "Beast Of Burden" and "Shattered" with "Brown Sugar", and as Mick shook his ass at the front rows and removed his jacket and T-shirt, the gentleman in front of me boldly held up expensive microphones to capture it all in stereo for some future bootleg album.

By now the temperature was topping 100 degrees, despite the three giant fans that revolved above the stage, and Mick's red plastic pants clung to his legs, revealing the contours of his knees.

"I've been spat on, shat on and fucked all over this town," he suddenly expostulated, resulting in a cry of "Pardon?" from his English publicist sitting in the gallery with yours truly, like Waldorf and Statler.

It was Mick's cue for "Shattered" and more strange passes with his hands across the nether regions that seemed to indicate he was in need of that well-known American medicant, Cruex.

It was time for "Jumping Jack Flash", the final number that sent the audience into an orgy of shouting and stamping, as Keith and Ronnie plucked their strings and Mick plucked his pants up to his shoulders in a final bizarre gesture.

The house lights went up and there was no encore, a policy rigidly adhered to by the Stones, whether the fans want to throw beer bottles in frustration (as they did at Philadelphia, causing some damage and injuries) or not.

At the Palladium there was some disappointed booing, but eventually the truth dawned that the Stones wouldn't be coming back, and so the fans began the long process of clearing the theatre.

Outside, they sang the hookline of "Miss You" to the police, to cab drivers – anybody passing by. As for my friend from *Rolling Stone* magazine, he remained silent, unwilling, perhaps, to admit that the old group hadn't been so bad after all.

Meanwhile I staggered off in the direction of Bleecker Street in search of hamburgers with the man from the *Sunday Times*, who had earlier been expressing opinions not dissimilar to those already aired. His comments on the evening's events were to smile with faraway eyes, purse his lips and emit a familiar cry. "*Oo-oo, oo-oo, oo-oo OOH!*"

MICK JAGGER IS, as usual, at the centre of a maelstrom of press attention as news breaks of a divorce with Bianca, of goings-on with model Jerry Hall, at one time Bryan Ferry's mate, and of course the long-running saga of Keith Richards' appointment with fear in Canada next October.

That is when Keith has to face up to drugs charges, with the possibility of life imprisonment if found guilty. It's not a happy thought: an unwanted knife-thrust of reality into lives where play-acting and imagery are long-term cellmates.

Thus there is a nervous tension surrounding the Stones that causes people to fly into tantrums. Normally easy-going, nay timorous folk become enraged bulls, cursing all around them, in their efforts to get at Mick, Keith and the truth. On the press bus to Philadelphia for the Saturday concert at JFK stadium, the US under-assistant press agent, Michael Leeman, rolled his eyes to heaven and yelled at a Japanese reporter who was trying to get onto an already crowded vehicle: "It's not that I don't like you, I've never heard of you! We're FULL, FULL!" He actually dropped on his knees to emphasise his frustration.

There were more expressions of ill-temper when the British national press first joined battle with the Stones at their hotel. One reporter asked Mick if he was playing guitar so that he could take over from Keith when the latter went to prison – not the most tactful of questions to lead off a discussion.

The results were predictable. Mick blew his top, harsh words were said, and nobody got more than incoherent babblings on their tape-recorders. This led to tension within the British press party, and at one time it seemed as if everybody might fly back to London sans copy.

But reason prevailed. By the time I got to see Mick at the legendary Carlyle Hotel, he was calm, reasoned and fully recovered both from two exhausting shows and his verbal dust-up.

> "We went as far as we could with the big stage presentations"

The Stones book into their hotels under pseudonyms, and as they probably change them a lot, it would do no harm to reveal that a certain "Mr Spade" and a "Mr Ronnie Biggs" were among the touring party.

Certainly everybody at the Carlyle, a stroll from Central Park, seemed to know that Mr Jagger was in residence; and even the elevator man was planning his strategy to get an autograph. Mick was due for a doctor's appointment, as he was suffering from a viral infection. He had gone on stage against doctor's orders at Philly, with a temperature of 101, which doubtless contributed to that day's less-than-explosive performance.

But otherwise he was in good spirits, delighted at the news of chart success from England, where both *Some Girls* and "Miss You" are Top 10.

He had already left instructions that he didn't want to talk about Bianca, but was more than ready to talk about the Stones' renewed success, their future, and his own exciting plans, which include a return to filmmaking, which until recently he had vowed to avoid.

I told Mick I thought the Palladium was one of the best Stones shows I had seen. Apart from the throwing of buckets of water over the audience, a traditional gesture on "Jumping Jack Flash", it had been totally devoid of presentation gimmicks, and just relied on rhythm and melody.

"Well, thanks," said Mick. "I didn't think it was, because it was so hot. I could hardly move. The last time we played a theatre in New York was '64, when Murray The K introduced us at the Palladium when it was called the Academy Of Music. I think it was our second trip to New York, but I was too young to remember it.

"Did you hear me say that before? But it was so hot there last night. Even Peter Tosh's drummer was complaining!"

Mick explained why they were mixing big stadiums with smaller venues: "The Palladium is a regular rock venue, where Bruce Springsteen played recently, and all the smaller shows are at similar places.

"I remember when The Who played at opera houses – special theatres, in other words. Well, this is not like that – they're all straight rock places, like the Rainbow in London. I heard they threw bottles at Philadelphia, but we didn't see it because we were away and changing at the navy base.

"The thing is, we never do encores anyway. Most bands just save the last three numbers as encores and keeping walking on and off. We have never done that. You have to make up your mind to go in a place like that stadium or you get stuck there forever."

Would the Stones give a "small" Rainbow-style show when they came to London? "I dunno," said Mick vaguely, reaching for some cold beer.

"Most of the places in England are small anyway. There are no good 10,000-seaters and there's nothing like the Garden. We hope to come to England, though, and we were going to earlier but it didn't prove feasible in the middle of all this madness."

What were those amazing trousers that Michael Philip was sporting on stage? "I know – they were outrageous," chortled Mick. "I got them for 15 dollars down the road. They are Men's Disco





The Stones film the video for "Respectable", the third single from *Some Girls*, in New York, 1978

Outfits, and they're made of plastic. That's what I'd wear at Studio 54 – if ever I went to Studio 54. I must admit there were a lot of girls at the Palladium, inciting one to be rude.

"I got the hat from an English friend of mine, a designer. In fact, it's just a flat 'at from Birmingham. It's a fuckin' cheese cutter, innit?

"We never did use laser beams on stage, but we went as far as we could with the big stage presentations, and basically we've just got down to playing. In fact, I'd like a bit more for the outdoor shows. We're playing three different types of gigs, 3,000-seat theatres, then 10,000-seat arenas, and then the outdoor ones. We've got good lighting and the idea is to turn the spotlight off me for a while, especially when I'm doing back-ups to the solos on guitar.

"I just want to concentrate on getting the sound right. Somebody told me you couldn't hear Keith, but I'm not going to tell 'im that! On record, Keith will sometimes overdub his solo onto the rhythm track, or get a counter-rhythm going. It's what we did in rehearsal, which is why we sometimes use three guitars on stage now: me, Keith and Ronnie. It gives Keith and me an opportunity to play counter-rhythms, and also Woody and Keith can play solos at the same time. They can play straight lines, and they've still got a rhythm guitar from me going in the background.

"I've been playing guitar for some time anyway, and played on the '75 tour, but I didn't know many numbers. It's much easier when you've got a few numbers to play on. You feel strange if it's just ONE number."

Did the guitar restrict Jagger's movements, despite the inherent freedom of a Men's Disco Outfit? "Nah. What makes it really easy is we've all got radio mics instead of guitar leads, which means you don't trip over anything, and you can't get a shock. You don't get any interference on their FM range, and you could walk to the back of the theatre or down to the dressing room and keep playing and the sound would be picked up.

"In fact, Frank Zappa did just that at one concert. We could walk off and leave Charlie there, get into the car and keep playing, and the audience would still hear us. Mind you, it wouldn't be in time!

Did you see Bob Marley the other night?" demanded Mick.

No, but I saw Tom Robinson at the Bottom Line and he said…

"Bob Marley has gotta beat THAT into the dust," interrupted Mick, not wishing to hear what Mr Robinson had to say about anybody.

Last year it was thought that with court cases pending it would be all over with the Stones touring again.

"I was so pissed off last year," revealed Mick. "We didn't go on the road at all, although we went to Toronto to play that club, right? And then Keith got busted, right? And I said, 'Oh no, what's the point, the first gig we go to play, Keith is going to get busted again.' So I said, 'I'm not going to go on the road. Forget it. I'll go into the studio and see what happens.'

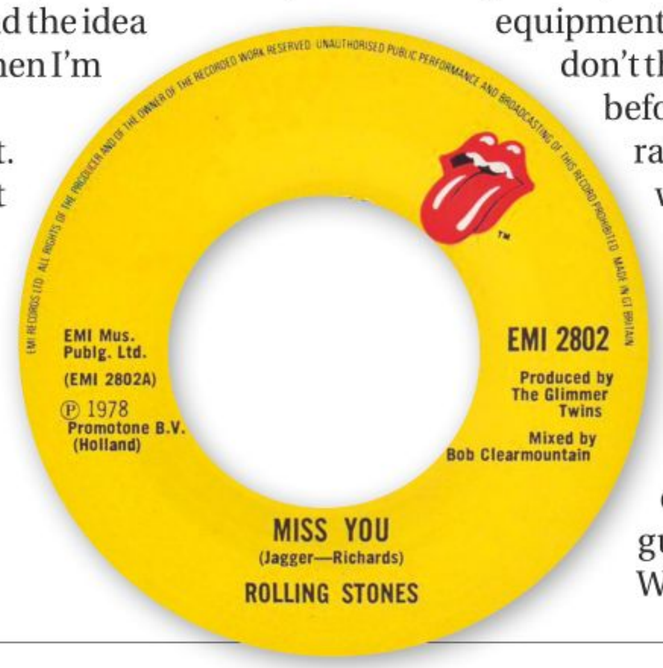
"You'll notice we're not going to Canada on this tour? They've not tried to stop us, but fuck 'em. I'm not going. Peter Rudge and I went to Barbados in the New Year and talked about it, and I said I didn't want to do another tour of hockey arenas.

"But to make any money at all we decided to base the tour around six outdoor shows, and in between we can play smaller hockey arenas if we want, so we can pay the crew and roadies, because we can't pay them off the small theatres, as you can imagine. We have to pay for the light and sound and transportation, and it all costs money. Playing small theatres, we'd lose money, and we'd have to go to the record company to pay for it, which a lot of bands do.

"But they wouldn't give us support – they'd say, 'Fuck you, go and play hockey arenas.' So we did a mixture of arenas and theatres. On the big gigs you only see the first 5,000 people.

"I can get nasty sometimes, when they throw bottles and screw the equipment up. Audiences are different every time you tour. I don't think a lot of people who come have ever seen the band before and they're very young. On this one we asked the radio stations to tell people to send in a card if they wanted to see the Stones. Then we picked a day and said, 'OK, let's do it.'

"Then the people who sent cards were phoned and told to pick up their tickets, so there was no chance of scalping. I think it should be made illegal to scalp [tout] tickets. We try and keep prices to a minimum, but it's almost impossible. A kid gets offered double for his ticket, so he sells it, and the next guy doubles the price again."



"I don't think a lot of people who come have ever seen us before"

When I asked again about the chances of touring England, he explained in more details the present strategy. "I have to be very careful what I say. You see, Europe is the one place we can tour later on if Keith does get convicted, ie, NOT put in jail. We can still tour Europe and the UK.

"But if we want to tour Australia, we have to go before, because there are immigration problems in Australia. I wanna come to the UK and Europe, but it's the easiest place for us to play without visa problems.

"We have to think pragmatically about it. If Keith is not convicted then there's no problem. If he's convicted, and given a suspended sentence, then we won't tour for a while, let's say, but we can go to Europe eventually, so that's what I'm thinking about. Anything is possible. He could get six months to life imprisonment.

"Keith is reasonable philosophical about it, but underneath it all… Well, I remember when I was up for those pills and a bit of grass, let alone what he's up for, well it wasn't very nice, so he can't feel 100 per cent great. But Keith is very together, and to be honest he's even feeling a bit shy on stage."

Did Mick go into training for touring?

"Oh God, yes! Nobody could do it without. I go horse riding, rowing, and I've got a karate guy who trains me. Those karate exercises are really good. They're very similar to dance exercises and stretch you. You could start pulling muscles otherwise, especially at whatever age I am. Townshend goes out running as well, y'know. You've got to.

"I do weights, but they're not very useful for touring. I mostly go running. I can lose up to five pounds in weight after a show, but you can drink it all back on again – no trouble!" *Chris Welch* •


'Miss You' nights

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY

RAMONES: A BLITZ AT THE SPEED OF LIGHT

The Ramones: straddling the area between being fans, freaks and rock stars

Genial hysteria

MM SEPT 30 Though rattled by some unfavourable album reviews, the Ramones still deliver speedy business as usual.

ULSTER HALL BELFAST — LIVE! — SEPTEMBER 23

IT WAS A tricky confrontation. Johnny Ramone stepped out of the hotel lift and, after a brief moptop nod of recognition, dived into the obvious question: "Have you read the reviews"?

I need hardly elaborate on what he was referring to. The subject was *Road To Ruin*, of course, the latest offering from the brothers four. So far the British press has given the album a rough ride, at best demonstrating lukewarm sympathy and at worst a rattlesnake bite. Having only heard the album a hurried couple of times, I wasn't prepared to defend or chastise, but what had struck me forcibly was its genuine attempt to progress – particularly in the area of production.

The band had been unnerved and so faced the opening date of their UK trek last Saturday with apprehension. But the tension worked wonders, and they proved effortlessly that they are still one of the greatest rock'n'roll live acts to have emerged since Clear-Gel was invented.

The setting was bizarre, to say the least. Security forces lurked at the back of the Ulster Hall while the audience participated in a sort of Tossing The Toilet Roll contest. The Ramones' banner had been draped in front of a set of massive organ pipes that would honourably grace any remake of *Phantom Of The Opera*. Genial hysteria rang through the ranks.

"Hi, we're the Ramones", howled Joey, and instantly "Rockaway Beach" twitched into life. All the albums were scavenged as one song tumbled out after another: "Lobotomy", "Blitzkrieg Bop", "You Don't Come Close", "I Don't Care" and so on.

The tactic (as ever) was a concentrated rush of pure mania, regularly punctuated by Dee Dee Ramone's yelping countdown into each number. Only once did they come close to a traditional introduction: for a magical version of "Needles And Pins", Joey deadpanned, "We gotta little tearjerker for you lonely hearts out there."

Everything centred on the sheer speed of the songs, the sheer number of songs, the band's ability to keep pace, the audience's ability to keep pace. The Ramones aren't so much an ordinary band as a trigger mechanism for highly disciplined delirium.

The four parts slot together perfectly (new drummer Marky showed no awkwardness whatsoever) and virtually ignore visuals in favour of pure sound. Joey is still an Anglepoise lamp clamped onto the mic stand, though on a few numbers his arms did flail around. Dee Dee still has the lowest-slung bass ever and performs split-level leaps, while John adopts a surly stance and holds it for eight bars. Marky is a drum.

As a result they straddle the area between being fans, freaks and rock stars. The street kid who topples into a world of cartoon therapy and finds himself on a stage playing to similar kids.

The "Gabba Gabba Hey" poster came out, and the ritual was complete. The connections had all been made. *Ian Birch*

Everything centred on the speed of the songs and the crowd's ability to keep pace

GUS STEWART / GETTY

The same as a year ago

MM SEPT 16 The Doomed sound damned familiar.

IT STARTED AS Les Punks but an eleventh-hour decision changed it to The Doomed. The Electric Ballroom had put together another of its one-off specialities: temporarily inactive musicians come together for a night and have a sort of jigsaw jam. So far there have been The Greedies and The Vicious White Cats, while last Tuesday unveiled The Doomed.

No prizes for guessing the main participants, however. Original Damned members Dave Vanian, Rat Scabies (or is it Chris Hitler now?) and Captain Sensible were joined by Lemmy from Motorhead on bass.

The idea in itself seemed depressing, and the reality wasn't much better. Hadn't the band split up so that they could supposedly pursue their own lines of attack? Only Brian James, conspicuous by his absence, has actually pulled something out of the ashes with Tanz Der Youth. The rest got back together again.

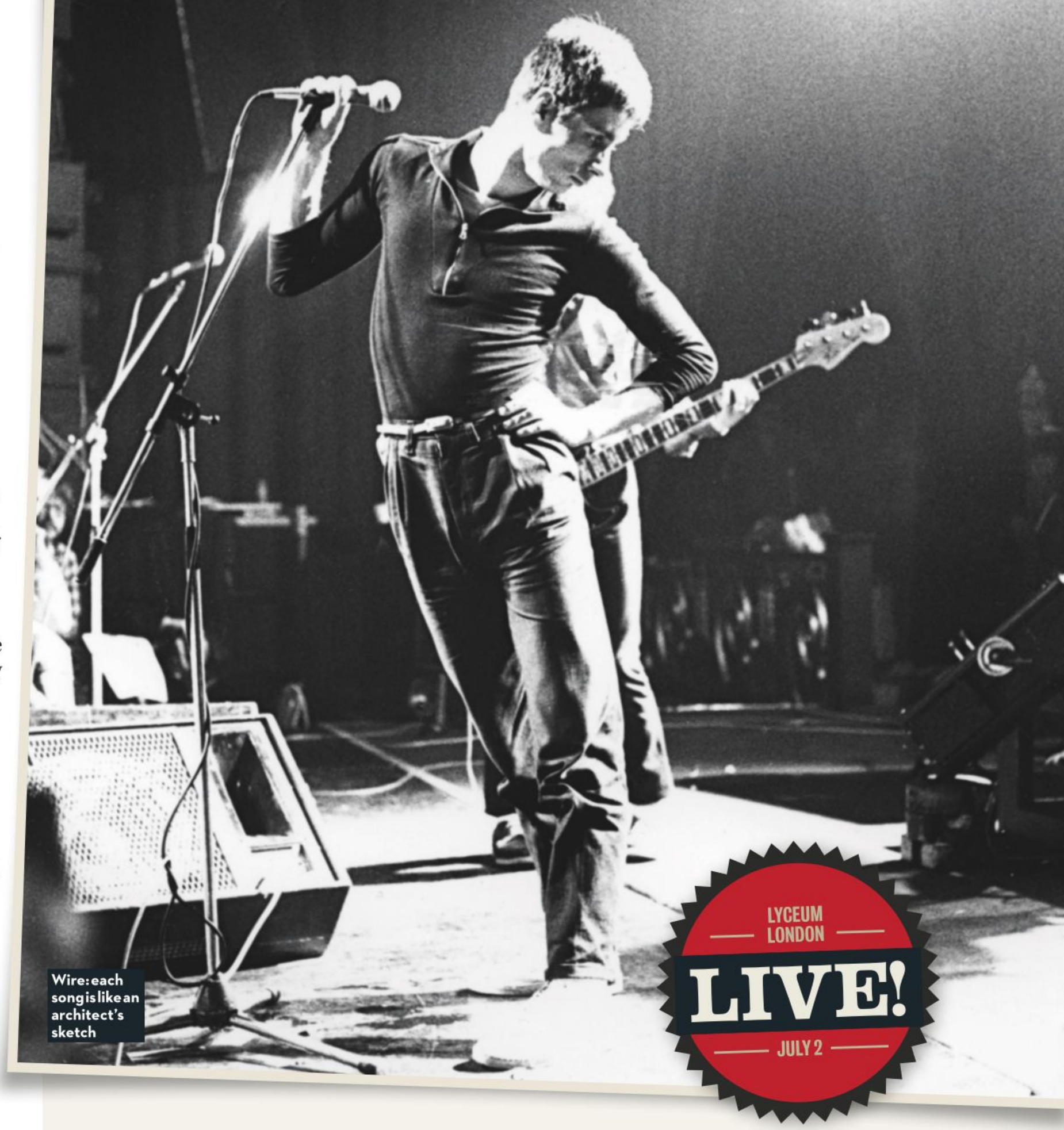
After three totally unexceptional numbers by The Softies (the band Sensible had a brief fling with) and four infantile records (specially selected by Sensible), they appeared and launched into "Jet Boy, Jet Girl". Damned numbers thereafter poured out: "Stretcher Case", "Problem Child", "Stab Your Back", "New Rose", their historic version of "Help"… Lemmy even got a look-in with "Silver Machine", that quality anthem of his former band, Hawkwind.

Nothing sounded better or worse than a year or so ago. It sounded the same and that was probably the most miserable aspect of the whole show. No one seemed to have *any* new ideas. Consequently the cartoon aggression reigned again and again and again.

Still, there is a definite market for The Damned and if they re-form they won't have any trouble paying the rent.

ELECTRIC BALLROOM LONDON LIVE! SEPTEMBER 5

Oh yes, the stars turned out in force. A dapper Wreckless Eric was there, and Elvis Costello looked as inscrutably angry as ever behind huge, dark glasses. I wonder if they had a good time. *Ian Birch*



Wire: each song is like an architect's sketch

LYCEUM LONDON LIVE! JULY 2

Metallic hum

MM JULY 8 Wire impress, coldly.

THE PLACE WAS practically deserted. Last Sunday, London's Lyceum couldn't have been more than half full, and even though that's a healthy enough gate on paper, it shrivels up within the cavernous seedy grandeur of the hall.

The bands on show were The Doctors (formerly Of Madness) and Wire. They were supposed to be co-headlining, but that in fact translated into The Doctors being followed by Wire in traditional stepladder fashion. I have to admit that whereas I have a decided soft spot for Wire, I have a decided blind spot for The Doctors. After the brief flirtation with Dave Vanian, they are back to a three-piece of Kid Strange (lanky vocalist-guitarist who was dressed in a cross between a rocker's drapes and a Victorian patriarch's uniform), Stoner (bassman with perpetually pained expression) and Peter DiLemma (drummer with bleached-white locks).

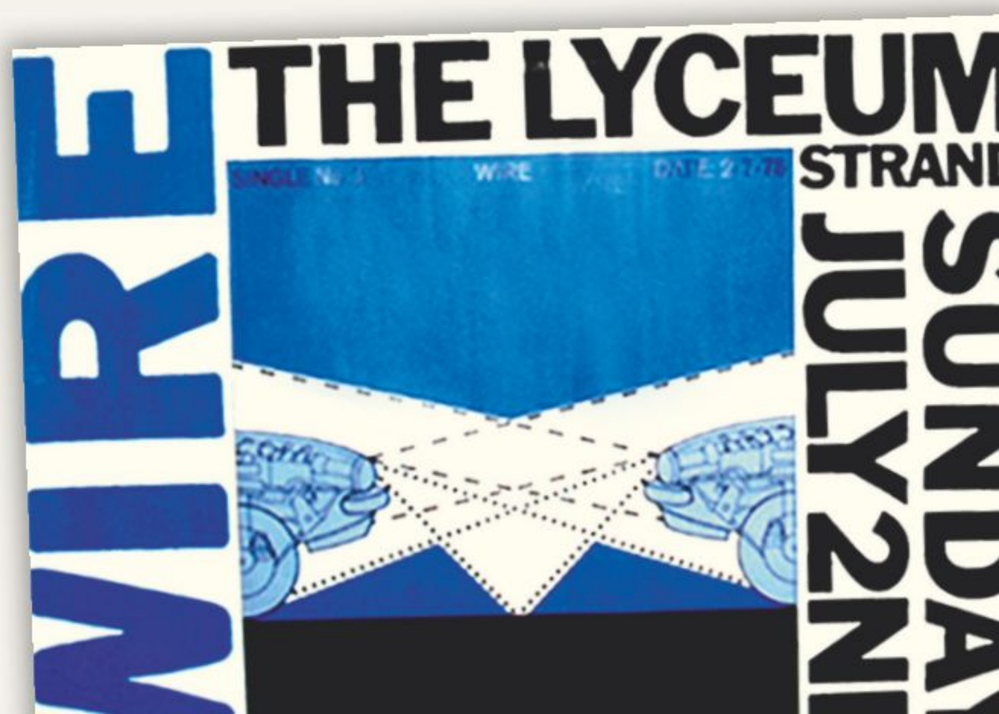
Admittedly they worked hard, squeezing (almost) every ounce of energy available to the unit. Still, however hard they may have worked, the standard at best was mediocre. Kid Strange's songs simply aren't strong enough or imaginative enough to bear the brunt of his excessively doughy wordage.

Twenty minutes later, Wire took to the stage. Their visual impact was immediate; Graham Lewis (bass) and the inscrutably silent Robert Gotobed (drums) had black/dark-coloured wraparound, kimono tops on. The other two, Colin Newman (guitar/vocalist) and Bruce Gilbert (guitar), chose white as their main colour. If the colour contrast was a fluke, it was a coincidence of Arthur Koestler proportions.

They started on a strident metallic hum and then swept through countless songs, most of which were brand new and devastatingly short as usual. Each Wire song is like a blueprint, an architect's sketch for a building. The main structure and support are there, while due and proper attention has been paid to the human factor. Wire inject emotion which is open-ended enough to be both accessible and, oddly, mysterious. But to reap full benefit, you have to work yourself.

There is still a major gap between the presence Wire transmit on vinyl (just sample their glorious new single, "Dot Dash", for example) and what they project on stage. But the space is getting smaller. *Ian Birch*

PENNIE SMITH



“Something a little more feminine”

TAMMY WYNETTE opens up about marriage, divorce, even women’s lib. “I think I can relate to the average woman very easily,” she says. I’m pleased to be with the Middle America people.”

— MELODY MAKER SEPTEMBER 16 —

TAMMY, RIGHT DOWN the line, is the public face of the old guard; the upholder of conservative Nashville values. The official representative of the traditional Deep South. “I like,” she tells me with earnest intensity, “mah songs to have a beginning, a middle and an end.”

She looks the part: blonde, buxom, and gushing. Almost incidentally she is, when stretched, a magnificent singer. She’s seen enough of the classic emotional turbulence in her life to complete the confusion of fiction and reality which creates Nashville royalty.

Born and brought up in Mississippi, the daughter of a struggling farming family, married at 17, depression when the marriage collapsed, a succession of small-time jobs, moved to Nashville, more struggles and depression, and finally… the crown. And since then personal upheavals exposed, almost (it sometimes seems) with relish, for public examination.

Her marriage to George Jones, for example, was faithfully documented in all its colourful twists; and when it finally collapsed Tammy took to filling in the gaps along the lines of “Ah wrote this song when Jones was out drinking one time.”

She certainly shows no compunction about shielding her private life. “My life’s an open book,” she tells me at one stage, adding that anything the world doesn’t know will all be in an autobiography to be published in January. “Ah been workin’ on that for just over a year and a half and it’s just finished and ah’m anxious for that to come out. What you haven’t read already, you’ll be readin’. There’ll be no secrets. Bar none.”

She is now into her fourth marriage, to writer, musical director, pianist and television director George Richey, an affable man with a tufty beard, who doubles as her manager. When not on the road they share their time between homes in Florida and Nashville, with their combined total of six kids (four of them, all daughters, are Tammy’s, the eldest 17). They get mentioned at every opportunity, and at one point she shows me a book so I can see pictures of them and tells me they are adopting a seventh, a native American.

Last time she was here, two years ago, she collapsed with pneumonia and had to cancel one London concert. George Jones flew over from the States to stand in for her. It was, she says, the combination of overwork and a sore throat. »



Tammy Wynette on stage at the Country Music Festival at the Empire Pool, Wembley, London, in April 1979

DAVID REDFERN / GETTY



"I never have throat problems, never have 'em," she tells me with pained indignation. "All mine are stomach. I've had seven major operations on mah stomach, but never anythin' wrong with my throat. Nearly always the stomach. I'm a very poor eater, y'see… I eat a lot of junk food… Don't watch my diet as well as I should."

This time, though, her throat is just fine, and she's sure enjoying herself, and can't believe that we in Britain love her so much.

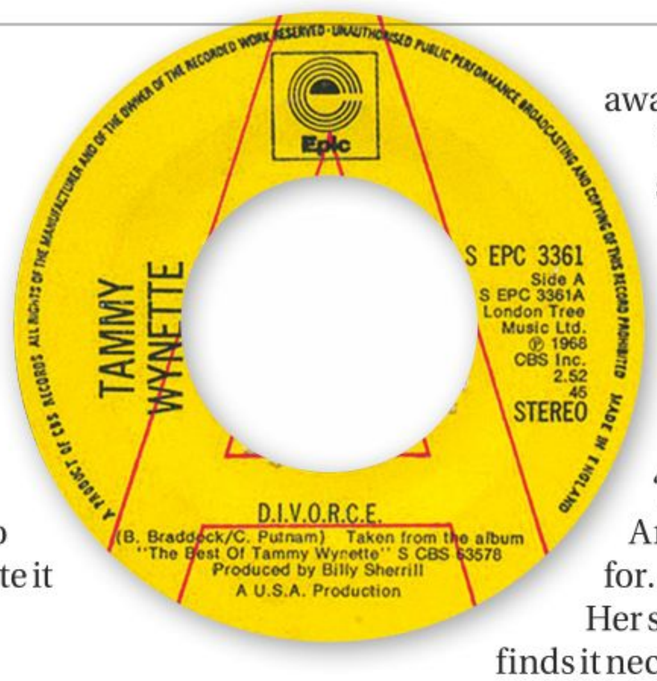
"My latest album, they just brought me a gold album this morning and said that before I went home it'd be platinum. That's a real thrill. Because the album is called *20 Country Classics* and it hasn't even been released in the States. So you can imagine I was really thrilled with that. To get a gold or platinum in another country is really a thrill."

Life, it seems, is one long thrill.

"Sexist," yelled a young lady accusingly as Tammy went into "Stand By Your Man" at Hammersmith Odeon, emphasising the song's role as the symbol of the un-liberated woman. Despite Wynette's protestations that it was merely a love song, written and performed with no ulterior motive other than that of an attractive ballad, "Stand By Your Man" will forever mirror the general lifestyle, upbringing and conservative attitudes that she has come to symbolise, directly in opposition to changing attitudes in America.

It's the biggest-selling record ever by a female country artist, has won numerous awards, and went to No 1 in Britain for four weeks, eight years after she wrote it with Billy Sherrill, who is still her producer.

> "Y'all hope for crossover records, because we sell more"



THE IRONY IS that it took a long time for her to come to terms with the song, though not for the reasons that have earned it so much scorn. "That was the first song I wrote with Billy Sherrill, and I wasn't so… well, Billy didn't believe in my writing as much as I believed in Billy's.

"George Jones and I had just gotten married, and the song was real different from the rest I'd done. I'd done things about kids… 'I Don't Wanna Play House' and 'D.I.V.O.R.C.E.' and that kinda thing. So I went home and played it for George and he didn't like it. He didn't know I'd written it, so I asked him what he didn't like and he said, 'I dunno, I just don't care for the song.' That kinda got me started off wrong with 'Stand By Your Man', but it's grown on me now.

"I do like the meaning of 'Stand By Your Man' very much. Women's lib really put me down for it, though when we wrote it we didn't have nuthin' at all in mind, it was just a pretty love song. It was at the time women's lib came out so strong, so they picked on me."

Did she have no sympathy for what they were saying?

"Well, I can sympathise very easily because I have seen it happen in Mississippi where I was raised, and Alabama, growing up as a child, where a woman couldn't make a third of what a man could make doing an identical job. I can sympathise with that, and I feel it's very wrong. A woman should be equal to a man for anything she's capable of doing, but I still feel there's a lot of things she isn't capable of doing. Physically. Personally, I'm not particularly fond of the thought of digging ditches or climbing telephone poles. I'd rather stick with something a little more feminine.

"I wouldn't want to lose the little courtesies that we've always been extended, like lighting cigarettes and opening doors, and pulling out chairs and things like that. I enjoy that. I guess I just enjoy bein' a woman."

It may be a trite assessment to suggest that she's the voice of the silent majority, but she's certainly a mouthpiece for it. A fantasy to men, a shining example to women. Her songs, after all, wouldn't win medals for complexity, dealing in simplicity and the most basic subject matter… even – dare we say? – corn. Classy corn, mind.

The giggles have dried up to be replaced by a slight frown as she deliberates. It's an image she's stuck with whether she likes it or not. "Mmmmm… yeah…" she finally decides she does like it.

"Yeah," she says more positively. "I think I can relate to the average woman very easily. I've worked as a waitress, I've worked in a shoe factory, I've worked in a department store, in a clothing factory. I've done so many things that the average woman does now, and I feel that I'm an average woman. 'Cept I sing for a livin' where they might work in a bank or they may be peanut farmers. Yeah, I'm very pleased to be with the Middle America people."

And that, presumably, is the basis of Miss Wynette's appeal, which has given her more than 30 No 1 country singles, including several crossover hits (her current one, "Womanhood", looks set to become one of her biggest), more gold and platinum albums than she can possibly know what to do with, and armfuls of awards. The lady clearly hits a few nerves somewhere.

"I would say (*more firmly this time*), a lot of mah success is because I sing about the things that really happen to a lot of women my age and younger. And we're getting a younger audience all the time.

"Maybe the people are just getting ready for a more simple lyric, and way of life. Maybe they wanna hear it the way it is. I like a beginning, a middle and an end. I don't like a song that just says '*Yeah baby yeah*' and that's all. I like a story in a song. And I know our country fans do. That's what they look for… somethin' they can relate to."

Her strong sense of morality is demonstrated later as she finds it necessary to go into great detail to justify living with George Richey before she married him. Her strict Southern values go deep, and it takes a sizeable mountain even to make them waver.

"I guess I'm very old-fashioned in a lot of ways. And then I've changed an awful lot too; I never thought I'd live with anybody without being married to 'em first. Richey and I met 12 years ago and we were the biggest buddies. I cried on his shoulder a million times when I couldn't find Jones, when he was out drunk somewhere (*weary laugh*) and he'd go look for him.

"We travelled around the world and back with his ex-wife and mah ex-husband, and all of a sudden his marriage failed and I was divorced, and all of a sudden we started… seein' each other. And we did move in together, and that's somethin' I've been totally against, being raised in the Deep South, and Richey's father been a Baptist minister for 46 years.

"I can't say I'm proud of the fact that we lived together before we got married, but I'm proud of the fact that we got married."

Her protected attitudes – which might be considered prudish in some quarters – give the impression of a disapproval of the changing face of Nashville. The outlaws have come in from the cold, Ronstadt and Emmylou have made rock respectable in country circles, and Dolly has taken showmanship to extremes. Tammy trucks on down the middle with barely a glance sideways, sticking closely to Billy Sherrill, and cautiously acknowledging the right of any of her contemporaries to introduce any style or influence they wish.

However, she shows definite concern when the sanctity of Nashville tradition is threatened. She talks sadly of the incursion of politics and the failing credibility of the Country Music Association, held in such


Stand by your record producer

reverence by the country music hierarchy, and comes out in direct criticism of the way some – notably a hard-boozing, brawling Kris Kristofferson – attempted to question the solemn untouchability of these occasions by disruption and disturbance.

"I think Nashville has changed, along with the music. It's had to. And I'd have to give Kris Kristofferson credit for helping country music broaden the lyrics a little bit, because up until 'Help Me Make It Through The Night' came out, there was never ever anything… suggestive… in a country song. I think the T-shirt-and-blue-jean bit wasn't what upset Nashville so bad; I think it was the way they used it at the time. At one time nobody could wear jeans any more than I do.

"But I do think that at a function such as the CMA award show, when everyone likes to dress up and look nice and have a black tie… everybody should comply with the rules. That's one of the things everybody got aggravated with him about, because he came to the function in just blue jeans and dirty T-shirt and they didn't really approve of his… attire."

Enter once again the Tammy Wynette giggle. Exit quickly, enter stern expression. She clearly doesn't feel that she's been left behind during this revolution: "I just try to stay as up to date as I possibly can, and I think the more competition we have, the harder it makes us look and work for better material."

But she does state quite categorically that there's no way she could ever sing in a rock or any other style. Her background, her lifestyle, is too closely related with her music to change now, and she has not the slightest desire to, even though her own tastes in music span from Ray Charles to Barbra Streisand and Gladys Knight. Crossover hits seem to come her way frequently enough without adopting a new approach.

"I think y'all hope for crossover records because naturally we sell more records, and we make more money. But I can't blame Dolly at all for anythin' she's been doin'. I think she definitely should do it if it makes her happy, because she's a very talented young lady. I don't think there's anything she shouldn't do.

"I'm a great admirer of Dolly. When I first went to Nashville she was doin' demos and most all of 'em were rock. She didn't just start doing somethin' different; she used to do rock demos all the time in Nashville. And when she finally got a country one she'd do that for me and see if I wanted to record it before she started recording herself.

"So I don't think her ideals have changed; I think she just started the only way she could start, with country. She got a hit in country and now she's just growing.

"It's all just another part of country music. I don't think it will ever overtake straight country music. There's pure country, there's contemporary, there's the outlaw breed, there's bluegrass, and there's so many different kinds of country.

"I think Willie and Waylon were way ahead of themselves. They should have made it years ago. They don't do anythin' any different now than they did 15 years ago, and I knew 'em both many years ago and I loved their singing then. I would say they've brought an awful lot of listeners to country music, which I'm very grateful for and proud of, and so has Emmylou Harris, Linda Ronstadt and Olivia Newton-John. And I think people like that, the songs they sing, the songs Emmylou sings, are pure country. But she just does it a little bit different in her way and she's got a pop and country following."

IN A FIELD of music that feeds and flourishes on thick layers of sentiment, the marriage to George Jones was greeted with orgasmic delight by media and fans. Jones was at the time (in fact still is) one of Nashville's biggest stars, better known than Tammy, even though she'd already scored with "I Don't Wanna Play House" and "D.I.V.O.R.C.E." As her hits began to match his, it was logical and inevitable that they should play concerts and record together.

She shows no qualms about discussing Jones and the marriage break break-up. Her admiration for him as a singer remains undimmed, but they won't be working together.

"If he could pull himself together I'd consider it, but he's drinking so much now… He was doing an album, he did the song with James Taylor, 'Bar-tender's Blues', and Billy wanted to do a complete album on him with different artists. So Dr Hook came into town, Waylon came into town, Willie, Emmylou, and they all flew in to record with him and he didn't show up for the session.

"It's really sad. He's sick and he needs help, but I don't know of anybody who can help him right now. Everyone I know has tried. I have, and I'm not pattin' myself on the back, it's just a job I can't do. He has to make up his own mind. I don't wanna be worried with him drinkin' and not makin' the shows and everything, because I feel terribly obligated to the public. When I play a show I wanna be there. So many times we had shows together and I just had to make excuses for him not bein' there, and I don't like that feelin'."

Any suggestion of a rivalry between her and Crystal Gayle, Loretta Lynn, Dolly or anybody else is drowned beneath a welter of protest, even though their recent successes have, superficially at least, diminished her position at the helm. She does graciously concede that she's less in the spotlight, and picking up fewer awards. "I don't think in terms of being number one any more. I'd much rather be consistent. I was thrilled to death with every award I ever received, but I've passed that stage right now. I just wanna make good records." *Colin Irwin* •



Country cabaret

HAMMERSMITH ODEON LONDON
LIVE!
SEPTEMBER 14

MM SEPT 16 Tammy's polished routine proves too hokey for London.

SO ENTRENCHED IS the tradition of slick showmanship and synthetic sincerity among buxom country goddesses that we should no longer be surprised or nauseated by it. Some – Dolly Parton is the obvious example – use it to hilarious advantage by taking it to ludicrous extremes, while others (Crystal Gayle, Emmylou) underplay it to acceptable limits. But for Tammy Wynette, however – constantly self-serious and grimly rehearsed to the point where you can see reflections in the polish – it is never less than an irritation and a distraction.

It's also unnecessary: she's a superlative singer, perfectly able, in the sympathetic context of a concert hall, to get away with the most gruesomely sentimental material without earning a snigger of disapproval. Yet, for her return to Britain last Thursday, she chose to give us what is, in effect, a cabaret show, with long rambling introductions, embarrassing stabs at humour, and the odious feeling that it was all a mechanical routine.

No doubt Vegas loves it, but a Hammersmith Odeon crowd seemed slightly bemused and cool. Wandering into the audience, grabbing a guy (who stood beside her grinning foolishly) and singing "Stand By Your Man" certainly didn't do much for the old credibility.

We heard all about the interior of her bus, a description of her home in Nashville, details of her children, we were introduced to her husband, and heard various references to her former husband, George Jones. But the best moment came as she gushed, "We're feelin' good tonight and we love y'all", stopping suddenly short as her stool tipped up, nearly depositing her on the floor.

Three of her best-known songs – "Your Good Girl's Gonna Go Bad", "I Don't Wanna Play House" and her parody of the Billy Connolly hit "D.I.V.O.R.C.E." – were thrown away in an opening medley, and the rest of the material rarely showed her at her best. Her band is accomplished, but the general lack of ambition barely extended her remarkable vocal qualities.

Only the Kenny Rogers song, "Sweet Music Man", and her current single, "Womanhood", which for once breaks away from the customary restrictions, did her justice. They both displayed a power that merely reinforced the frustrations. *Colin Irwin*



1978

OCTOBER – DECEMBER

SIOUXSIE, THE CLASH, SPRINGSTEEN, JOHNNY THUNDERS AND MORE

"I didn't kill her"

NME OCT 21 Snapper Joe Stevens phones a report from Rikers Island, where Sid Vicious is held for murder.

RIKERS ISLAND IS a heavily guarded remand centre and short-term jail situated in the Hudson River, not far from LaGuardia International Airport. The prison population consists of blacks and Puerto Ricans. The Island has a tough reputation, and is supposedly a drug-trafficking centre.

Accompanied by Sex Pistols manager Malcolm McLaren and Sid Vicious' mum Ann Beverley, I met Vicious in the prison hospital wing. When we told him that according to both London evening papers on Friday, Sid had "confessed" to Ms Spungen's murder, he angrily denied the reports.

"When the fuck did I make a confession?" he retorted. "I was well out of it, mate!"

Over the course of our visit, Sid detailed his version of the events that took place in room 100 of the Chelsea Hotel between Wednesday evening and Thursday morning. His story is as follows:

He remembers waking up sometime during the night and seeing Nancy sitting up in bed fingering the knife they had bought earlier in the day, ostensibly to protect themselves from junkie scavengers who hung around the methadone clinic Sid frequented. Sid dozed off again before he could ask Nancy what she was doing.

His next recollection is of waking up a few hours later and seeing blood all over Nancy's side of the bed.

"There was blood everywhere. On the sheets, on the pillowcase, all over the mattress and the floor leading into the bathroom. My first thought was that she had been killed."

He stumbled into the bathroom and found Nancy – still breathing – slouched under the bathroom sink. After a futile attempt to revive her, Sid ran out into the lobby yelling for help.

He then ran into the room and called the hotel reception desk, saying, "Get an ambulance up here quick! I'm not kidding!"

Minutes later it wasn't an ambulance but the police who had arrived. When they saw the scene they turned to the dazed ex-Pistol – who, it was later revealed, had at the time been taking Tuinal – and said, "Listen kid, why'd you do that?"

"Why did I do what?" replied Vicious.

"Why'd you kill the girl?"

"I didn't kill her."

"If you didn't kill her, why can't you look me straight in the face?" »

ALLAN TANNENBAUM / GETTY

October 13, 1978, New York City: the day after Nancy Spungen is found dead, 21-year-old Sid Vicious appears in court under his real name, John Simon Ritchie, to be charged with her murder

THE VICIOUS AFFAIR

ON SUNDAY, IN AN EXCLUSIVE interview with NME, Sid Vicious gave his version of the events which led up to his arrest for the for the murder of Nancy Spungen.

NEWS DESK

When we spoke to Vicious, he was undergoing heroin detoxification

"All right," retorted Vicious, "I'm looking at you straight in the face. I didn't kill her, mate."

The two cops laughed at Vicious' denial, then pushed him up against the wall face first and handcuffed him.

According to police, Nancy died of "a stab wound inflicted after midnight on Wednesday". They later recovered the weapon, a large folding knife with a black wooden handle, and are said to be investigating reports that an unidentified young man had been with the couple until 4am that morning.

Vicious was meanwhile taken to Rikers Island. The following day he appeared in court, where he seemed understandably distressed and not a little disconnected. He was charged with second degree murder under his real name, John Simon Ritchie, and bail was set at £25,000 – much to the dismay of New York's finest, who had expected bail to be denied.

By this time Malcolm McLaren had arrived in New York – Vicious is still contracted to him – telling the British press before he left that "one of the reasons I want Sid out is to record a new album in New York. With a bit of luck the money from the record might pay for the trial."

McLaren engaged the respected New York law firm of Pryor, Cashman, Sherman & Flynn to represent Vicious. Estimates of the legal fees likely to be involved are in the region of $100,000.

McLaren also engaged some private investigators to follow up, among other leads, a theory that the death had some connection with the activities of a Puerto Rican gang that has recently take over drug operations on the Lower East Side, who sometimes congregate in a bar near the Chelsea Hotel.

Soon after his court appearance, Vicious was moved to the hospital wing of Rikers Island, where he is undergoing heroin detoxification. On Sunday, Sid's mother Mrs Ann Beverley arrived in New York armed with a sleeping bag and obviously ready for a long siege. We went to see Sid in hospital.

When Mrs Beverley – a very cool-headed lady who spent time on the hippie trails when Sid was 10 years old – started getting a bit soft with her boy, Sid said, "Listen, I'm not a mama's boy. I'll fight my own battles."

Sid seemed to be unaware of the pressures building up around him, of the fact that the US courts will probably be only too happy to make an example of him to any aspiring punk desperadoes. And, of course, Nancy's death is taking its emotional toll.

That same day, Nancy's body was buried in her parents' home city of Philadelphia. On Monday, Virgin Records telegraphed the bail money to McLaren in New York, and Sid was released on Tuesday morning.

If, when the case is heard, Vicious is convicted, the absolute minimum time he will spend in prison, with parole, is seven years. The maximum is 25.



February 8, 1978: Sid and Nancy outside Marylebone Magistrates Court, London

MICHAEL PUTLAND / GETTY, GETTY



Keith Richards at his home in upstate New York pending the trial in Toronto, summer 1978

"Mick says he's very pleased"

NME OCT 18 Having avoided a trafficking charge, addict Keith Richards is found guilty of heroin possession and placed on probation.

KEITH RICHARDS WAS given a year's probation by a Toronto court on Tuesday for the possession of heroin. And this now means the Rolling Stones' plans to play UK concerts early next year are no longer in jeopardy.

Richards had pleaded guilty to possessing 22 grams of heroin worth about £2,000, found when Mounties raided his Canadian hotel room in February 1977.

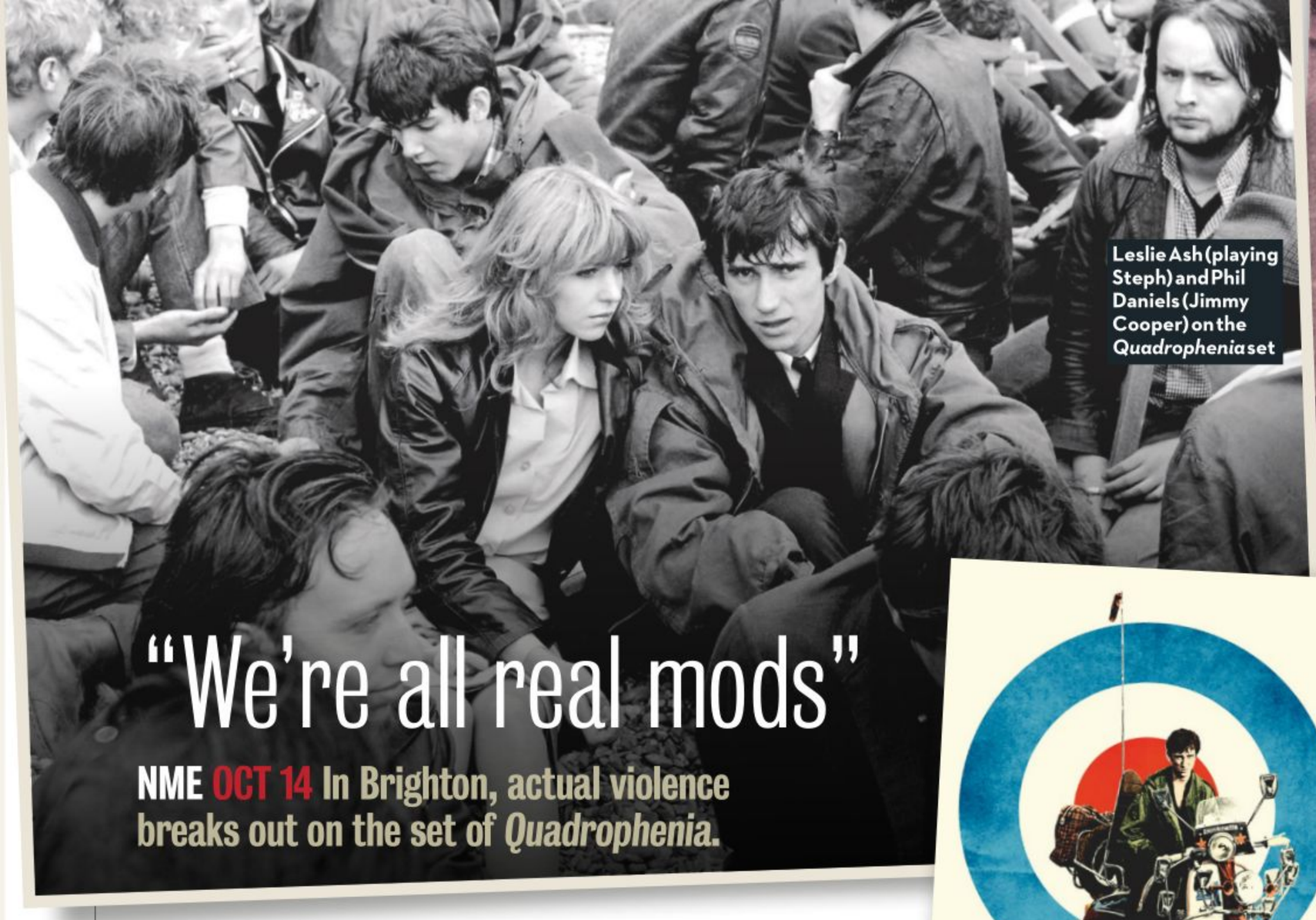
The prosecution had hoped for a six- to 12-month jail sentence for the guitarist. But the defence for Richards, who'd faced life imprisonment on a trafficking charge until it was dropped earlier this week, argued that he needed at least another six months' medical treatment to kick his addiction.

Richards pleaded guilty to possessing 22 grams of heroin worth £2,000

Plans for a Stones tour were going ahead even before Richards was sentenced. Visiting London last week, Mick Jagger said they'll play Australia soon after Christmas. "And when we're finished there, then it's the UK," he added.

Even so, Jagger is relieved Richards is not going down. The group's British press agent Keith Altham said that Richards had already been invited to play a charity show in Canada.

"Mick says he's very pleased," Altham laughed, "and he thinks Keith will be excellent on his own."



Leslie Ash (playing Steph) and Phil Daniels (Jimmy Cooper) on the *Quadrophenia* set

"We're all real mods"

NME OCT 14 In Brighton, actual violence breaks out on the set of *Quadrophenia*.



HUNDREDS OF MODS and rockers clashed in Brighton last week in a flashback to the trouble-torn days of the '60s. Cafe windows were smashed, deckchairs torn to bits; a scooter was hurled from the cliffs at Black Rock into the sea.

Most of the action centred on an East Street cafe. Hundreds of mods ran wild across the seafront road and clashed with a group of rockers inside the cafe.

They were supposed, in fact, to be making the new Who film *Quadrophenia*, but it looked a little too real for comfort. Some of them were really beating the shit out of each other.

I crawled over to the St John's Ambulance mob to see what was going on.

"Have there been any casualties so far?" I asked the nearest St John's lady. "No," she said. "Why, who wants to know?"

"I'm from the *NME*."

"Well, I'm not allowed to tell you – you'll have to ask the director," she declared, and carried on dressing some poor rocker's face with bandages, blood dripping on to his BSA badge.

I tried again. "Is it true a mod from Modrapheniacs Club from Poole had his leg broken yesterday?"

"I'm not allowed to say."

I spoke to members of the Modrapheniacs Club after the day's filming.

"Yeah, those fuckin' grease rockers busted Frank's leg. He's in hospital wiv multiple fractures."

Do you always wear parkas and ride scooters, or is it just for the film?

"We always look like this, 'cos we're all real mods from different clubs."

How much are they paying you as an extra?

"Ten pounds a day, or if you've got a bike or scooter, £15."

That probably doesn't sound like a vast sum of money, but then there's over 600 extras and they've been filming in Brighton for 10 days.

According to director Franc Roddam, the rest of the film takes place in West London, around Hammersmith where Pete Townshend used to live.

Is it true your budget is £20,000 per day, I asked. "It could be, I can't really say."

How's the film going? "Fantastic, really good."

So if you're a mod or rocker and wanna have some bovver and get paid for it, phone the Job Centre in Hammersmith and tell 'em you're a sucker.

"Brian Rock"

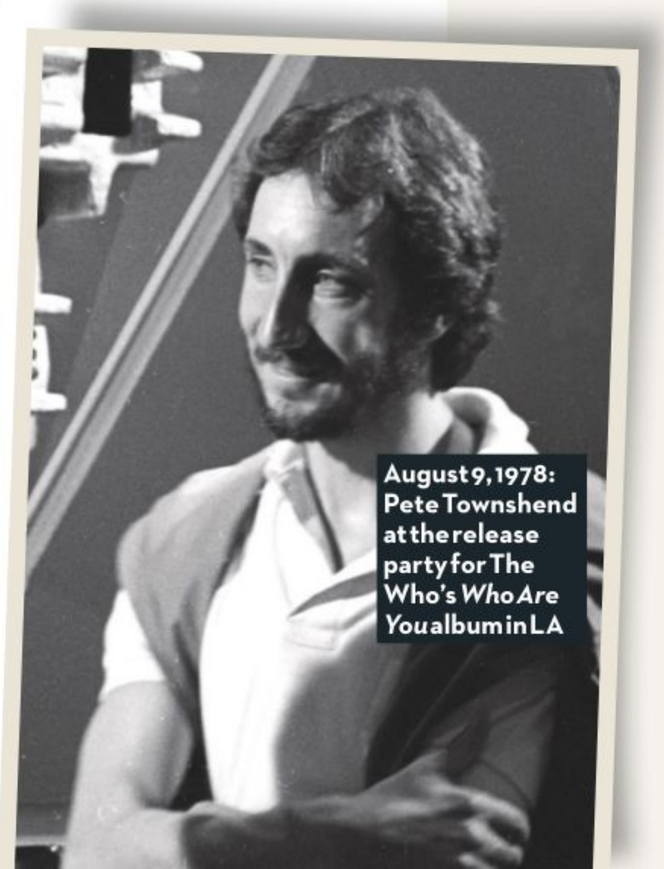
NME OCT 14

REPORTS IN THE national press, suggesting that The Who are considering expanding their lineup and changing their name, were vigorously denied by their spokesman this week. The *London Evening News* quoted Pete Townshend as saying they were not only planning to bring in a new drummer, as replacement for the late Keith Moon, but also intended to add another guitarist and keyboards player.

Commented the spokesman, "When The Who go back into the recording studios in the new year, it's possible they may use additional musicians – as, in fact, they have occasionally done in the past. But when they get back to live work, which is unlikely to be before next summer, the idea of a six-piece Who on stage is sheer nonsense. And talk of a name change is just speculation. I mean, what would they call themselves – The Noo 'Oo or The Whom?"

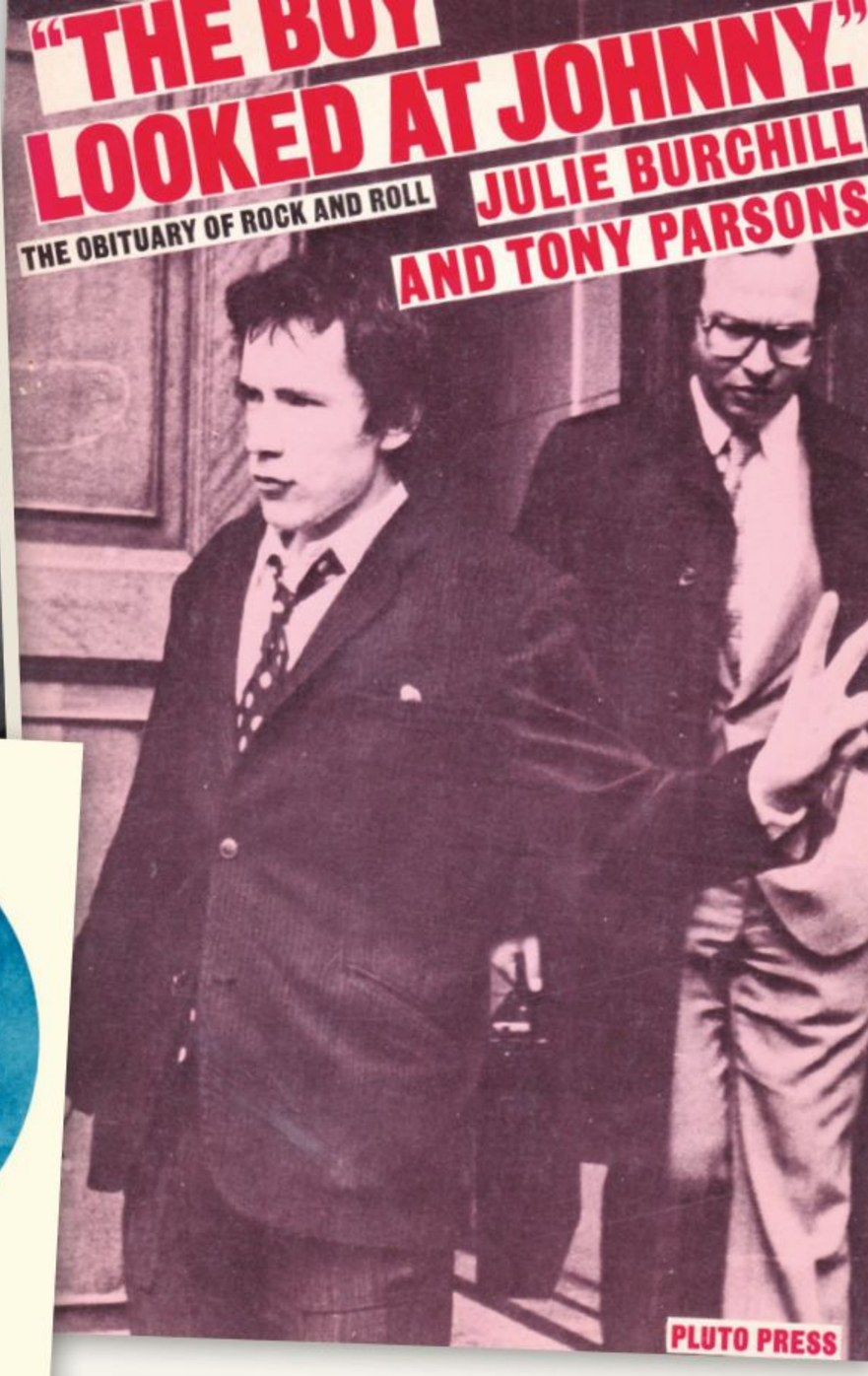
NME NOV 11

KENNEY JONES – drummer with the now-defunct Faces who, after their disbandment, joined the re-formed Small Faces – is at present working on The Who's film *Quadrophenia*. Rumours in rock circles this week suggested that he had, in fact, joined The Who as permanent replacement for the late Keith Moon. But a Who spokesman denied this on Monday, and added, "The band are laying down a few tracks for the film, and Kenney is sitting in with them to help them out. That's all there is to it."



August 9, 1978: Pete Townshend at the release party for The Who's *Who Are You* album in LA

GETTY, JEREMY FLETCHER / GETTY



RIP rock'n'roll

NME OCT 28 The first book by Julie Burchill and Tony Parsons.

YOU'RE SO SMART, right? Riddle us this: when is a rock book not a rock book? When it's *The Boy Looked At Johnny*, Julie Burchill and Tony Parsons' obituary of rock'n'roll. "Handle with caution," the blurb announces. "The authors come not to praise rock but to bury it."

And if there's any rock'n'roll left scrabbling for air after the earth gets shovelled back on its artfully dishevelled head, then it ain't Tony and Julie's fault. THIS BOOK IS EXACTLY WHAT IT SAYS IT IS. Every last icon gets thoroughly clasted.

We don't remotely believe that you're going to agree with more than a certain percentile of the opinions expressed, but you'd have to be a fairly timid, chronically respectful sort of fan-type person not to cheer the drastic duo on to greater flights of endeavour as they ruthlessly drag away the snakeskin platforms (and the brothel creepers, and the artfully grimed sneakers) off the numerous clay pedal extremities of everyday rock folk.

The tome in question is published by Pluto Press for £1.25, but if you want to save some, be the first in your cell block and lay your hands on a priceless collectors' item, then fill in the coupon, whack a quid in the envelope (along with your address, natcho) and send it off. You'll not only receive a pre-publication, pre-lawsuit copy of *The Boy Looked At Johnny*, but if you're among the first 500, you get it autographed by your two favourite counterculture heroes.

RICHARD MCCAFFREY / GETTY

"The greatest rock'n'roll show that I will ever experience": Bruce Springsteen on stage during the North American Darkness Tour of 1978

Widely worshipped but impressively grounded, BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN is still in touch with his people. Lawsuits, gifts, hit albums won't turn his head. "I will never put anyone in the position of being humiliated," he says. "It happened to me for too long."

"My music gave me everything"



— NEW MUSICAL EXPRESS OCTOBER 14 —

GREETINGS FROM THE New Jersey shoreline's omnipresent leisure industry of endless beaches, boardwalks, amusement parks, souvenir arcades, piers, clubs, pubs, bars and sideshow booths… greetings from smalltown life in Asbury Park, NJ.

Our story begins circa the early '60s. At a strict Catholic school, a strange, solitary boy of 11 has been caught skipping lessons. His punishment is being placed in a class of six-year-olds.

His arms and legs feel too long for his body as he sits at the dinky table and chair built for a mere mite. Stared at by the room full of curious Catholic ankle-biters – immobile Lilliputians to his awkward, embarrassed Gulliver – he grins self-consciously, his face burning.

The Sister of Mercy's voice breaks the silence.

"Let's show this young man", she intones, her eyes never leaving the boy, "what we do to children who smile in this class."

One of the six-year-olds stands up and walks over to where the big kid is sitting. Their eyes are level. Then the small child pulls back his fist and, with all the force he can muster from the spirit of the Holy Mother Mary, rams it home into the older boy's face.

"Very good," smiles the Sister.

Stunned with shock, shame and pain, the boy clutches his face, fighting back the tears.

"There's a dark cloud rising from the desert floor / I packed my bags and I'm heading straight into the storm / Gonna be a twister to blow everything down / That ain't got the faith to stand its ground / Blow away the dreams that tear you apart / Blow away the dreams that break your heart / Blow away the lies that leave you nothing but lost and brokenhearted / The dogs on mainstreet howl 'cos they understand / If I could take one moment into my hands / Mister, I ain't a boy / No, I'm a man / And I believe in a Promised Land."



SOME 17 YEARS later he's slumped in the dressing room at New York City's Palladium. After his usual three-hour soundcheck that afternoon, where he personally covered every last inch of the 3,400-seater theatre to make sure that the sound was absolutely perfect for every kid in the house, he performed the greatest rock'n'roll show that I will ever experience. It lasted for nearly four hours. It will be almost dawn before he finally leaves the Palladium.

Out back there's several hundred kids waiting for autographs, a chance to talk to him, an opportunity to thank him. None of them will go home disappointed. He's got time for all of them and he doesn't make a big deal about it. If you press him on the subject, he'll just get thoughtful and reply, "My music gave me everything that I got, I was nobody, I had nothing… I will never put anyone in the position of being humiliated. It happened to me for too long."

And if any other musician in the world said that to me – as you've no doubt noticed – I'd wait until I stopped laughing and then it would be news-sheet mincemeat time. But this geezer is unique; when Bruce Springsteen comes out with emotive statements like that I don't sneer, I BELIEVE.

When Springsteen played New Orleans on his last American tour, a middle-aged woman reached up from the stalls and handed him a ring, saying that it had been her grandmother's engagement ring. There was a plethora of precious stones encrusted on the ring and it was obviously worth thousands of dollars. Springsteen thanked her for the thought, but said he couldn't take it. The woman refused to take it back, told him that she wanted him to keep it and disappeared back into the darkness of the auditorium. Shaken, Springsteen handed the ring to the hall's management after the show and told them to keep it safe in case the woman ever came back to claim it.

She never did.

"It gives you a feeling of responsibility, a real heavy feeling of responsibility," Springsteen reflects. "I had all these kids coming up to me all the time we were making the album and they'd say, 'We know it's gonna be great, we know you're gonna do it, it's gonna be great!'… I don't wanna let the people that have supported me down. And it ain't good enough just getting by – I wanna take it all the way, every night…"

There ain't nothing else that he can do.

All duded up for Sunday night, the last of three Springsteen dates at the Palladium (all 10,000-plus seats sold in under two hours), this is a partisan crowd, hardcore Springsteen followers since the early days. They're mostly in their late teens or early twenties; wild and loud but without the glass-chucking violence so beloved by the mob-handed morons with a mile-wide yellow streak down their backs who contaminate gigs back in the good ol' Yew Kay.

"These kids that come to my shows, they ain't here for trouble, they're here to have a good time," Springsteen tells me. "They get kinda noisy and excited, but the last thing on their mind is busting somebody's skull."

Before every show he plays, Springsteen talks to the security and tells them that he doesn't want any rough stuff. He tells them that if there is any heavy-handed bouncer antics, he'll do everything in his power to make sure the individuals responsible are looking for a new job in the morning. What he doesn't tell them is that if they start beating up on the kids, then they better be prepared to go through him, too; he personally dives into the audience to sort out security- provoked aggravation. It happened time and time again on his last tour.



December 15, 1978: Springsteen and the E Street Band on stage at San Francisco's Winterland Ballroom

LARRY HULST / GETTY

"You guys work here?" he demands. "These guys you're roughing up are my friends!" And his fans love him for it…

"But the security at the Palladium are OK," he grins. "Never any trouble here. They know me."

About half of the crowd are from New Jersey and a lot of them remember Springsteen jamming in the Upstage club, which he remembers as "some of the happiest nights of my life".

"If there was ever a chance of any of us making a living through music, we figured it would be through Bruce," says his guitarist Miami Steve Van Zandt of the E Street Band.



Getting down with tenor sax player Clarence Clemons, AKA The Big Man, on the West Coast leg of 1978's Darkness Tour

SPRINGSTEEN HAD FIRST picked up a guitar (for mirror-posing purposes) at nine, the day after gawking at Elvis on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, but he didn't start playing until he was a friendless 13-year-old, two years after the nun's rough justice in the Catholic classroom. His distaste for organised religion ("The smell of the convent made me literally throw up"), his lack of self-respect ("I definitely did not dig myself") and his loneliness ("It was a very solitary existence, I didn't have the flair to be the class clown, it was like I just didn't exist") left a life of such awesome nothingness that he was soon practising eight hours a day to fill it.

"My sister, my youngest sister, she's 16 and she's very pretty and very popular. There's no way that she's gonna sit in her room for every waking hour." He grins ruefully. "I didn't have that problem."

By the time he was 14 he was in his first band; by 16 he was so good that when he practised in a garage, kids would stand on milk crates with their noses pressed against the windowpanes to watch him.

At first none of the countless bars and clubs in New Jersey would allow him on their stage because he refused to play Top 40 golden greats. Then he was given a chance to strut his stuff at the Upstage and struck while his plectrum was hot. From then on he packed out the club for four nights a week until he finally met his first manager, Mike Appel. They decided to be Elvis and Colonel Tom, but it really didn't happen that way at all.

After the CBS contract in the early '70s came *Greetings From Asbury Park, NJ* and *The Wild, The Innocent And The E Street Shuffle*, both in 1973, with only a handful of songs – "Lost In The Flood", "Spirit In The Night", "Incident On 57th Street", "Sandy", "Rosalita" – giving a clue to the quality to come, the rest of the records too verbose for comfort, Springsteen subsequently getting lumbered with one of the New Dylan albatrosses that in those days they were giving away instead of Green Shield stamps.

Springsteen went into the studio for a year or so to record his third album, co-producing it with Appel and *Rolling Stone* scribe Jon Landau, and when he came out again the shit was already poised to splatter against the proverbial fan, man. *Born To Run* was grandiose, heroic, magical, worthy of some unholy alliance between Phil Spector and Leonard Bernstein, a romantic fantasy of sleazy streetlife, enormously accessible.

As the hysterical hyperbole of the CBS publicity machine went into overdrive, Springsteen played 10 sold-out dates at New York's Bottom Line to consistently ecstatic audiences, *Born To Run* became a platinum album and the single of the same name broke into the American Top 20. Top of the world, Ma! Then everything began to fall to pieces…

> "I don't wanna let the people that have supported me down"

Jon Landau had written an incisive, sensitive, trenchantly subjective article on Springsteen for *Rolling Stone* in which he succeeded in expressing the unique brilliance of the man in intensely personal terms; Landau spoke of his love for his girlfriend asleep upstairs as he worked at his typewriter, of what the music he had grown up with had meant to his life and how witnessing Springsteen that night had been the purest exposition of the rock'n'roll spirit that he had seen in many years. Landau's piece remains one of the best articles on Springsteen.

But CBS instigated all-out critical backlash by latching on to one quote from the article – "I have seen the future of rock'n'roll and its name is Bruce Springsteen" – taking it completely out of context and using it as the masthead for the hard-sell marketing technique overkill that rebounded on the record company and Bruce himself with a vengeance. "At Last London Is Ready For Bruce Springsteen!" was another one, and I remember sneering at it as I walked down City Road, N1, on my way to work one night late in 1975.

In fairness to Springsteen, no one was innocent when it came to the extravagant claims being made on his behalf except for Bruce Springsteen himself. As soon as he saw the "FUTURE OF " quote screaming from a *Born To Run* advertising billboard he was on the blower to the Fat Cats telling them to cut the crap. And when he discovered gratis "I Have Seen The Future, etc" badges being handed out at one of his gigs, well…

Meanwhile, back in the boardroom, Appel and Bruce were having the initial argument over the distribution of the newly acquired wealth that would eventually degenerate into a permanent rift twixt manager and musician, both parties filing million-dollar lawsuits against the other alleging breach of contract.

Jon Landau became Springsteen's new manager and Appel filed an injunction preventing Landau from entering a studio with Springsteen and preventing Springsteen entering a studio at all. There followed nearly three years of lay-off and litigation. When Bruce should have been out on the road consolidating the *Born To Run* victory (he loves touring, says he's always fascinated by what his hotel room will look like, how big the bed will be, what colour the carpet and wallpaper will be, if there'd be any weird pictures on the wall: ain't he a lovely bloke?) he was in front of the legal bar.

The basis of the disagreement between Appel and Springsteen is rooted in Bruce's naivety when it comes to contracts and Mickey's when it comes to same. Appel had always told Springsteen that he paid the E Street Band far too much money, but it wasn't until the royalty cheques for their first hit album began getting delivered by the truckload that Bruce realised how little say he had over the fruits of success he and the boys had been working towards for the best part of a decade…

"We'd suddenly made all this money and contracts we'd signed three years before became important. It wasn't so much the money… I wanted my songs. Mike had the publishing rights to all my songs… When I signed those contracts I didn't even know what publishing was! That whole period was just a time in my life that seemed completely out of my hands. Business is something that I'm pretty easily intimidated by…"

Remarkably, Springsteen holds no grudges against Appel. »

MICHAEL PUTLAND / GETTY

"Even when we were in court… he was still a guy that I kinda liked and knew that he kinda liked me."

The final proof that Springsteen survived all the hype, the two years in court and the *looooong* time in the wilderness of enforced retirement is Darkness On The Edge Of Town. He has returned with infinitely more maturity, power, soul and fire on his fingertips than he ever had in his life.

"That album… it's about people refusing to let go of their humanity. No matter what they go through, no matter what life does to them, they never let go of their humanity."

"BROOOOOOOOOCE!!!" FROM three-and-a-half thousand throats and the lights go on as the E Streeters hit the opening chords of "Badlands": the same epic, awesome waves of invigorating beautiful noise as before, but Springsteen – striding the planks grinning, his Fender hanging loose on his back, gripping the hand mic tight in both hands, dapper in black jacket and strides – once he starts spitting out the lyrics, makes it plain where he's been all this time, how he's not the same any more…

"Lights out tonight/Trouble in the heartland/Got a head-on collision/Smashin' in my guts, man/I'm caught up in a crossfire that I DON'T UNDERSTAND!/BUT THERE'S ONE THING I KNOW FOR SURE, GIRL!!"

"I was disappointed that the reviews of the album said it sounded depressed," Bruce told me later. "I spelled it out for 'em on the first track…"

"I don't give a damn for the same old played-out scenes/Honey, I don't give a damn for just the inbetweens/Honey, I want – the – heart – I- want – the – soul – I want – control right now."

Raw, exhilarating, inspirational… the superlative dictionary is right down the dumper, John. Springsteen – be it in conversation, on record and ESPECIALLY on stage – often appears too good to be true. You look for the catch, the flaw, the giveaway. And you look and you LOOK and you keep looking until you finally concede that there isn't a catch. He's the one.

After two years of showbiz decadence, all the free albums and concert tickets, Springsteen is the only geezer I'd actually pay money to go and see. He's the only person who makes me feel like a fan again.

"I believe in the love you gave me/I believe in the faith that can save me!/I believe in the faith and I pray that someday it may raise me… above these… badlands!!!"

This is joyous, optimistic rock music. It's what rock'n'roll should have been about and rarely was. He's not, unfortunately, the future of rock'n'roll; he's so good, so vital, so honest that he shows the majority of the rest of 'em up for the squalid cretins they are. The day he quits is the day the music really dies… this guy, this rocker, has actually got some backbone to his work, some MORAL FIBRE.

"Yeah, there's a lotta morality in the show, and it's a very strict morality. Anybody that works for me has gotta understand that. I know how I'd feel if I paid money to see a show and what I wanted wasn't delivered. It comes back to the responsibility thing…"

I've seen great gigs before: The Clash at Harlesden in '77, The Who at the Rainbow in '71, Bowie in Newcastle earlier this year, the Pistols on the Jubilee boat trip or at the two Screen On The Green dates, but what Bruce Springsteen does transcends all of those without a photo-finish. This ain't just the best gig I've ever seen in my life; it's much more than that. It's like watching you're entire life flashing by and instead of dying, you're dancing.

Springsteen sings a love song and he doesn't make you smirk the way you would at some fat-zero axe-hero mucho macho man; he makes you ache for the girl you love; he makes you remember her and wish she were here tonight so you wouldn't have to go home alone and without her. I didn't know music could do that to you.

And Springsteen documents the conflict between father and son better than anyone since Steinbeck in *East Of Eden*. There's the raging "Adam Raised A Cain", but the real killer is the unrecorded "Independence Day", possibly the most poignant, moving ballad he's ever written. I was close to tears. At first I thought it was because either I'm too sensitive or else I'm getting soft, but then I realised that rock'n'roll rarely gets this real.

"Well, Papa, I don't know what it was with the two of us/We chose the words and, yeah, we drew the lines/This house, no how could it hold the two of us/I guess that we were just too much of the same kind/So say goodbye, it's Independence Day/All boys must run away… come Independence Day/Oh, say goodbye, it's Independence Day/All men must make their way/Come Independence Day…"

You want it, you take it, you pay the price… Springsteen, apart from everything else, is also a born performer, frequently jumping offstage and running into the heart of the auditorium, one hand on the mic and another wrapped around a kid in a display of genuine affection.

The E Street Band is a revelation; Danny Federici on organ and Roy Bittan on piano, Steve Van Zandt on guitar, the golden sax of The Big Man Clarence Clemons as always the most important instrument after Springsteen's impassioned, howling voice, and with it all nailed down solid by the relentlessly strident rhythm section of Garry Tallent on bass and Max Weinberg on drums. The sound is as full and vibrant as on vinyl, but Springsteen's meticulously perfectionist attitude to soundchecks and the electric urgency applied to performing live by everyone on stage takes Springsteen's music to awesome, unprecedented extremes of excellence.

"Something In The Night" and "Streets Of Fire" were both recorded for *Darkness…* in just one take. The latter is yet another gem on stage, Springsteen alone at the front of the darkened stage, haunted, tortured, agonising like some tormented Prince Of Denmark yet totally believable.

"When the night's quiet, and you don't care any more/And your eyes are tired/And someone's at your door/And you realise… you wanna let go/And the weak lies and the cold walls you embrace…" The vocal building, the bitter bile of undiluted fury rising in his throat. *"Eat at your insides and – leave – you – face – to – face with STREEEETS OF FIII-RRRE!!!"*



WARING ABBOTT / GETTY

September 16, 1978: one of three sell-out shows at the Palladium in New York City



And "Factory", possibly the most accurate recording of the drab, dull, soul-destroying boredom of working-class existence ever put on black plastic. Kraftwerk, Devo and all those other industrial-togged turds … do you *really* believe – and you can add your darling Davie-poo to that list – that their product is "industrial factory folk-muzak of mass-man in the machine-age" *undsoweiter*. You *do*? You poor, deluded git. I bet you never done a day's work in your miserable life.

"Early in the morning factory whistle blows/ Man rises from bed and puts on his clothes/Man takes his lunch, walks out into the morning light/ It's the work, the working, just the working life/ Through the mansions of fear, through the mansions of pain, I see my daddy walking through those factory gates in the rain/Factory takes his hearing, factory gives him life/It's the work, the working, just the working life/End of the day, factory whistle cries/Men walk through these gates with death in their eyes/And you just better believe, boy/Somebody's gonna get hurt tonight/It's the work, the working, just the working life…"

I love that song. But then I'm still a bit Mutt'n'Jeff from Distiller's, so then I'm biased.

Springsteen performs all of *Darkness On The Edge Of Town*, all of *Born To Run*, early songs like "Spirit In The Night" and "Incident On 57th Street".

He performs great songs that he gave to other people – "Faith" (Robert Gordon), "Fever" (Southside Johnny), "Because The Night" (Patti Smith) – all of them cutting the cover versions to shreds, smouldering lust paeans, love bites back …

That's Bruce's one fault, to my mind – he's too GENEROUS: nobody else in the history of rock'n'roll has given songs of that quality away. Still, I guess he can afford it, the geezer is a genius, after all.

And when he's played for nearly four hours and it's way past midnight and the houselights have been on for over half an hour but we just won't go away, we refuse to leave the auditorium, we just stand on our seats and scream "BROOOOOOOOCE!!! MOOOOOOORE!!! BROOOOOOCE!!!" he comes back and plays on, all old jukebox giants, Buddy Holly songs, "Quarter To Three", "Devil With The Blue Dress On" and many, many more (no, I didn't take notes). And you're your heart sinks because it's all over.

What can I tell you, kid? God, I wish you could have been there.

> "Some people get buried so deep in the dirt that they never get out"

"**BRUCE HAS COLLAPSED,**" his manager Jon Landau tells me 30 minutes after the end of the show. "We'll have to cancel the interview. He's in a state of exhaustion. He can't talk to anyone now."

Usually, I'd know that I was getting served bullshit and the rock star I was ready to interrogate had pissed off back to a gram of coke in the Ritz and was at this moment writhing around in the back of his limo with leather strides around his ankles and a big, fat groupie sitting on him.

With Springsteen it's different; all I can think is… Christ, I hope he's gonna be all right.

But I stick around inside the Palladium, just thinking about the gig. Shit, I got a plane to catch early in the morning, so I might as well stay up all night. I couldn't sleep after a show like that anyhow.

"You can come backstage and meet Bruce if you want to," Landau tells me and my heart starts a-pounding. Kid, I've met 'em all… Led Zeppelin, the Rolling Stones, the Pistols, Mike Batt, you name it. Never in my life have I felt awe at the thought of meeting a musician before …

Well, I was afraid I'd be let down. Of course, I wasn't; he's exactly what he seems to be – open, honest, warm, personable, friendly, funny, probably the most likeable geezer I've met in my life.

Five feet nine inches with a muscular, tanned, athletic build, an easy smile and a hoarse, rasping laugh; he's relaxed and talkative, ready to listen and you feel like you've known him all your life.

As you've no doubt sussed, I was meant just to say hi and split, but me and Bruce got talking and we just couldn't stop. He talks about the album for a while and when he asks me what I think of it and I tell him it's nowhere near as accessible as *Born To Run* but after repeated playings it stands up as by far the best thing he's ever done, he actually breathes a sigh of relief.

"Phew, that's good… that's what we want people to react like when they hear it."

But, Bruce, surely you ain't worried about it… you must know how good it is…

"Ah, people tell ya so many different things… I just want the people who care about me to know what I'm trying to do. See, it couldn't be an innocent album like *Born To Run* because things ain't like that for me any more. The characters on the new album ain't kids, they're older – you been beat, you been hurt – but there's still hope, there's always hope. They throw dirt on you all your life and some people get buried so deep in the dirt that they never get out. The album's about the people who'll never admit they're buried too deep to get out."

Bruce talks about the three nights he sold out Madison Square Garden in the summer. "I don't usually like playing places that big, but that was for all the long-time supporters, so they could all get in and see us…"

On the first night he brought his 16-year-old sister Pam on stage after dedicating "Sweet Little Sixteen" to her.

And before the final encore on the last Garden date he was dragged back on stage by his Italian mother Adele (his father, Douglas, is Irish, once a factory worker in New Jersey and now a bus driver in Northern California). Bruce was screaming in protest as Adele dragged him to the mic, "Aw, Mom. I can't do any more! I just played four hours! I can't do no more!"

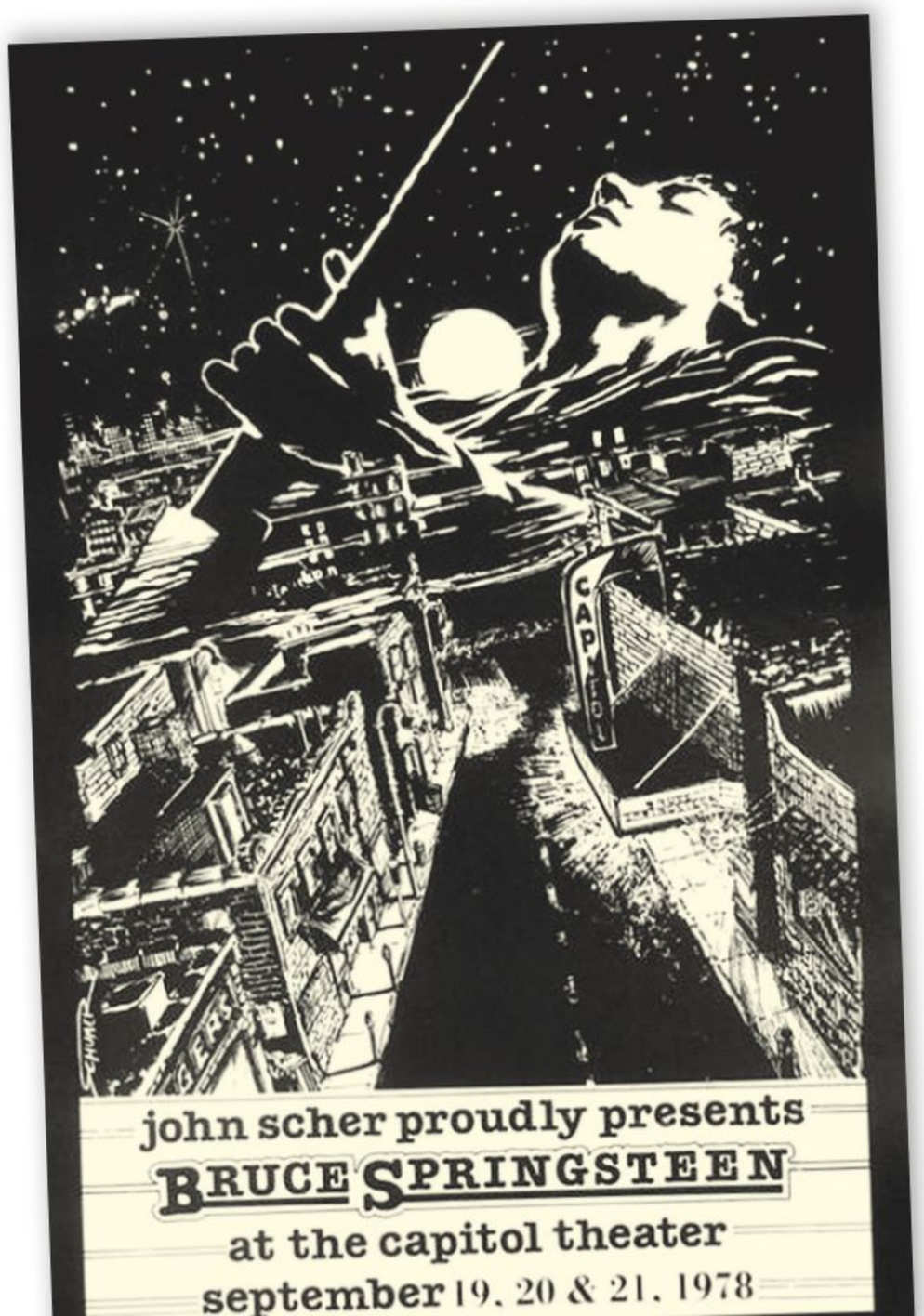
The Garden dates were typical Springsteen gigs; intimate and chaotic both, more like a great party than a rock'n'roll show, yet paradoxically the greatest rock'n'roll show in the world.

I inform him that I was at Madison Square Garden a few days ago, standing out front and trying to sell two ELO tickets that CBS had given me. After getting hassled by the local spivs and unable to unload the tickets, I decided to take a look inside and use the tickets myself. After seeing that the Garden was just another Wembley and reluctant to watch an ELO show, I decided to leave. But though the Garden was geared to take thousands upon thousands of people into the auditorium, there was no provision for letting people out. All stairs, all halls, all escalators were strictly one way. Travelling in the opposite direction just wasn't allowed. Eventually, I got out. I had to get thrown out by the cops, Bruce.

But this fat cop called "Heavy" was very nice about it; he only bounced me on the pavement once and waved his nightstick at me but never hit me with it.

Bruce cracks up with laughter. "Hey, I never thought what would happen if somebody wanted to get OUT of one of my shows!!"

And the dogs on Main Street howl, 'cos they understand. *Tony Parsons* •



1978

OCTOBER–DECEMBER



Siouxsie Sioux in 1978, born Susan Janet Ballion from Chislehurst in suburban South-East London

“We feel things more than anyone else”

After the success of “Hong Kong Garden”, SIOUXSIE AND THE BANSHEES offer the lowdown on their debut LP. Nazis, drowning, Charles Manson... It’s not an easy ride. “The best thing would be if couples sat down by the fireside and listened to it.”

— MELODY MAKER OCTOBER 21 —

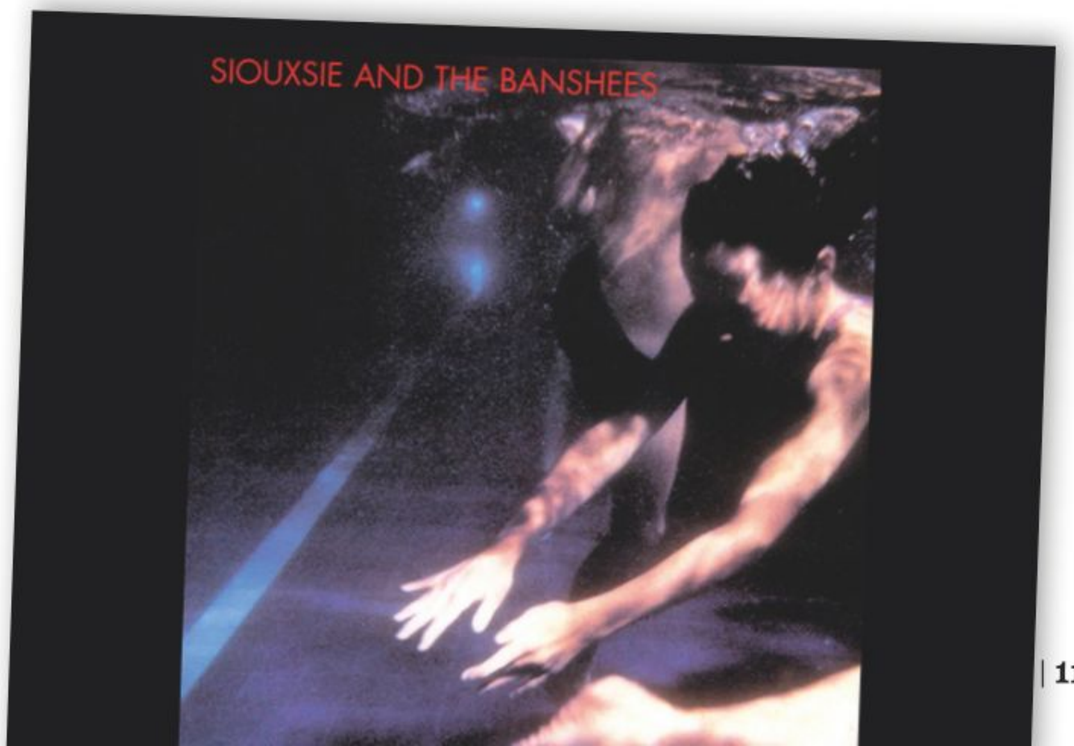
“You have an interview and you’re talking about things that are so personal and that you honour so much in a way and it becomes so abused. You look at it and it’s unrecognisable. There’s no feeling in it whatsoever. It’s totally on the other side of the fence.” *Kenny Morris, Banshee drummer*

“If you’re in an interview situation and you really disagree with each other, the interviewer will always agree with you to get more of an interview, to carry on. But when it goes to print, instead of it being a battle he’ll write the two sides of an argument but slant it so that his side comes across through his ego.” *Steven Severin, Banshee bassist*

SIOUXSIE AND THE Banshees have absolutely no illusions about the mechanics of journalism. Through a combination of first-hand experience and a steely awareness of all the tricks of the trade, they approach the interview with a friendly but level-headed reserve.

They listen to questions attentively, and frame their replies with a sling-shot concision that’s meant to illuminate rather than to evade or irritate. Their unity of purpose just doesn’t allow irrelevant or indulgent detours, which other bands encourage, presumably in the hope of getting more column inches. They treat the interview as a serious and personal exchange of ideas where honesty should prevail.

All that might sound unnecessarily heavy, but in terms of the Banshees it’s vitally important. The band have become well known for their uncompromising stance (and justifiably so), but they are not the ice-age warriors that last year’s press tried to make them out to be. Rather, they chronicle what they see »



RAY STEVENSON / REX FEATURES

around them and confront the audience with those impressions. They are aware of all the paradoxes in a situation and won't pander to listeners by maybe spotlighting the one rosy angle that people might prefer to hear. You can only achieve this through equal parts of respect, compassion and clear-eyed realism. They have also just made one of the most impressive albums of this year. It's aptly called *The Scream*.

Previous interviews with the band have largely concerned themselves with the evolution of the Banshees. Their history, which has virtually slipped into new-wave legend, has been pretty exhaustively documented.

Everyone now knows that Siouxsie and Steve were part of the infamous Bromley Contingent that followed the Pistols everywhere in those heady days of '76. How they wore wildly extravagant togs and first performed at the 100 Club's Punk Festival in September of the same year with a band that included Sid Vicious on drums and Marco [Pirroni] on guitar. How they disembowelled The Lord's Prayer for 20 minutes and acted out the chaos that other bands preached but rarely practised.

How Siouxsie, kitted out in Sex Shop fetish attire, danced alongside the Pistols at their Screen On The Green gig, much to the greasy relish of tabloid-sized brains everywhere.

How Kenny Morris joined and PT Fenton was replaced by John McKay. How Nils Stevenson, a former employee of the Maestro McLaren, became their manager and every record company regarded them with maximum (commercial) distaste until Polydor came up trumps this year. How "Hong Kong Garden" turned all the tables and shot into the Top 10.

THE TITLE OF *The Scream* relates to the cover artwork, and to the music inside.

Steve: "We wanted something that would sum up the first album, so we went right back to the name of the band and that's where we got *The Scream* first of all."

Siouxsie: "The words 'The Scream' can apply to every song on the album in different ways. People have different ways of screaming out for help. It just sums it up."

John: "*The Scream* was a lot of suffocated passion coming out."

And that is exactly what the front sleeve portrays. Two bodies are submerged under water, locked in that nightmarish split second of blind panic when drowning suddenly becomes a real possibility.

Siouxsie: "There was a film called *The Swimmer* with Burt Lancaster and there's a bit where the camera's partially submerged and he's swimming through that crowded pool right at the end…"

John: "You know the panic when you swim through a crowded pool, you haven't got room to move, you can't swim properly, so you keep stopping and getting to the bottom…"

Siouxsie: "And the screams of kids having fun in the pool is really ear-piercing. Lancaster was swimming all through that, so I thought it'd be great to get that claustrophobic feel for the photo without the sound…"

Kenny: "Just taking that little moment. It usually only lasts for a few seconds and is almost like you whole life pattern in front of you."

Being an unrepentant hunter of these kind of offshoots. I wondered if a painting by Edvard Munch, also called *The Scream*, had had any bearing in the matter.

John: "I think it was to do with that picture vaguely."

Siouxsie: "No, we found out later that there was a picture called *The Scream*."

John: "No, we knew already."

Siouxsie: "Well, I didn't. And we saw it but we thought it was too obvious, too one-dimensional to just have the face screaming."

This dovetailing idea also comes through strongly in the way the songs slide in and out of one another. While each one is decidedly separate, there is an amazing continuity between them all. Listen, for example, to the climactic finish of "Jigsaw Feeling", when Kenny's acrid drums suddenly finish and a distant guitar sequence gradually introduces "Overground".

Steven picked up the point: "We stuck 'Switch' at the end because it's the most recent song and it's like a pointer for where maybe the music is going."

> "We had to re-record 'Hong Kong Garden', and very quickly"

"Switch" is certainly the most adventurous cut in terms of structure, but John slightly modified the position: "We're suggesting that we're capable of that but not that they're all going to be as complicated as that from now on."

Siouxsie came in: "I can't see that every song we do is necessarily a progression – they're all very different and should be taken on their own… The main link between the songs is that they are different but they're all linked in that they are extremely powerful – whether they're slightly laid back on purpose to show controlled power or just let loose to show we can… just feel things more than anyone else can.

"There's not one song on the album that we think, 'Oh dear, we put that on to fill in a gap.' They're all powerful and… great. I don't mean that in an egotistic, maniac way…"

The band didn't seem to have much difficulty choosing which songs to include and in what order.

Steven: "There was only one song left off that before we went into record it we thought might be on it. That was 'Make Up To Break Up'."

Much of their original repertoire, including stage faves like "Captain Scarlet" and "Love In A Void", was excluded, though "Carcass" and "Helter Skelter" remain in newly aligned and ferocious form.

Kenny: "There was three-quarters of an album's worth of songs left over that were so old. We chucked all the dead wood out."

Does that mean that those early numbers are forever outlawed?

Siouxsie: "They're dormant at the moment. The only time we'd ever redo them or something was when we felt something for them.

John: "When the Buzzcocks came out with 'Spiral Scratch', if we had come out with something like that at the time, then you wouldn't have expected those songs to be on this album, but because we haven't, they still expect to see all the old songs on it." Message understood.

The album was recorded in a week, but mixing took seven. The band and Steve Lillywhite (with sporadic assistance from Nils) produced. Why Lillywhite, whose name adorns innumerable Island albums?

Steven: "We were desperate. We got an American guy that Polydor had recommended to do the first session with 'Hong Kong Garden' and 'Voices' and he did 'Hong Kong' really badly. So we had to re-record it, and re-record it very quickly. Nils went down to the Johnny Thunders sessions and heard Steve producing and liked that."

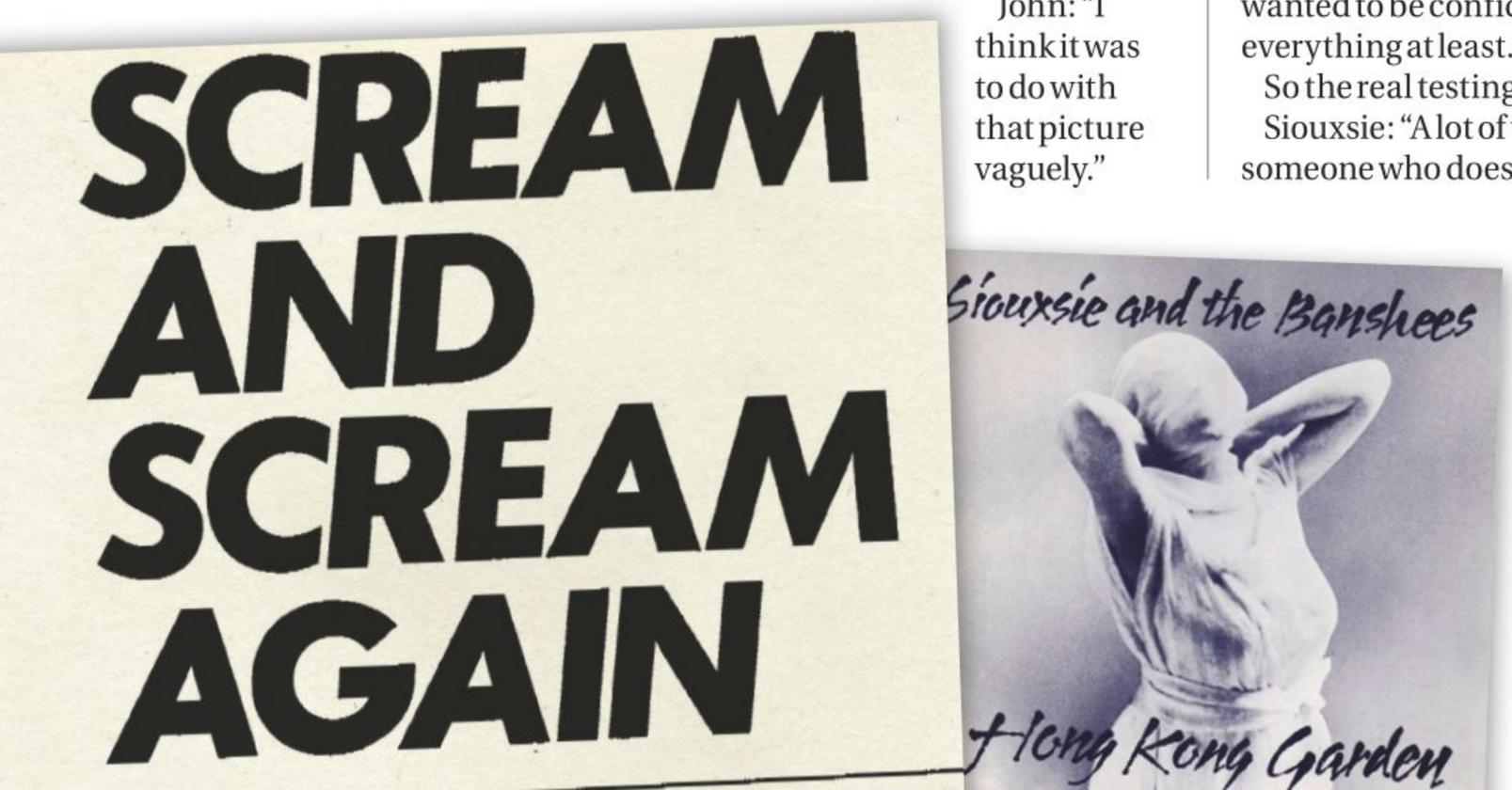
Siouxsie: "We were so desperate and we were adamant about not having someone who would try and run the show. A lot of producers are very able but they always leave their mark stamped all over everything. We just wanted to be confident that they could get the basic sounds on everything at least."

So the real testing time came at the mixing stage?

Siouxsie: "A lot of that [seven weeks] is down to communicating with someone who doesn't really think on your level."

John: "Steve obviously doesn't think like we do and it took him time to start settling in to some sort of pattern. He didn't even do it in the end – obviously there's a lot of give and take. You just cannot get somebody into the band, in seven weeks, however graphically you might try and describe a thing."

The sound that emerged is strong, abrasive, visceral and constantly inventive, with a thrust that makes the spaces equal partners to the notes. Possible blood relatives to the Banshees in this respect (and maybe in textures as well) are The





Siouxsie And The Banshees in 1978: (l–r) Steve Severin, John McKay, Kenny Morris and Siouxsie Sioux

Velvet Underground, Wire, Can and Pere Ubu. The combination was blueprinted?

John: "It's got to be. It's got to come from a passion. The words have to as well. But music is just that much more raw. Speech is a lot more developed than notes. You can't say as much with a note as you can with words."

I'd have thought the exact opposite.

"If you isolate a note and you isolate a word… I think it should be much more equal, and I think it's much more equal in this band than it is in any other I can think of. But, for most people, music is something to catch people with, and the words are lost, the icing on the cake. And the music isn't something that has to be thought about because it's all 12-bar stuff that any fool can play. It's so simple, some of the stuff that most bands play. The chart stuff – a lot of it is just practice makes perfect, which is something that can never been said about this band."

With the exclusion of some sax snorts on "Suburban Relapse" and "Switch", nothing was imported to boost their regular lineup. They'd never felt any desire to do that, especially on a debut.

Siouxsie: "We'd only use something else if it added; not just for the sake of saying we had an organ on such a thing."

Steve: "Most bands usually do that when they're playing bigger places and they feel they have to have another person or couple of people to make it seem like a really good show. Even Bowie does it. He has violins and things which are totally superfluous to his music."

> *"The Scream* was a lot of suffocated passion coming out"

John played the sax segments.

"I don't play exactly. I play sax the same way I play guitar, in fact a bit better because I haven't got as many inhibitions on a sax. I had two lessons to teach me how to blow it and where to put my fingers roughly and that was it. It's the same attitude to that as the guitar, but with all the guitarists around you can't help but pick up things. With sax it was easier in some ways, but then it's a very difficult instrument to do different things on. You can't make it sound different – it either squeaks or plays a right note. And I decided I never wanted to squeak."

To return to the mix, I suggested a similarity with something that Eno had written two years ago. Eno argued that rock was first of all structured like a hierarchy of events. There was the bassline which varied little and on top of that the rhythm instruments which were marginally more flexible although they still had to carry the chords. Then you have the lead guitar and vocals, which carry the biggest opportunity for change.

People like Bo Diddley, The Who and The Velvet Underground, however, threw spanners into this ranking system and experimented with ideas like using all the instruments in the rhythm role. This »

ALAMY



The Banshees with guitarist Pete Fenton (in glasses), who would be replaced by John McKay in July 1977

sparked off some healthy disorientation. Eno's point was that he wanted to constantly shuffle the two approaches and thereby create a "perceptual drift". The result is that you're not sure what you're supposed to be listening to, and all the instruments seem to travel in parallel lines that actually meet or intertwine or bounce off one another.

Anyway, if bass and drums are already laying down a rhythm, why should the drums follow slavishly behind? They can develop in another direction. Equally the voice can be as much an instrument and a vehicle for words. It seems to me that this is precisely the Banshee method. They agreed.

> "It wasn't written; it just happened on stage and we called it 'Pure'"

MORE CONCEPTUAL LEAPFROGGING about *The Scream*, this time about the lyrics. There is scarcely ever a mention of love for a start, let alone any of those cliches that constitute 99 per cent of rock's verbal output. Instead, Siouxsie intones lines like "*So I sit in reverie/Getting on my nerves/The intangible bonds that keep me/Sitting on the verge… of a breakdown, of a reaction, of a result*" ("Jigsaw Feeling").

The band refer constantly to breaking down taboos, and one of them is breaking down the traditional rock language and replacing it with words that are often condensed, elliptical and sometimes very funny. Each number paints a different situation, but none of them appears to stray far from a kind of real-life suburban landscape. The Banshees react to such observations with understandable caution.

John: "The album is where we live, what we see. All the songs come out of that." It's as simple as that. "It's not as simple as that but it's part of it, obviously."

Steven: "That's the stuff the listener works out. It's not put in on purpose."

Siouxsie: "None of us wants to say exactly what each song means. That's robbing the audience of their imaginations."

With that in mind, we began a (flexible) track-by-track run down. The opening sally is "Pure", an atmosphere piece that is a perfect instrumental intro for an album called *The Scream*. A snarling, predatory bass stalks its ground before it's met by teeth-grinding guitar splinters and the distant footfall of drums. Siouxsie's voice becomes an instrument and adds a further edge to the nightmare. The album's tone has been effectively marked out.

Steve: "For 'Pure' you can also substitute 'essence'. That song wasn't written – it just happened." It happened during a soundcheck in France some time ago. "Also it summed up all that we were going through back in those days. It happened on stage and we just called it 'Pure'. It's like what happens when the band lets loose."

The way the instruments swoop in and out smacks somewhat of dub techniques.

Steven: "It wasn't mixed like that. We always really hated bands like Generation X doing a dub B-side. If we listen to reggae, it's just to take in the music."

The mood switches with "Jigsaw Feeling", a tough and vibrant statement about (I think) someone who is in such a state of advanced confusion that he or she retreats into a frozen limbo, helplessly immobile.

Siouxsie: "It's when your limbs won't do what your brain wants them to. You're so confused that you can't co-ordinate your limbs to do something positive, and you just twist yourself in knots."

Ah yeah, knots. On the lyric sheet, the word is highlighted by inverted commas. The lines run: "*Five fingers do my walking/Ten toes unravel 'Knots'*." How come? Was there any connection with that Charisma recording artiste and Philadelphia Society founder RD Laing?

Steven, who wrote the words, hesitated: "It's just the idea of your toes unravelling your personal relationships for you."

Should your toes do that for you? Siouxsie interrupted, laughing: "You little fearful!" Steven retaliated: "It's the wrong things doing the right things for you. It started out as a self-disgust song and evolved from that. All these interpretations you're saying aren't necessarily what's gone in. We're getting the right things in the wrong way, if you see what I mean, from you instead of from us."

Siouxsie: "Sometimes a person that's completely outside the situation you're involved in can get things that you don't get. It can be therapeutic."

John: "It would be much more therapeutic if a fan came up and said these things. You're a literary type of person, so you would read things into it. Hopefully other people will too."

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Siouxsie: "I remember when we recorded that song, because we'd done 'Suburban Relapse' and then something else. We'd worked ourselves up into a frame of mind where we could have done all those songs at once, and we did. We listened to it back and it was like a speed rush. It really pinned you back to the wall."

Kenny: "It was very weird when we did that song. It was about four in the morning, we were really tired and we'd done nothing. We walked in and just felt that something amazing was going to happen, and it did."

"Overground" charts a course from life in the netherworld to that of pleasantries where modern families breathe stale air. "*Overground – from abnormality, overboard – for identity.*" The theme is old; the expression new.

Steven: "It's another one about choice. You can either go along with the way things are or… It's very personal to the band on one level. The whole thing about the uncompromising Banshees. It's saying that we can change to go overground but at the same time we know we'd be worse than ourselves."

The song has a circular structure.

Steven: "I don't know if you can hear it, but right at the end, as its fading out, you should hear the bass coming in again as if it's starting all over again. The idea of fading in and out so it could just go on and on forever. It's like you sit down and say, 'I'm in such a rut.' You say those first words and it's like the process of thinking – thought on top of thought."

Next is "Carcass", an everyday tale of a butcher falling in love with one of his hunks of meat. The saga moves even closer to Warhol when the butcher, in the ultimate act of true devotion, lops off all of his extraneous limbs so that he can nestle more comfortably beside his other beating heart. "*In love with your stumps / In love with the bleeding / In love with the pain that you once felt…*" It wasn't, as I'd half-imagined, the result of a late-night screening of *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. Patti Smith's "Horses" was the original inspiration.

Steven: "The track, not the album. It didn't end up like it, but the original idea was to do that kind of thing with those kind of lyrics."

At the end of the song, the written lyrics turn "carcass" into "car-crash". However, Siouxsie continues to sing "carcass". It fooled me utterly,

Siouxsie: "That's taken from a fan who thought he heard 'car-crash'. We just wanted to write it in. It's a love song really. You read about how love's supposed to be, but in the papers you see all these other things that people do to get their certain kicks. More people seem to have those sorts of kicks than meeting the girl next door. It's an angle of looking at things and they are there – it's not purely fictional."

> "You read about all these things people do to get certain kicks"

Do you think people will find it, ahem, distasteful?

Steven: "I hope so. When they find themselves suddenly singing it." And that's an easy thing to do. The chorus, especially, sports a refrain that insinuates, "*Be a carcass, be a dead pork, be limblessly in love…*" When I found myself singing this in the street, I burst out laughing.

John: "What does 'funny' mean? 'Funny' is just a release in something. Humour is always a release. Maybe you did find it distasteful, but you had to laugh anyway. In the back of your brain somewhere it was telling you that it wasn't the sort of thing you should be singing and so you laughed."

Maybe. Siouxsie returned to the topic: "It's about how far do you go about accepting people that are different. The impact the lyric has when one first sees it is probably the one that, 20 or 30 years ago, someone had reading about a gay relationship – it gets more acceptable as they look back and think, 'It wasn't so bad.'"

So have people become more insensitive?

"Probably. Like television. The humour of television is so sadistic. And peak vision time is seeing tragedies in other countries with people's skin dropping off, and that is becoming entertainment now. People want their money's worth. They have seen that sort of thing on the news and they expect it. I remember seeing a play on television called *The Sex Olympics*. It was television way into the future – and the comedy piece was a clown falling down some stairs and smashing his head on the floor.

"The audience clap and laugh, while the sick thing – that everyone was getting shocked about – was someone showing themselves as sensitive, saying, 'I love you.' And the sports thing was these couples banging away. I can just see little things like that creeping in already."

The last cut on side one is their awesomely bleak version of "Helter Skelter". A psychotic reaction from the post-Manson generation? It begins on an agonising contortion with stiletto shards of guitar, gains momentum and finally crashes to a halt on the word "*Stop*".

Steven: "It's more than a song now. We felt there was a need to redo it after all that happened."

Siouxsie agreed: "The Beatles had done it… quite innocently with just the intention of a helter skelter, a child's playground, or other insinuations – like sexual ones.

"Manson was due parole this year, but as John said, he didn't get it. You'll hear the scream. We've been looking jokingly through Manson's eyes, by thinking about 'Pure' and 'Overground' with his theories in mind and thinking what he'd read into it. You know he had that bit about them all going down the hole and then coming back up. The blacks would take over and the Family would go down a hole somewhere in the desert. Then, when the blacks had got really decadent and were losing again, the Family would come out and rule the world. 'Overground' could be construed in that way with his head."

Does that worry you?

Siouxsie: "A bit."

John: "Not 'worry'… he might never hear it. It's in the same mood as terrorism, where people can't understand why people commit terrorist acts because their politics aren't usually that clear. Terrorists usually have very airy-fairy political ideas. They kill people for the sake of it, practically, and people can't take that in. The feeling isn't a '60s thing as much as it has built up from the '60s."

The conversation turned to ideas of self-analysis and change, and then onto the responsibility the band felt towards their audiences. Kenny entered at an oblique angle: "One of the funniest times, the oddest time and the most important time, is that period when you leave school and for a few years, where something happens to set a certain pattern, even though you're probably not conscious that the pattern was set from that high… That's a funny period when things start to sort themselves out and that's when kids will do those sorts of things – like listen to what you're saying, dress like you do. I, to a certain extent, did those things, but you go through changes all the time."

Siouxsie added her perspective: "A lot of kids, when they leave school, are very influenced by their parents »



November 8, 1978: Siouxsie And The Banshees on stage at Hammersmith Odeon, West London

PETER STILL / GETTY

still. They usually don't get out of that trap right from then. I feel very lucky in that I didn't get trapped in that sort of thing."

Flip over to side two.

TELEVISION FIGURES YET again on "Mirage", where the chunk of homely technology seems to rebuke its viewers for being like "*photo-fits of loose ends, framed in 3D*". A sardonic reversal of roles. The electronic eye crops up again and again.

Kenny: "It's more the idea of blindness and screens rather than taking it down to TV. It's about walls, screens, inhibitions, inabilities, expressing oneself in public."

The theme sneaks in for another reprise on the following track, "Metal Postcard (Mittageisen)", which is dedicated to the celebrated photomontage artist of the '20s/'30s, John Heartfield. Siouxsie's words update the pre-wartime situation for the TV generation of tomorrow, where day and night loudspeakers blare out commands and the deity becomes metal. "*Metal is tough, metal will sheen, metal will rule in my master scheme.*"

Siouxsie: "It's a warning song. The whole propaganda of the Nazis at that time was very dangerous and it could easily creep its way in without there being all the hysteria of killing the Jews. Their whole propaganda could easily fit in today." How does she see this Metal Metropolis? "Not being able to get away from the commands of the day, not being able to escape, the idea of having cameras in your room and having people watching you…"

"Nicotine Stain" would be a perfect anthem for ASH, the anti-smoking campaign. It conjures up horrific images of old men hacking up their lungs but powerless to resist any puff. The song moves from a graphic description of the actions and the needs of an individual smoker to, in the last verse, almost global proportions.

Siouxsie: "That song started off when I had both my hands full and I had a cigarette. I had to hold on to it and I could feel the fumes all around my face. I had to look in the mirror to see that my face hadn't gone brown. I just got to thinking how nicotine could soak up all your body."

While Siouxsie saw the number in strictly tobacco terms, Kenny substitutes any kind of drug. "It's about everyday things that you really don't need to do, that you don't want to do but you just find yourself doing them. Because you have to." Siouxsie came back in: "It's that habits are very disgusting and you realise how addicted you are to them. You try to find the usefulness of your habits, you try to justify them."

"Suburban Relapse", they all agree, is probably the most immediately accessible cut. The picture is that of a housewife who is trapped (something along the lines of "Jigsaw Feeling") between fury, scrambled consternation, frustration and what is supposed to be her fixed role, "*washing up dishes and minding my own business*". The apron-string finally snaps and the suburbanite becomes a hapless murderer.

Siouxsie: "It's committing a crime under the stresses of everyday life. Being so confused and… I don't know how anyone can be a judge – an actual one in court."

And, lastly, "Switch" – whose lyrics are deliberately written out like the shape of a dumbbell. Why?

Siouxsie: "I had in mind that it was going to be very fragmented with three different sections. That's all."

The song has these three distinct sections that nevertheless all gel perfectly. Sympathetic disorientation, you might say, but not so stylised as to alienate.

John: "There's a responsibility to fans. If you went totally weird, I mean just for yourself, nobody would understand. It would get totally blurred. You can't go over the top. That's why I'm so annoyed at a lot of bands. They either go one way or completely the other. They feel they have to be very obvious, or very oblique and weird."

Steven: "For a long time I think that's why we weren't offered a deal. We weren't one or the other. We weren't weird or terribly Sham-like."

Siouxsie: "Virgin snapped up a lot of bands pretending to be weirdos and also bands like Jam and Sham – real rock'n'roll punk bands – because they could market it very easily. They can always market something if it's going to last a year or two, because it's so immediate and doesn't need any thinking about."

Like several of the other songs, "Switch" moves images around like chessmen on a board. As you switch TV channels, or radio stations, so you can switch personalities. It's a method of workable survival for many, but the pictures get blurred. "Switch" takes the roles of a scientist, doctor and vicar and turns them around so that the traditional functions become confused, up-ended, almost interchangeable. I hadn't noticed this at all until the band pointed it out.

Steven: "The scientist becomes the doctor and applies science to medicine – that kind of thing."

Siouxsie: "The vicar becomes the scientist and he applies religion to science and the doctor becomes the religious person and applies his medicine to religion."

Steven: "It all comes down to the same thing – the hypocrisy of it all."

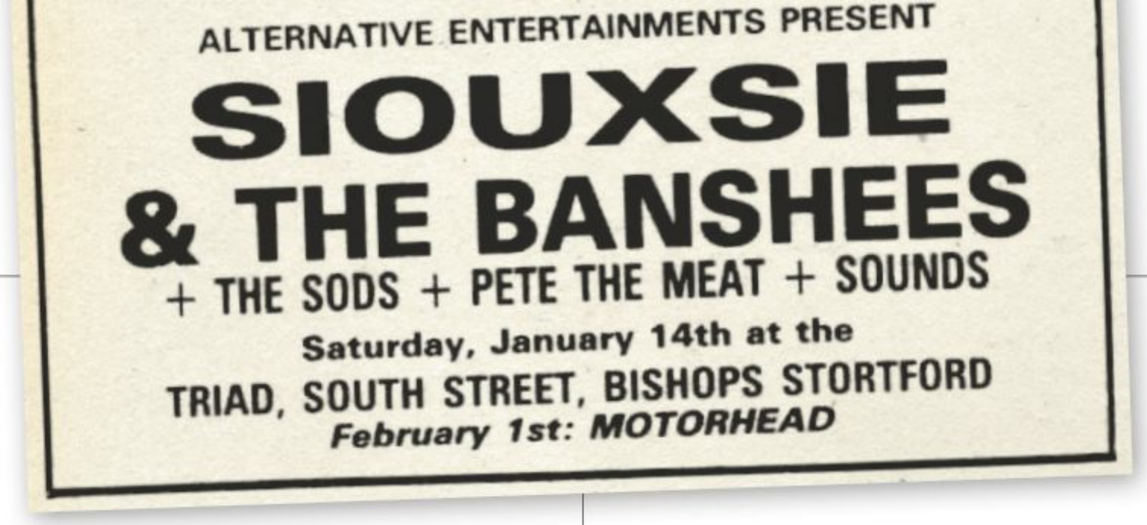
But if all these images are so interchangeable, does it matter?

Steven and Siouxsie talk over one another and this is the hybrid answer: "That's the point. That these people, whatever the given situation, they will apply their same standards

> "People start suspecting you of being self-consciously avant-garde"



RAY STEVENSON / REX FEATURES



to it and won't change. You didn't realise that they were switched, so that proves the way it is."

So explain the hypocritical slant. The double act again: "That's the vicar's verse. Although he's a scientist because of the way he thinks, he regards it as blasphemous to do more than the Almighty. The doctor can't be sympathetic with hallucinators because he puts it down to being hysterical and prescribes a tranquiliser." Reach for that Valium.

IT WAS APPROACHING 2.00am. I was certainly knackered but the band seemed wide awake, all cylinders firing. I was about to wind up when John mentioned that I hadn't asked about "Hong Kong Garden". Its success should mean that a lot of people who would normally have ignored or simply not known about the Banshees will investigate *The Scream*.

John: "If we had put out something with a very underground feeling, or one of our less accessible songs, we would have stayed a cult band, which we didn't want to do. A lot of the fans are very possessive and really want us to be an underground band, which is something we've always hated."

Siouxsie: "That's totally pointless and self-indulgent. The things we're writing about aren't aimed at the underground…"

"Hong Kong Garden" was written in a different way from their normal corporate jigsaw building.

Siouxsie: "John came up with a riff, a fragmented riff, and I wrote what I thought that riff conjured up. Impressions that I drew up of the East. It's called 'Hong Kong Garden' because that's a British colonial thing and, as its part of Britain, it's neutral. Mixed in with this are all the factual things that have happened in Nagasaki and Hiroshima, and the way the Japanese are fighting against the old and new ways – with Americanisation coming in. They are always having to fight back the trashy kind of thing that America put into Japan. And then there's the false impression that we get of these, as well."

Steven: "The false impressions of anywhere. Like in England or Scotland. Like caricatures, Irish jokes, anything. We're talking from a vulnerable point because we have never been to the East, so it's like saying we are naive about it as well. But at least we realise that."

John tilted the viewfinder. "But the Japanese are right into America. They love the West like the Eastern Bloc countries do. James Dean, the lot. They have business cards with their Japanese business names and then underneath it has Jolly Friendly Fellow or something in total pigeon English. It doesn't matter what it says, it's just that they love English characters. Like we love Chinese things maybe… It's partially just a place we haven't seen. All we've got is media representation."

THE BANSHEES BEGAN with less than minimal musical knowledge and, through a ferocious determination have carved out a sound and vision that is entirely their own. The secret is actually utterly simple. Steven unintentionally gave it away: "You don't think about old forms. You pretend that you're the first person ever to put pen to paper and ever to play guitar."

Siouxsie expanded: "We're trying to get rid of more and more of the taboos musically; it was such a natural release and progression."

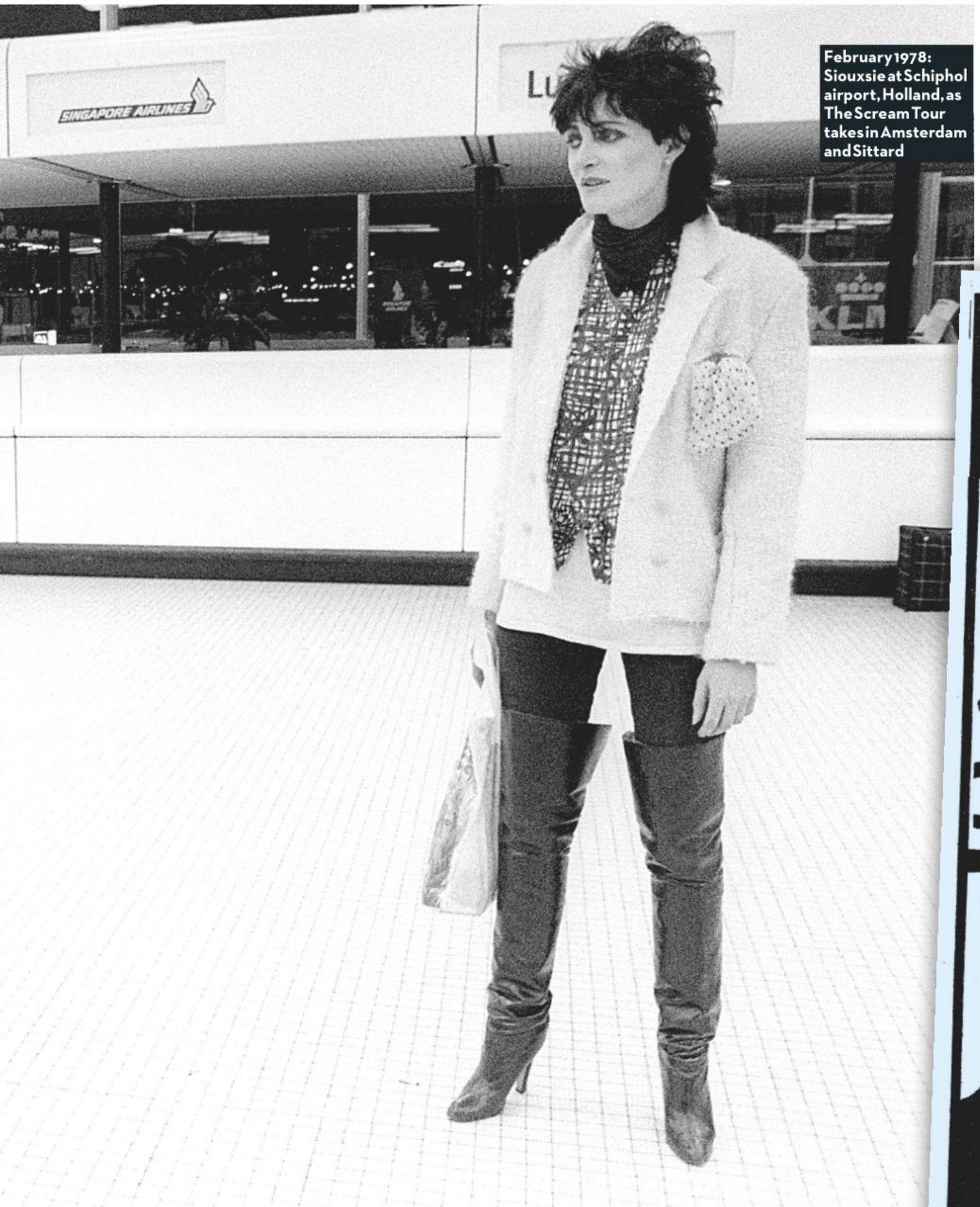
Steven again: "And that can be dangerous, because people start suspecting you of being self-consciously avant-garde."

Siouxsie: "We're very aware of that, which is probably why we hardly like anyone. There's a lot of new bands that appear to be quite progressive and there's a lot that aren't. Yet they're all in the same vein in a way because it's all fake. They live the life of being an artist. Those big stereotypes."

John agreed. "There's NO intrinsic taboos. I'm thinking about trying slide guitar. Slide is like, OK, 'orrible country & western stuff, but if you say I'm not gonna use this or that, you're obviously limiting yourself terribly. Just use everything and anything you can, in the right way."

Kenny: "The best thing for this album would be if couples sat down by the fireside and listened to it. It's those sorts of people who need to listen to it."

Ian Birch •



February 1978: Siouxsie at Schiphol airport, Holland, as The Scream Tour takes in Amsterdam and Sittard

Kate Bush in the outfit she describes as "slightly comical", on the cover of her second album, *Lionheart*, released on November 10, 1978



“I want to get heavier”

Nobody’s wispy theatrical, KATE BUSH is growing in confidence. With her second album, she is assuming more responsibility. “It’s important to know what’s going on,” she says, “even if I’m not controlling it.”

— MELODY MAKER NOVEMBER 11 —

THE ENIGMA THAT is Kate Bush – it confuses us all. I’ve just read a bitter character assassination of Kate Bush (in another paper) and the central area of complaint around which this assault revolves is that Ms Bush is “nice”. “An hour or so in the company of Kate Bush,” this enlightened scribe considered, “is like being trapped for the duration in a very wholesome TV show with definite but unwarranted intellectual aspirations.”

I can understand that as a reaction to a well-mannered chance meeting, but really, had the writer listened attentively to her first album (regardless of liking or disliking it), I don’t think he would have come to the same rash and puerile conclusion.

Actually, Kate Bush scares me, for a combination of reasons. The first is the diplomatic pleasantness and awesome logic she displays in interviews, but that is only one dimension – she is, in fact, a “nice” person. It is when that initial impact is paired with the multifarious intensity of her music that I start to quiver.

The contrast is eerie, and frightening. In the studio, living out her imaginative fantasies, Kate Bush is stricken by a rush of surrealism, and suddenly a range of weird personalities are displayed. It is a »

GERED MANKOWITZ



Kate Bush in 1978: "I'd rather write a song that was really different, that I liked, although it might not get anywhere"

CHRIS WALTER / GETTY

subconsciousness that was evident on her first album, *The Kick Inside*, and it is captured to an even greater extent on *Lionheart*, the sequel now released.

"Nice" is not a word I'd turn to, to describe the consequences. The songwriting, the singing, the arrangements, the production have the mark of a singular personality. Kate Bush's music is more like a confrontation. At times, it makes the listener feel uneasy and insecure. Kate's approach to her work is marked by an obstinate refusal to compromise in any way, so she does not make it easy for the listener to get into the music. To begin with, it's a challenge.

Because, then, it's difficult to appreciate fully Kate Bush's music (and who, after all, is she to make such demands?) –compounded with the fact that she seems to have the Midas touch – she is set up for criticism, which must make it all the more fulfilling to carry off two awards in the *MM* Poll. Even when told of her performance in the poll, Kate girlishly enthuses, "That's wonderful! Fantastic! Incredible!"

The success of *The Kick Inside* and its hit singles ("Wuthering Heights" and "The Man With The Child In His Eyes") was as much a hindrance as a help when the time came for Kate Bush to record a second album. As she has said before, the terms of reference were suddenly overturned. Instead of a rising talent, she is now a risen talent – and anything less than an emulation of the initial success will be interpreted as a failure. It's a pressure, though, that she can live with.

There are similarities to the debut album. *Lionheart* is produced once more by Andrew Powell and, generally, the musicians who did the honours on *The Kick Inside* are recalled. Kate wants the connections between her first and second album to stop there.

For instance, her own band makes a slight contribution to the new album, being featured on two of the tracks, "Wow" and "Kashka From Baghdad", and had it not been for a mix-up in the organisation, might have made a heavier contribution. It is, it appears, a sensitive situation, and one that Kate doesn't care to dwell upon, but she's still determined that, eventually, her own band – Charlie Morgan (drums), Brian Bath (guitars), Del Palmer (bass), Paddy Bush (mandolin) – will play a more prominent part in the recording proceedings.

On the subject of producing, it's significant that Kate is accredited as assistant producer and so is acknowledged as playing an active role in mixing the sound as well as performing. She takes an immense interest in recording techniques and states intentions to pursue ambitions in that area. There was, however, a problem in communication when she was involved in the production and her lack of professional lingo for various methods of recording often led to confusion and amusement in the studio.

"I feel I know what I'm talking about in the studio now. I know what I should hear. The reaction to me explaining what I want in the studio was amusement, to a certain extent. The were all taking the piss out of me a bit."

Overall, Bush was concerned that the new album should differ quite radically from her first. Maybe I'm a bit too close to it at the moment, but I find it much more adventurous than the last one. I'm much happier with the songs and the arrangements and the backing tracks.

"I was getting a bit worried about labels from that last album: everything being soft, airy-fairy. That was great for the time, but it's not really what I want to do now, or what I want to do, say, in the next year. I guess I want to get basically heavier in the sound sense… and I think that's on the way, which makes me really happy.

"I don't really think that there are any songs on the album that are as close to 'Wuthering Heights' as there were on the last one. I mean, there's lots of songs people could draw comparison with. I want the first single that

> "I feel I know what I'm talking about in the studio now"



comes out from this album to be reasonably uptempo. The first single was 'Hammer Horror'. That's the first thing I'm concerned with, because I want to break away from what has gone previously. I'm not pleased with being associated with such soft, romantic vibes, not for the first single anyway. If that happens again, that's what I will be to everyone."

She is acutely aware of the danger of being pigeonholed, and is actively engaged in discouraging that.

"If you can get away with it and keep changing, great. I think it should be done, because in that way you'll always have people chasing after you trying to find out what you're doing. And, anyway, if you know what's coming next, what's the point? If I really wanted to, I guess I could write a song that would be so similar to 'Wuthering Heights'. But I don't. What's the point? I'd rather write a song that was really different, that I liked, although it might not get anywhere."

> "I want to break away from what has gone previously"

Have you heard her new single, "Hammer Horror"? Now that's really different.

The major change in the preparation for *Lionheart* was undoubtedly that Kate, overburdened with promotional schemes for the first album, was for the first time left with the unsavoury prospect of meeting deadlines and (perhaps) having to rush her writing to do that. It was a problem she was having trouble coming to terms with at our last meeting, when she spoke in obvious admiration of bands like Queen – who came up with the goods on time every year, and still found time to conduct world tours.

But Kate insisted that she wasn't going to be rushed, and eventually the songs came along. In all, it took 10 weeks to record the 12 tracks (10 are on the album), an indication of the meticulousness shown by Bush herself in exercising as much control as possible over every facet of the work.

"I'm not always right, and I know I'm not," she says, "but it's important to know what's going on, even if I'm not controlling it."

I'll be interested to read the reviews of *Lionheart*. It'll be sad, I think, if the album is greeted with the same sort of insulting indifference that *The Kick Inside* met, when Kate Bush was pathetically underrated. *Lionheart* is, as the artist desired, a heavier album than its predecessor, with Bush setting some pretty exacting tests for the listener. Kate's songwriting is that much more mature, and her vocal performance has an even more vigorous sense of drama.

Musically, the tracks on *Lionheart* are more carefully structured than before. There is, for instance, a distinct absence of straight songs, like the first album's "Moving", "Saxophone Song", "The Man With The Child In His Eyes" and "The Kick Inside". Here, only "Oh England, My Lionheart" makes an immediate impression, and I'm not sure that the move away from soft ballads (be it to secure a separate image) is such a wise one. As Bush proved on those songs on *The Kick Inside*, simplicity can also have its own sources of complication.

There is much about this album that is therapeutic, and often Kate Bush is the subject of her own course. "Fullhouse" is the most blatant example of that. There is no evidence that this song is autobiographical. One of the album's three unspectacular tracks musically (along with, in my opinion, "In The Warm Room" and "Kashka From Baghdad"), it is still lyrically a fine example of ridding the brain of dangerous paranoias. The stabbing verse of "*Imagination sets in / Then all the voices begin / Telling you things that aren't happening / (But they nig and they nag, till they're under your skin)*" is set against the soothing chorus: "*You've really got to / Remember yourself / You've got a fullhouse in your head tonight / Remember yourself / Stand back and see emotion getting you uptight.*"

Even "Fullhouse" is mild, though, when compared to tracks like "Symphony In Blue", "In the Warm Room" and "Kashka From Baghdad", which exude an unashamed sensuality. "Symphony In Blue", the opening track, is a hypnotic ballad with the same sort of explicit sexual uninhibitedness as "Feel It" from the first album. "*The more I think about sex / The better it gets / Here we have a purpose in life / Good for the blood circulation / Good for releasing the tension / The root of our reincarnation,*" sings Kate, happily.

"In Search Of Peter Pan", "Wow" (running together on the first side) and "Hammer Horror" are examples of Kate's strange ability to let the subconscious mind run amok in the studio. "Wow" is tantalisingly powerful and "Hammer Horror" (the single) is most impressive for the way it seems to tie in so many of the finer points of the first album and project them through one epic song.

That leaves three tracks, "Don't Push Your Foot On The Heartbrake", "Oh England, My Lionheart" and "Coffee Homeground". All of them with totally contrasting identities, but all succeeding in areas that many might have considered outside the scope of Kate Bush.

A few months ago, in the paper, Kate said how one of her musical ambitions was to write a real rousing rock'n'roll song and how difficult she found that task. "James And The Cold Gun" was her effort on *The Kick Inside*, and with "Don't Push Your Foot On The Heartbrake" she has tackled the art of writing a roasting rocker on her own terms. "…Heartbrake" (another piece of emotional therapy) might not be considered a rocker in the traditional sense of racing from start to finish, but it's still one of the most vicious pieces of rock I've stumbled across in some time. The chorus is slow, pedestrianly slow. The pace is deceiving. It slides into the chorus. Bush moves into a jog. Then the second part of the chorus. It's complete havoc, and when it comes to repeating that second part in the run-up to the end, Kate wrenches from her slight frame a screaming line of unbelievably consummate rock'n'roll power that astounded me. A rather unnerving turn to Kate's music, I think.



"Everything I do is very English": in black tie for a TV appearance

Then there's "Coffee Homeground", influenced by Bertold Brecht and inspired by a journey with a taxi driver who was convinced that somebody was out to poison him. For "Oh England, My Lionheart", from which the album title is derived, Kate is expecting a barrage of criticism because of the blatant soppiness of the lyric.

Kate's reasons for writing the song are simple enough. She had always liked "Jerusalem", and thought that a contemporary song proclaiming the romantic beauty of England should be written.

"A lot of people could easily say that the song is sloppy. It's very classically done. It's only got acoustic instruments on it and it's done… almost madrigally, you know? I daresay a lot of people will think that it's just a load of old slush, but it's just an area that I think it's good to cover. Everything I do is very English, and I think that's one reason I've broken through to a lot of countries. The English vibe is very appealing." *Harry Doherty* •

TV TIMES



Judas Priest: (l–r) Les Binks, Glenn Tipton, Rob Halford, Ian Hill and KK Downing

ALBUMS REVIEW 1978

ALBUMS

Judas Priest Killing Machine

COLUMBIA

"You are not in touch with the modern world, sucker," hissed the obnoxious little voice in my ear. "Today's kids don't give a flying one about punk or anything that's happened since punk. They're not interested in reggae, disco, balding Continentals with notions about art and" – twisting the knife quite unnecessarily, I thought – "they definitely don't care about R&B."

"So tell me, O Wise One," I pleaded with what I hoped was the proper note of humility, "what do Today's Kids consider to be the knees of the bees, please?"

'"Eavy metal, mate," quoth the voice. "'Eavy metal. Cop a load of this if you don't believe me. It's what's happening." So saying, the voice left me alone with my thoughts and a copy of the new Judas Priest album.

Well, I played the damn thing through, checked back to see that I hadn't just dreamt it, checked back once again to see if it wasn't imagining me... Bleak isn't the word, but bleak was the way it was seeming.

Y'see, *Killing Machine* is an album composed of grandiloquently empty riffs, played at tempos which are in the main on the dull side of stodgy, by guitars which either sustain chords endlessly (producing a sound not unlike perpetual vomiting) or else dweedle-yaaaaaa-fribble-honk at high velocity, while a gentleman of some sort intones lyrics of some sort in a voice that would suggest that he was undergoing a double hernia, if there was any evidence to suggest that he had any Niagaras in the first place. Robert Plant clearly has a lot to answer for.

The titles give a fair clue to what Messrs Priest (their names are Halford, Tipton, Downing, Hill and Binks – and they look it) have on their minds: "Delivering The Goods", "Rock Forever", "Hell Bent For Leather", "Burnin' Up", "Killing Machine", "Running Wild" and "Evil Fantasies", to name but seven. The titles sound considerably more exciting than the music, which would score absolute zero on the Excitometer were it not for the fact that they receive one bonus point for not featuring any keyboards.

They clearly wish to present themselves as very tough boys indeed – they're so macho that those of the group who shave probably use blowtorches – and one presumes that rough-trade fantasies of this nature are what is necessary to counteract the titanic feelings of inadequacy that lurk just below the conscious minds of the band and their regiments of fans. However, the most unpleasant song in an unpleasant repertoire is "Take On The World", which invites the audience to *"put yourselves in our hands, and together we can take on all the world"*.

To do what, one might ask? I can see it now... Sheffield City Hall brimful with spotty youths resplendent in denim and dandruff, waving peace signs (what do peace signs have to do with heavy metal, anyway?) engendering the most boring and meaningless apocalypse of all. *Charles Shaar Murray, NME Nov 11*

Chic C'est Chic ATLANTIC

Disco, the People's Music, is the modern blues: the truest expression of a generation's thoughts, bittersweetness with a backbeat. The old blues celebrated the things that money could buy: cars, sex, a measure of freedom; disco tells us what to do with that freedom.

No one makes better upwardly mobile disco than Nile Rodgers and Bernard Edwards, who write and produce the Chic material and play guitar and bass respectively. Their first album, *Chic*, released earlier this year, was one of disco's keystones, containing the marvellous "Dance, Dance, Dance (Yowsah! Yowsah! Yowsah!)" and "Everybody Dance"; their second is an intelligent development. Chic is rooted in the finest disco rhythm section of all. Rodgers invents a crafty new lick for every song (like the current hit, "Le Freak"), Edwards is the most fluidly inventive bassist in a crowded field (he never repeats when it's possible to do something new), and their drummer, Tony Thompson, adds a light, deft touch to his four-on-the-floor funk. Around this core they arrange a repertory company of voices (this time, sadly, not including Norma Jean, who starred on the first album and was then promoted to her own hit, the memorable "Saturday") and clever permutations of horns, strings and tuned percussion.

C'est Chic abandons the trademark of David Friedman's vibes, which lifted "Everybody Dance" and "Saturday", but has plenty of compensation, notably in the bite of the small string section on "Le Freak" and "I Want Your Love". The latter, which should be the next hit single, is spiked with intelligent use of tubular bells and Edwards' marvellous accompaniment: the ear is constantly drawn to his fluid octave-jumping fills, laid across the typically pretty changes.

Edwards is even better on the ballad track, "At Last I Am Free", the most claustrophobic slow-motion chant since War's "Four-Cornered Room". Whoever takes the elegantly impassioned female lead vocal is patently ready to follow Norma Jean into top billing, and there's a thoughtful, surprising coda where all the instruments are faded except Robert Sabino's grand piano; his sumptuous chords are left to end the piece.

There's plenty more: the intimate male-and-female lead vocals of "Sometimes You Win", Rodgers' thrilling guitar showcase on "Savoir Faire" (George Benson would weep with envy), and the arch humour of "Chic Cheer" are just some of the treats.

From the Park Avenue styling of the cover to the merest hint of echo on the snare drum, added halfway through "At Last I Am Free", Rodgers and Edwards live up to the name of their group with flair, grace and wit. What really gets up the noses of disco-haters is that, beneath the attractive surfaces, this music is useful. *Richard Williams, MM Dec 9*



FIN COSTELLO / GETTY



chic cheer
le freak
savoir faire
happy man
i want your love
at last i am free
sometimes you win
(funny) bone

Blondie Parallel Lines CHRYSALIS

Blondie's third album seems designed to cater for two distinct requirements: a) to satisfy the near-hysterical cries for the pure pop of the band's debut album; and b) to consolidate their popularity with the hard-rock audience that helped chart the second set, *Plastic Letters*.

Presumably, that is the significance behind this album's title. *Parallel Lines* emerges as an interesting endeavour by Blondie to keep two yelping hounds at bay without sacrificing any artistic integrity and even hinting on one track ("Fade Away And Radiate") that their musical future lies far from the commerciality of the first two albums.

Having subjected the album to intense scrutiny (ie, I've had a tape for a couple of weeks and played it nightly), I'm of the opinion that the compromise between the first and second album is a healthy one and should ideally serve to confirm Blondie's importance in the present and future.

Mike Chapman (you must know Chinnichap) has been called in to handle the production (Richard Gottehrer directed the first two albums), which is a commendable and ambitious attempt by the band to crystallise their pop attitudes. But I have to say that Blondie are no Sweet, Smokie or Mud, and are really not suited to the discipline Chapman obviously wields in the studio.

For starters, I'm not too enamoured of his handling of Deborah Harry's vocal. He forces a strict delivery that is uncharacteristic of her usual casual, street-corner drawl.

On the other hand, there are choruses on the album ("Hanging On The Telephone" and "Pretty Baby" especially) where voices have been tightened to capture that magical Ronettes-like poppiness. To his credit, though, Chapman has pushed Blondie's lucrative pop sensibilities to the fore, exaggerating hooks (which perhaps explains why Debbie Harry's vocal is mixed so high) and making what were very commercial songs even more magnetic.

This works best on "Hanging On The Telephone", the brilliant "Pretty Baby" (a Number One smasheroo if I ever heard one), "11:59", "Sunday Girl" and "I'm Gonna Love You Too", all of which are of a pop excellence that qualifies them for singles and would be more appropriate as a 45 than the dull (in comparison) "Picture This". Another obvious single is the disco-flavoured "Heart Of Glass", which has, naturally, bass and keyboards prominent against Debbie's beautifully seductive vocal.

Generally, there is a consistency in the band's writing that, in retrospect, may have been previously missing. With the rock songs, the pushy "One Way Or Another", the nonchalant but deviously potent "I Know But I Don't Know" (with Infante duetting with Harry on vocals), "Will Anything Happen", a panic-stricken rocker, and "Just Go Away", with Debbie at her bitchiest ("*If you talk much louder, you could get an award from the Federal Communications Board*"), Blondie further exploit their growing interest in hard, melodic rock.

That leaves one track, "Fade Away And Radiate", the most testing composition Blondie have yet recorded. Not only does it challenge their own capabilities, but the song is a radical departure from what the band's fans (who get what they want here otherwise) expect. It features Robert Fripp on guitar.

My immediate reaction was to recoil in surprise at the shock shift, but I've since found that the track has a haunting, hypnotic appeal and, with each subsequent listen, I've appreciated it more.

This album will consolidate Blondie's UK popularity. The next, I suspect, will test their audience's loyalty.

Harry Doherty, MM Sep 9





SINGLES REVIEW 1978

Paul Weller reviews the singles

NME NOV 4 The mod-suited Jam frontman cocks a jaded ear to the latest releases.

Bethnal
Nothing New VERTIGO

Me and Bruce saw Bethnal at the Greyhound, Fulham Palace Road, about two years ago. We both agreed they were a very good band but lacking in identity. Playing stuff like "Baba O'Reilly", the Feelgoods' "She Does It Right" and "Jig A Jig" alongside their own material. I thought at the time, "Now if I managed that band, I'd get Everton's (*the bassist*) hair cut like Marvin Gaye's circa '64 and put them in mohair." Being the derivative person I am.

Anyway, fantasies aside, Bethnal are a great underrated band. I personally prefer the B-side, shades of Little Stevie Marriott and white Small Faces soul. "Nothing New" has a great fiddle intro; they're all brilliant musicians and George Csapo's voice is really strong. And they don't sound a bit like The 'Oo. Nice one, lads.

Blondie
Hanging On The Telephone
CHRYSALIS

[Lifted from their new LP, *Parallel Lines*.] Being a personal friend of the band, it's kinda difficult to review this one. I'd like to say a smash; but it just doesn't do a lot for me. The band, as usual, are well together, and Blondie, well she's got a great voice. The trouble is that the song is just not of the standard now expected from them. Brrr-brrr... is there anything there?



Adam & The Ants
Young Parisians
DECCA

[The band's first release on Decca.] A nursery rhyme-type tune which takes 'A gay look at Paree!'. "*Young Parisians are so French/They talk nothing but... French*"! Maybe the French will like this one.

X-Ray Spex
Germfree Adolescents EMI

Well, I'd really hoped after eight more or less boring singles that this would be the one to pick me up. Basic song about deodorants, antiseptics, mouthwashes, etc, etc. All I can say is – I've got to go and wash my hands of this week's singles. Sorry, Poly.

BB King
Hold On
ABC

Still one of my heroes. Magic!



PETER NOBLE / GETTY

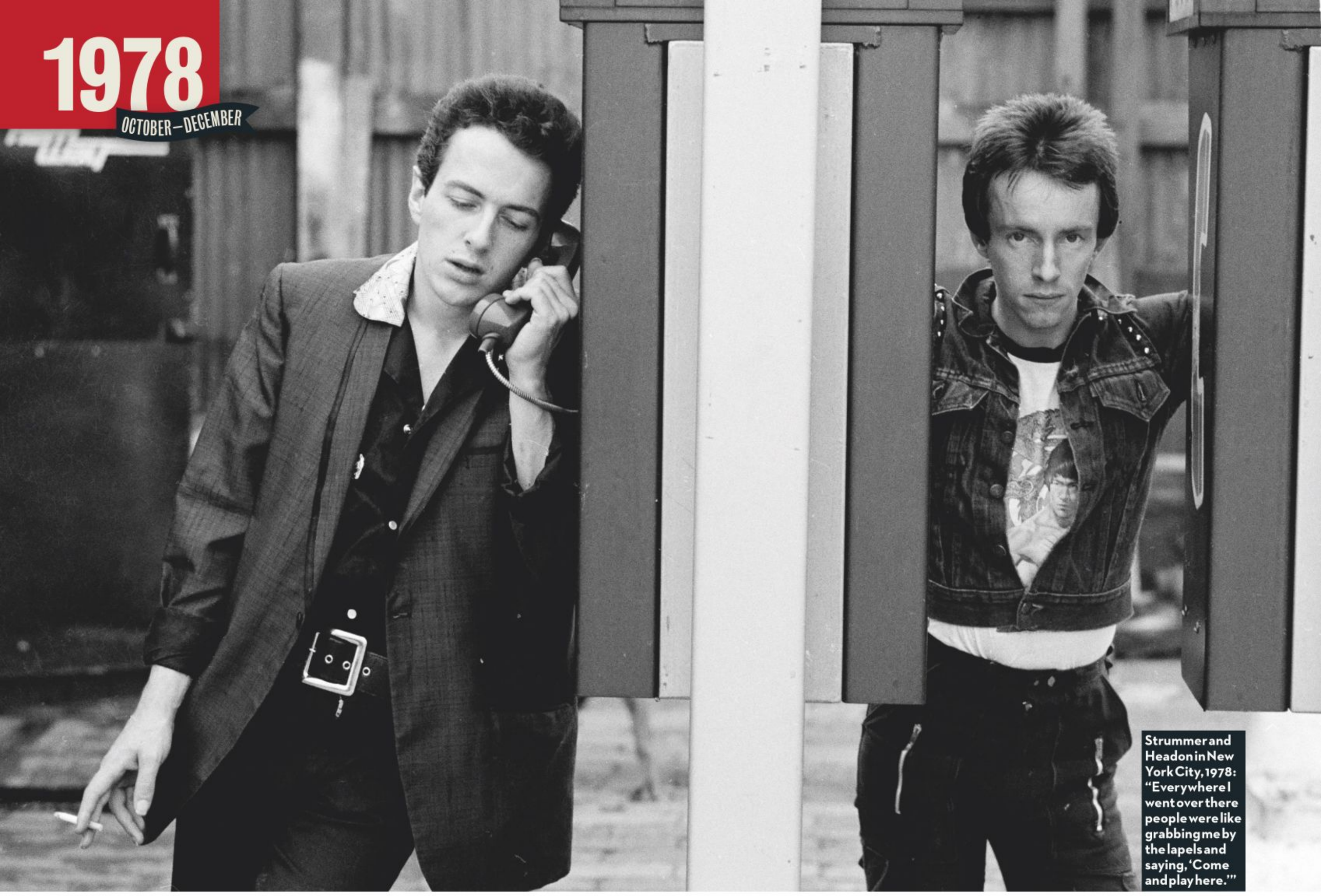
"Just another battle"

It's tough at the top, as THE CLASH are discovering. "Punk has ended up in the courts," Strummer says sternly. "And I think it's disgusting. But I don't feel disillusioned. It would be too easy."



The Clash in 1978: (l–r) Paul Simonon, Nick "Topper" Headon, Mick Jones and Joe Strummer

SHEILA ROCK / REX FEATURES



Strummer and Headon in New York City, 1978: "Everywhere I went over there people were like grabbing me by the lapels and saying, 'Come and play here.'"

— MELODY MAKER NOVEMBER 25 —

TUESDAY MORNING STILL has the sleep in its eyes, but the Edgware Road is alive with the general chaos and frantic panic of the rush-hour blues. It's half nine, and Joe Strummer and Paul Simonon are to be found hiding from the brittle November sunshine in the Metropolitan Cafe, a greasy spoon just around the corner from Strummer's flat.

The pair are hunched over their breakfast plates, insolently disregarding the inquisitive eyes of Metropolitan regulars who peer with a barely concealed curiosity from behind grubby copies of *The Sun* and the *Mirror* at the two punks wolfing down omelettes and chips.

Strummer and Simonon share the look of tired refugees. Strummer is wearing a soiled Elvis T-shirt – a souvenir presumably of The Clash's recent sojourn in America – and bondage strides. Simonon, his spiky blond hair razored tight against his skull, looks like an out-of-focus mirror image in a similarly grimy T-shirt, strides and cumbersome biker boots.

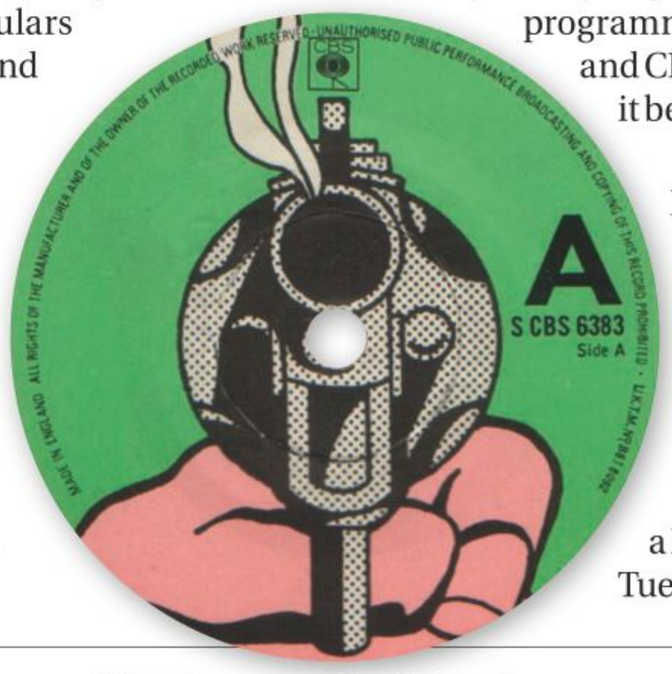
The conversation is punctuated by the howling and steaming of the espresso coffee machine and the constant clatter of crockery and cutlery, and interrupted briefly by the appearance of Caroline Coon, the rock journalist with whom Simonon lives and who, since the recent exit of their erstwhile mentor and manager Bernie Rhodes, has been managing The Clash.

She takes Strummer aside. Their conversation is hurried. Strummer looks impatient. He returns, clearly agitated and quietly furious.

He has just been told that CBS, the group's record company, have acquired a copy of a promotional film The Clash have produced. The film features them performing their new single, "Tommy Gun", and CBS, it transpires, are attempting – without the group's permission, hence Strummer's anger – to flog the clip to *Top Of The Pops*. The Clash have already refused unconditionally to appear on the programme, and Strummer is determined to prevent the record company from negotiating a slot for the film on the show.

"It was one of the shouts, remember," he seethes later, "to refuse to have anything to do with *Top Of The Pops*. It's one of the things we all wanted to do away with, right? It was one of the shouts. No one was gonna do *Top Of The Pops* to sell their records.

"Seems we're the only ones still shouting. The others have all done it… maybe they've got their reasons. But it makes me sick that that programme should still be on. I want it to end. We don't do it, and CBS ain't gonna get away with putting any film of us on it behind our backs."



> *"Top Of The Pops* is one of the things we all wanted to do away with"

Simonon smiles indulgently at Strummer's passionate outburst. Strummer's temper, though, is slow to cool. His anger is understandable. The commercial manoeuvres of CBS present to him yet another irritating distraction.

"It's just another battle," he complains. "We just don't have the time to keep fighting them. There's more important things for us to be doing."

It's the truth: The Clash were scheduled to open a British tour the following night in Edinburgh. Tuesday afternoon found them still rehearsing in London. Their preparations for the tour have been surrounded by enough hassles already, Strummer attests. They should, he declares, be concentrating on the tour, not fighting petty battles with the record company.

"We're used to it now," Simonon alleges. "So many things have happened during the last tours that we don't take much notice now. We've always had all kinds of hassles before tours. Personal hassles within the band. Hassles with the management. Hassles with the record company. Hassles with everybody. The last time we had that court business…"

"The Guns On The Roof Tour," Strummer recalls slyly.

MICHAEL PUTLAND / GETTY (2)

"You just have to plough your way through it, you know," Simonon continues. "I don't find it frustrating any more; I find it's good fun, actually. It really brings the group together in a way, having to face up to it. You've got to stand up to it when people are going on at you all the time from all directions. If you give in, you ain't gonna get nowhere. You've gotta fight back. To try to win. To beat them."

"Yeah," smiles Strummer laconically. "I find it adds a certain desperation to the proceedings. It's not always a bad thing to be desperate, you know what I mean?"

THE LAST MONTH has, indeed, been traumatic for The Clash. The release of their long-overdue second album, *Give 'Em Enough Rope*, was prefaced by their well-publicised estrangement from Bernard Rhodes, whose sacking as the band manager succeeded months of speculation and rumour about the growing rift and increasing animosity between the two factions. The split, when it came finally, provoked the inevitable round of hostility, allegations, accusations, bitching, sneering and lawsuits.

Rhodes applied to the High Court to freeze the band's earnings. They replied with the claim that his financial accounting amounted to a breach of his duties as their manager. Rhodes, assuming an injured tone, explained the principle reasons for the split (as he saw them, naturally), when he spoke to the *MM* at the end of October.

"I have been given the elbow by the band," he complained. "I took them off the street and made them what they are, and now I'm out. It's ended with the group owing me money – it's not often that it ends up that way – and I feel they have let me down over the last year, during which time they haven't really done anything.

"I thought this was one band that wouldn't get involved in all the rock'n'roll nonsense, but that's what they've drifted into. I know I've been painted as a horrible ogre-like figure, not letting the band have any fun, but that's not what it was about.

"I didn't view my job as being here to subsidise their silly indulgences like recording in big New York studios and staying in top New York hotels. That's basically what the split between us is all about."

Bernie, I might add, was not alone in his apparent disaffection. The Clash had been widely criticised even by their most ardent admirers, impatient with the delays and constant rescheduling that afflicted the production of the album, and for their choice, as producer, of Sandy Pearlman, a producer most noted for his involvement with the Blue Öyster Cult. The decision to employ Pearlman must, to committed Clash addicts who idolised the group as the most radical of the surviving punk bands, have smacked of commercial compromise and an attempt to secure some kind of advance into the American marketplace.

The idealisation of The Clash as fervent revolutionaries had already been tarnished by their association with CBS (which Mark P, you might recall, had described emotionally as the death knell for punk and its more radical intentions), and an initial backlash – which they survived, of course – which had many of their original champions, who merely exaggerated the importance and social weight of their first album, bickering and sniping at what they interpreted as the corruption of the group's early idealism.

I should probably mention here a personal aversion to much of that frequently cheered debut. Its crude musical force was briefly exhilarating (despite the enormous shortcomings of the production), but I tired quickly of its ranting tone and the confused indignation of Strummer's violent rhetoric. And I found quite absurd the image, fostered by some of their more impressionable supporters, of the band as captains of a revolutionary underground.

Still, I could sympathise (reluctantly, perhaps) with their tribulations, and the pressure under which they were supposed to be suffering with the imminent release of a new album, which – most observers agreed – would probably leave them vulnerably exposed to a more vicious critical sandbagging than anything they'd previously encountered.

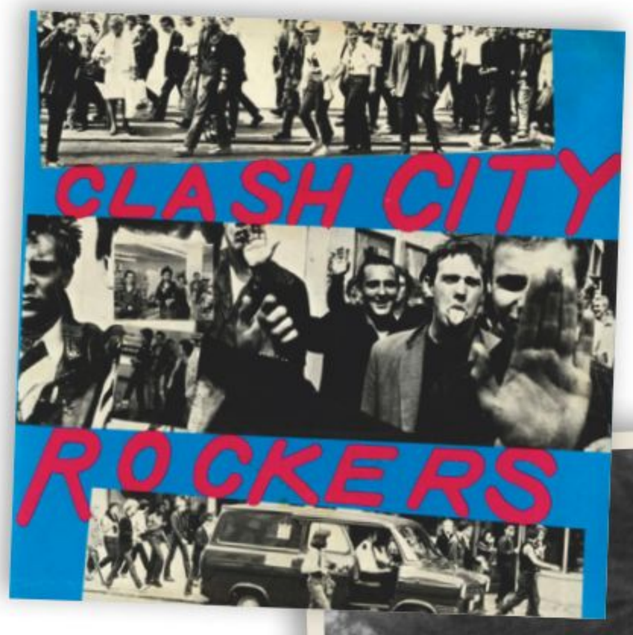
As it happened, *Give 'Em Enough Rope* escaped the expected mauling: the reviews, thus far, have been favourably enthusiastic. Only Jon Savage, in this paper, was openly critical of its disappointments and failures.

I might as well admit that I find *Give 'Em Enough Rope* generally disappointing. Pearlman's production strikes me as erratically balanced, capturing only occasionally any real musical force. The opening salvo of "Safe European Home," "English Civil War" and "Tommy Gun" possesses a genuinely fierce thrust that the rest of the album fails to sustain, though "Guns On The Roof" comes close to the same kind of orchestrated frenzy.

Some of the cuts, I must say, seem quite embarrassingly shoddy to these ears. "Julie's Been Working For The Drug Squad", especially, seems pathetically slight, while Mick Jones' "Stay Free", despite its obvious emotional sincerity, reminds me of one of those cloying sentimental tracts with which Ian Hunter used occasionally to clutter Mott The Hoople albums.

Strummer, however, shrugs off the criticisms of the album, and remains defiant in his defence of his band and his belief in the ultimate worth of The Clash.

"I could've stood a slagging," he says bravely. "The first time you're slagged, it really gets you here, you know…" he thumps his fist over his heart in a characteristically dramatic gesture. "But after that you get sort of immune. You get a leather heart, know what I mean?" »





Jones and Simonon in NYC: "When we signed with CBS we had to take on certain responsibilities that we didn't have before"

"We probably expected more criticism," Simonon offers. "People do seem more critical of us than most bands. It's like, the higher you go, the more people expect of you. You come to expect criticism, and after a while you don't really take any notice of it. You just get on with what you're there to do."

Strummer is especially unrepentant about the decision to record the album with Pearlman, despite the flak it might have provoked and despite the contradictions it embraced: "He was the only contender. Who else is there? Try and name one. We wanted to find somebody who could put us on record, you know. And he was the only one. And so we had to do it his way.

"The record took so long to do, 'cos I got hepatitis and we did that tour in the summer… and, anyway, that's the way he does it. He takes the long way around. He gets there in the end. It just takes him a long time. But we accepted that – I mean, we asked him to do the record. So we worked in his style, out of respect for him."

It had been rumoured that CBS, exasperated with the band's prevarication, gave them an ultimatum and presented them with a shortlist of eight producers and instructed them to choose one or be damned.

"Well," says Strummer, "I've read about this list. But I've never seen it myself, I'm told it exists. Perhaps it does. Nobody's ever shown it to me. The only producer I met was Sandy. And he amazed me. I'd never heard of him before. I'd never bought a Blue Öyster Cult album, never read the small print on the back. I didn't know who he was. But he really knew quite a lot about us. And he was the first producer I thought we could really work with. We'd tried people in the past, but the ones we tried were all past their peak."

Strummer denies Bernard Rhodes' allegations that the reason for his split with The Clash centred upon their recording in New York with Pearlman (who, it was rumoured, was eager to take over their management). Their differences with Rhodes pre-dated their association with Pearlman, he suggests. He is, however, initially reluctant to pursue the conversation about the present wrangles with their former manager.

"The thing is," he says, "we can't say too much… If we slag Bernie off, they can do us, you know… But the reason, really, that we had to part company is that Bernie, although he's like some kinda genius – a great ideas man – he can't, you know, do *sums*. That and the fact that he hadn't really been friends with the group for the last couple of years."

Simonon agrees that Rhodes' contribution to the nascent Clash image was vitally important: "He made us actually *think* about what we were doing. To observe the record business from the outside. He taught us to keep our distance. To always keep outside the music business."

"He put it all together, really," Strummer says succinctly.

Simonon suggests that Rhodes' antagonism towards The Clash can be dated from the time, virtually, when they signed with CBS.

"It wasn't the same after that. Probably the whole business side of it pulled him away from the contact with the band that he had before."

I mention that Rhodes had claimed that he thought that the band were becoming increasingly indifferent to the original impulse of his definition of a punk rock group, and the ideals that had earlier fired their inspiration.

"I don't think that's true at all," Simonon argues. "What happened was that when we signed with CBS we had to take on certain responsibilities that we didn't have before."

"Like, we thought we had to play better and sound better on stage," Strummer interrupts. "We felt that when we did a show we had to be really good, you know. We had to be at our best. So first we wanted decent amps. So we'd sound good. We'd had enough of crappy amps and shitty equipment. At first we were using terrible equipment and we sounded awful. So we just wanted decent stuff, you know… but Bernie thought that us getting decent amps was contradicting the original aims of being a punk band.

"Bernie thought punk rock meant low overheads. We didn't think it meant any such thing. When we went out in front of an audience we wanted to sound as good as possible. We didn't want to sound terrible. We wanted decent amps to back us up and he just thought it was us being pop stars.

"But we were in a situation, you know, of suddenly having to go out to play in front of, like, 2,000 people at the Glasgow Apollo, say, and we owe it to those people to sound good, to be heard, at least. They've paid to see us, right? They wanna be able to hear us, too. That was the situation. We had to deal with it. He didn't have to deal with it. He wasn't on fucking stage."

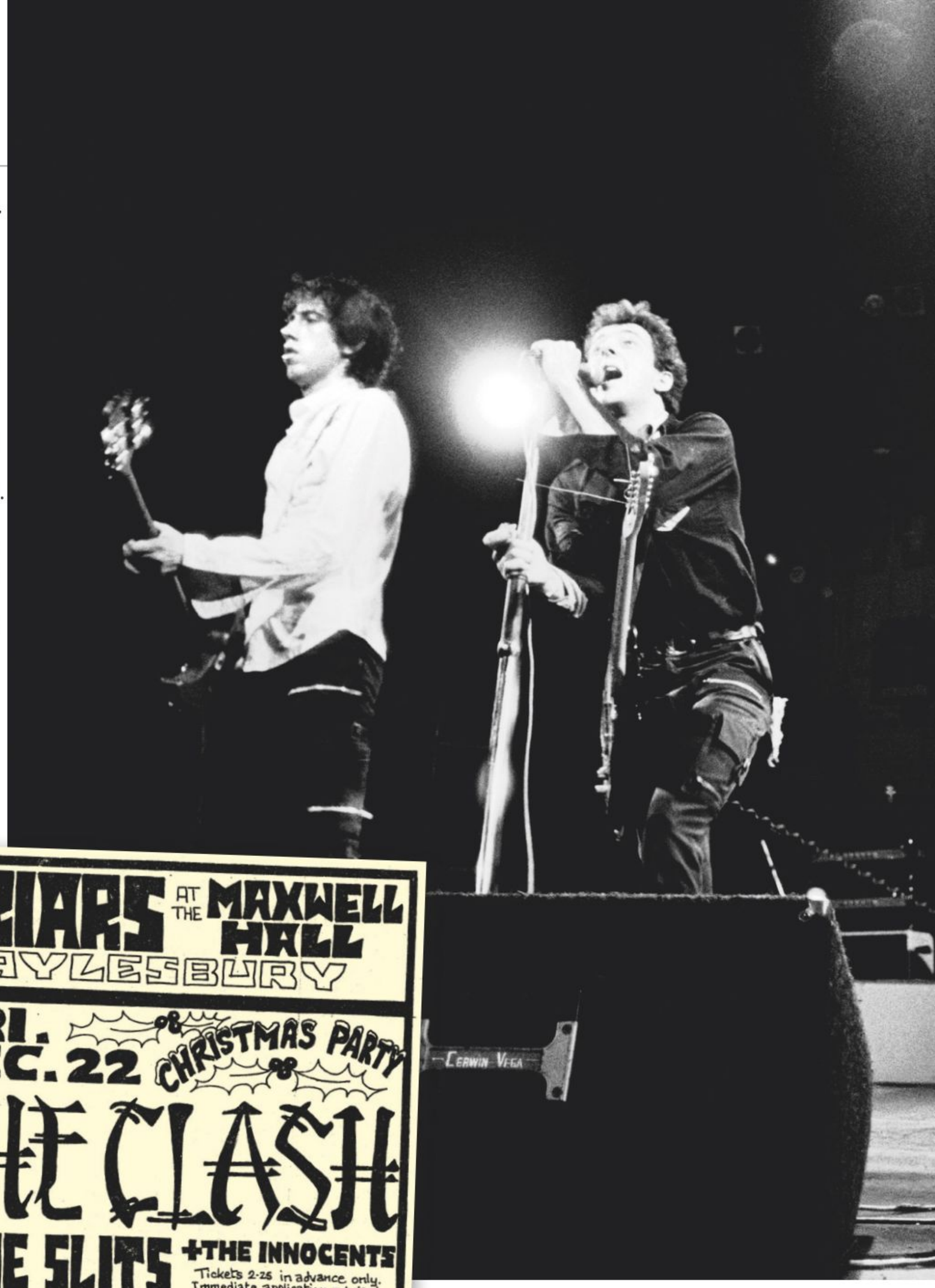
You mean he didn't share your sympathy for the demands of your audience? "I just think he felt that it sounded alright as it was," Strummer replies. "But Bernie always hated music anyway."

Was there one final thing that forced you to ditch him?

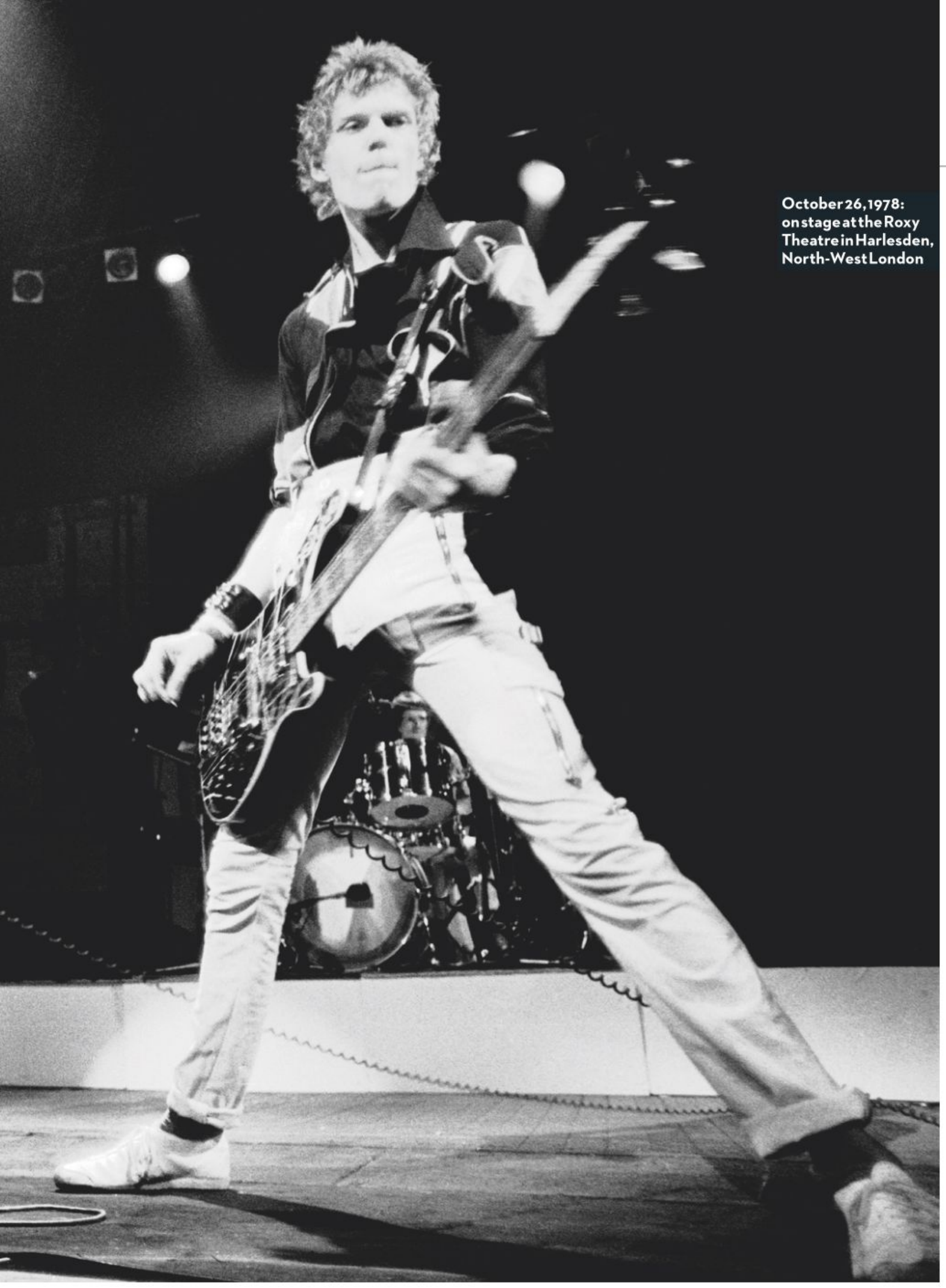
Simonon: "There were a lot of minor but crucial things that happened."

Strummer: "When we found out what state our business was in, we realised we'd have to do something pretty quick. Otherwise we weren't gonna survive much longer…"

"Like I said," says Simonon, "he didn't have time to come down and see the group, which he'd been able to do before. When we signed with CBS,



GUS STEWART / GETTY



October 26, 1978: on stage at the Roxy Theatre in Harlesden, North-West London

suddenly there was a whole lot of new things to do and they took up all his time. He was as much a victim of the music business as anyone."

"I think it took him a bit by surprise, the way we took off and what he then had to handle," Strummer reflects. "The amount of work built up really quickly over a few months, and I think it caught him by surprise as well as us. He didn't want us to become what we'd started out against. All credit to him. But his method of preventing this was to come and attack us, to come in with scorn."

And did you, I ask Strummer, think you were becoming what you originally campaigned against?

"I think that every day," he replies gravely.

TAKING THEIR SPLIT with Rhodes in a more general context, it's suggested that it might be seen as symptomatic of the manner in which the punk movement has suffered for its original idealism. The initial momentum of punk, and its potential for change, has been battered by the mercenary realities of the music business and degenerated into bad-tempered squabbling and self-destruction.

"Punk has ended up in the courts," Strummer says sternly. "And I think it's disgusting. But I don't feel disillusioned. It would be too easy to be disillusioned. We believed in all the stuff we said about wanting to change the system… We believe in everything we've said or done. We're not backing down. We're actually still directing our own future.

"There's certain things I regret about the way it's turned out. I regret that I've got to go down to the Hammersmith Odeon to see acts that were once bumping around the 100 Club with us. I don't think that's progress. I think that venue has no respect for the punters, you know. You go there, right, and you sit down and that's it. You can't get up. If you get up, someone's got their hand on your shoulder.

"If the venue's got no respect for the punter, therefore the groups that play there can't have any respect for the punter either. I remember going to see Humble Pie there once… a friend of mine dragged me along… And the other night I was sitting there and I couldn't help thinking about Humble Pie, and how many years ago that was. And this is now, and yet here we are in the same situation. And it's even worse… Who did I see the other night? Some so-called new-wave group…"

He refuses to acknowledge any nostalgic regret for the early days of the punk movement, and accepts as inevitable the friction that occasionally surfaces between various bands (something of which he has been guilty himself – you might recall the letter he wrote to Mailbag attacking Brian James, Tom Robinson "and four-eyed Van Morrison impersonators").

"As soon as it all becomes a big deal, or becomes something to be lost rather than won, it all changes. That's what happened to punk. People start stabbing each other in the back. But I don't bother to think back. It's a waste of time."

He admits, though, to a personal disappointment with some people with whom he has enjoyed some degree of friendship or respect, who later turned against The Clash.

Mark P, for instance, who penned the immortal line, as mentioned earlier, "Punk died the day The Clash signed to CBS."

"The dirty fucking rat," Strummer swears when Perry is mentioned.

"The strange thing is," says Simonon, "that *he* becomes a director of a record company."

"He was just blaming us for his own cop-outs," Strummer bristles. "Any time that I've copped out I've never blamed anyone but myself. When I heard that he'd said that, I was so annoyed, you know. It was like him saying, 'It's all their fault. They let us down.' Why should he hang on to us? Where's his own two feet?"

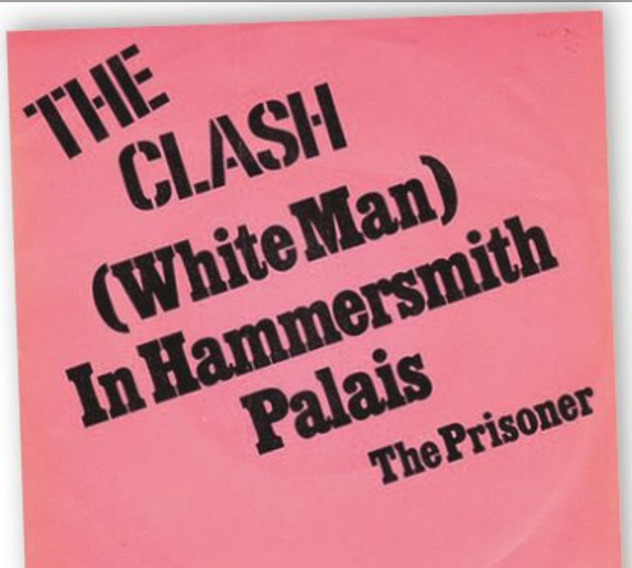
More recently, The Clash have been bitterly attacked in *The Boy Looked At Johnny*, the Tony Parsons/Julie Burchill book; it's an attack that especially offends Strummer, because of his former friendship with Parsons (who I clearly recall openly fawning over Strummer at the Mont de Marsan punk festival last year when he trailed The Clash singer over most of the weekend like a ga-ga shadow).

"Somebody gave me it to read the other night at a gig. What disappointed me most was that it was boring to read. And also the fact that they'd invented so many lies. They needn't have. They could've put that kind of cynical slant on the facts. But they've thrown in, like, five or six outright lies. They're just things that I know just as well as Tony knows that are just a load of lies."

"That kind of thing happens all the time," Simonon says conclusively. "Friends turn against you quicker than anyone. Like at school, it's always your best mates that turn against you. You don't think anything of it. You just have to turn the other way and get on with what you're doing."

It's not impossible to surmise from the new album (notably from the evidence of, say, "Cheapskates", Strummer's vindictively sardonic attack on critics of The Clash) and, especially, "Last Gang In Town" »

> "Bernie didn't want us to become what we'd started out against"





and "All The Young Punks (New Boots And Contracts)" that The Clash see themselves as increasingly isolated from their contemporaries. The last of the punk bands still true to the old punk standards.

Someone once mentioned to me that if the Pistols were the martyrs of punk – "grinning on their way to the scaffold" – then The Clash were the social conscience of punk. I thought it a fanciful comparison at the time. But then I hadn't heard "All The Young Punks".

"I think we *are* the last well-known punk group still true to the original aims of punk," Strummer says, without any undue arrogance. He denies, though, that "Last Gang In Town" is any kind of idealisation of The Clash. "I was just taking the piss out of mob violence."

But I seemed to recall Mick Jones describing The Clash in almost the same terms last summer when he was interviewed by Chris Brazier.

"Maybe," says Strummer. "But that was just after the Pistols had thrown the towel in, and that's how we felt at the time. When the original Pistols split we had to look at ourselves in a new light. We'd been chasing them for so long, you know. We wanted to catch them and beat them. And it did them a lot of good. If you've got somebody chasing you all the time, there's no relaxing."

"We were suddenly left out there on our own," Simonon interjects, "and it made us feel a bit lonely somehow. The Pistols had suddenly gone. They weren't there any more. There was nothing to chase."

"We'd never have beaten them anyway," Strummer says.

"Probably not. We'd almost get there and they'd do something else and they'd be even further ahead. And then we'd catch up again and they'd be doing something else. It was like that right from the Anarchy Tour."

So you saw the Pistols as the only real competition?

"We thought they were one of the best groups. In fact we thought they were the best."

And there's no one else you regard so highly?

"Only people like Bo Diddley," Strummer smirks. "I mean, we like Sham, but we never had the same kind of respect for them that we had for the Pistols. And when they came out with 'Let's Go Down The Pub' or whatever it's called, they really dropped quite a few places on the Clash Top 10. We thought 'The Kids Are United' was a really great record…"

"But the new one," says Simonon, "it's like, this is the way to keep the working man in his place. As if going down the pub is the only thing for them to do."

"All The Young Punks" – which Strummer describes as a direct comment on Mott The Hoople's "All The Young Dudes" – might in this context be regarded as a direct antithesis to the Sham song; a stirring call-to-arms, if you like. This is Strummer's version of the song, at least.

"We really wanted it to sound like a hymn, you know. The essence of that song is that it's for the young people who listen to it. It tells them they've got to start with nothing. 'Cos that's how it does start – with nothing. It isn't a requiem for punk, or anything like that. It's about us. And the future.

"There's been a long history of political songs… but they were always folk songs – we brought that kind of political thing into, like, electric flash music. And when you do that you are opening yourselves to attacks. It's much safer to say, 'Well – it's just entertainment, boys… It's not really meant to threaten you or make you think'… But the thing is, we are trying to threaten you and make you think."

This diatribe, of course, opens up the whole area of The Clash's apparent radicalism. OK, Joe – how radical do you think The Clash really are?

"We're really radical… yeah. We don't do anything we don't want to do. We've got a really high standard that we want to maintain, right? And we don't do anything that might cross that standard…

"Awright – you've got to sell records to survive. This is one thing we've found out. We've got to sell records to survive, 'cos a group is such a huge machine. It requires a lot of money to run on. The input of money to keep it going must be from records, 'cos you never make money from touring.

"So we realise that we've got to sell records. But we're not prepared to do just anything to sell them. We're only prepared to do what fits in with our idea of what it should be like. We're not prepared to go on *Top Of The Pops*. 'Cos we don't feel that it's like a real show…"

Refusing to appear on *TOTP* could hardly be classified as the most radical of acts, though.

"You're talking about radical acts… right: you mean like bombing. That's a radical act, isn't it? To actually blow something up is an extreme act. There's nothing more extreme you could do to this caff then blow the place up and leave a big hole in the Edgware Road. Maybe you could take

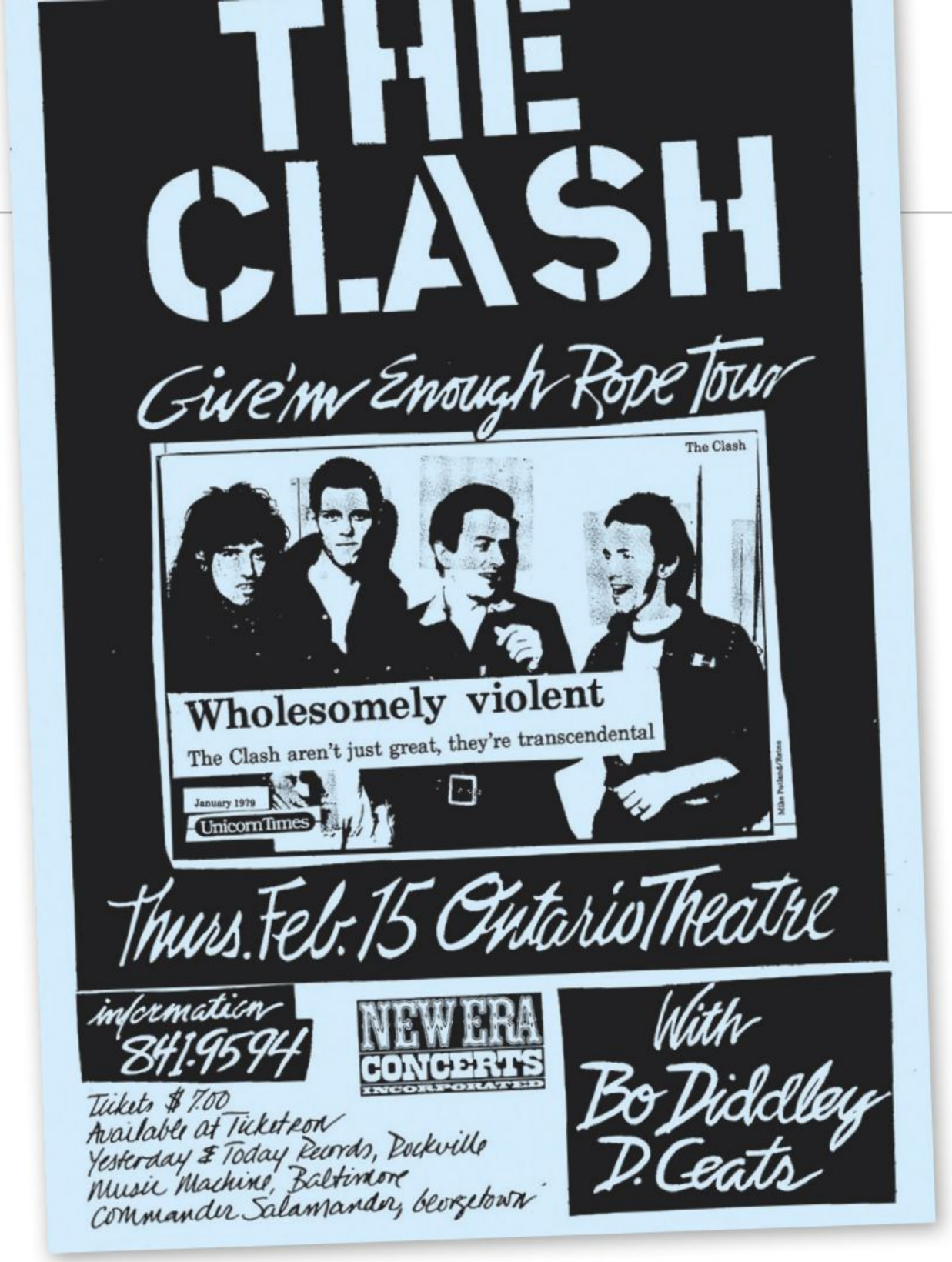


New York City, 1978: says sacked manager Bernie Rhodes, "I didn't view my job as being here to subsidise their silly indulgences like recording in big New York studios and staying in top New York hotels"

MICHAEL PUTLAND / GETTY

your clothes off and dance around on the tables. That would be pretty good. That would turn a few heads. But to blow it up would be pretty extreme. But we never came to destroy. We never did."

AND HERE RESIDES the crux of another classic anti-Clash argument, which both Jon Savage and Nick Kent, in their respective reviews of *Give 'Em Enough Rope*, levelled against the band, and Strummer specifically. Both reviewers questioned Strummer's apparent infatuation with a kind of gratuitous revolutionary violence (of a kind perpetrated by the Baader-Meinhof gang and the Red Brigades), and his occasionally unfortunate tendency to react somewhat hysterically to the potential supremacy of reactionary forces (as on "English Civil War," which predicts the immediate ascendancy of the National Front).



Strummer, of course, believes that he's been misunderstood. We never came to destroy, right?

"We have been misunderstood," he says plaintively. "When we wrote 'White Riot' and all that about Sten guns in Knightsbridge and knives in West 11, we imagined what was gonna hit on us. I imagined having a knife pointed at me, right? I imagined Sten guns in Knightsbridge pointed at me. But people took it to mean that *we* had them and we were pointing them at other people. That was a song written about the future. I thought the future was gonna do us in. I really imagined it."

"The thing is," Simonon says, "when you're a kid, right, you go around smashing things up. And most of the time people smash up their own areas. Like kids go around their blocks of flats and piss all over the walls. And I remember when I was a kid, me and me mates went around Knightsbridge smashing things up. And that's what more kids should do, instead of doing it to their own areas."

> "The thing is, we *are* trying to threaten you and make you think"

Well, that's one point of view. But I still think that there's an element of sensationalist overkill on something like "English Civil War" and a danger, even, of being seen almost to relish the potential of that violence…

"I don't think it is hysterical," Strummer argues with a passionate conviction. "The song says '*It was still at the stage of clubs and fists…*' And *that is* the stage it's at now. If you go on a march – on an anti-National Front march or whatever – if the police don't get in the middle and the two sides get together, you'll see people with bits of wood hitting each other over the head and punching each other. It's not being wildly out of hand to imagine it getting more violent in the future."

But you're still wide open to the charge that you're using such emotive subjects to create no more than a dramatic impact, and that your apparent militancy is no more than a fashionable stance. Especially when the songs tend toward the ambiguous and make so few conclusive statements about the predicament you're attempting to illustrate.

"This could be true. But I think if you listen to the song, I injected it with as much emotion as I could. I actually felt that situation. The fear is real. You know, like, when you read all those books about the Second World War, and the armies marching in and there were people hiding in cupboards and hiding radios under the stairs – you realise how people have to live under another regime… And I imagined it was, like, happening to me and my girlfriend. I was trying to imagine how it would affect me."

Yes: but don't you think you do tend to glamorise to some extent the violence of the Baader-Meinhof gang or the Red Brigades… Isn't there a danger of creating a kind of romantic respectability for that violence?

"Yeah. But the only reason I ever brought them up was 'cos I couldn't believe what they were doing. They were just human, right? And they've taken up guns. They've gone out robbing banks, kidnapping people and shooting people and murdering them and blowing up places… They've gone to that extreme. And I couldn't go to that extreme… so I had to compare them to me, right?

"Right now there's loads of people out in their country mansions getting ready to go out grouse shooting. And at the same time there's millions of old-age pensioners who have to wrap themselves in bits of cardboard to keep warm 'cos they've got no heating, and they have to last three days on a piece of rotting bread 'cos they've got no food… And I don't think it's fair.

"And those people in West Germany and Italy, they decided that the only way they can fight it is to go out there and start shooting people they consider to be arseholes…"

I still find your attitude towards them ambiguous.

"I *am* ambiguous. 'Cos at once I'm impressed with what they're doing, and at the same time I'm totally frightened by what they're doing… It's not an easy subject."

Presumably there's little chance of you and The Clash cooling it at all on the righteous anger front?

"No."

Not even for America?

"Listen," says Strummer, "everywhere I went over there people were like grabbing me by the lapels and saying, 'Come and play here.' I'd go to clubs and there'd be punters who'd had, like, a few too many, and they'd get excited and grab me by the collar, demanding that we come and play in America – and they didn't want us to tone it down.

"And I think that if we toned it down we'd fuck it up completely in America. Some of them are worried that by the time we get over there we'll only be a pale imitation of what we were like when we started."

So that answers that one.

The interview is just about over and the plates have been cleared away. I mention that I found it ironic, after all the promises from groups like their own to remain independent of the music business and its various satellites, that the interview should have been arranged through the offices of Tony Brainsby, a publicist whose other clients include (in no particular order) Thin Lizzy, Queen and Paul McCartney.

"Yeah… well," Strummer smiles uncomfortably, "the thing is, right, there ain't nobody who can be with us now that we can accept into our circle. It's too late. And we haven't brought any publicity man along with us. So we have to go outside the circle, to someone like Tony, right?

"But it don't matter, as long as the songs are still true. It all depends on the music, on the songs. The songs that you're writing tell you if it's still worth it. If they're no good, you've got to face up to the fact that you've gone as far as you can with this thing… Songs have got to be truthful. And it's important that they tell the truth to us as well as everyone else. That's important. You can't fool yourself." *Allan Jones* •

1978

OCTOBER–DECEMBER

Johnny Thunders: born John Genzale in Queens, New York, goes it alone after the dissolution of the Heartbreakers at the end of 1977

"Nothing's forever"

Let down by the Sex Pistols. No band. Short attention span. JOHNNY THUNDERS has a new album, but it doesn't seem to indicate a new start. "I don't regret anything I've ever done," says Johnny. "I don't regret anything about lifestyle or what I do."

— MELODY MAKER OCTOBER 21 —

"WHEN AH SAY *Ah'm in luv, you'd best believe Ah'm in luv… L-U-V…*" The slight, dark figure of Johnny Thunders is hunched over the mic. The band surrounding him – the "All Stars," it says on the concert ticket – stumble through the song ("Give Her A Great Big Kiss") like it's a 100-metres sprint. Inevitably, somebody falls and everybody else trips over him. The rehearsal halts in confusion.

Johnny, meantime, is immune to the chaos, calmly retreating to the amplifier, touching a knob, tuning a string, coolly confronting the mic again: "*When Ah say Ah'm in luv…*" And so it goes.

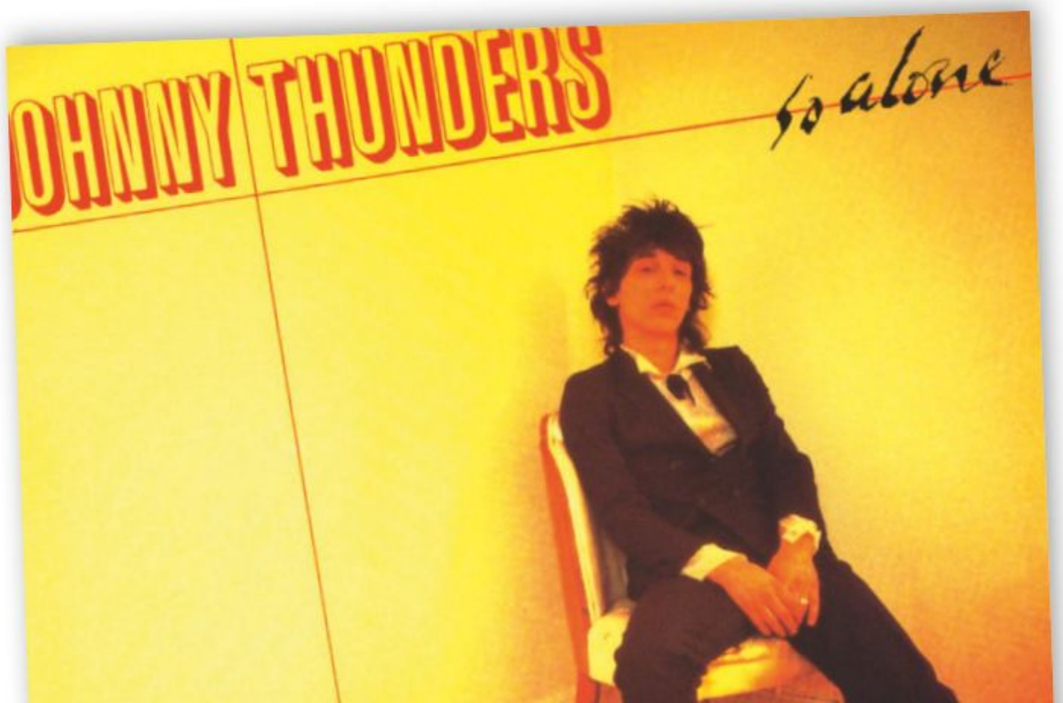
With a gig at London's Lyceum 24 hours off, one would envisage considerably more panic in the air than was evident when I busted into Thunders' rehearsals at the Roxy Theatre in Harlesden. There are, as I see it, a whole range of barriers to be climbed before this band takes the stage.

"Hey, Steve…" Thunders casually addresses his personal manager. "Phone up and find out where Patti [Palladin] is… And Peter [Perrett] too. And ask them ta send round some copies of the album, so that the band knows what it's playin'."

You see the problem we have here. One of our all-stars is missing. The day before, in somewhat controversial circumstances, Sex Pistolettes Paul Cook and Steve Jones dropped out of the party, and seeing as they were billed on the tickets (and obviously were an immeasurable help in the crowd draw), it's not something that can be easily laughed off.

Malcolm McLaren, the Pistols' manager, planted a disclaimer with the media that his boys were never intending to do the gig. Jones was in Los Angeles producing a band called the Avengers, while Cook was in London putting the finishing touches to the Pistols movie, *The Great Rock'n'Roll Swindle*.

From other sources comes the more dramatic claim that Jones and Cook steadfastly refused to share the stage with Thunders unless they »



ANDRE CSILLAG / REX FEATURES

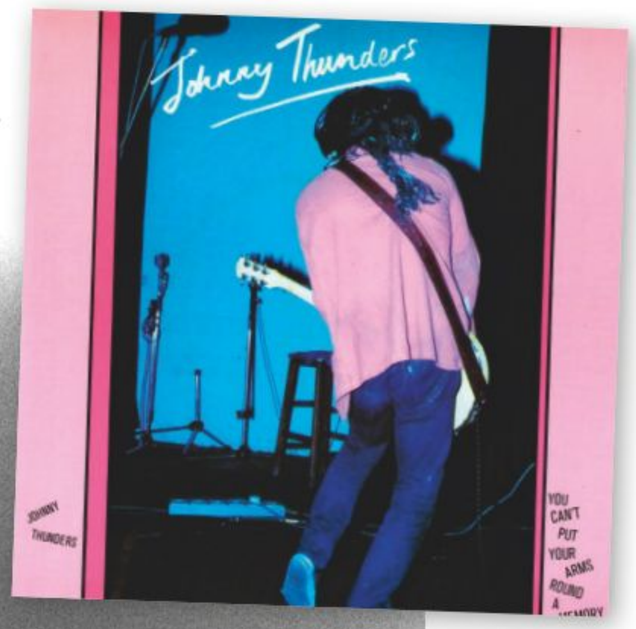
were given a hard guarantee that Thunders, not noted as being the most together person, was in fit shape to play frontman adequately. Apparently when Cook and Jones worked with Thunders on the new *So Alone* album, they were (so the story goes) freaked out by the New Yorker's haphazard attitude. And you thought the Sex Pistols were all shits and laughs. Johnny has a few pertinent points to make about da boyz a bit later.

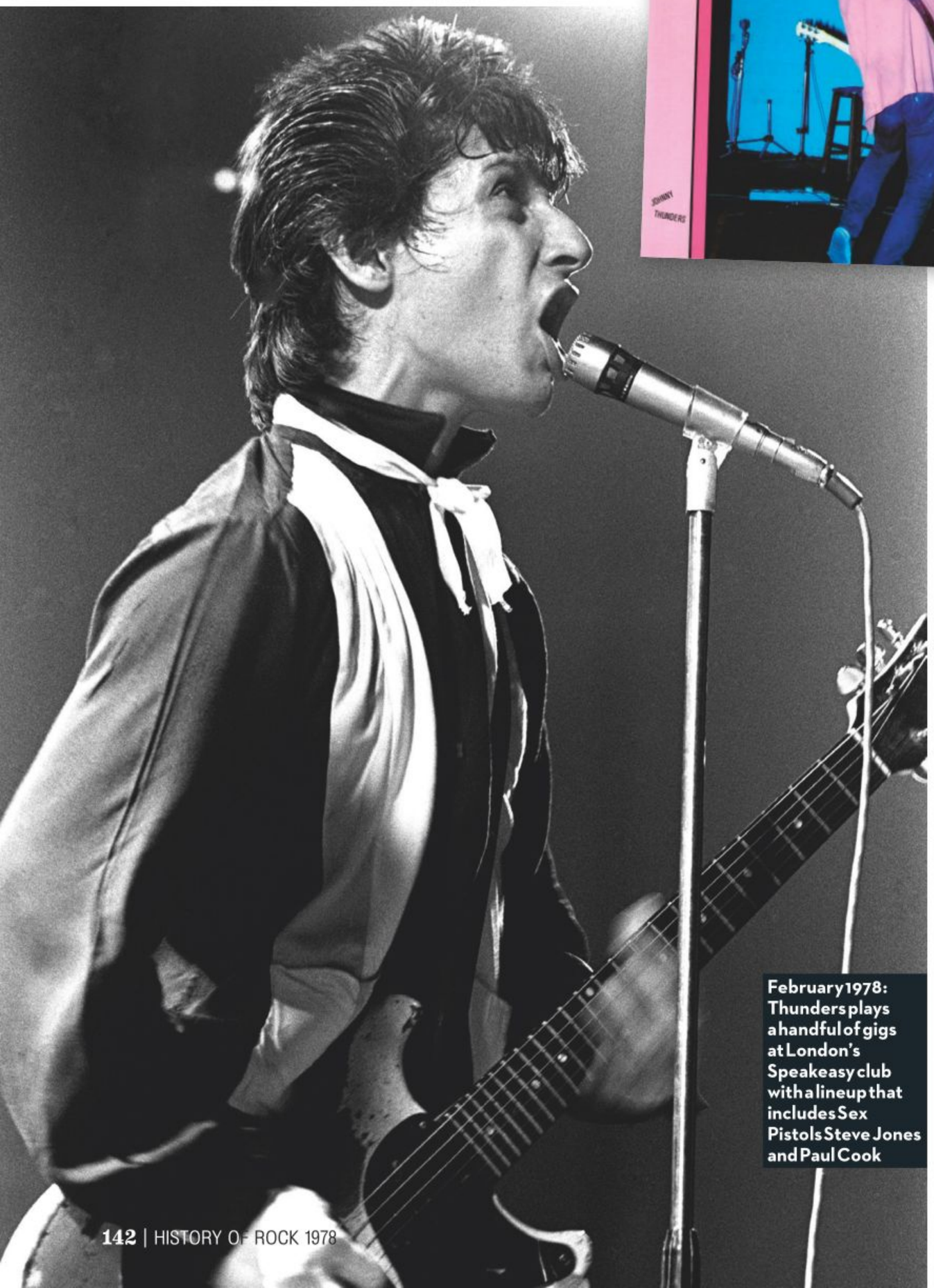
And so here we are at the Roxy on an unnaturally hot October afternoon. Stars or no stars, Thunders has a quorum and batters on regardless. Paul Gray of the Hot Rods is up there on bass. So is drummer Mike Kellie. And sax player John Earle – Thunders never seems to know his name, constantly referring to Earle as "the sax player".

To comment that there is still a lot of hard graft to be done before a presentable set is reached would be an understatement. Wednesday was the first full day of rehearsal, although a rather shattered (surprise, surprise) Thunders dived straight into practice when he arrived from New York on Monday evening. By late afternoon Wednesday, the band had four songs off, "Great Big Kiss", "Untouchable", "Daddy Rollin' Stone" and something else that I didn't recognise, and the repertoire expanded gradually as other members of the band arrived.

The thought that the Lyceum gig would either be a disaster or a momentous event prevails. At six o'clock on Wednesday afternoon it's looking a bit on the dim side. This stuttering organisation is, of course, a true reflection of the big dipper style that has been Johnny Thunders' life. To the uninformed outsider it might come as a shock to find that anybody so blatantly adrift from reality can continue to exist (and frequently flourish), but to those who know him, Thunders' unpredictability – so well portrayed in the events leading up to the Lyceum gig – is the norm.

THUNDERS IS A haggard-looking 24 now, with the detached informal, and sometimes disconcerting air of a man who has been dragged, head-first, through every gutter that Earth has to offer. And has survived.





GUS STEWART / GETTY

February 1978: Thunders plays a handful of gigs at London's Speakeasy club with a lineup that includes Sex Pistols Steve Jones and Paul Cook

He was born in the Queens area of New York, a tough vicinity – "not as tough as Brooklyn" – and, apart from displaying a natural flair for baseball, the rest of his high-school life was relatively undistinguished. When the team coach advised young Thunders to have his hair cut, to suit the team image, he didn't take kindly to the advice and the memory still bites – "Maan, I was good enough to make the team and everything. I got fucked up, so I quit," Without baseball, school meant nothing, so Thunders cut short his academic career, too. Said goodbye to all that and formed a rock band with some friends. They called themselves the New York Dolls.

The Dolls' philosophy was in the age-old tradition of rock'n'roll: play, get wrecked, get laid. In the words of one biographer, they were "flash, young, obnoxious and brash". Thunders shared the limelight with singer David Johansen, regarded in those days as a surrogate Mick Jagger. In New York, they evoked the same sort of response the Sex Pistols managed to stir two years ago when they first arrived: apathy.

The difference was that the Dolls were out on their own, and without the aid of a general movement, they were pummelled into submission. They recorded two albums, *New York Dolls* (1973), produced by Todd Rundgren, and the prophetically titled *Too Much… Too Soon*, produced by Shadow Morton and released the following year. Neither attracted any commercial attention, so the Dolls split up disillusioned.

Hearing about the rise of the British new wave, Thunders, accompanied by Walter Lure (guitar, vocals), Billy Rath (bass) and Jerry Nolan (drums), headed for London in the desperate hope of finding an audience and a record deal – "The Dolls had such a bad reputation that it was pretty hard to get a record deal in the States."

Thunders soon perceived how major an influence the New York Dolls were on the new wave, and immediately identified with what was happening here. The Heartbreakers (as he called his band) signed to Track Records and there began another unfortunate period in Thunders' career. They got off on the right foot when they obtained a slot on the Pistols' notorious Anarchy In The UK Tour, but the optimism soon began to sour. This, says Thunders, was due to a series of factors, not least that the Heartbreakers were constantly served with deportation orders.

"Our passports were stamped so that we could only stay so long; and we overstayed. I mean, nuthin' was done properly, so of course they're gonna deport ya. Every time we'd leave the country and come back to London, they'd lock us up in a cell for five hours."

In between clashes with the authorities (the connection with the Pistols had nothing to do with it, Thunders maintains), the Heartbreakers' misery was further compounded with the release of their debut album, *L.A.M.F.*, which, although boasting a fine selection of songs, suffered in the production. But it transpires that producer Speedy Keen wasn't to blame for that.

"It was a shitty album. That's the worst thing that happened to us. What happened was that we mixed it, right, and everybody liked the mix. Then Jerry Nolan went back to London ahead of us while we were still in New York. We had heard a test pressing and liked it and then he started remixing the album. I was in New York at the time and I didn't even hear what went down until the album was out. Y'know, he started screwin' up all the mixes and so it sounded the way it did.

"Jerry, y'see, didn't want the album to come out then 'cos he knew it was fucked up. Walter and Billy wanted the album out 'cos, y'know, it was due three months before and they… ah… forced it out. Then Jerry quit the band. I didn't even know what was happenin'."

It must have been a disappointment to wait so long for a record deal to see it messed up in such a silly way at the final stages.

"You're tellin' me."

The Heartbreakers eventually returned to New York and Johnny broke the news that he was leaving the band to go solo. He did a one-off single for Dave Hill's Real Records, called "Dead Or Alive", and was subsequently invited to get a solo album together.

It was around this time that Thunders met Our Very Own BP Fallon, and we were all slightly bemused and amused by the news that Beep was taking care of JT's business affairs. Fallon was good and the relationship healthy, but "he didn't have money and ya can't survive without money".

Fallon helped put together the musicians for the album, eventually titled *So Alone*. He brought in Phil Lynott and Steve



Marriott, while Thunders enlisted the help of some Hot Rods, the Pistols' Cook and Jones, and The Only Ones' Peter Perrett.

Thunders recorded songs that had been hanging about for some time, a couple of cover versions, but mostly tracks of his own. He picked a few old Dolls numbers, "Subway Train" and "Leave Me Alone" (a very early Dolls song, recorded by that band under the title "Chatterbox").

Although he professes himself happy with *So Alone*, Thunders, it appears, often felt like a fish out of water working without a band.

"It was a change… not one for the better either," he murmurs under his breath. "I miss hangin' out with New York boys but, y'know, I'm startin' a new band now." And so, here we are.

"The Sex Pistols copied everything from the New York Dolls"

ALL THAT EVERYBODY told me (warned me) about Johnny Thunders is true. After being bombarded with all sorts of tales about New York junkies and how Thunders was out of his brain all the time, any ideas I had of perhaps catching him on a good day had thoroughly diminished. I just hoped he'd be able to stay awake.

A break in rehearsals affords the opportunity for an introduction. "Uhh, hi," Johnny brightly welcomes me. He actually does look wasted. His eyes need a vacation. When we're established on a sofa in a backstage dressing room, the prospect occurs to me that he might fall asleep, which he's been known to do during interviews.

As he settles into the chair, I notice that he's having a fight keeping his eyelids open. They flicker dangerously, aware that they're fighting a losing battle. If I'd had a box of matches, I'd have been tempted to prop his eyelids up. The image is further emphasised by his slow, monosyllabic drone.

Why, I asked him, aren't Cook and Jones playing at your gig? "Ah… Malcolm wouldn't let 'em do it… said I might be a *baaad* influence on them. Nuthin' was said, but Malcolm didn't want 'em to do it. I guess that's why. I'm sure that's the reason, y'know. Yeah, that's it… an' I don't think they personally wanted to do it, or they woulda did it, I guess."

Did it hurt you in any way? "Nah… I couldn't care less. It don't make any difference to me."

How do you get on with Paul and Steve? "Ah… Paul I get on with all right. Steve… he's a bit of an egomaniac, I think, just his general behaviour. Nuthin' specific. He probably thinks he's a guitar hero; a pity he learned all his riffs from me, which is quite evident on the Pistols album."

Maybe they didn't like "London Boys" (a track on *So Alone* that puts down Johnny Rotten specifically but could apply to all of the Pistols)? "Nah, they play on that on the album. It has nuthin' to do with them. It's not about them."

Why did you write that song? "Wellll, Johnny Rotten wrote a song called 'New York' that put down the Dolls and mah man David. [The lyrics went: "*You're just a pile of shit/According to this/You poor little faggots.*"] That's the only reason."

You said at the end of "London Boys" about the Pistols being puppets? "Dey are. They're Malcolm McLaren puppets. He pulls the strings and they do what he sez. I still think McLaren's a genius. I think he's great. You can't take credit from him. He deserves all the credit that I can give him. I think he's a great manager, but, y'know, them guys… he pulls the strings and they do it."

You think McLaren's a genius because he's a master puppeteer? "Nah. I think he's a good manager, damn good manager. The song was written specifically 'cos they had a go at the Dolls. That's the only reason. I wasn't really upset by it. It was just a tacky thing to do, especially as the Pistols were, y'know, the Dolls of '77. They copied everything from the Dolls. McLaren worked with us and picked up a lotta ideas from us and poured them out in the Pistols."

The difference, of course, is that the Pistols sold records and the Dolls didn't. "Exactly. That doesn't get me mad. I'm flattered."

When you came to London with The Heartbreakers, you obviously saw what was happening here as a salvation for you. Then it got messed up. Why couldn't you take more personal control over what was happening to your career? "'Cos we were told one thing and led to believe that things got done and they weren't done, like how money was spent and it wasn't spent that way. We were just ripped off. It all fell apart because we were bein' lied to."

You obviously felt an association with what was happening here? "London Boys" seems to imply that you grew more disillusioned with it as time went by, because you saw that it wasn't the spontaneous street rising that it originally appeared to be.

"Oh, I knew what it was the first time I ever saw it. I knew how honest it was, what the legitimacy was. They were all tryin' to be rock'n'rollers. I saw what was wrong with it, too. There were only a few bands that I liked, like the Pistols. I liked their words. I liked their music. I thought they were a great rock'n'roll band. They were the only band that said anything for the new wave. The rest of the bands were all… like… JIVE."

Jive? What do you mean? (*Thunders is silent for a minute*) "…Ah, they were a bunch of TURKEYS. They had nuthin' to say."

How was the New York scene when you went back there? "It hadn't changed too much. There's more bands… more terrible bands. The bands there are really worse now… and there's more of them."

Don't you think that bands should be encouraged and not put down? "Dunno. I didn't see any bands that I liked at all, 'cept for the Senders. I dunno 'bout everybody else. They're rilly behind the times musically and what they sing about. I mean, I don't care what they sing about, but I just couldn't relate to what they were doin'. It's just so behind the times."

The feeling we get from New York is that there seems to be a very active thing happening there. "Maybe someone else would think so."

YOUR SONGS ARE obviously very related to what went on when you were in New York, the things about drugs. I've seen you say in interviews that you don't condone dope and yet in your songs, you lay it straight on the line, especially on songs like "Pills", "Chinese Rocks" and "One Track Mind". Are you aware of how straight you're putting it?

"Wellll… it's just a part of our lives. That's why we wrote those, realise what I'm sayin'? I mean, I don't regret anything I've ever done. I don't regret anything about lifestyle or what I do."

Does it still play as much a part in what you do? "No, not as much. Nothing's forever."

Having seen that the Dolls were such an influence on the new wave, does what might have been ever figure in your discussions with other members? "Yeah, if we hadda kept it together, we coulda made a lotta money. I always think about money… a lotta money. I don't wanna become famous after I die, y'know. I wanna be around to spend it. It figures in everything I do, everything anybody does."

But having seen the Dolls, and then The Heartbreakers, split up without achieving much recognition and earning much money, doesn't it occur to you that you might just have to become famous after you die? "Nah. It opens my eyes more about different things. What to look out for and what to avoid. It's all chalking up experience, not making the same mistakes again."

What were the major mistakes? "Bad management. Bad record company. Good band."

At one time it was presumed that Steve Jones and Paul Cook were going to join up with you in a band. What happened to that idea? "I'm still lookin' for the right musicians. I'm a little too wild for guys like Paul and Steve, if you know what I mean. We're in different leagues.

"I dunno how to explain it. Steve's just like a little kid. They take it all too serious. They got no sense of humour, which is a real drag. Everything is just cut and dried with them. There's no room to fool around. It was no fun to work with them… and that's puttin' it mildly.

"I mean… they're great musicians. I'm not losin' sleep over them not playin' the gig. Honestly. It woulda been better if they had played, but I'm not gonna lose sleep over it."

The interview is over. Johnny sets out in search of his stars. Peter Perrett has arrived. As I leave, Patti Palladin enters grandly. In the background, the band is starting again.

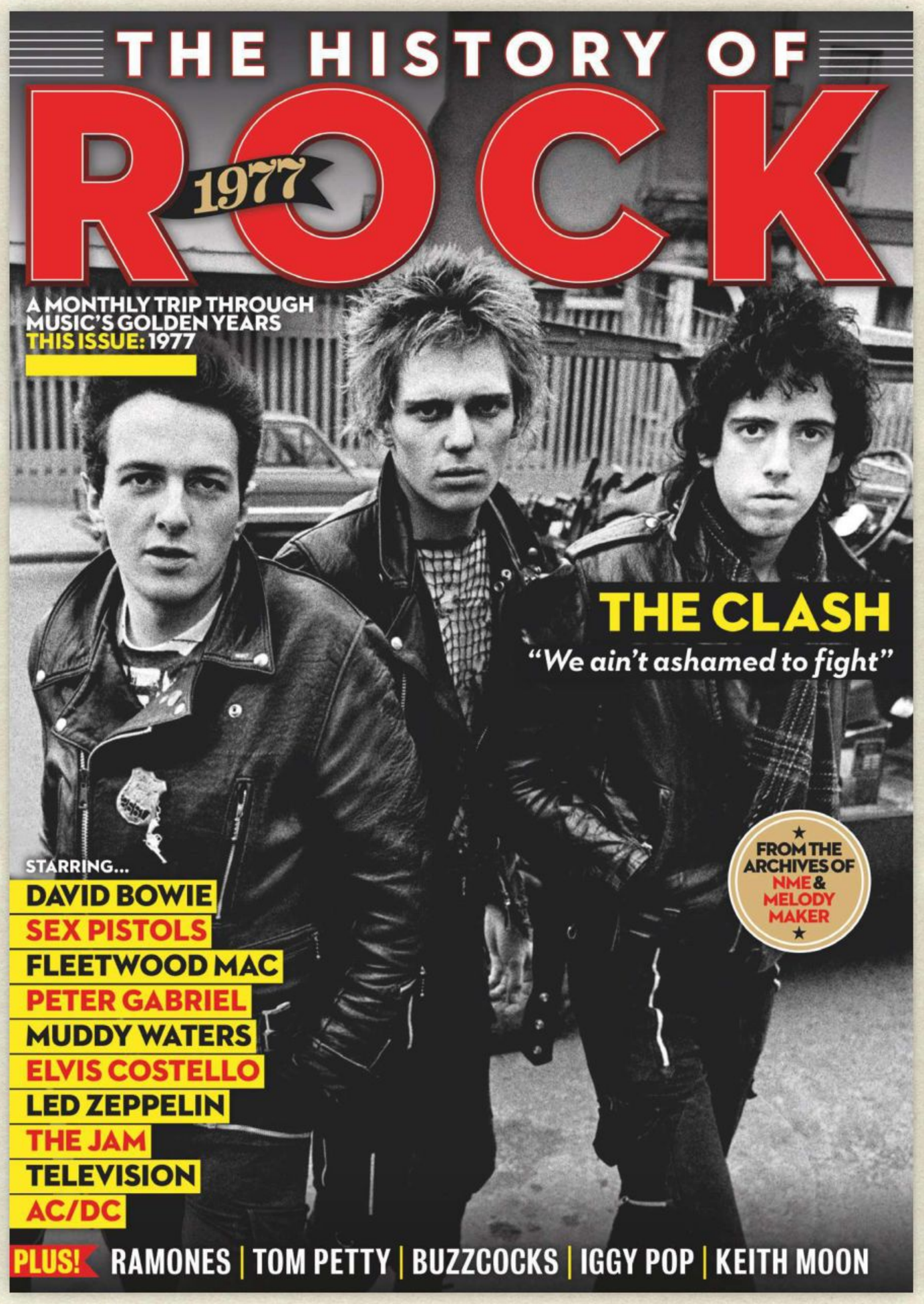
"*When Ah say Ah'm in luv…*" *Harry Doherty* •

THE HISTORY OF ROCK

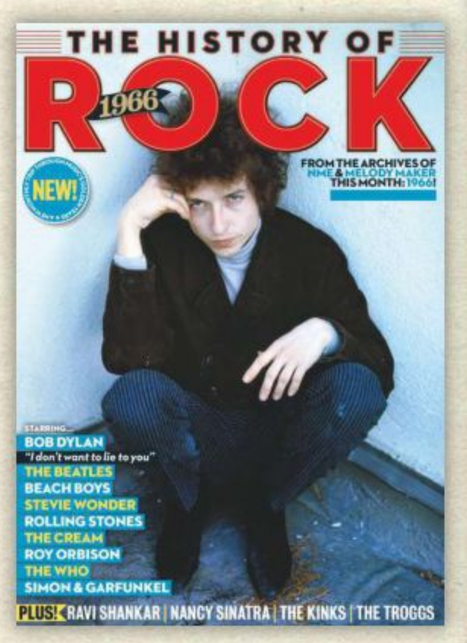
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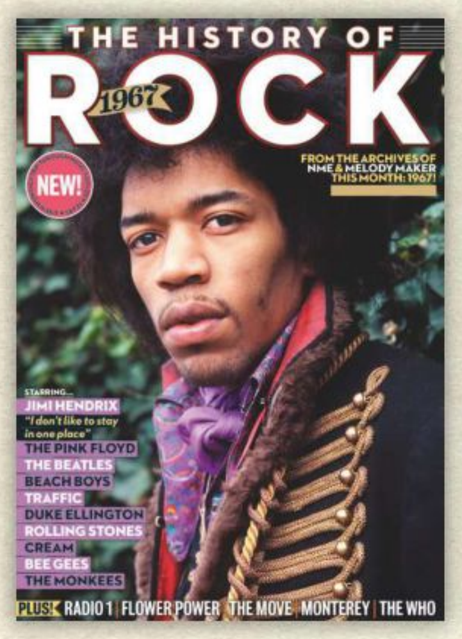


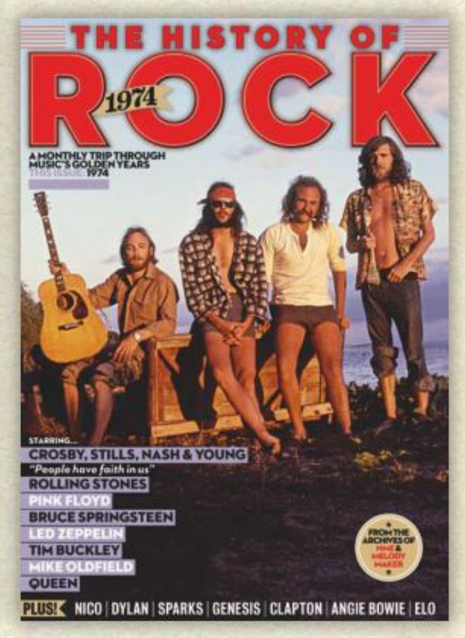






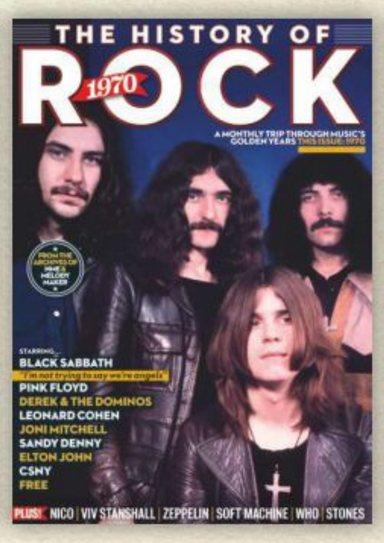




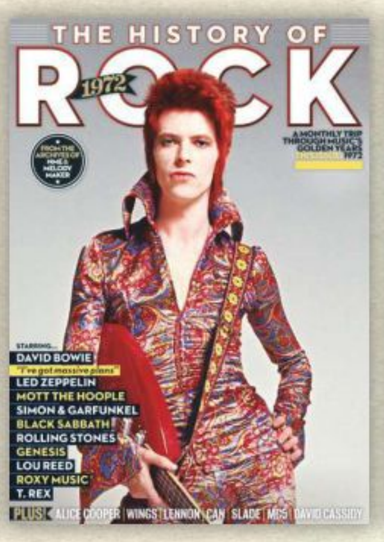


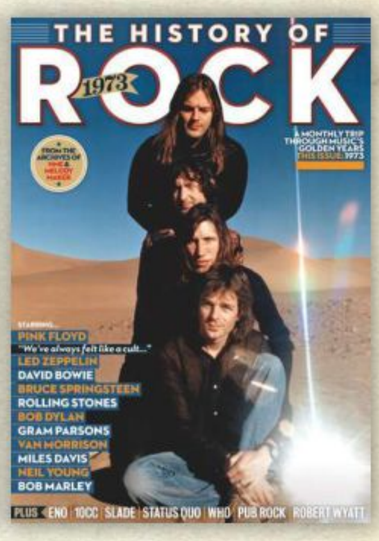












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Readers' letters

MM JUL–DEC Hospitable RAR types, sadistic *Maker* scribes and killer bouncers...



LP WINNER!

Stones prove Tom Robinson wrong

What a great article Chris Welch did on the Stones' gig in New York! Chris Welch is the first person who hasn't blindly slagged the Stones off as "has-beens". The Stones can still relate to the kids of today, because most of the people who buy the Stones' albums and go to their gigs are only teenagers; they, I'm sure, remember nothing of the '60s and early '70s and they are taking the band as it is now.

They're getting into the new stuff, just like people raved about "The Last Time", "Satisfaction", "Get Off Of My Cloud". This proves Tom Robinson totally wrong when he says the Stones aren't valid any longer. People say the Stones are too old, they call them the grandfathers of rock, but for God's sake, Muddy Waters is still making great music and he's well into his sixties.

There's no reason why the Stones can't keep on going for years. They're like a good bottle of wine: they just keep on getting better.

A TURNER, Millersdale Avenue, Evington, Leicester (*MM* Jul 7)

Rock against pointless journeys

Now rock music is heavily promoted and dehumanised, it is really refreshing to see the lesser-known and less business-orientated bands have the integrity and honesty that the hyped bands have not.

Last week I travelled 200 miles to see Henry Cow in a Rock Against Racism concert in Wandsworth. Through no fault of their own they had to pull out. Notices apologising for their absence were immediately put on the concert hall doors and drummer Chris Cutler was there in person to apologise. They did not just shy away from the issue – they cared.

Later I was talking to the replacement band, Red Rinse, about my plight. They were immediately hospitable, offering food and drink, and they even got me somewhere to stay for the night.

The actions of both bands show two points of note. They actually care about their audience. And they are honest and realistic, taking a down-to-earth view of fans' plights in a way that the Led Zeppelin/Dylan types do not.

STEVEN ASHWORTH, Sparthbottoms Road, Sparth, Rochdale (*MM* Jul 15)

Public Image Ltd are the future

Doesn't anybody understand Public Image except me? Simon Frith based his review of the album around the "music in a vacuum" premise. He's wrong, completely wrong. The people making music (and money) in a vacuum are Newton-John, Funkadelic, Bee Gees, Boney M and all the rest of the last-gasp, desperate rubbish.

The PIL are not screaming; they're offering a future. It seems you either take it or implode. There's no other way out and J Rotten doesn't have to say a word; he lets people like me, and not Simon Frith, do it for him.

P HARROD, Clifton Hill, Exeter (*MM* Dec 23)

Send him back

It seems impossible that Eric Clapton, a man who owes his inspiration and career to black musicians, cannot see the racial bias in Enoch Powell's ideas of "repatriation", and his ignorance of the implications of such a policy reflects a surprising lack of sensitivity and tolerance towards other people.

J NICHOL, Glenthorn Road, Jesmond, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. (*MM* Dec 23)

LP WINNER!

Cover aversion

Certain releases over the past few months have given cause for some concern, and I refer to the following: "Walk On By" – Stranglers; "Paranoid" and "Eve Of Destruction" – Dickies; "David Watts" – Jam; "My Way" – Sex Pistols; "Glad All Over" and "I Like It" – Rezillos.

Surely one of the prime reasons for the emergence of the new wave was to create a fresh and distinctive sound, using new songs and new artists. Now, more and more new-wave acts are relying on the establishment they had openly criticised, and in doing so are losing any credibility. Let's hope they discontinue this policy before it's too late.

MV EDWARDS, Markham Crescent, Dunstable, Beds (*MM* Sep 2)

Appeal for witnesses

In the early hours of October 23, 1977, a young man, Henry Bowles, was killed by bouncers outside the Bell public house in Pentonville Road. In the recent past, various similar occurrences have been reported. As many readers know, various points are common to this and other cases.

1. Bouncers are employed to protect the punters by removing undesirable elements – yet these attacks happen outside the premises when the person has already been ejected.

2. The victims are generally assumed to have "invited" the assault in some way. This is often not proved, yet the implication remains, and in the case of someone being killed, that person has no legal representation.

It is high time that some responsibility was accepted by landlords and breweries about whom they employ and how they look after the public.

Henry went to the Bell to help rig up the sound systems for The Wasps and ended up dead. Can any reader with knowledge or experience of similar attacks please write to me giving details in the hope that we can stop these beatings?

IRENE BABSHY, Haverhill Road, Balham, London (*MM* Dec 16)

No Bob? You can whistle for it

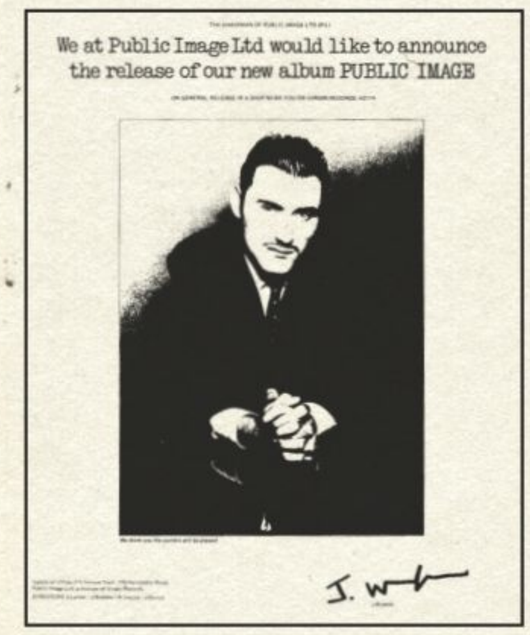
I would just like to let *MM* and Bob Harris know that there are some of us left who agree with the Bomber. I was an avid *Old Grey Whistle Test* viewer until the demise of Bob and the emergence of a punk rock-orientated show hosted by a dull Anne Nightingale.

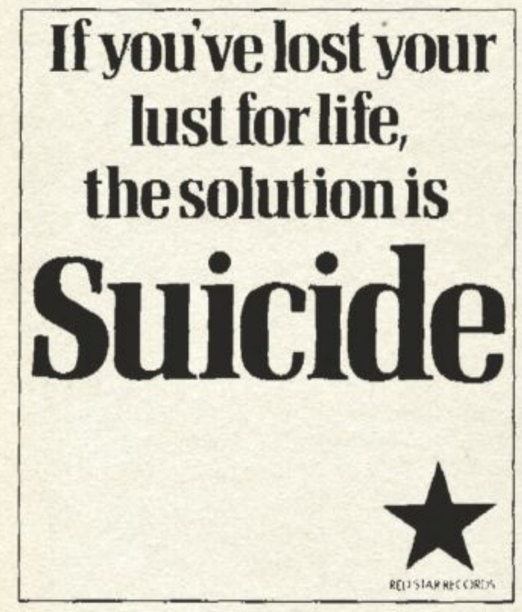
Can't the public see that punk bands are operating on the same musical level as The Bay City Rollers and The Osmonds did? I would like to offer my support to Mr Harris for sticking to his principles in the fact of sadistic *MM* journalists.

HAMISH DOUGLAS KEMP, University Of Stirling (*MM* Dec 16)

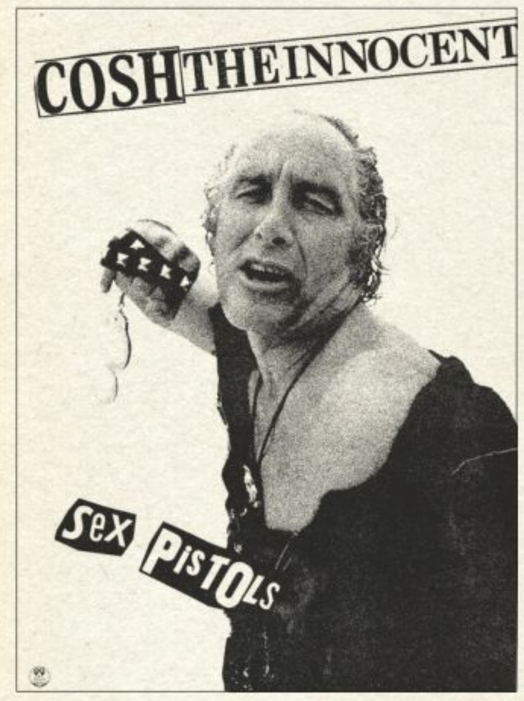












MICHAEL PUTLAND / GETTY

1978

MONTH BY MONTH



Coming next... in 1979!

SO THAT WAS 1978. Was it all just a publicity stunt?

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, 1979!

JOY DIVISION

FROM THE NORTH-WEST, the young band are interviewed at work on new recordings with producer Martin Hannett. Tony Wilson from Factory Records remembers their first meeting. "You bastard. You put Buzzcocks on the telly – what about us?"

THE JAM

"I WANT TO write songs for today," asserts the very modern Paul Weller. After the successes of *All Mod Cons*, the band continue to evolve their sound, but need to be careful. "We could end up sounding like Genesis," he says wryly.

TOM WAITS

TALL TALES, PUSH-UPS in the hotel room, and after-hours excursions in Copenhagen straight out of "Tom Traubert's Blues". "I'd like to make some kind of breakthrough," says the singer, now six albums into a career serenading the underbelly.

PLUS...

ROLLING STONES!

THE CLASH!

THE SPECIALS!

FROM THE MAKERS OF **UNCUT**

THE HISTORY OF ROCK 1978

Every month, we revisit long-lost *NME* and *Melody Maker* interviews and piece together *The History Of Rock*. This month: 1978.
"Bad dreams in the night/They told me I was going to lose the fight…"



Relive the year...

KATE BUSH TOOK "WUTHERING HEIGHTS" TO THE TOP OF THE CHARTS

THE SEX PISTOLS TOOK ON AMERICA, AND LOST

BLONDIE RELEASED *PARALLEL LINES*

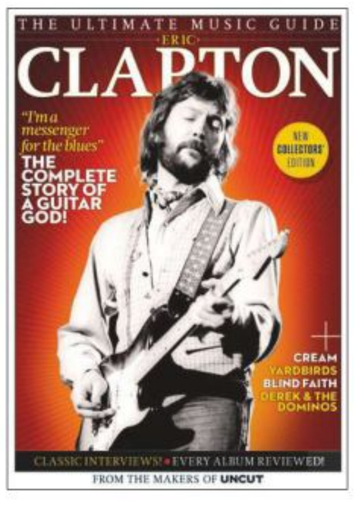
…and **MICK JAGGER, BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN, TELEVISION, PAUL WELLER, THE CLASH** and many more shared everything with *NME* and *MELODY MAKER*

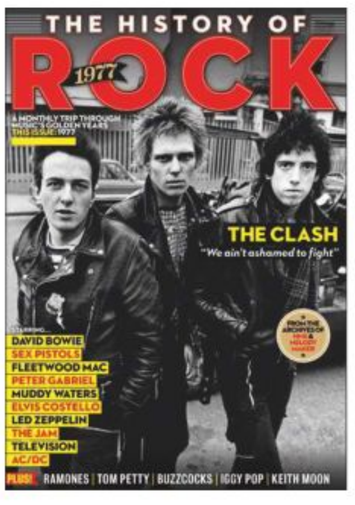
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