THE HISTORY OF ROCK

1979

A MONTHLY TRIP THROUGH MUSIC'S GOLDEN YEARS

THIS ISSUE: 1979

KEITH RICHARDS

"I don't regret nothin'"

STARRING...

BLONDIE
JOY DIVISION
THE CLASH
TOM WAITS
KATE BUSH
DAVID BOWIE
THE SPECIALS
PRETENDERS
TALKING HEADS

FROM THE ARCHIVES OF NME & MELODY MAKER

PLUS! B52s | GARY NUMAN | WHO | THE JAM | HUMAN LEAGUE | LED ZEP

1979

MONTH BY MONTH



Welcome to 1979

THERE ARE THOSE who think that the death of Sid Vicious in New York of a heroin overdose at the start of the year also signals the death of punk. Perhaps it was a passing fad, as rock'n'roll itself was once thought to be.

In many ways, however, punk continues to proliferate. There are tawdry elements to this – the faintly sleazy exploitation industry around Sid and the Pistols; the McLaren/Lydon litigation, to name two – but there is also evidence of more positive activity.

New, self-determined music is being made by bands like Joy Division and The Human League – both emboldened by new liberties and new technologies. Elsewhere, the likes of Blondie, The Undertones, the Pretenders and The Jam turn their revolution into pop. A tour by two bands, The Specials and Madness, meanwhile, effortlessly brings a charmed cultural harmony to the mix.

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 15th edition, dedicated to 1979, you will find verbatim articles from frontline staffers, filed from the thick of the action, wherever it may be. Watching Lou Reed slapping David Bowie around the head in a restaurant. Looking on astonished as Jerry Dammers attempts to placate a furious feminist by inviting her to a party. Witnessing the domestic upheavals of Keith Richards and Anita Pallenberg.

"Sid thinks he done it just because he woke up with the knife in his hand…" says Keith of punk's lead story.

"…Silly boy."

It's the kind of hard-won wisdom that might keep a man alive for a while yet.

1979 MONTH BY MONTH

Contents

6 News
Sid Vicious RIP. Rod Stewart is sued, several times. The Bee Gees plan their return. Introducing a new band from Crawley, The Cure.

12 The Jam
The Jam record a new album, and debate the relevance of their evolving music, and of punk. "Once you're over 20," says Paul Weller. "You've had it, mate."

18 Keith Richards
"Shut up, darling". An amusing audience with a hardly penitent Keith Richards – and various interruptions from Anita Pallenberg. Sid Vicious? "A silly boy."

24 The Pop Group
An ideological discussion (and gig) with the Bristol avant-gardists.

28 Live
Saluting the magic of the Pretenders. Also appearing live: The Cure and Generation X.

30 Rough Trade
Inside the dominant retail outlet of punk. But there's more afoot within Geoff Travis' burgeoning empire of "dynamic confusion".

34 Rotten vs McLaren
Malcolm McLaren emerges from hiding in France to discuss his considerable legal woes.

38 The Human League
A meeting with the Sheffield band, working on a set of electronic torch songs.

42 Roxy Music
A stealth mission to Sweden to observe the returning Roxy. "Don't tell Bryan you're here…"

46 The Mekons
One of the more art-minded and oddball scions of punk state their position. "It's social music," they explain.

50 The Undertones
The Derry band announce their arrival with songs about their teenage lives – and *not* about the troubles in Northern Ireland.

56 Blondie
At home with Debbie Harry and Chris Stein. Chris does the business, Debbie sees to the roast dinner.

64 News
The Canadian government is still not finished with Keith Richards. Introducing The Specials. The Clash play a benefit show. Ex-Bonzo Viv Stanshall to make a film.

68 Lou Reed
A ringside seat for one of the oddest bust-ups in rock history. Lou Reed attacks David Bowie in a London restaurant. Allan Jones is there to report.

72 Tom Waits
A spirited trip to Scandinavia with the deadbeat poet. Riffs on beat culture as Waits bids for a breakthrough.

76 Tubeway Army
The disarming Gary Numan reveals his inspirations and his magpie talent for making futuristic hits . His mum cuts his hair, you know.

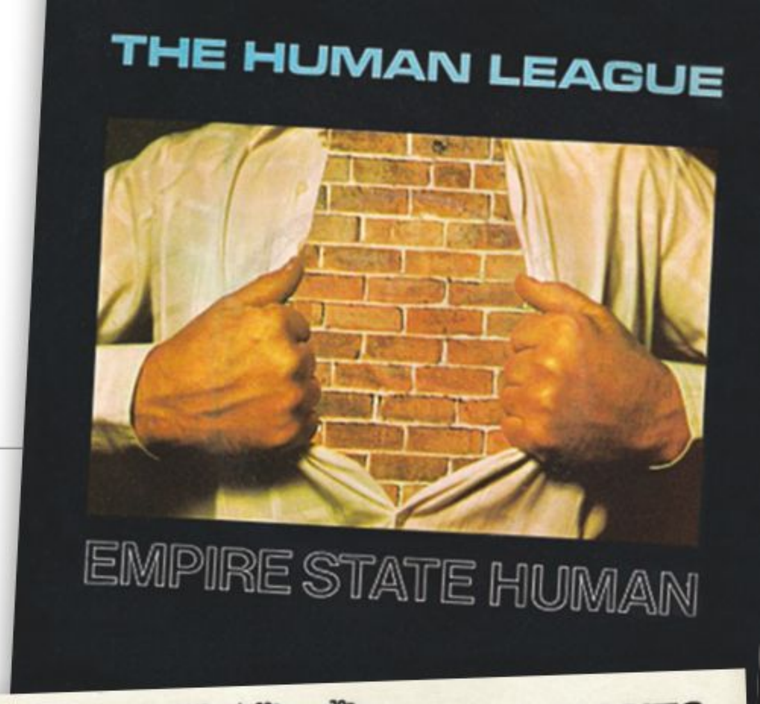
80 Albums
David Bowie's *Lodger* given the once-over, track by track.

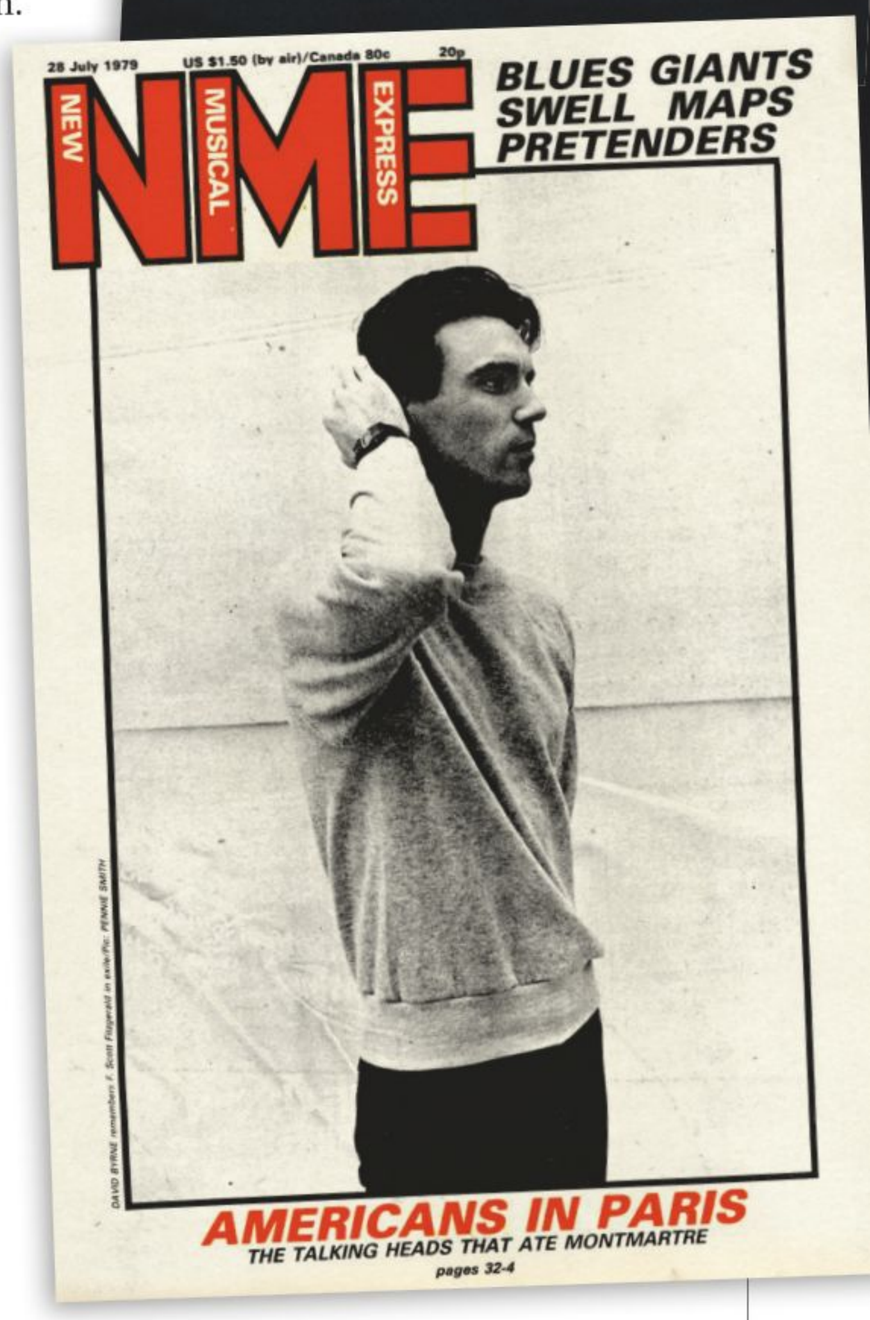
82 B-52's
The Georgian band write "nonsense songs", they claim – but are winning over crowds from New York to London.

86 Live
The Jam continue their mission in the United States. A hard battle against long odds yields some rewards.

89 Letters
The demise of Sid Vicious, farewell Sandy Denny and other valedictions from the mailbag.

90 News
Heavy rock, heavy manners… Knebworth proves contentious. RIP Lowell George. Dylan wants Capital Radio to do a favour. What ails Chaz Jankel?







PETER STILL / GETTY





94 The Damned
"You want anarchy?" Fighting talk in the USA from the reconstituted original punk band.

98 Pretenders
On an occasionally revelatory tour with the country's hottest new band.

104 Albums
The new Led Zeppelin album gets a rough ride.

106 Talking Heads
Visions of how we will live in the future from chief Head David Byrne. In Paris, via New York and Africa, under the auspices of Brian Eno…

114 Joy Division
A meeting with the earnest Manchester band as they record new work. "Each time we go one step forward," says guitarist Bernard Albrecht.

120 Live
Ian Dury and Keith and Ronnie's New Barbarians perform.

122 News
U2 come to London. Richard Branson defends posthumous Pistols releases. The Who to continue their US tour, despite a tragedy.

126 Kate Bush
An enjoyable meeting with a star who has retained her down-to-earth candour.

130 Live
Post *Quadrophenia* (the film), The Who play Brighton – their spiritual home.

132 2-Tone
A riotous countrywide trip with The Specials, Madness and the occasional skinhead.

138 Albums
PiL deliver *Metal Box*. Gang Of Four's *Entertainment!* under close examination.

140 The Clash
The band enjoy the triumph of *London Calling*.

145 Letters
Final thoughts from this year's mailbag…

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 1979 is *She Is Beyond Good And Evil by The Pop Group* **DEPUTY EDITOR** John Robinson *In A Rut by The Ruts* **ART EDITOR** Lora Findlay *Outdoor Miner by Wire* **PRODUCTION EDITOR** Mike Johnson *The Message by Punishment Of Luxury* **ART DIRECTOR** Marc Jones *Transmission by Joy Division* **DESIGNER** Becky Redman *My Sharona by The Knack* **PICTURE EDITOR** George Jacobs *Since You've Been Gone by Rainbow* **COVER PHOTO** Janette Beckman / Getty (UK); Michael Putland / Getty (USA) **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**

Time Inc.

Subscription rates: One year (12 issues) including p&p: UK £119.88; Europe €179.40; USA and Canada $203.88; Rest of World £155.75. For enquiries and orders please email help@magazinesdirect.com. Alternatively, from the UK call 0330 333 1113, or overseas +44 330 333 1113 (lines are open Monday–Friday GMT, 8.30am–5.30pm ex. Bank Holidays). Back issues enquiries: Tel: 01733 688 964. www.mags-uk.com

recycle
When you have finished with this magazine please recycle it.

MAUREEN DONALDSON / GETTY



1979

JANUARY – MARCH

KEITH RICHARDS, THE JAM, HUMAN LEAGUE, UNDERTONES AND MORE

Sid Vicious plays up for the cameras in 1977, before heroin addiction tilted the high jinks towards tragedy

A Jekyll and Hyde personality

NME FEB 10 RIP, Sid Vicious
(May 10, 1957 – February 2, 1979)

JOHN SIMON RITCHIE, better known as Sid Vicious, died in New York last week after taking an overdose of heroin at a party held to celebrate his release from jail on $50,000 bail pending his trial on a charge of murdering his girlfriend, Nancy Spungen, some four months ago.

The party was held at the flat of Sid's current girlfriend Michelle Robinson, and among those present was his mother, Mrs Anne Beverley, who had been campaigning for his release since the Spungen death.

Following his arrest for murder, Sid was initially released – on $50,000 bail and conditions which included treatment for his heroin addiction – but he was arrested again after an assault on Patti Smith's brother Todd in a New York disco. This time he served 55 days.

While in prison Sid was put on a detoxification course to "clean out" his addicted system. Without the "tolerance" built up by regular usage of heroin, even Sid's normal dose was potentially fatal.

The precise circumstances of the lethal dose are not known. What is evident is that around midnight Sid was given heroin at the party and that shortly afterwards he collapsed and went into a seizure, his skin and lips taking on the blue/grey tinge associated with heroin overdose.

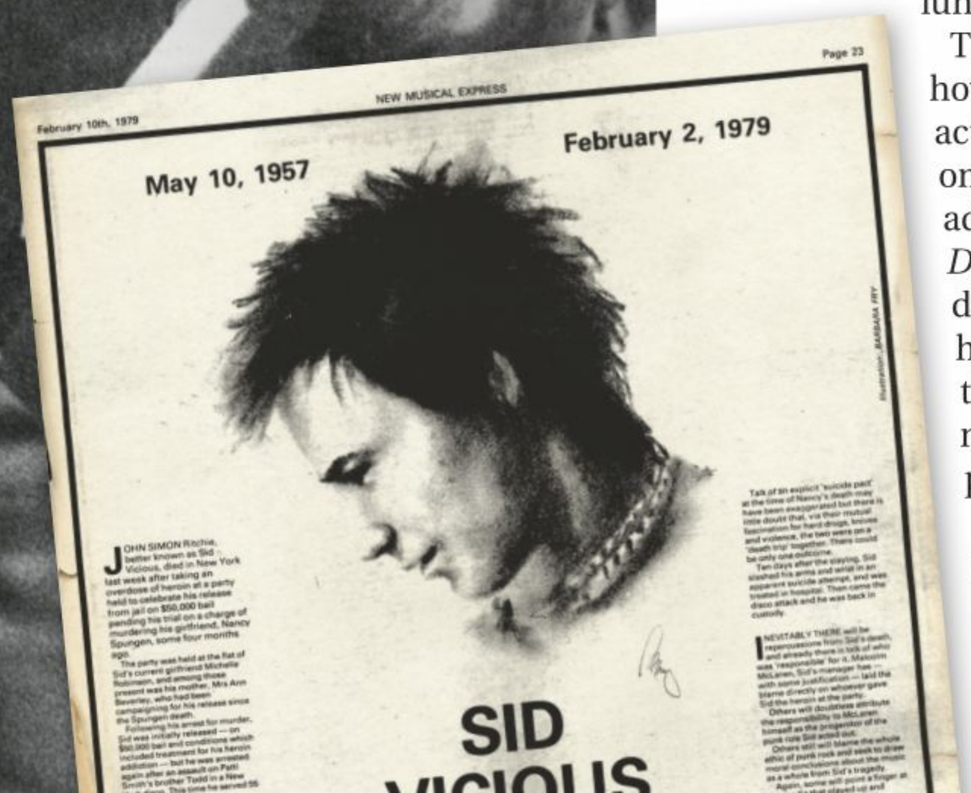
He was covered with blankets and his pulse checked until some 40 minutes later he revived. Guests spoke of seeing him walking around at this point. Around 3am the party finished and Sid and Michelle retired to bed. Mrs Beverley stayed the night on the couch in the front room.

The following morning she went into the bedroom to wake the couple and discovered her son dead, naked and lying outside the covers while his girlfriend slept on the bed beside him, unaware of his death. The police were called. Patrolman Robert Zink, the first to arrive, discovered "a syringe, a spoon and what is probably residue near the body".

Later, Dr Michael Baden, who performed the autopsy, said that Sid "died much like a drowning person. There was an accumulation of fluid in the lungs characteristic of heroin."

There remains some dispute, however, on the origin of the dose that actually killed him. Mrs Beverley, once a registered addict herself, admitted in an interview with the *Daily Express* that on the night of Sid's death she had been holding his heroin supply, but claimed that after the seizure Sid "didn't have any more that night because I had the packet in my pocket".

She did agree, however, that the heroin he had taken had been unusually pure: "He knew the »


NEW MUSICAL EXPRESS

February 10th, 1979

Page 23

May 10, 1957

February 2, 1979

SID VICIOUS

JOHN SIMON Ritchie, better known as Sid Vicious, died in New York last week after taking an overdose of heroin at a party held to celebrate his release from jail on $50,000 bail pending his trial on a charge of murdering his girlfriend, Nancy Spungen, some four months ago.

The party was held at the flat of Sid's current girlfriend Michelle Robinson, and among those present was his mother, Mrs Ann Beverley, who had been campaigning for his release since the Spungen death.

Following his arrest for murder, Sid was initially released — on $50,000 bail and conditions which included treatment for his heroin addiction — but he was arrested again after an assault on Patti Smith's brother Todd in a New York disco. This time he served 55

Talk of an explicit "suicide pact" at the time of Nancy's death may have been exaggerated but there is little doubt that, via their mutual fascination for hard drugs, bruise and violence, the two were on a "death trip" together. There could be only one outcome.

Ten days after the slaying, Sid slashed his arms and wrist in an apparent suicide attempt, and was treated in hospital. Then came the disco attack and he was back in custody.

INEVITABLY THERE will be repercussions from Sid's death, and already there is talk of who was "responsible" for it. Malcolm McLaren, Sid's manager has — with some justification — laid the blame directly on whoever gave Sid the heroin at the party.

Others will doubtless attribute the responsibility to McLaren himself as the progenitor of the punk role Sid acted out.

Others still will blame the whole ethic of punk rock and seek to draw moral conclusions about the music as a whole from Sid's tragedy.

Again, some will point a finger at

LING / ANL / REX / SHUTTERSTOCK

smack was pure and strong and took a lot less than usual."

The view held by some people is that Sid had another source of heroin and may have taken an additional dose after his mother and Michelle Robinson were asleep. If this was indeed the case, then the overdose may have been tantamount to suicide.

The product of a broken home, London's East End and Clissold Park School, Sid started his rock'n'roll career with the Sex Pistols. As a former crony of Johnny Rotten – the two were at a further education college together – he was one of the small faithful coterie of friends/fans who followed the Pistols' early gigs from late '75 onwards.

It was during this time that he acquired the name Sid Vicious, apparently inherited from Rotten's pet hamster. Later he was to declare that he hated the name, but at the same time did little to shake it off. He was fond of carrying a bike chain as a weapon and was sometimes in evidence at the occasional eruptions of violence at early punk gigs.

Sid was not a "hard man" – not constantly or determinedly aggressive – but there was a violent streak in him. Sometimes this was turned against other people and at times against himself in fits of self-mutilation. Friends and associates spoke of a Jekyll/Hyde disposition. "He seemed to have a lot of demons in his head," said one. "He was tormented."

Whatever, the name stuck.

Sid's first public performance was at the Punk Festival at London's 100 Club in September '76, when he played drums for the hurriedly arranged debut gig of Siouxsie And The Banshees. Later he took up bass and hoped to play with the Banshees, but this came to nothing.

Following Glen Matlock's departure in spring '77 he joined the Pistols as bassman in time to sign with A&M Records and face the sound and fury that accompanied the eventual release of "God Save The Queen" in the Jubilee summer.

His playing was strictly rudimentary but he seemed to learn and practise. All the Pistols agree that for a time his playing got better.

A major change in Sid's life took place when he met Nancy Spungen, a 20-year-old New York groupie who had followed Jerry Nolan of The Heartbreakers to this country and seemed determined to "pull" one of the Pistols. She got Sid.

All agree that Spungen was a bad, if not disastrous, influence on him. His weak character was easy prey for her aggressive, vampish ways. She instigated dissent between him and the other Pistols, and more importantly, introduced him to heroin.

Nonetheless the couple had an obvious liking for each other, and when Nancy was threatened with deportation, Sid falsely testified that they were married to gain her a visa extension.

Once Sid became involved with heroin his self-destructiveness and self-mutilation gained momentum, and by the time of the Pistols' tour of America at the beginning of '78, he was taking the stage with his torso covered in self-inflicted lacerations. He also indulged in some ugly scuffles with the Pistols' American audiences, kicking and using his bass as a cudgel.

He was also taking increasingly large amounts of the drug, alienating himself from the rest of the band and contributing to their decision to split.

Ten days after Nancy's slaying, Sid slashed his wrists in an apparent suicide attempt

Following the Pistols' final gig in San Francisco he had to be rushed from New York airport to hospital for emergency treatment following an overdose.

Back in London things did not improve. He and Nancy were remanded for possession of amphetamines, but the case was never heard. Attempts to start his own band with the remainder of The Heartbreakers – either as The Flowers Of Romance or, more brutally, The Junkies – were a failure.

The couple then moved to New York, where Sid hoped he would find a new career (he felt his ex-Pistols status gave him more credibility there), but he never got further than the methadone clinic and a few abortive gigs at CBGB with old friends helping out.

Shortly after the CBGB gigs came Nancy Spungen's death, the grisly secrets of which will probably follow Sid into the grave. Whether Vicious killed her or not, once she had gone it seemed only a matter of time before Sid followed. Even before the Pistols' US tour, he had talked to *NME*'s Nick Kent about premonitions of his death.

Talk of an explicit "suicide pact" at the time of Nancy's death may have been exaggerated but there is little doubt that, via their mutual fascination for hard drugs, knives and violence, the two were on a "death trip" together. There could be only one outcome.

Ten days after the slaying, Sid slashed his arms and wrist in an apparent suicide attempt, and was treated in hospital. Then came the disco attack and he was back in custody.

Inevitably will be repercussions from Sid's death, and already there is talk of who was "responsible" for it. Malcolm McLaren, Sid's manager has – with some justification – laid the blame directly on whoever gave Sid the heroin at the party.

Others will doubtless attribute the responsibility to McLaren himself as the progenitor of the punk role Sid acted out.

Others still will blame the whole ethic of punk rock and seek to draw moral conclusions about the music as a whole from Sid's tragedy. Again, some will point a finger at the media that played up and glorified the Pistols and Sid – which must include the music press and *NME* – claiming that his death is the inevitable outcome of elevating a nobody to undeserved heights.

Some might also point to the late Nancy Spungen as the person who gave Sid his fatal fascination for heroin in the first place. Probably there is an element of truth in all of these accusations, but the simple fact remains that it was heroin that killed Sid Vicious; a drug and not a person, a drug that he took of his own free will. That is, in as much as junkies can be said to have a free will.

Certainly on the night of his death Sid Vicious was not under any compulsion from physical addiction to take more of the drug; his detoxification is the guarantee of that.

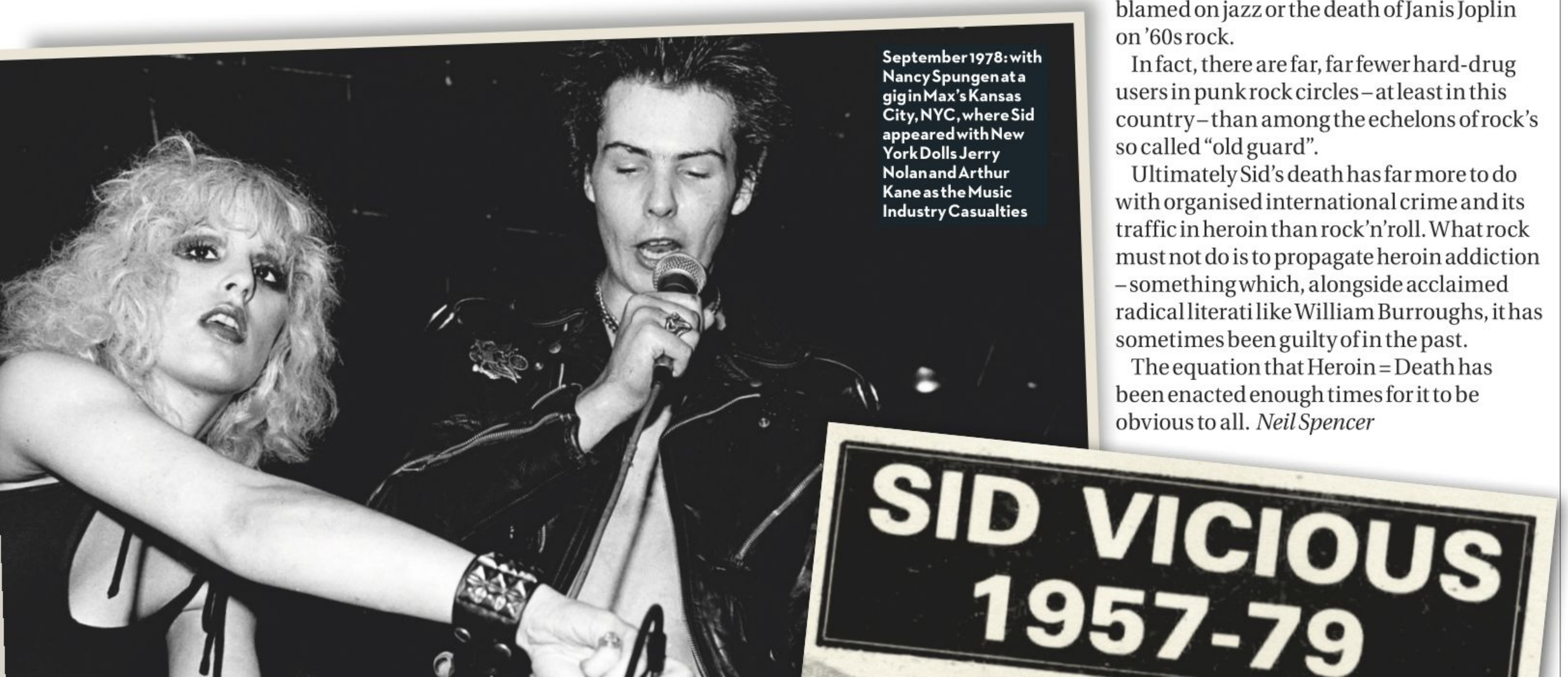
Finally, his death is mostly a warning about the futility and ultimate fatality of heroin addiction, and the responsibility for that cannot be laid at the door of punk rock, just as the death of Charlie Parker cannot be blamed on jazz or the death of Janis Joplin on '60s rock.

In fact, there are far, far fewer hard-drug users in punk rock circles – at least in this country – than among the echelons of rock's so called "old guard".

Ultimately Sid's death has far more to do with organised international crime and its traffic in heroin than rock'n'roll. What rock must not do is to propagate heroin addiction – something which, alongside acclaimed radical literati like William Burroughs, it has sometimes been guilty of in the past.

The equation that Heroin = Death has been enacted enough times for it to be obvious to all. *Neil Spencer*

AT / GETTY



September 1978: with Nancy Spungen at a gig in Max's Kansas City, NYC, where Sid appeared with New York Dolls Jerry Nolan and Arthur Kane as the Music Industry Casualties



January 23, 1979: Bee Gees Robin, Barry and Maurice Gibb pose in LA

"They would like to play"

MM JAN 20 A year on from *Saturday Night Fever*, newly minted megastars the Bee Gees plan a return to UK stages.

THE BEE GEES are working on plans for a series of UK shows later in the year that will mark the brothers' first professional return to Britain since their super-star renaissance following *Saturday Night Fever*. No definite dates have been booked, and the band's record company, RSO, is being cagey about any precise plans, but a spokesman did say, "It is hoped that the Bee Gees will tour Europe at some point this year. We know they would like to play in Europe and the UK later in the year. It would certainly be the latter half of the year, rather than before summer."

It is understood that when the Bee Gees finalise their plans they will try and avoid the huge UK venues like Wembley Arena and concentrate on the major town theatres and halls like Hammersmith Odeon and Glasgow Apollo.

They will try to avoid huge venues like Wembley Arena

In the meantime, the new Bee Gees' album, *Spirits Having Flown*, is released in Britain on February 9. The record was produced by the Bee Gees, Karl Richardson and Albhy Galuten, and is the group's first standard studio album since *Children Of The World* in 1977. In between the brothers have focused on soundtrack LPs with *Saturday Night Fever*, which has sold about 18 million copies worldwide since its release in November 1977, and *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. A single taken from the new album, "Tragedy" backed by "Until", is released on the same day.

Relaunch with lasers

MM MAR 31 Tax exiles Pink Floyd are at work on their new long-player.

PINK FLOYD ARE expected to return to active service with concerts and a new album around next September. The band are currently recording tracks in studios in Britain and on the Continent, and as Roger Waters spent most of last year writing, it is said they have enough material for a double album.

On Monday, Harvest Records, the Floyd's label, told the *MM*: "We haven't heard any of their work yet, but they have been re-recording some stuff that was done last year."

Floyd may relaunch with a brand-new stage presentation involving a special stage and laser beams. They will have to spend most of this year abroad for tax reasons, and as a result will finish recording at a studio in France, near Nice. This week, lead guitarist Dave Gilmour was in a London studio producing an album with ex-Pretty Things singer Phil May.

Reactivated Floyd



Graham Nash and David Crosby at Woodstock 1969

Woodstock II

NME MAR 3 A rerun for the legendary rock festival?

AN AMBITIOUS PLAN to stage a replica of the world's most famous rock festival, the near-legendary Woodstock event in 1969, was revealed in New York this week. The idea is to hold Woodstock II on the 10th anniversary of the original event – August 21 this year – on the same site and using as many of the original artists as possible. The festival would again be filmed for worldwide cinema distribution, and there would be at least two live albums released.

NME understands that the farmland on which the first Woodstock was held has now passed into other hands, but negotiations are well advanced with the new owners for a repeat festival. Although some of the original artists have since died (Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin among them), and several groups have disbanded, they would be replaced in the new event by a number of today's top bands.

There are plans for some acts no longer in existence – including Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young, Creedence Clearwater Revival and Mountain – to come together again specially for Woodstock II. And there is a strong probability that The Band, who quit the concert platform in a blaze of publicity last year, would rescind their decision to perform at the festival.

Approaches have already been made to many of the original acts involved – including Blood Sweat & Tears, Joe Cocker, Jefferson Airplane (now Starship), Grateful Dead, Johnny Winter, Paul Butterfield, Joan Baez, plus several others. And it's on the cards that The Who, one of the stars of the original event, could make their US debut with their new-look lineup at Woodstock.

There are many complications still to be overcome, not the least of which is the contractual problems involving the recording of the various bands. But this was also a problem in 1969, and it was eventually overcome. Indications are that all interested parties are reacting to the project favourably, and that it will go ahead in Upstate New York in August – possibly attracting even more than the 450,000 who attended the original event.

ED CARAEFF / GETTY, FOTOS INTERNATIONAL / GETTY



The Cure in early 1979: (l–r) Michael Dempsey, Robert Smith and Lol Tolhurst

"We unnerved a lot of people"

MM MAR 24 Introducing, from Crawley...The Cure.

"EVERYTHING'S DISAPPOINTING. LIKE we expected the *MM* office to be an impressive edifice and it isn't. It's a Nissen hut." The worst-kept secret in the world has finally been exposed.

The Cure react to most things with this kind of light cynicism. They may only be nudging into their twenties, but experience has already made them wry and wary. After a succession of names which ranged from Malice to Easy Cure, the band started in earnest in late '76. Robert Smith (vocals/guitar) and Mike Dempsey (bass) had just finished school, while drummer Lol Tolhurst gave up trying to be a chemist.

Forthwith they entered a talent-search competition organised by the newly burgeoning Ariola-Hansa label, and won a recording contract – which proved, however, to be more of a millstone than an open door to stardom.

Lol: "They'd give us the money to do demos and suggest a couple of things for us to do – they suggested we do a couple of Bowie tunes, for instance. We'd do that, and put on about four or five songs of our own as well. They'd get past the first one and say, 'This is horrible – not even people in prison would like this!' Then we wouldn't hear from them again."

So 1977 turned into a year of benevolent neglect. On the positive side, the trio scored a new PA, lived off a reasonable retainer and learned about the machinations of the music biz. They also finalised their lineup, which had yo-yoed between a three-, four- and five-piece. On the negative side, they never actually managed to release any product.



The clash of interests was so great that the five-year contract was mutually terminated at the end of '77. There followed sporadic gigs around Crawley, their home town, and, more importantly, a loan from an old mate that allowed them to cut some demos of their own songs. Twenty tapes were duly mailed out to the record companies, but the only favourable reaction came from Chris Parry, then Polydor's A&R man. Parry was about to leave Polydor to set up his own label, Fiction, and was sufficiently impressed to make the band his first signing.

At the moment he's acting as their godfather, handling everything from press to carting the equipment around and mixing the live show. He also set up a one-off single deal with Small Wonder. The band had begun to play London dates and, to help whip up some interest, they released "Killing An Arab"/"10:15 Saturday Night" through this interim arrangement. The strategy worked: not only did the single get glowing reviews, but the house-full signs started going up.

Inevitably, "Arab", has elicited the odd misguided charge of racism.

The group knew that this could happen, and at one stage toyed with the idea of putting a disclaimer on the picture cover, but in the end they didn't. Mike: "There's no reason why we should have to. If people aren't bothered to listen to it properly, we don't really care about them anyway."

In fact the song takes an incident from Camus' novel *The Stranger* and distills it with surprisingly evocative compactness. The general effect is eerily atmospheric, from the taut bassline to the brittle guitar slaps. As "Hong Kong Garden" used a simple Oriental-styled riff to striking effect, so "Arab" conjures up edginess through a Moorish-flavoured guitar pattern. This kind of inventive economy characterises their whole approach. They don't see being a three-piece as in any way limiting.

Robert: "That broadens rather than limits us. You can do much more with less instruments. That's why the single sounds different. If someone else had done it, they would probably have thought it needed a keyboard or a rhythm guitar playing along with the bass. Because it hasn't got that, it makes people think, 'Ah, there's something a bit wrong because it sounds slightly unbalanced.'"

Dempsey invariably plays more lead solos on his bass than Smith does on his guitar. Robert added, "It's not that I dislike playing lead, but it's very hard to do things that aren't cliched. Playing lead on the bass is, as yet, relatively unexplored."

Mike took up the point: "The reason I play bass and he plays lead is that he knew more chords than I did. I always approached the bass from the angle of the lead or rhythm guitarist, so I tend to play the melody and follow the line he's singing."

Their practical pop is matched by a distinct discomfort with the notion of image. The stage act is pared down to absolute essentials, which can give punters a few qualms. They once supported Generation X on a few dates and, the contrast was marked. Gen X were all carefully cued drama, while The Cure settled for the natural stage lighting.

Robert smirked: "We used to just walk on, which unnerved a lot of people in the audience. They would immediately take a stand against us."

Mike draws a distinction between pretence and presentation: "Pretence is presenting yourself in a way that you don't like, or that you find over the top. Presentation, on the other hand, is just the way you are. I'd like to think that we have a little more integrity, a little more honesty to present ourselves the way we are rather than present an image. We're our only yardstick."

The band don't reject the past, but borrow shrewdly from the traditions of '60s pop-rock. They aren't trying to reactivate '77 punk thrash, but do respond to its home-brewed drive and complete control. They aren't slipping into the current trap of ersatz modernity (the shambolic bleeps and burps that are fast becoming cliches), but are experimenting with sounds and structures.

The Cure won't change your world, but they should keep you smiling... despite that cynicism. *Ian Birch*





RICHARD MANN / PHOTOSHOT

"Resist any claim"

MM MAR 31 Rod Stewart faces two allegations of plagiarism.

ROD STEWART AND his company, Riva, are at the centre of two disputes, claiming that songs recorded and co-written by Stewart are unnaturally close to material written by other musicians. Brazilian singer Jorge Ben has filed a writ in America claiming that the melody line of "Do Ya Think I'm Sexy?" is taken from his song "Taj Mahal", and Scottish group Slippery Dick are trying to find enough money to fund a legal claim against Stewart and co-writer Gary Grainger that "I Was Only Joking" is uncannily close to a song they wrote three years ago, "Paradise Found".

The Ben case has been complicated by the fact that Stewart and Carmen Appice, who is credited with the music of "Sexy", donated the copyright and royalties of the song to UNICEF, and they have replied to Ben's writ that while they deny any deliberate use of part of anyone else's song, any attempt to challenge copyright and claim royalties would go against the gift of the song to UNICEF, and "it is Stewart's attitude to resist any claim in order to ensure that the needy children of the world are not deprived of the generous offer he made by donating this song".

It is Riva's understanding that Ben and his publishers are having second thoughts about the case, and are negotiating for a settlement. Riva have also resisted the claims from Slippery Dick, and have now said that if the group continue their allegations that Stewart or Grainger heard a demo tape of "Paradise Found" and somehow "borrowed" the tune, then Riva will sue.

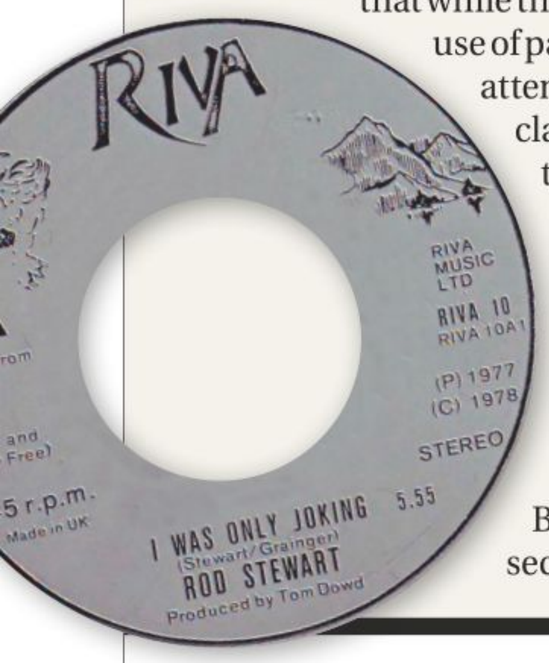
The group has had an extensive analysis and comparison made of the two songs by a music specialist from Edinburgh University, who found identical chord changes and "a similarity in sound patterns". Slippery Dick's John Simpson said they have taken legal advice over the last year, but cannot afford the cost of a court case to test their claims against Stewart and Grainger.

Riva told *MM* they consider the group to be out for publicity, and that any suggestion that Stewart had copied their song was totally denied. "If Rod wants to use someone else's song, as he has done occasionally in the past, he uses it and credits them. If this group continue with their allegations we will sue them for serious defamation against Rod and Gary."



Rod Stewart: tussling with Slippery Dick and a Brazilian





"An element of control"

MM MAR 10 After Sid's death and the legal disputes, what will become of the Sex Pistols film?

THE FUTURE OF the Sex Pistols film, *The Great Rock'n'Roll Swindle*, will be clearer by the end of this week when they receiver for the group's affairs will be shown a rough edit. Executives of Virgin Records, the Pistols' label, and lawyers for Johnny Rotten, who won his case to get a receiver appointed, will also be present.

The movie still needs another £150,000 to be completed, and Richard Branson, the head of Virgin, is one of several potential backers.

"We've been asked if we'd put the money up and we're considering it," Branson told the *MM* on Monday.

Glitterbest, the Pistols' management company, say that the film requires a further two or three weeks of editing. Although uncertain of their own future, Glitterbest employees are maintaining their involvement with the film and its soundtrack, which is currently number 17 in the *Melody Maker* album charts.

"We want to try and keep an element of control," said Jamie Reid, assistant for Malcolm McLaren, the Pistols' former manager.

McLaren will be returning for the film's showing from Paris, where he has been recording and producing. The *MM* understands that he has produced a Frenchwoman singing "The Lambeth Walk". He is due to be on *The Russell Harty Show*, which starts a new series this weekend.

Paul Cook and Steve Jones, the remaining Pistols, are continuing their association with Virgin, it seems. This week they are recording a single at Wessex Studios to be released within the next six weeks.



GADYE / GETTY

➤ A conman acting as a promoter has hoodwinked 200 Ian Dury fans into spending £800 on tickets for a hoax concert at Hastings. The fake promoter was professional enough to convince the management of the Hastings Pier Pavilion that he had Dury available for a concert on March 9, and the Pavilion had the show down as a firm booking. The "promoter" then distributed a number of tickets to shops in the Hastings area, and on Wednesday last week went round the shops collecting the money for tickets sold – only a few hours before the police rumbled him. **MM MAR 3**



➤ The Slits, recently signed by Island Records, are recording their first single, a version of the old Motown / Marvin Gaye hit "I Heard It Through The Grapevine", at Ridge Farm Studios in Dorking. Dennis "Blackbeard" Bovell, who recently produced The Pop Group's first album and Linton Kwesi Johnson's second, is at the controls. **MM MAR 3**

➤ The Human League, who have just signed a publishing deal with Virgin Music and are set to play a series of British gigs in February, are having their music offered to filmmakers with soundtrack scores in mind. Virgin feel the band's talent could be used effectively in the film world. **MM JAN 20**



RICHARD E. AARON / GETTY

The Jam in New York City in April 1979, during a two-week tour of the States: (l–r) Rick Buckler, Paul Weller and Bruce Foxton

“We’ve set our standards higher”

Paul Weller’s ambitions for THE JAM extend beyond hit albums. He’s now about ambitious concepts – on record and off. “I don’t wanna be a greatest-hits band,” he says. “That’s a deception.”

— MELODY MAKER JANUARY 20 —

ALL IN ALL, it was really quite a painless operation. The "moody", "difficult" Paul Weller is in approachable form, willing even to volunteer the theme of The Jam's (tentative) new single.

"Like, y'know all this stuff that's goin' on now about UFOs an' that? I 'ave one of 'em landin' on Earth, takin' a quick look about the place an' getting out fast." He pauses for a second. "Christ, can you *blame 'em*?"

The story reflects Weller's new-found intellectual aspirations. He has, he feels, grown out of teenage anthems ("Time For Truth", "In The Street Today", "Standards"). It sounds absurd, but at 20 – he agonises over the passing of teens – Weller thinks he's "too old".

RAK Studio, oddly sited in the middle of a Hampstead estate, is currently The Jam's favourite. This is where they recorded *All Mod Cons* (which has sold over 150,000 copies, qualifying for Silver) and it's where they're going to put down three or four new songs, one of which (they hope) will come out as a single in mid-February. "Strange Town", the one they're working on now, is their first choice.

"I can smell gold already," producer Vic Smith declares as Paul Weller emerges from the recording booth having put down a guitar track. As the band have barely finished the backing track, one can only stand back in awe of Smith's spectacular sense of smell.

The Jam unconvincingly assert later that they're not too concerned with hit singles. Drummer Rick Buckler toes the party line and announces that he doesn't think they would like a No 1 single.

"Once you get a No 1, what do you do next?" he plaintively enquires. The answer seems simple enough: try to get another. "You end up writing for the public at large." He requests that I speak to Paul about that.

> "You can't suppress a progression. I wouldn't, 'cos it's pointless"



Weller upholds Buckler's view. He'd much rather have a No 1 album. (Wouldn't they all?) "I don't care about singles," he shrugs.

There is a certain amount of apprehension about my presence; apparently The Jam felt that the *Melody Maker* had been sanctioning against them. A long history of downers, in fact. We were the paper which slammed *All Mod Cons* when everybody else was proclaiming it a contemporary masterpiece. And while *All Mod Cons* featured highly in critics' favourite albums for '78 in the other papers (*NME* placed it No 2 behind Bruce Springsteen's *Darkness On The Edge Of Town*), only Simon Frith and yours truly, out of 27 people, picked it as one of our 10. They had grounds, then, for supposing that they weren't exactly the darlings of *MM*.

The attitude was further illuminated recently when Weller reviewed the singles for us, adding in a brief note to the editor: "When are you bastards gonna do a proper serious feature on us?" You soon find that Weller has a mania about being taken seriously.

SO HERE WE are. Manager and dad ("'Course I call 'im 'Dad'") John Weller is scooting about the studio attempting to find a location for our interview, eventually securing an upstairs office. To save time, he suggests that it might be wise to talk with Buckler and bass player Bruce Foxton while Paul is working on guitar overdubs.

The brief encounter with Buckler and Foxton serves only to emphasise the notion that The Jam is almost entirely Paul Weller's ballgame, although Foxton has risen to challenge Weller's authority occasionally. He wrote two songs on This Is The Modern World ("London Traffic" and "Don't Tell Them You're Sane") but failed to make All Mod Cons, although a couple of his tunes were recorded.

"When we played them back, they were pretty boring, plus we've set our standards higher now. I was a bit put out, but I realised it was for the benefit of the group." Foxton admits to not being very prolific.

There is a general view of Buckler and Foxton as the fun-loving pair in the group, as opposed to the more introvert Weller, who retreats, after gigs, to his hotel and girlfriend. The image, they maintain, is a trifle exaggerated, although essentially accurate.

"People started sayin' things like, 'Are you separated?'... and I suppose we are – we've gone more our own ways recently – but it works out even better," Foxton says. "There is a separation socially, but there's no separation on stage, where it all works."

John Weller mercifully interrupts the conversation to announce that Paul has finished, and could he have these two down to the studio to do some work? Buckler and Foxton are relieved that their bit of the interview has been abbreviated.

Weller, I'd been told, is something of an unpredictable character, recently not given to talking much. When he did, he seemed prone to the occasional pretentious banality – like referring to The Jam's music as "pop art".

"I read something on some of the pop artists," he explains. "It was very similar to what we are doin'. They were just takin' everyday things, like washing machines, an' turnin' it into art. That is just basically what I feel that I'm doin' really, the same as Poly Styrene, takin' a situation like a tube station ["Down In The Tube Station At Midnight"] – takin' an everyday experience and turnin' it into art."

There is a rather dramatic line in *The Modern World*: *"I've learned to live by hate and fear / It's my inspiration drive."* I ask him how true that is.

"I was talkin' about the mental hate that a lotta people suffer at school," he says. "The only thing I learned at school was to hate people an' be really bitter with people, like teachers. An' the more bitter you are, the easier it is to write."

Is it still an inspiration?

"Nah. Now I suppose I have to take a more open view of things. I'm tryin' not to feed off that initial thing, 'cos I'd just be writin' the same old songs over an' over again. My inspiration now is just by lookin' out the window every day."

In the studio a couple of minutes later, Paul Weller makes a dramatic entrance, and – as if to assert his superiority – positions himself casually on a desk, chewing gum and dragging a fag. Buckler and Foxton sit meekly side by side on a settee across the room. A fraught-looking Weller immediately launches himself into conversation. Shy? You must be kidding.

"The trouble is that this *All Mod Cons* has proved to be... dunno... proved to be a bit of an albatross round our necks, typafing. I get paranoid now when I write songs, 'cos I think, 'That's not up to standard', so I throw the song away. To me, like, the standard of songs on that album is so high that I throw a couple of songs away that maybe would be OK. Everyone's praisin' us and saying, 'Great album, but can they follow it?' – so I do tend to get paranoid about it.

"I think the best thing for us is to go back to doin' something really simple, even more simplistic than we've done in the past, towards the old R&B roots of the stuff we was doin'."

But why go back? If the progression is natural, shouldn't it be followed?

"Well, to me, takin' a really objective view of *All Mod Cons*, I would say that our next step is to advance even more, you know, which could be a bit silly really. We could end up soundin' like Genesis or somebody in three years' time. I wanna keep it simple all the time. But you're right, too. You can't



"There is a separation socially, but there's no separation on stage": The Jam shoot a promo film, 1979

suppress progression. I wouldn't suppress nothin', cos it's pointless."

I mention the obvious progressions on *All Mod Cons* and how it was practically a concept album. Weller agrees, informing me that there was a vague idea to string all the songs together, but seeing as The Who did it with *Quadrophenia*, he'd rather come up with something original.

"I'd like to do a concept album. The term has an awful sorta sound to it. It makes you think of Jethro Tull an' that, but I'd like to do something in that direction. I've been thinkin' of doin' a 45, you know… a concept single, havin' an A-side and then turn it over to the B-side and have a continuation."



"Down In The Tube Station At Midnight" was, in a sense, a concept single.

"It was more like a little play really. The words to it were like a poem, you know. I write a lotta stuff apart from actual song lyrics. That was a poem, and I put it to music. When we first started doin' it, I was thinkin' about makin' it like a TV theme, like a *Sweeney*. I was goin' to make it into like a vinyl play."

There were a lot of characters on *All Mod Cons*, people like "David Watts" and "Billy Hunt". The situations you portray in songs are more complex now.

"Yeah, but it's just that I think my songs have been takin' more of a general view. I mean, I can't write any more kids' anthems now, 'cos I'm 20 years old and you can't go on doin' that."

But 20 isn't old, I persist. Weller's retort is uncharacteristically emotional.

"It is to me, man, fuckin' 'ell. Once you're over 20, mate, you've had it. I can't go on writin' those type of songs. That'd just be lyin'."

Do you really believe that?

"Yeah, I mean, I *felt* the change, you know. I just felt so much older. You're not a kid any more. All the time you were under 20, like you were one of the kids an' it's great… but one has to face up to these things. I think that everybody must feel that, but they just don't want to admit it.

"It doesn't really bother me. Not too much. But now I've got to take a more general view, you know. I really like youth songs, really old classic youth songs, but I mean, it's just a lie to carry on writin' 'em."

That, I supposed, was the main difference between *This Is The Modern World* and *All Mod Cons*. *Modern World* was full of blatant "statements".

"That ['The Modern World'] was a misunderstood song anyway, and a lot of the other songs were very personal. This one [*All Mod Cons*] is very much more general. I think you can get different age groups relating to 'em."

Misunderstood?

"That whole song was about all these sorta creeps who said that The Jam were derivative and 'not part of the contemporary scene' an' all that shit, so it's just a statement sayin', you know, 'We're just as much entrenched in the '70s as anyone else.'"

That brought us to a subject I was intending to raise: it's 1979, already, and The Jam are still thought of as a '60s group. »

TONY NUTLEY / REX



"When it all started off, everybody was pluggin' everybody else": Weller plugs little-know Bristol punk band The Numbers

"But you can't name one artist who's been totally original, you know. We was talking about it the other day and I could only think of one band that was totally original, an' that was the Pistols. An' then I thought about the 'In The City' riff which they nicked from us, for 'Holidays In The Sun'. So, you see, everybody steals. Everything's been done before, you know.

"How much further can you go? All this technical stuff today: The Beatles an' Pink Floyd were doin' that typafing in '67. As far as I'm concerned, the songs I write are about today, so that always pisses me off. Still does. The clothes I wear has nothin' to do with it. I dig these clothes, so that's it."

> "I was pissed off that the other bands were into this cosy left wing"

We talk a while about how Weller got into the mod image. He was eight years old when it was all happening, but maintains that he's into the "collective imagery of it all, the clothes and the music. People think I'm tryin' to put on some sorta front when they ask me about it." He wore the clothes to look different, but surely the clock has turned full circle again? It's not so flamboyant now to wear mod gear. In some cases, it's the norm.

"Probably, yeah," he offers. "But it's not gonna affect me… I was here first. People put us down for being '60s revivalists, but we was doin' them clubs the same time as all the other bands, you know. I can use any chord sequence, no matter what period it comes from. No one's got a copyright on 'em, you know.

Most of the people who champion The Jam's cause refer constantly to the '60s link.

"Yeah, that's true. I think that Charlie Murray, his review of the last LP in the *NME* was about the best piece of journalism we've had done on us, 'cos it was the first time that somebody had taken our lyrics seriously, which pleased me a lot. That was more important than any front pages we had in the past. But when it all boils down to it, it's the kids that buy our records and come an' see us that's really important.

"I think we're still representative of the kids. We still understand the kids, and vice versa. What I'm sayin' is that I can't go round writin' songs like 'I'm Still Young' cliches and get away with it. Yeah, well, I don't think I'd ever do that. Like, we've dropped 'In The City' an' 'All Around The

RICHARD E. AARON / GETTY





World'. I don't wanna be a greatest-hits band. That's a deception. Our songs are still gonna be representative, and there are a lotta fans that are still gonna relate to 'em, like everyone related to 'Tube Station', but those early songs are now down on plastic for that period, like little vinyl photographs, and hopefully we'll have other greatest hits coming along to take their place."

I mention the early Jam image: the suits, the Union Jack on stage, the occasional rumblings of conservatism and monarchy, all combined to give them a right-wing identity.

"Nah! It wasn't right-wing. I never thought it was right-wing."

That was the impression.

"If that impression came across, it wasn't meant to, 'cos I've got no allegiance to any fuckin' party. I hate all of 'em. I made that silly comment about votin' Conservative, right, and that was quite funny. It was all a bit of a joke. I was very annoyed, 'cos there's a lotta kids who hang onto your every word, so you're influencing 'em – an' that's a bad thing, so I wouldn't make that type of statement again.

"I was just pissed off that the other bands were into this cosy thing of, you know, strict sorta left wing an' all that bullshit. I wanted to cause a bit of trouble between ourselves and other bands. An' I did. We received telegrams an' that. That's all we done it for, to get up their nose.

"The only reason the Union Jack was involved was 'cos it looks great on stage. That's the only reason I put it up there. The colours. You've got all the black and white, very negative, an' then you've got this flash of colour."

Influence is a power that is inevitable when a band is in an elevated position.

"Yeah, but all I'm sayin' is that I would use that power more wisely now. I think more about what I gotta say. I don't really wanna cram things down people's throats.

"The main reason that someone picks up a guitar is not to get across a political message. I don't ever believe that. That's a lie. You can do it, but it's not the prime motive. The main reason you pick up a guitar is that you wake up one morning and you don't wanna go and work in a poxy factory. An' you can pick up more birds if you play in a group. That's the real truth of the matter. Anyone who says any different is a liar.

"You get a lot of these bands who moan about everything, but I regard myself in a lucky position, you know. I'd hate to be stuck in a factory from 8.30 till 5.30. This sounds corny, but I think it's good that kids who're stuck in that position have got some release with a band like us – or any other band."

I AGREE WITH WELLER. One quickly became fed up with all those new brave people endlessly moaning and preaching but offering no solid alternative.

"Well, we done a lot of that as well, which was really stupid lookin' back, bitchin' about silly little things. I was thinkin' about this the other day, you know… all the bands that started off, once the competition thing started, slaggin' each other off. We done it – I'm not sayin' we didn't – an' really if all the bands had stuck together, it couldn't [could've?] been so much bigger and so much more important. Everybody's talking now about… what is it?… oh yeah, the 'demise' of the new wave, an' in some ways it died as soon as all the bands got signed up. It was dead from that moment onwards."

It was inevitable that they would be signed up. But did the new wave have to die as a result?

"I don't think it *had* to happen, but that's when it did die. The moment you stick your name down on the contract, the whole thing's blown anyway. Everyone was tryin' to lie an' say, 'We're not gonna get sucked in', but that's not the point.

"Even now, things could be a lot better. If all the bands got together and said, 'I'll put some bread in and you put some bread in an' we'll start a club, we'll start a label' – but instead of that, everyone just wants to boost their creditability by sayin', 'Look, I've done this first. Look, kids, I've stuck to my word', which is bullshit. That's not what it's about. It's about unity."

Would you be willing to do something like that?

"Yeah. I'd do it tomorrow. If Strummer or someone came up and said, 'Yeah, let's do this', I'd do it. I'd love to do it. That would make it so much more meaningful. But no one's prepared to do that."

What sort of thing would you envisage?

"Well, a good club would make a difference, you know. There's nowhere really. Or a good rehearsal room for bands. I'd like to do a lotta things, but I ain't got enough bread to do it on me own. That's what it should've been about.

"There were too many egos, I suppose. I experienced that myself, when we made our first record. There was competition to get records into the charts, an' when somebody like the Buzzcocks or Sham went in you thought, 'You bastards.' That's the reason why people slag off other bands, 'cos they're scared of 'em. They're scared of competition.

"It's all down to prestige. I remember when it all started off, everybody was pluggin' everybody else. I remember when we was trying to get a deal with EMI about two years ago, I was sayin' to the bloke, 'You should go an' see The Clash', when we was there tryin' to get a deal. I'd've loved him to sign The Clash an' sign us an' sign all the bands. That's the sort of thing I'm talkin' about, but we all went to separate companies an' started doin' our own thing."

All this amounts to a confession from The Jam, as well as an indictment of all the other bands who failed to live up to the new-wave spirit.

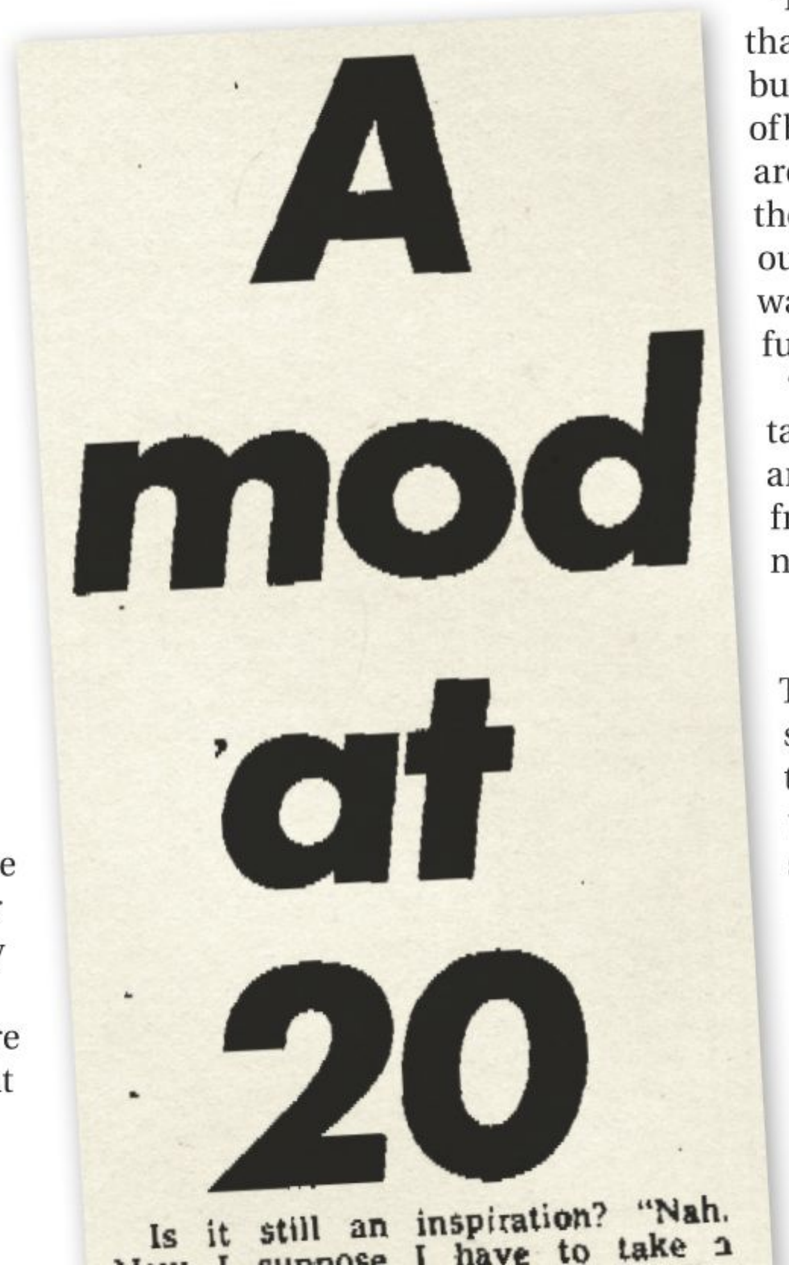
"I'm not excludin' us. I've always said that I hope that new bands come up and give as a hard time, but there's a lack of bands… Or rather there's loads of bands goin' around but the record companies are too scared to take the plunge any more, 'cos they realise they can't make any more money out of promotin' bands as 'punk rock'. They're waitin' for the next big thing an' they've got a long fuckin' wait.

"There's some great bands about but nobody'll take a chance on them, like The Nipple Erectors an' the Gang Of Four an' The Vipers. It all stems from the companies an' us, the top bands, doin' nothin' for 'em, not makin' enough room for 'em."

It sounds as if you're fed up with the routine.

"Me? Fed Up? Nah. I've never enjoyed it more. The last tour was the first time I've enjoyed playin' since the 100 Club and Red Cow days; the first time I've really got a charge off playin'. The only thing I'm pissed off about is that it could've been so much better. I'm not really talkin' about The Jam, 'cos I'm really happy with The Jam, but just generally. I mean, we could become the biggest band in the world, but it won't mean much really. There could've been something much more purposeful than that." *Harry Doherty* •

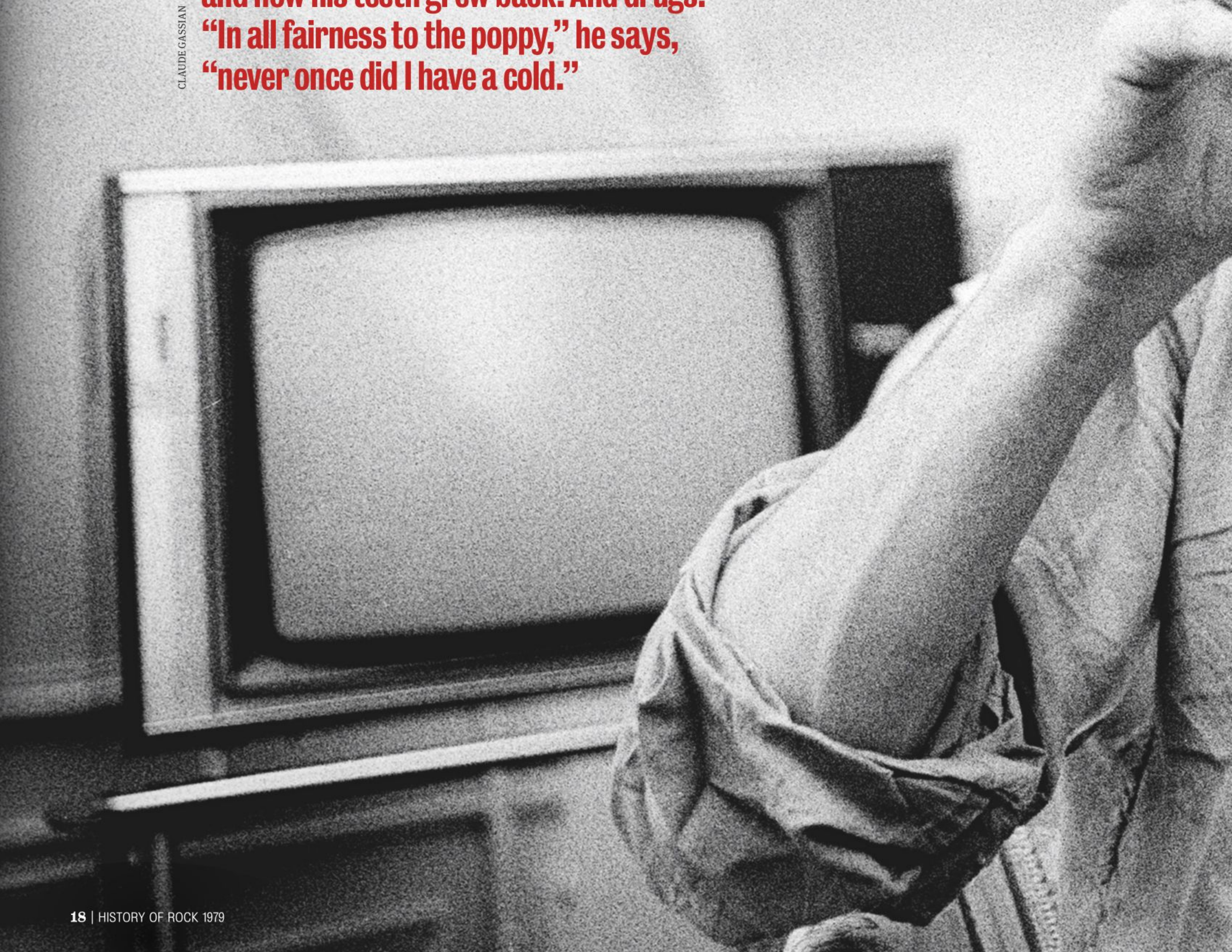
> "The new wave died as soon as all the bands got signed up"


A
mod
'at
20
Is it still an inspiration? "Nah.

"I don't regret nothing"

In London, KEITH RICHARDS offers opinions on Margaret Trudeau, Sid Vicious and how his teeth grew back. And drugs? "In all fairness to the poppy," he says, "never once did I have a cold."

CLAUDE GASSIAN





August 1979: Keith Richards at the Ritz Hotel in Paris as the Rolling Stones record their 15th album, *Emotional Rescue*

— MELODY MAKER JANUARY 13 —

UP AT THE Ritz Hotel in Piccadilly, the air of 19th-century opulence and grandeur extends to the elevators, which are panelled in polished wood. On the surface of the lift that carried me to the fourth floor, someone had scratched "Rolling MOSS!" It was a petty piece of vandalism which hinted at the dark conspiracies that still seem to surround the Rolling Stones.

Who, on this freezing January night, would know that one of the last folk heroes of rock'n'roll was in residence? Who would inscribe strange messages for him – friend or foe?

Outside the double doors of Keith's suite, one could hear the familiar sound of a rock band in occupation of expensive territory: phones ringing, a tape machine relaying insidious reggae, girlish cries, and repeated clamours for room service.

It suddenly occurred to me that I hadn't interviewed Keith Richards since 1966. And that was in a hotel room too, with Mick Jagger, talking about *Between The Buttons*. The weird thing was, Keith seemed to think it had been only yesterday.

Keith, not long freed by a Canadian court on drug charges, a one-time heroin addict who now keeps life at bay with hearty draughts of vodka, is an extraordinarily charming man, possessing infinite patience. While his speech and thoughts are sometimes held in check by the flow of soporifics and stimulants holding their own press conference inside his head, his acerbic wit and hard-bitten worldly wisdom remain intact.

Roaming the suite were Barbara Charone, the American journalist, just completing her forthcoming book on Keith's life, and the remarkable Anita Pallenberg, Keith's lady, who is described in Anthony Scaduto's book on Jagger as "a very wicked lady, not human, extra-human". I had a taste of the alleged wickedness when Anita set about systematically destroying the interview.

But even Anita, at her most irritating, was often very funny, and the dialogue between the pair was often more illuminating than the polite record of intentions. Another member of this strange little circle was Marlon, Keith and Anita's nine-year-old son, a bright, good-looking kid who seemed more together than any of us. He'll make a fine tour manager one day.

Despite the inroads on his stamina made by the vodka, Keith was keen to talk about anything. It was not until a few hours had elapsed that one realised that he had been packing away enough liquor to fell a fair-sized ox.

"I don't want no tea, or coffee," he told Barbara at one point. "I just want this bottle."

KEITH: All right, leave me to it, you've heard it all before.
ANITA: I haven't heard it all before.

***MM*: Can we turn the music down a little bit?**
KEITH: Sure!

(*The conversation begins, but there is a flow of interruption from Anita, as we talk cursorily about last year's American tour. Eventually Keith betrays impatience, as Pallenberg answers yet another question for him.*)

KEITH: Look, darling, will you please shut up!

(*His remonstrance has little effect and she keeps up a heavy barrage of Anglo-German mutterings.*)

KEITH: Back to my train of thought. That was a really good tour, especially the small theatres. We didn't know half of them existed. The Palladium in New York was great. That was the last playing we did, apart from a thing at the Bottom Line with Nick Lowe, which was to celebrate my freedom. What I'm doing here is taking a look at the old country. It's two years since I've been here, and I couldn't stand the idea of having another American Christmas… You know, there's nothing more disturbing than two chicks whispering to each other. (*Keith looked crossly towards Barbara and Anita, ensconced on the couch and giggling.*)
ANITA: Oh, Just throw me out. Don't mind it. I mean… y'know… all that about the Palladium, that's OLD stuff.

***MM*: We were just recapping.**
ANITA: Keith – he's got future plans, I tell you.

***MM*: I'm sure we'll get to that.**
KEITH: Now I've gotta think of something.
ANITA: Throw me out if you want to. (*She clings firmly to the sofa.*)
KEITH: I don't want it to get that far. I was saying, I came home to see my folks, which I haven't done yet. I still have a house here, at Redlands, but due to the quirks of the IRS [Inland Revenue Service], I'm not allowed to stay in it. I can look over the fence, and say, "Oh what a nice house, I wish I could go in there." I'm allowed 90 days a year in the country. I thought if you stayed away two years you could have 180 days the third year, but it doesn't work like that.

***MM*: What have you missed about England?**
KEITH: I missed the sarcastic coppers… I'm probably a little out of touch with the music here, but most of the stuff that's happening here has lost touch with itself anyway. It's back to fads. One minute it's Bay City Rollers, then it's punk rock, then it's power pop or new wave, then that's finished… People are back to sticking labels on things. Elvis Costello. I've 'eard his stuff. I'd sooner see him live, that's all I care about. I don't care about album production. I like Ian Dury, he's down to the bone. As long as there's *something* happening here, that's all that really matters.

"Where they went wrong with the punk thing was they were trying to make four-track records on 32-track. We were trying to do the same thing in a way. We tried to make 1964 sound like 1956, which wasn't possible either. But we did end up with something that was our own. The gap between '76 and '62, as far as recording technology was concerned, was too big. I think punk rock was great theatre, and it wasn't all crap. But at the beginning I saw the Sex Pistols on TV trying to think of a few extra swearwords in front of Grundy, and I thought their vocabulary was rather limited. But I've no doubt they've learnt a few words since then. The music was all incidental, like background music. You just had to see it.
ANITA: Mumble, mumble.
KEITH: Look, darling, who's doing this interview?
ANITA: I am!
KEITH: The problem is, if two people talk at once, you don't hear anything.

(*Anita's noisy demands that the conversation should turn to future plans were now impossible to ignore.*)

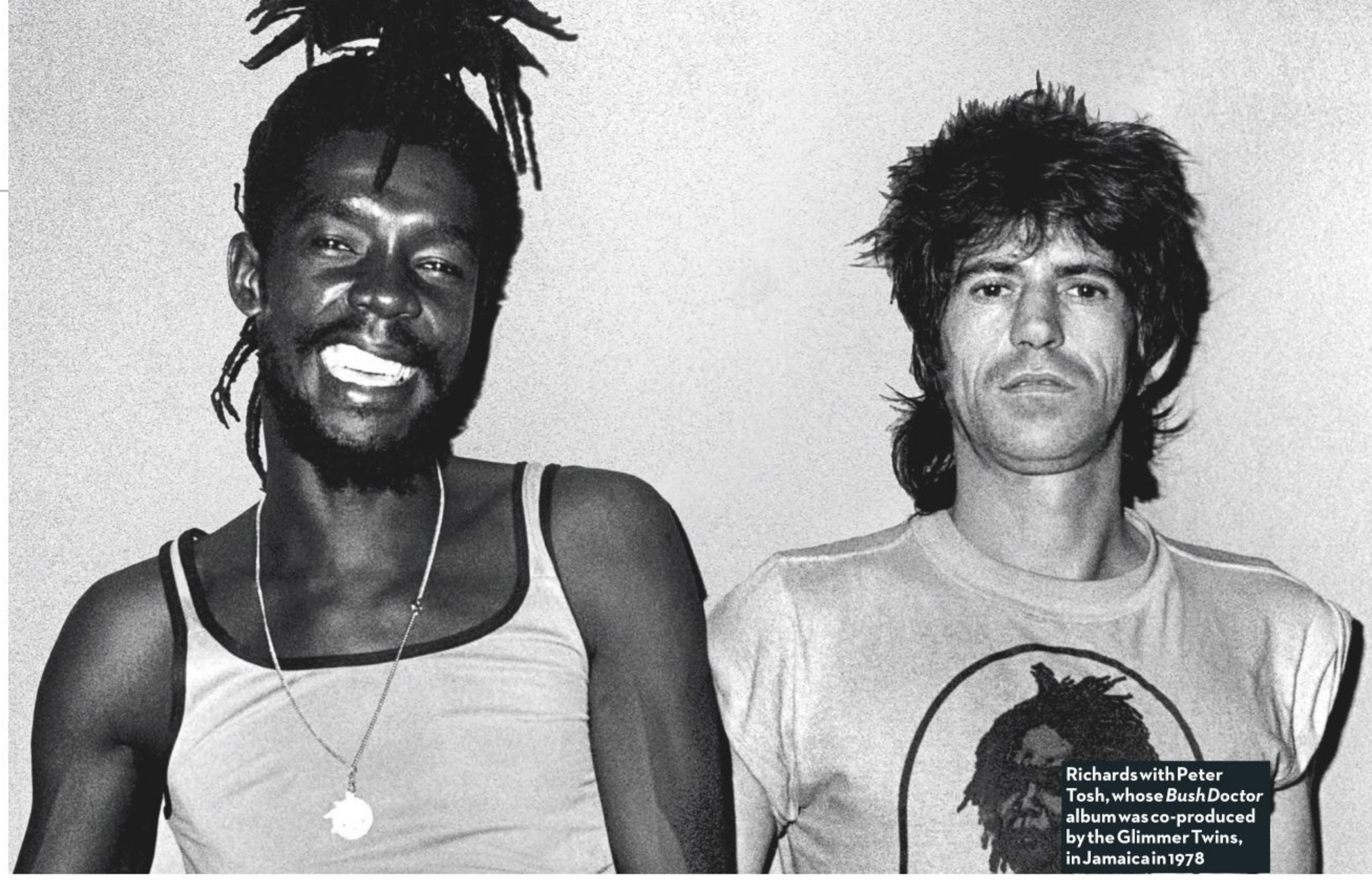
***MM*: Are you planning a solo album?**
KEITH: It just so happens that I've met a few people during the past year or so, and we've got together and put some stuff on tape. That's as far as it goes, and whether it comes out or not is another thing. They've put a single out in the States of "Run, Run Rudolph" with "The Harder They Come", and… er… no one likes it. It's the first time I've put a record out, and it was cut at Island in Hammersmith two years ago. It hasn't been released here; we're letting the Americans suffer first.



August 19, 1979: Anita Pallenberg at a Peter Tosh concert at Xenon in New York City

Keith and Anita's children Dandelion and Marlon in 1979

RON GALELLA / GETTY, REX FEATURES



Richards with Peter Tosh, whose *Bush Doctor* album was co-produced by the Glimmer Twins, in Jamaica in 1978

ANITA: I find that very significant.
KEITH: Jolly good.

***MM*: But are you hoping to get a solo album out?**
ANITA: Yes.
KEITH: No… certain executives are. I don't give a shit. I've got some stuff, but I don't know if roots-reggae is what people want to hear from me. That's most of the stuff I've done while playing with Tosh's band in Kingston. Either I cut some more to make enough for an album or I leave it in the warehouse. I dunno – I can't think about an album until I've got the whole thing in front of me. The only thing that stops me is that…
ANITA: The only thing that stops me is that I need the whole thing in front of me…
KEITH: Look, go and read your scripts. When I've got an album's worth of material in front of me, then I'll think about it. I've got Robbie Shakespeare on bass, Sly Dunbar on drums, plus two percussion men, Ansel Collins on organ, Robert Lynn on piano and Big Mao on guitar.

***MM*: Do you get the same satisfaction from reggae that you got from R&B back in the '60s?**
KEITH: Yeah, I find that I'm drawn to it for the same reasons, and because there's nothing happening in black American music. There's probably more happening in white American music at the moment. They're going through the formula disco phase, and of course it's very popular, so it's no wonder people are drawn to it. The temptation to make those records is so strong.

***MM*: Do Rastafarians accept you, as a white musician playing reggae?**
KEITH: As far as I'm concerned, I'm not white and they're not black. It's just something you don't think about. They make me feel very comfortable when I'm on their turf and I do the best to make them feel the same.

***MM*: Do you have to adapt your style much to play reggae?**
KEITH: Not much, I've been going to Jamaica for over 10 years. Sixty-seven was the first visit, and in '72 we lived there for a whole year. Ever since then I've had a house there. We lived on the beach for a long while before we realised it's the dumb thing to do. Everything goes rusty from the salt, from your guitar strings to the Range Rover. The hip thing to do is live on the other side of the road, on top of the cliff where you get a breeze even when it's really hot. People may say, "Oh, now he's doing his reggae bit." I'll go the whole way with it or just record it for fun and put it in the vaults, until it's acceptable to everybody. Five years ago there were people who said they could never get behind reggae…
ANITA: Like Keith Richard.
KEITH: Thank YOU darling… OK, fuck off.
ANITA: You baam claat man.

***MM*: What DOES that mean?**
KEITH: It was a cloth that they used to mop up the blood after whipping a slave.

***MM*: Good grief.**
KEITH: That's one interpretation, but every other Rastafarian will tell you another.

(*The conversation mysteriously got on to the subject of the toothless whores of Kingston, and we mentioned that until recently Keith had been conspicuous by his deficiencies in the molar department.*)

KEITH: Miraculously, due to abstinence and prayer, my teeth grew back! I think I was just late developing. Nothing an expensive operation couldn't prolong. Considering all the thumping hearts of the last year, I feel quite good: But I don't feel that a great weight has been lifted from my mind. They've put in an appeal in Canada, so we're back to square one. I don't have to go through the whole case again, but if the appeal judge says the trial judge was wrong, then I'm back where I started. But I never thought much about it anyway, not until I had to go to Canada and stand in the dock.

It was very boring having to sit there and listen to it all. I thought the judge was fair and that the Canadians knew enough to leave well alone. Now they've turned it into a stupid internal squabble. It's Canada vs the Rolling Stones. The trial judge did his best to please everybody. I don't have to make any more appearances, only in concert in front of the blind. How can you appear in front of the blind? But whoever I have to play for, the blind, deaf or bubonic plague vicitims, I'll do what I've always done anyway. I'm leaving it all to the people who set shows up, but I guess it'll end up in Maple Leaf Gardens. We'll do it, probably with the Stones, and Peter Tosh.
ANITA: Sid Vicious will be the next.
KEITH: Sid – yeah. He's been a silly boy. Just because he woke up with a knife in his hands, he thinks he done it. I have a feeling he didn't. It was probably some very sharp New York dealer. Nobody deserves a trial, whether it's in Canada or New York. I mean, I didn't screw Margaret Trudeau. Ah, hah! But in that case – who did? Who ripped the flimsy bathrobe aside? I end up feeling that I have to pay for the rape of Canada. But I didn't have nuthin' to do with it. And as far as I could see they were after Trudeau anyway, because you've got a civil war brewing there. Both sides were trying to use me as part of their internal conflict.

But they're the bastards that make us all-important. It's not as if I, or anybody involved with us, has ever gone around saying, "Oh, it's great to be on dope. Everybody should do it." Whatever my lifestyle is, or whatever my problems, I don't encourage others to follow me.

Thinking about the bust, what disappointed me was that not one of them was wearing a proper Mounties uniform when they burst into my hotel room. They were all in anoraks with droopy moustaches and bald heads. Real WEEDS, the whole lot of 'em, all just after their picture in the paper. Fifteen of 'em, round me bed, trying to wake me up. I'd have woken up a lot quicker if I'd seen the red tunic and Smokey Bear hat. I was taken down to the jail and I asked them to give me a couple of grams back, just to tide me over. »

> "I didn't screw Margaret Trudeau. But in that case – who did?"

ADRIAN BOOT / URBANIMAGE.TV



April 22, 1979: with Ronnie Wood in The New Barbarians, supporting the Stones during one of two benefit shows for the blind at the Oshawa Civic Auditorium, Ontario. The gigs fulfil a condition of Richards' probation after his drugs trial in Toronto the previous October

***MM*: Do you ever regret starting to take drugs?**
KEITH: No, I don't regret nothin'. I just got bored with it [heroin]. It would take more than the Mounties to turn me off something, if I really wanted to stay on it. Because I know damn well that in those pens [penitentiaries], you can get as much as you want. The first day in Wormwood Scrubs, during the first exercise period, I was tapped on the shoulder and some geezer said, "Want some hash?" I said, "Lay off! I wanna get out of here!"

That was years ago. Can you imagine what it's like now? All you've gotta do is bend over twice or have the right amount of tobacco, and you've got whatever you want. I still remember that fucking screw at the Scrubs, when Mick picked me up in me Bentley – which was a bit much, he should have used a minicab – I remember the screw shouting at the gates, "You'll be back, we'll get ya!"

You were in Rome doing *Barbarella*, darlin' (*Keith addressed Anita, still keeping up her monologue from the sofa*), while I was doing time.
ANITA: Na, na, na, na, na.
KEITH: Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes – we won't talk about that any more. We'll argue about that later.

***MM*: Do you feel healthier now?**
KEITH: Different. I suppose you could say healthier, although I must say, in all fairness to the poppy, that never once did I have a cold. I'm gonna blurt it out now, right? The cure to the common cold is there – but, of course, they daren't let anybody know because you'd have a nation full of dope addicts. This winter I've had two colds. But I don't recommend drugs to anybody. What's really wrong is 12-year-old kids on the street scoring dope that's got strychnine thrown in, to give you extra flash for fun. That's wrong, because it retards you. I know one junkie in London who started at 14, and kicked the habit when he was 20. And then his voice broke. It slows down the metabolism. The worst thing is the ignorance of people taking things without knowing what they're doing.

***MM*: And you need the appropriate lifestyle and freedom to be able to indulge.**
KEITH: I don't know if it's that. Half the reason I got drawn into it was because I didn't have a lot of freedom and time off. If I'd have had the freedom and time, I could have dragged myself off to somewhere remote for three months and cleaned myself up and pulled myself together. But in this business, you find there's always something that has to be done, a new tour or whatever, and before you know it, five years has gone.

***MM*: Did coming off drugs affect the way you play or write?**
KEITH: I would like to say… hum… actually, after watching stuff I've done when I know I was out of my brain, and don't even remember the show, da da dum… not really. I mean, I'd like to say it did, to encourage anybody to get off it, but the only difference, now I'm off it, is I enjoy what I do much more. Also I can remember enjoying it. One show was just like another… it was like a tunnel that got smaller and smaller.

Keith ruled out the possibility of his doing shows on his own outside of the Stones, and talked about his working relationship with Mick Jagger.

KEITH: For what I do and for what the rest of the band does, I don't think I could do it any better elsewhere, in a different set-up. Sometimes I might do the odd song alone, and that's the way we've always worked. Mick might say, "Your rough tape has got the best feel, why don't you do that one?" But we still work closely on songs. We enjoyed making *Some Girls*, it was the most immediate album we'd done in ages, and you can't argue with seven million sales, as far as acceptance goes.

I don't think there's that much between it and *Black And Blue* or *Goats Head Soup*. It's just that suddenly the timing clicks. That's the thing in this lark, it's the timing. It could just as easily have bombed. "Miss You" wasn't specifically recorded as a disco single, it was just another track for *Some Girls*. "Hot Stuff" was disco-ish too, and so were some others if you want to dig down. All that really matters is that it took off, at the right period in the band's evolution.

***MM*: The bass riff on "Miss You" had a lot to do with its success.**
KEITH: Bill is leaping ahead. Charlie is so magnificent, you expect him to go on getting better, and if it doesn't get better at a session you sorta moan at him, "Why aren't you better than last time, 'cos you always are!" Bill tends to go more in cycles, and in the last couple of years I haven't seen him so happy and playing so well. Something like "Miss You" proves it.

***MM*: What's the origin of the Glimmer Twins pseudonym for you and Mick?**
KEITH: Glimmer Twins came from the infamous cruise from Lisbon to Rio in Christmas '68, with Mick and Marianne, Anita and myself. We met this very vivacious woman. When she got drunk, all she would ever say was, "Who are you? Won't you give us a glimmer?" I just loved the way she said it, so we became the Glimmer Twins.

RICHARD E AARON / GETTY

***MM*: Whatever happened to Nanker and Phelge?**
KEITH: That included the whole band, it wasn't just me and Mick. Phelge was the name of a guy that lived with us in Edith Grove at World's End, who was one of the most disgusting people that I've ever known. I've forgotten his real name, but he was known as Phelge and he was the sort of guy who would meet you on the stairs of your slum with his streaked Y-fronts on his head, and nothing else, and he'd say, "This is Phelge – welcome home. Unfortunately I haven't made enough money this week to help chip in with the rent, so instead I'll entertain you and be as disgusting as possible for the whole week."

He was the sort of guy who would nail up the john while you're in there and lower a tape recorder in through the window and capture the moment when the victim couldn't get the door open. He ended up with a whole reel of tape and every time it got to the bit where they flushed the toilet you'd hear a roar of applause. It was a great tape – unfortunately nobody kept it.

***MM*: And Nanker, who was he?**
KEITH: One of Brian's inventions and deserves to stay with him.
ANITA: (*Censored interruption in which she revealed that Brian Jones had once done something very peculiar to a chicken.*)
KEITH: He was always very good with his hands.

***MM*: Do you still enjoy playing R&B tunes like "King Bee"?**
KEITH: If we have a session suddenly come up, to warm up we do the old Richmond set, just to get the chops together. We do "Route 66" and "King Bee". I'd play you a tape of us jamming, but unfortunately it went up in the Hollywood fire. Don't ask me what happened – I was asleep.

***MM*: You do seem to have a lot of dramatic events in your life. Do you get the feeling someone is following you around?**
KEITH: Mmmmmm… not really. I've had two or three houses burnt down. Redlands burned down once – the roof went with the whole top floor.

***MM*: That was two fires. What was the third?**
KEITH: Londonderry Hotel. I should have got a medal for that one.
ANITA: Keith! Keith! It's Marlon.
KEITH: Here's my man, he's the one who straightened me out. (*And nine-year-old Marlon came in armed with Action Man toys, anxious that the mysterious conference should come to an end and that Dad should take him down to Redlands. Keith and Marlon embraced and the boy turned away from the photographer.*)

KEITH: Marlon, now look at the camera.
MARLON: No! (*Meanwhile, Anita fixed me with a steely gaze.*)
ANITA: Chris, you are a star. Ho, ho, ho. (*She mimics my deprecatory mirth. The constant barrage is becoming unnerving, but unfortunately there are no blunt instruments to hand.*)

***MM*: Are the Stones going to play in England this year?**
KEITH: We gotta. We gotta play England and Europe this year. Fuck movies. There's nothing concrete, and I can't say when or where. Originally we were going to come to Europe last year, but it was big mouths in Paris that blew the whole deal. We were going to play the Palace, which I like very much. When you read about it they always say it's Paris' attempt at a Studio 54; in fact it's a real theatre and holds about 2,000. In New York they ruined a perfectly good theatre by filling it with faggots in boxing shorts waving champagne bottles in front of your face.

***MM*: The last time you played in England you got criticised because of the bad sound.**
KEITH: Well, when we were playing at Earl's Court it wasn't until the last night they realised that the balcony there was solid steel, behind the plaster, and that's where the weird echo was coming from. It helps a band like Pink Floyd, when you want a very spacey sound, but for a band like us that uses a lot of middle and bottom – forget it, there's no way you can get the sound across. It just sounds like endless feedback. But I know we were playing good at Earl's Court, and I'm the first to say when we're playing bad, I'll tell ya. I have the tape from Earl's Court and those shows were some of the best on the tour.

***MM*: Do you still get a kick out of playing?**
KEITH: Look, this is the sort of band that, if it didn't get a kick out of it, would retire the next day. There's nobody in this band you can persuade to do something, unless they wanted to. Charlie hates going on the road, but he likes it enough to still pack his suitcase. He only ever carries a holdall with a change of clothes in it, because he likes to pretend he's going home the next day.
ANITA: Not like Rod Stewart. His suitcases have got wheels.
KEITH: Rod cancelled that Lyceum show, didn't he? That was a cheap trick. The diplomatic excuse was that the band had got laryngitis. But how many shows can you do with Billy Peek without puking?

***MM*: Is he that bad, Keith?**
KEITH: Oh, maybe that was a bit extreme. But I listened to that single Rod put out, and I look at the peroxide hair, and I like the guy, I always have done, but I feel like saying, "Now look, cunt, you don't need it." I was just thinking there isn't a band left from when we started that has still got the original lineup, now that Moony has kicked the bucket. Ashes to ashes.
ANITA: That was the best comment of the whole interview.

(*The waves of verbal static from Anita increased to such a pitch at this point that Keith was eventually goaded into asking her to vacate the premises, an invitation she gracefully declined. Meanwhile we turned to the barriers in outrage, which have been finally smashed asunder.*)

***MM*: Is it possible for the Rolling Stones to shock people any more?**
ANITA: They can't, they're past it.
KEITH: We never did anything consciously to shock people. All we ever did was answer the call of nature.
ANITA: Oh, gosh.
KEITH: It's true. If you're consciously trying to shock people, you might as well forget it. The comparison between Malcolm McLaren and the Pistols, and Andrew Oldham and the Stones – well, it was just too obvious. Too obvious to work, and it didn't work. I'm sure Johnny Rotten sussed it was a set-up and went along with it, and the others couldn't think of enough swearwords to keep it going. "You, you, b-b-bastard."
ANITA: So, they'd got a speech defect, so what.
KEITH: I didn't say they had speech defects – I said they couldn't curse properly.

(*Keith discussed further the perils of Sid Vicious, and mentioned that he used to stay at the Chelsea Hotel in New York, where the murder of Nancy Spungen took place.*)

> "Phelge was the sort who'd nail up the john while you were in there"



KEITH: There was a guy called Zimmerman on the floor above making a fucking row with a guitar all day, and next door there was this Nico with a harmonium, with a hole in her windbag. If you let the maid in to clean your room, everything would be gone. You had to be a certified dealer to get a job as a bellboy.

(*Marlon increased his demands to be taken down to Redlands. Keith tottered towards the tape machine and played some Stones demos and jams.*)

***MM*: What's the next Stones album going to sound like?**
KEITH: You're talking to the wrong man! I'll write it in the studio when we get there. This is all pure bluff.

Keith disappeared, and for an hour or so we sat listening to Anita chatter gaily about her modelling career. Marlon re-entered the room, announced that Keith had gone to sleep. I found him lying on a bed, Marlon keeping watch.

"Goodnight, Keith," I whispered. *Chris Welch* •

1979

JANUARY – MARCH



The Pop Group's Mark Stewart and (right) John Waddington on stage in 1979

“How it’s supposed to be”

A band on the precipice, THE POP GROUP are ill at ease between punk and art. Contradictions and violent audiences aside, the question remains. Are they the new Velvet Underground. Or just the next Ultimate Spinach?



— MELODY MAKER MARCH 24 —

THE POP GROUP are: 1) Leaders of that pack which has taken advantage of the possibilities opened up by the new wave, progressing into the era of Afterpunk by the application of ideas from exterior, “exotic” sources. Or: 2) More middle-class Bohemians with an incurable urge towards eclecticism which will eventually undermine every thing the new wave stood for.

So: are they Velvet Underground, or merely Ultimate Spinach? At the core of The Pop Group’s problem is the desire to reconcile their complex, subtle and “difficult” music with a positive distrust of the line that separates the performer from the audience. It’s an easy task to accomplish when the performers play the basic two-chord 4/4 thrash; more difficult when the musicians are interested in applying ideas learned from the likes of James Brown, Charles Mingus, Sly Dunbar and Robbie Shakespeare, Ornette Coleman, George Clinton, King Tubby and Han Bennink.

How can you really break the stage-front barrier when your performance includes carefully aimed spotlights, when you put on a “show” which is “staged”?

During the course of a long, rambling conversation at a band-member’s flat in Bristol, The Pop Group attempted to explain some of their beliefs, against a soundtrack of *King Tubby Meets The Upsetter At The Grass Roots Of Dub* and Ornette Coleman’s *Free Jazz*.

The cover of their forthcoming album was stuck to a mirror: it’s a striking photograph, by Don McCullin, of the Mud People of Papua, New Guinea, and its relevance lies in the group’s desire to make their performance – in their own word – “tribal”, to attain a state of grace wherein the audience becomes one with the musicians. »

VERNON ST HILAIRE



ALBUMS REVIEW 1979

Primal and electrifying

NME APR 28 The Pop Group's inscrutable debut.

The Pop Group Y RADAR

The Pop Group. An enigmatic name. Not so much ironic as is often claimed, more plain cheeky. The Pop Group have nothing if not a lot of nerve. They dare to play a kind of music that owes nothing to the rock mainstream, yet they're convinced they can appeal to a rock mainstream audience. They make no concessions to the machinery of rock success, but they wouldn't deny that they hoped for a hit single with "She Is Beyond Good And Evil".

Are they brave, noble and foolhardy, or just pretentious? They're not pretentious in the arrogant, conceited manner of the Banshees, but they do constantly aim higher than they are capable of achieving – making them, according to my dictionary, pretentious. So be it.

The dangerous thing is that they should be judged on how high they have aimed rather than on what they actually achieve – which has been their fate in the hands of the critics so far. It's a disservice not least to The Pop Group, since it might discourage them from actually trying harder, and actively encourage their indulgence.

And boy, can they indulge. Not frivolously so – as was the case with the Public Image album – but determinedly so. They won't let anything come between them, their muse, and the pure creative expression of same. The buggers.

This insularity on their part – which helped breed the startlingly original sound they possess – is a potential trap. They ought to let something come between them and their muse, something called the audience.

They can, you know. But increasingly of late they seem to have been taking the easy way out of playing difficult music: playing to their camp followers, a converted coterie in on the angst. I want to see The Pop Group support The Members on tour. Then I want to see them come back and make another album.

Because (he said, removing the kid gloves) this, their debut album, will not spark the soul of anyone who hasn't already seen them live, and will probably dishearten many who have. It sounds like it was made in an hermetically sealed vacuum, with ideas bouncing freely around the five members of The Pop Group and Dennis Bovell at the controls, but not rebounding off anything outside.

It actually sounds like it was made in a cave. The instruments swell and ring in the cavernous, reverberating mix; they pursue, like the folk devils depicted on the album's striking cover, their own impenetrable rhyme and reason. The words scream out with the weight of conviction but, again, their language is self-contained, inscrutable – like the primitive hieroglyphics painstakingly carved onto the cave wall.

But your interpreter is at a loss to decipher the meanings. He has to resort to the printed lyrics, which he is loathe to do, since he feels that a song is a song: meant to be sung not read. The lyrics come printed on a poster covered in images of fright and deprivation. The Clash got no end of stick for something similar. A cheap holiday in other people's misery?

The Pop Group are sincere enough, and sometimes so earnest that they seem po-faced. They want to point at worldwide spiritual and mental drudgery. If the lyrics are too nebulous to convey this, then the angst-ridden, tortured tone of the vocals and iconography of the poster will have to suffice.

Yet it's really the music that puts it across best at this stage, by simply exemplifying the opposite of drudgery: liberation… It's literally bursting with spontaneous free-jazz invention, and often overreaches itself in its enthusiasm, like a horn player straining for that final perfect resolution.

Imagine a cross between Miles Davis' *On The Corner* and John Lennon's first solo album (go on, try) and you'll have some idea of what The Pop Group have aimed for. Not as harrowingly personal as *Plastic Ono Band* and not as fiercely wired as Miles' output, but similarly both primal and electrifying. That they've missed the mark is no great disaster, and let's just hope the boys with the balance sheets weren't looking for any quick overnight returns.

Whatever you felt about The Pop Group's "Beyond Good And Evil" single will be amplified listening to this. But anyone buying *Y* on the strength of the single will – aside from the whole of "We Are Time" and scattered moments elsewhere when The Pop Group do explain themselves to the groping listener – feel disappointed.

A brave failure. Exciting but exasperating.

Why? Z. See what I mean?

Paul Rambali

They would like it, they say, if the audience brought their own instruments – whistles, perhaps, or percussive devices. "There's nothing we can do that you can't do" would seem to be the message, although individual members of The Pop Group have attained considerable mastery of their instruments in a relatively short space of time. (It's no accident that newcomers to their music are invariable first attracted by those uptempo songs on which the rhythm section locks into a jagged but relentless groove reminiscent of mid-period James Brown – a groove that demands a degree of expertise.) When confronted with the argument that plainly they are creative artists with ideas above the imaginings of the audience, which is why people come to see them rather than staying at home making their own music, The Pop Group simply deny it.

There's a serious contradiction, too, in their scathing attitude to commercial enterprise. After all, don't they have a contract with Radar Records, which is funded and distributed by WEA Records, which is owned by the Kinney Corporation, which is one of the multinational pillars propping up the edifice of Western capitalism?

Well, yes, they agree. They're not happy about their affiliations. But it took in the region of £30,000 to get them in shape (equipment, roadies and so on), and where else was that kind of money going to come from? And, after all, they want their music to be heard by the largest number of people possible, and at the time they signed to Radar, Rough Trade's label operation was hardly fledged…

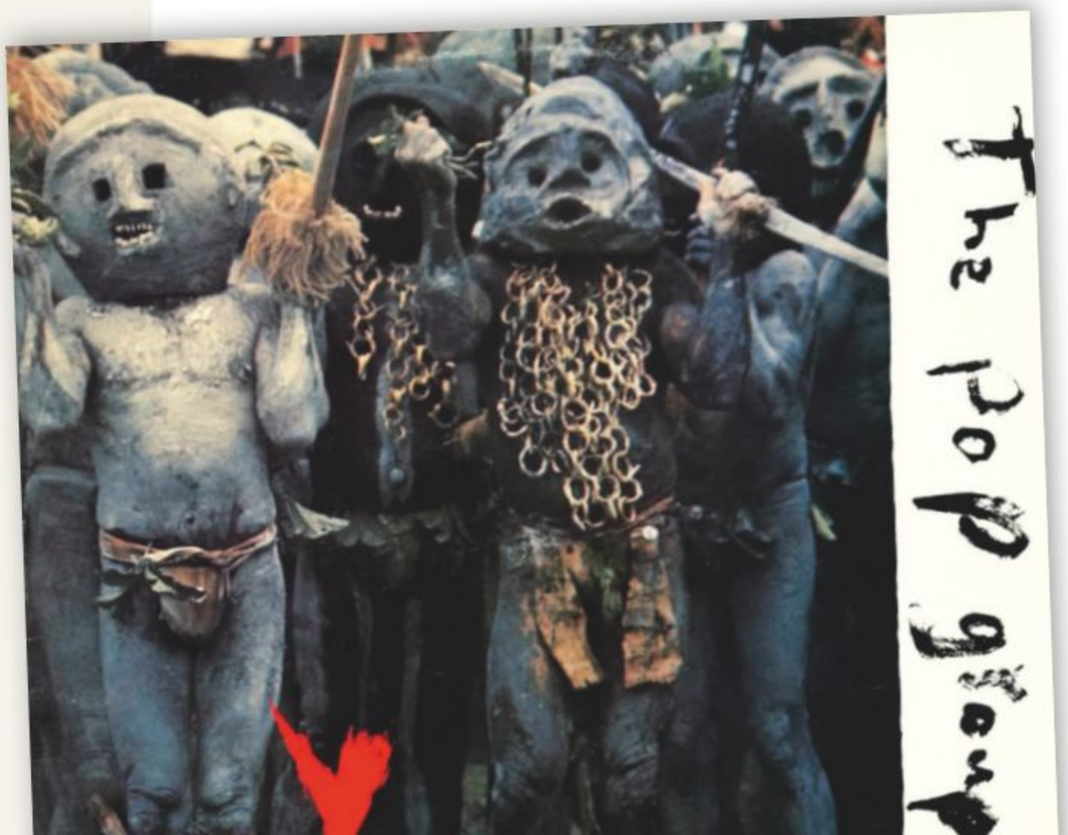
They told me that they don't want to have any copyright on their songs. They don't want to "own" the compositions – they would like anybody to be able to "use" the songs in any way, without payments of royalties or licensing fees.

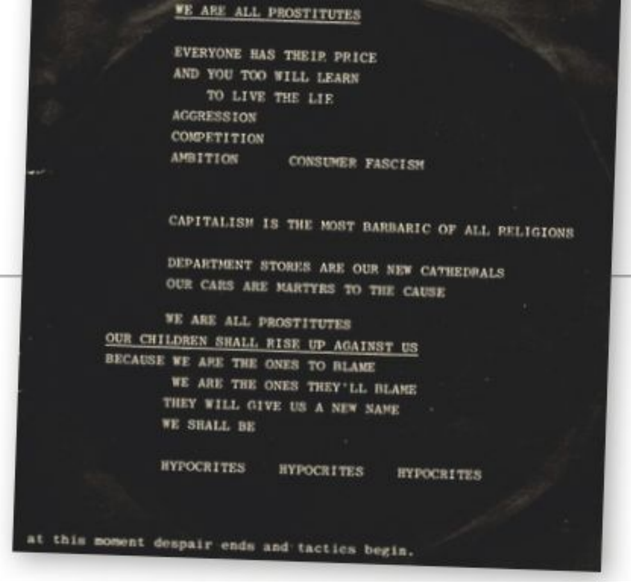
This is plainly at odds with the attitude of any commercial record company. Indeed, the man at Radar giggled rather nervously when I mentioned it, and said he hadn't heard of the plan. They have, though, already been in dispute with Radar about one copyright matter: they want to enclose with the album a lyric-poster featuring various photographs they've collected over the years. Radar pointed out that clearances would have to be obtained for the photographs, and fees paid; the group have been thinking of getting around the problem by bootlegging the poster. (So what about the rights of the original photographers?)

It's easy to stand back, examine the arguments, and demolish them as so much middle-class return-of-the-hippies jive-talking. After all, The Pop Group's career is going wonderfully. Like Roxy Music in their earliest days, the boys from Bristol have made all the right moves to become the darlings of the contemporary avant-garde smart set.

Is all this idealism merely intended to establish the right kind of credentials, along the lines of Ferry's calculated use of Eno's radical tendencies? Are they playing benefits for Amnesty International simply to give themselves cosmetic treatment, before effortlessly cashing in their campaign medals for royalty cheques?

Is their overwhelming optimism unshakeable as long as it's in the abstract, and what will





happen when their ideals are really put to the test? Did a new era – paralleling that of the early '70s, when albums were the currency and college students were the audience – begin the day The Pop Group compromised and signed their contract with Radar?

TWO WEEKS AGO, in Portsmouth, The Pop Group's chickens came home to roost. They were opening a short tour, organised to celebrate the release of their first single, at the Locarno, a chicken-in-a-basket discotheque embedded in the side of a modern shopping mall.

The audience was of the heterogeneous variety you tend to get at such events outside London: the local avant-garde mixed up with backdated White Rioters, confused but eager hippies, and a fair sprinkling of don't-knows. A far cry, indeed, from the Covent Garden stylists who turn up at their London appearances.

Mark Perry's Alternative TV opened the evening with a typically courageous, typically "unsuccessful" set: Perry finds it difficult to locate the targets of his derision (the audience? Its parents? The government? Its servants?) and finishes up irritating everybody, most notably himself. He's more than willing to confront his own artistic impotence, but seemingly unable to treat it.

The Pop Group, then, took the stage in an atmosphere of mingled dissension and expectancy. Their set was prefaced by a tape of African drumming, presumably to create the appropriate "tribal" feeling, and they began with their single, the pop-funk-disco-dub mix of "She Is Beyond Good And Evil", ending neatly and sweetly on the resounding guitar-chord triplets that comprise the song's Top 40 hook, and continuing through a rather perfunctory version of "Don't Call Me Pain", featuring Gareth Sager's semi-competent saxophone playing.

Following that was their most problematic song, "Don't Sell Your Dreams", a loose, drawn-out "ballad" with a lyric and a melodramatic delivery which most clearly bears the mark of singer Mark Stewart's affection for the French Romantic poets.

The rest of the set is so hard and so sharp that the placement of this song is vital: its meandering structure and improvised, impressionistic background allows the tension to drop, and the occasional quiet periods invite a restless audience to assert its dissatisfaction.

In Portsmouth, response was swift. As the song dragged on, a youth in what looked like a Seditionaries T-shirt took the stage and helped himself to the microphone. Joined by several of his friends, including a couple of punkettes, he proceeded to bellow through the PA.

"What a load of crap!" he shouted "What a load of crap! What a load of crap!" And then: "ANARCHY! ANARCHY! ANARCHY!"

The punks and punkettes danced, strummed the guitars, and took over the drums. The musicians' attitudes were markedly different. Mark Stewart appeared to welcome the intruders, giving up his mic and encouraging them to bash along on the instruments; bassist Simon Underwood and guitarist John Waddington played along as best they could; Gareth Sager picked up his saxophone, clarinet and guitar and made as if to carry them to safety.

It became obvious that the intruders had not arrived in a spirit of community. They had not been moved to participation by the nature of the music. They simply wanted to interrupt, to take over, and to impose themselves on the occasion. What they wanted was a two-chord 4/4 thrash: they would have been happy with The Members, delighted by the Angelic Upstarts.

Eventually, gently, they were removed (with the exception of the punkettes, who stayed to pogo), and the band resumed their positions to play "We Are Time", their most direct song, with a vivid rock'n'roll ferocity that indicated that they had not been unmoved by the experience. As it ended, drummer Bruce Smith threw down his sticks and rushed for the stage exit, followed by his colleagues.

The set had lasted for about 30 minutes, including the interruption. When it was over, the feeling in the hall was that nothing had actually been concluded.

When the audience had gone home, and the roadies were packing away, the band filtered out from the dressing room.

A youth helped himself to the mic: "What a load of crap! ANARCHY!"

Gareth, normally abrupt and ironic, appeared shell-shocked. "I don't ever want that to happen again," he said.

John Waddington, slumped in a chair, looked even paler than usual: "It was like a Sham 69 gig."

Mark Stewart seemed to have worried himself into utter bemusement. But Mark, don't you want people to join in? Don't you encourage them to participate?

"Yes… but not like that."

Well, how then?

"We did a film the other day, for our single, and we had people dancing round the stage… little kids, friends… it was fantastic. That's how it's supposed to be."

But you were on a stage tonight, three feet higher than the audience, with clever lighting and a stage act of sorts. How do you expect the audience to see you as anything other than stars? Aren't all those devices putting you at a distance from the audience? How can they be expected to cross that space and meet you in the way you want, without hyping themselves up to disrupt and destroy?

There's no answer.

LAST SATURDAY, THE answer turned up. It's simple: you play to your own kind, those who understand what you're doing and can make the correct responses out of a shared attitude towards "art".

The Pop Group played at St Paul's Church, Covent Garden, more usually known as "The Actors' Church". It may have been a typically unusual move, but it was where they belong: in a bohemian community which relishes the arcane reference, the frisson of the avant-garde.

They played well, the church's natural acoustics amplifying the heavy dub-style echo of their own PA (particularly on a song which very effectively featured two bass guitars) and were joined, for "We Are Time", by a crowd of young stylists, dancing in various modern modes, "making the scene". (I even spotted a junior Baby Jane Holzer, mane flying, doing the Frug '79 in front of a guitar stack.)

It was an elite gig for elite music, perfect in almost every detail – just like their last London appearance, at the Electric Ballroom last October, in front of a similar audience. "Tribal" it was, if that's also what you'd call a hunt ball.

During the days between the Portsmouth and the Covent Garden concerts, I encountered a WEA employee. We fell to talking about The Pop Group. He asked me how I thought his company should go about marketing the group. Radar and WEA, he said, seemed to feel that they had a major group on their hands, but WEA's staff couldn't agree on how to handle them.

"The radio pluggers don't feel that they can take the single up to the Radio One producers," he said, "and the sales reps aren't very happy…"

Don't market them at all, I suggested. After all (and here I entered into the cynicism of the conversation), they haven't made many mistakes yet. They've played the right gigs, and not too many of them; they've made the right friends; they've had a couple of front pages in the weeklies; they've made a terrific record; they've organised their own imaginative and appropriate artwork… Why worry? Just let them be.

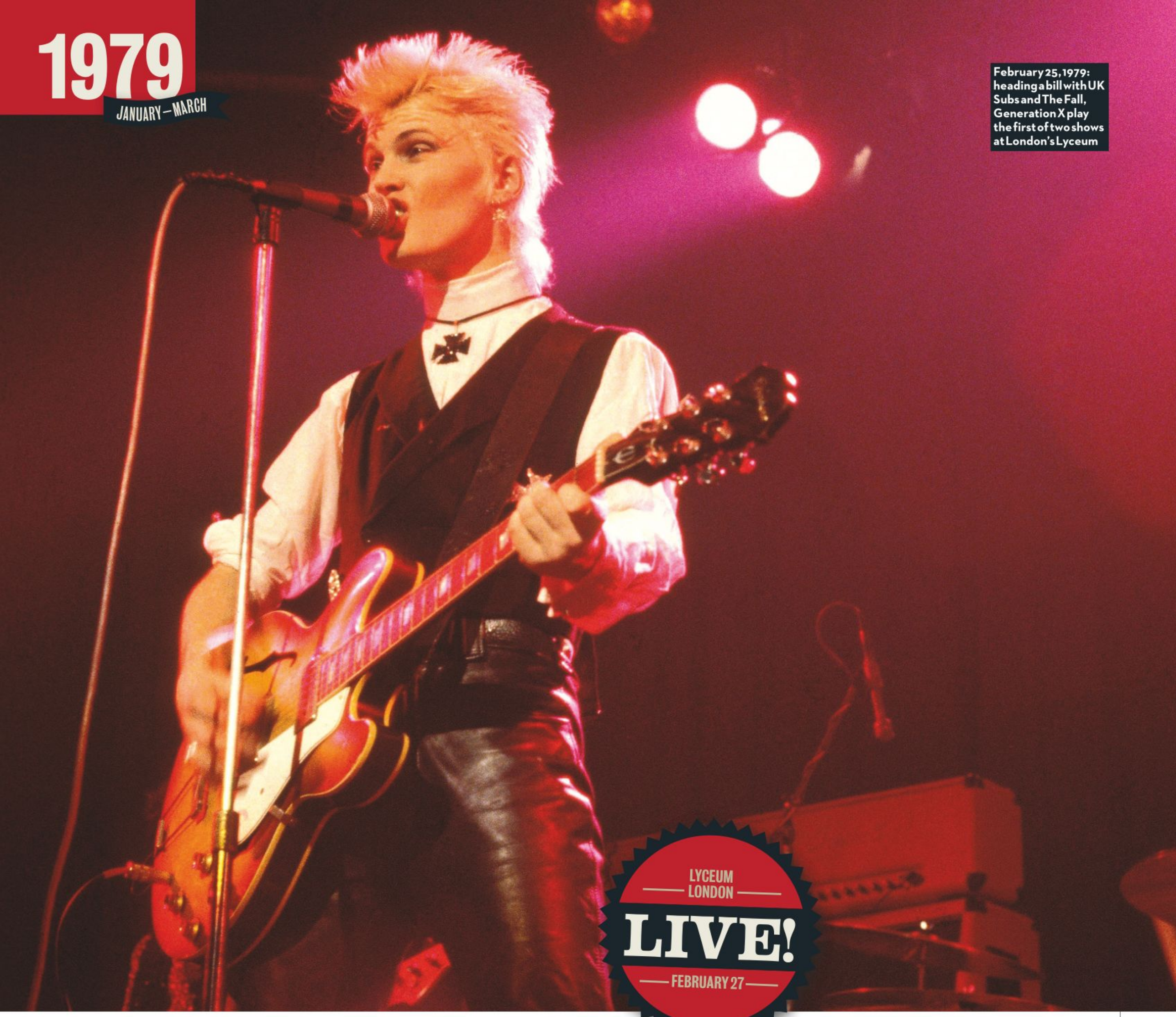
He continued to fret, and I left him to it.

The Pop Group's album will be released next month. It will cost £4.39, which is Radar/WEA's regular price, and its label will bear the words "Copyright Control" – which is a method of protecting the composer's copyright of songs which are not assigned to a publishing company.

It has been produced by The Pop Group in collaboration with the brilliant Dennis Bovell, and has been created with no compromises: nothing has been done to make the songs "accessible"; all of the participants' creativity has been expended with great artistic courage.

The album ought to be received as the first work of the most fully realised Afterpunk group of the time, whose potential is virtually limitless. Yet they deserve better than an uncritical response.

If they have the courage of their convictions, if they're prepared to start looking for the key to making what they do genuinely "tribal" (as opposed to playing tapes of African drumming before their sets, and then acting upset when people take them literally), they could make the next couple of years very interesting. *Richard Williams* •



February 25, 1979: heading a bill with UK Subs and The Fall, Generation X play the first of two shows at London's Lyceum

LYCEUM LONDON
LIVE!
FEBRUARY 27

Poise and confidence

MM MAR 3 "King Rocker" hitmakers Generation X face down a rowdy crowd.

MEDALS FOR BRAVERY should be struck for Billy Idol and his mates in Generation X. Would you, dear reader, like to stand on a stage, blinded by spotlights, peer out into Stygian darkness, and be pelted with an endless stream of beer cans and glasses? And, while prancing like a wounded bear in a medieval baiting pit, you are expected to retain enthusiasm for the task of entertaining your tormentors with jolly, exuberant rock'n'roll.

I was astonished that Billy could keep his cool and battle on regardless at the Lyceum on Sunday. And I was more astonished that kids who queue up and pay to see the band should then want to inflict pain and humiliation on the poor mug booked to bring something remotely stimulating into apparently empty lives.

Yet, despite those who armed themselves with a supply of missiles to hurl indiscriminately (many bounced back into the crowd or on to the photographers in front of the stage), there were many more who just wanted to dance and enjoy themselves; a sharp reminder to all who've attempted to write off the band just how hugely popular they have become. The Lyceum was packed to overflowing, and Gen X blasted into a much more polished and professional set than was evident only a year ago.

Then they were a raw, young band, strong on image but weak on delivery. Now they have that poise achieved through a growing confidence in their ability. Mark Laff is one of the best new hard-rock percussionists; he can lead the band from the rear, instilling explosive pyrotechnics to stompers like "Running With The Boss Sound", and driving along "Ready, Steady, Go" and their hit, "King Rocker".

Billy seemed worried by the tense atmosphere engendered by a mix of punks and skins

Billy, too, has matured, looking great, like a young David Bowie, in slightly more sober attire than last time around. Naturally enough, he seemed worried by the tense atmosphere, engendered by a mixture of punks and skins, but it says much for his courage and tenacity that he managed to calm things down with a powerful version of "Kiss Me Deadly".

It's a shame, in many ways, that Generation X have to live out their youth in the late '70s. They would have enjoyed themselves more in the '60s, the era in which their music and stance are rooted. The most they would have to worry about would have been a lot of screaming and mobbing. They would have loved being on *Ready, Steady, Go!* in the days when pop was fun.

In fact, what they need now is a *Ready, Steady, Go!* audience, and there is a hint of hope for them in that direction. Among the fans on Sunday was Hayley Mills. *Chris Welch*

EBET ROBERTS / GETTY

Appealing choppiness

MM JAN 27 The Cure give '60s sounds some post-punk drive.

AS THE COUNTRY slips into a non-operative stasis, here comes some good news. The subject of the bulletin is The Cure, a brand-new three-piece from Crawley. Last Wednesday, Robert Smith (guitar/vocals), Mike Dempsey (bass) and Lol Tolhurst (drums) played what I'm going to describe as modern pop. Don't groan – this is one of those occasions when the handle fits. All three members are in their late teens, and evince the kind of apprehensive excitement of discovery that makes for interesting and invigorating sensations.

MOONLIGHT CLUB LONDON LIVE! JANUARY 17

Of course, I'm not saying that they are ready-made saviours. There are rough patches (a new PA backline caused some nervy moments), and they need to work on projecting their act, but despite these teething troubles they showed a glorious potential.

Tolhurst is sturdy, while Dempsey and Smith manage to be both rhythmically sound and melodically inventive. Smith's voice is a lot stronger than it appears to be on their current single on Small Wonder, "Killing An Arab" (a sort of distillation of Camus' novel *The Stranger*) coupled with "10:15 Saturday Night" (which should have been the top-side).

At the moment, though, their real strength lies in the material, which is generally co-written by the trio. The plundering of classic '60s pop-rock with post-punk economy and drive. The effect is tight and open-ended, considered but on the right side of rough.

Take a song like "Boys Don't Cry", for example: reminiscent in structure of a Beatles' flipside around '64/'65, its appealing choppiness and ebullient angularity meet contemporary needs pretty well dead on. Mix in some imaginative lyrics (often tersely evocative narratives) and the experience should be far from unpleasant.

Don't let them pass you by. *Ian Birch*

Transfixing

MM FEB 10 A Pretenders show makes minor history.

MOONLIGHT CLUB LONDON LIVE! FEBRUARY 2

NO APOLOGIES FOR following Mark Williams' review of The Pretenders at the Moonlight last week with an instant replay. Now is the time to catch them, before success (which is inevitable) and the consequent expectations modify them in any way.

Last Friday night's event had the edge that feels like minor history being made: lots of interested faces from unexpected quarters, jammed into the Railway Arms' small room, lent a vibrancy to the atmosphere, and The Pretenders delivered.

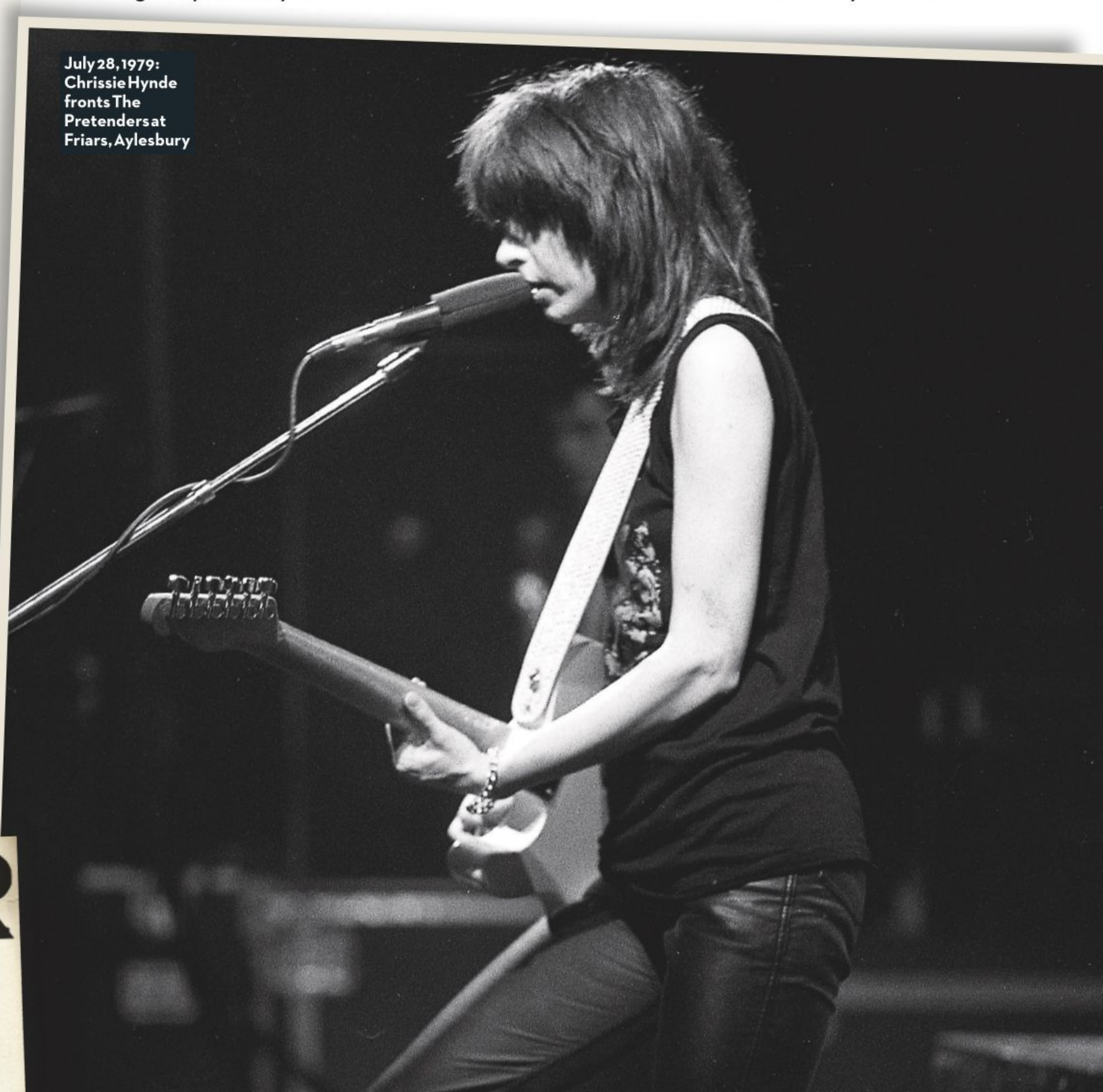
I thought they'd goofed when they opened with "The Wait", the B-side of their Real Records single, the best thing of its kind I've heard since the MC5's "Looking At You". They hadn't, though: almost every subsequent song was its equal (and, in at least one case, its superior). It was one of those sets which build to the point where, when it's over, you're cursing the fact that you didn't have a cassette machine in your bag and a microphone up your sleeve, because you want to hear it all over again, right away.

Chrissie Hynde deals with rock'n'roll like no woman I've ever seen. She avoids the pop nuances of Debbie Harry while, unlike Siouxsie Sioux or Poly Styrene, making an instrumental contribution (on rhythm guitar) of a weight equal to any of the three men in the group. Although she looks tuff (by Keith Richards out of Veronica Bennett), there's an uncondescending charm about her introductions and asides which establishes the performer/audience rapport at a very interesting and constructive pitch.

She also happens to be the best new singer in ages: razor-phrasing abets a pushy delivery, and she doesn't have to stop playing while she sings (or vice versa). She can spit out "The Wait" or drawl a Lou Reed-soundalike song about anonymous phone calls (better than anything Reed's written in years), and she transfixes the listener both ways.

The band matches her extraordinary power, most notably on "Married Life", the only decent white reggae song I've ever heard, and they cope beautifully with the dense pop textures of Ray Davies' "Stop Your Sobbing" (the A-side). Some of the originals have quite complex rhythmic substructures: I think it was "I Can't Control Myself" which had alternating bars of 4/4 and 7/8 in the verses, attacked very confidently by the rhythm section.

Anyway, the theme of this message is See Them Now. Maybe in Northampton tomorrow night (Friday), where the "House Full" notice will doubtless go up early again. But, pretty soon, it won't even be that easy. *Richard Williams*



July 28, 1979: Chrissie Hynde fronts The Pretenders at Friars, Aylesbury

SHEILA ROCK / REX FEATURES

KILLER CURE

into a
sis, here
ws. The
n is the

“We’re not worried about image”

ROUGH TRADE is a shop doing things differently: retail, label, management, distribution. Their attitude impresses everyone. “Island wanted our record company before we had a record out,” says one employee. “Ludicrous.”



Geoff Travis in 1977 at the first Rough Trade shop on Kensington Park Road, Notting Hill, West London

ESTATE OF KEITH MORRIS / GETTY

1979
JANUARY – MARCH

— MELODY MAKER FEBRUARY 10 —

"They go to Rough Trade to buy Siouxsie And The Banshees/They heard John Peel played it just the other night" *(from "Part Time Punks" by Television Personalities)*

EVERY NEW MUSICAL movement creates its own rallying points. Psychedelia did it in the '60s with oases like One Stop Records, Musicland, Indica Books, Middle Earth, Granny Takes A Trip, John Peel's Perfumed Garden and the Arts Lab.

Punk, of course, is no exception. Throughout '77, its blueprint rapidly emerged. The Pistols became the band, Malcolm McLaren the manager, SEX the boutique, Peel (yet again) the DJ, do-it-yourself the style and Rough Trade the record shop. They were among the first to suggest alternatives to the mainstream, new solutions to age-old problems.

But as time drags on, as the word spreads and the ranks swell, they run the risk of becoming institutions themselves. When the mass media began to adopt Mark Perry as the token punk spokesperson, he fled into the avant-garde and Alternative TV.

Television Personalities are equally aware of the dangers: "Part Time Punks" isn't condemning Rough Trade, or the Banshees, or Peel, but it criticises the kind of unthinking acceptance that people can adopt towards figureheads.

And, anyway, early '79 sees some of these reference points collapsing. Some have turned sour – but others have gone from strength to strength. Among the latter is Rough Trade.



Travis (left) being filmed at Rough Trade in 1977: "The shop was set up to have in it the kind of records that we felt were worthwhile"

GEOFF TRAVIS AND Ken Davidson opened their shop in February '76, although Davidson left after a few months for a new life in Amsterdam. The timing turned out to be perfect.

The first stirrings of punk were emerging in London's clubland, and Travis loved not only the new music but also the attitudes that went with it. His aim was (and still is) to establish a place which would not be a retail outlet where records are treated strictly as product, but a meeting-point where information and ideas are exchanged.

Hence the shop, deliberately installed in a slightly out-of-the-way location, was one of the first to stock all the punkzines and to have a kind of self-help noticeboard that has become a wonderfully haphazard amalgam of musicians' ads and current playlists of anyone who wants to contribute.

"It was the idea that our generation had something to call their own, where they could go and feel part of it and not feel instantly alienated… to break down the relationship between the consumers and those that were being consumed. Rough Trade has that chance to provide an important middle ground.

"What you have is people who are doing interesting things, making music, struggling to be heard on one level, and there's not many places for them to go. Traditionally, they just go in that very small funnel towards stardom. What's important, obviously, is to get rid of the idea that it's important to be a star, and to make the funnel wider, so as to include as many people and ideas as possible."

Such a notion clearly invites many problems. You want to give everyone a chance to be heard, you want to break down the barriers between the business, the artists and the audience. Geoff had to devise a workable solution.

"Say your best friend writes a novel, and you think it's absolute rubbish, and you set yourself up as a publishing company. What do you do? It's a very difficult problem, a continuing responsibility of Rough Trade, that when someone comes to you with something that they've done, you want to be able to act, to make sure that what they've done concerns you, too. But at the same time you want to be able to say, 'We don't think this is worthwhile or good enough.'

"The shop was set up to have in it the kind of records that we felt were worthwhile – not only aesthetically but also in the motivation that lay behind them. I don't ever want to see, or like to see, music simply existing in some kind of artistic void. It's always been to me part of a social relation, and we try to set something up which would, if possible, tip the balance towards what we saw as being worthwhile. And, obviously, that has put us in a very dangerous position, but it's one that we felt we wanted to tackle."

The results of this attitude have already been made manifest. They stopped selling Stranglers records over a year and a half ago, not only because they didn't like the music, but also because critic Jon Savage was beaten up by Jean-Jacques Burnel "for writing a review that was completely non-personal in its criticism".

But doesn't this process of selection close much-needed doors to many new bands? Rough Trade again wouldn't stock the first single by Raped, and it was this kind of action that, the group claim, forced them to change their name to Cuddly Toys.

Richard Scott, a former manager of Third World, who joined Rough Trade 18 months ago, and has since become a lynchpin, thinks the criticism is fair.

"I think the only chance Rough Trade has is if there are other people doing the same kind of thing – all we're asking people is to be honest. If somebody calls in and says, 'Should I buy this? Is it any good?' and if we say yes and that relationship works, well, then it's fine. If not, we hope that there are other people that they can go to and have the same kind of relationship. One of the problems at the moment is that there are too few people, in our opinion, doing this too."

In this way they view the shop as part of a growing and necessary network of small but determined independent units like Fast, Small Wonder, Good Vibrations (in Belfast) and Faulty Products.

Although their ideologies don't present a united front (Richard: "I wouldn't expect that, and in a way it would be a shame if there was one"), they do work comfortably together and, indeed, Rough Trade have already released singles in conjunction with other labels. Radar shared the credits on "Hysterie Connective" by Métal Urbain, while Stiff Little Fingers' "Alternative Ulster" came courtesy of Rough Trade and the band's own Rigid Digits concern.

It's very tempting, then, to see Rough Trade in terms of an "alternative system". Their success, albeit minor in megabuck terms, has given them the opportunity and confidence to expand and diversify. In fact, it's been a very logical progression. A mail-order service started because they were averaging about 20 letters a day, requesting records that just weren't available in local stores. Then the local stores cottoned on and, as a result, they set up a wholesale service.

Musicians began sending in tapes, asking Rough Trade to release them, and the outcome was their own label. When you have a roster of artists, the next stage is to think about finding them gigs – promotion, in a word.


The humane sell

to many new bands? Rough Trade

Rough Trade aim

ERICA ECHENBERG / GETTY





And this is already under way with a 15-date package tour that includes Stiff Little Fingers, The Normal, Robert Rental and Essential Logic, many of whom aren't even on Rough Trade Records.

So many angles are being covered that it might seem that they have set up that alternative scene. Geoff and Richard don't see it that way.

Geoff: "I really had no idea of what was going to happen. It wasn't consciously planned at all. It was only planned in that I thought I'd do it for five years and see what happened. We've had three of those years now; we've got two of them to go. It might be nice to go out one evening and throw the key away. I don't know.

"What we do next is a continual problem, one we face every week. Do we want to continue to try and expand our distribution to sell as many records as Warner Brothers? That's one point. How seriously devalued is the content of any work that is actually bought by that many people? Is it devalued to the point where what is trying to be conveyed loses nearly all its meaning? How important is meaning in any kind of cultural artefact?

"I always argue very vehemently against the idea – which many, many bands have – that the thing to do is to get inside the system and become very big, and then manipulate. I haven't seen anybody who has ever done that. It's a very fundamental mistake. It's very fashionable also to say, 'I don't want anything to do with the hippy notion that what we are trying to do is to set up an alternative.' That's almost a banned word in our language at the moment, so I suppose we mustn't say it!"

What, then, is that middle area that Rough Trade represents?

"It's not an alternative which keeps itself alive by avoiding the outside world. I mean, what happens in most alternative societies is that you create a self-sufficient situation, and you pretend at some level that what goes on outside is nothing to do with you. It's 'leave me alone' as long as you don't harm anybody else. And I don't think that's true.

"If you're going about not harming anybody else, you're using very little of your actual energy in doing other people good, as it were. And most alternative cultures are parasitical. I'm saying that we want to avoid being parasitical and that we want to confront the reality of the outside world. It's some way of being able to create the system and set up a new model and a process of attrition of what exists, and I think it comes from a lot of hard work. That's why it's really important to have that marriage between theory and what you're actually doing."

Theory grounded in practical hard graft and, to use Richard's words, "testing your reality against your expectations every day." Expansion has consequently brought as many advantages as obstacles. For instance, they have a very ambiguous attitude towards the record label.

Geoff explained: "We really don't know how seriously we want to become a record label and set ourselves up in a conventional way to build a career for a band. After all, it is important that bands do have a career and are not just an accessory for some Rough Trade hobby. It's important for them to know that we can follow through for them, and we don't know yet whether or not we are capable of dealing with that.

"Bob Last [of Fast Records] has the same problem. His solution is to de-accelerate the output, when everyone else is looking for more records. He decided that he didn't really want to go on just releasing singles and is going to do a mail-order thing, a magazine, with records inside it."



Nevertheless, with Stiff Little Fingers a solution has been found. Both parties hit on an arrangement whereby they would work together for about six months, after which the Stiffs would sign to a major label (it was to be Sire, but that link-up seems to have dissolved). Geoff and Mayo (Red Crayola) Thompson have already co-produced the group's debut album, while the sales of "Alternative Ulster" have topped 35,000.

The living warning of the large record moguls acts as a constant reminder of what could happen.

Richard: "The worst thing is that the whole record company business thing is structural in such a way that it's so rapacious of anything that's going on. It's actually extremely sophisticated in the way that it swallows up anything which is a threat. Any kind of way, it's just in there with money. Over something like distribution it's so easy to go to somebody and say, 'Give me money.' Then you're back with the same old problems like lack of control and so on.

"We consciously decided that we would stay independent, even if it meant the end of Rough Trade. Interestingly, we haven't had many offers. That's actually largely because our attitude, I think, is very well known." Island tried at the very outset. "They wanted our record company before we had a record out. It was ludicrous." No deal.

> "It's some way of being able to create the system, set up a new model"

Still, financial considerations apart, wouldn't a distribution deal with a major mean that a lot more people would hear worthwhile music?

Richard: "Then think of the pressures on the band. 'You can't use that sleeve', 'That record isn't fast enough for Radio One', all sorts of other constraints and levels of compromise that going further upmarket is going to entail. It's a very complicated formula. And all we're trying to do is broaden the base of the kind of operation that we can offer these people, so that it can better suit their particular needs."

This attitude, however, hasn't stopped Woolworths approaching Rough Trade with a mind to distributing the Stiffs' forthcoming album.

Richard responded, "We don't have time to deal with people like Woolworths. We have been looking for people who can do that on our behalf. We're not entirely happy that we'll find anybody who can, but we don't want to start up another section of Rough Trade to promote to that area of the market. We don't have the time and we don't want to expand."

Geoff: "We haven't set up an operation to try and get a No 1 record, and we seriously don't know how important it is to sell what quantity of what record and how that will affect what we do. It does seem that what happens is when people start, they put out records furiously, because they're not really worried about the commercial criteria. Then they get one or two hits and they start to build into their psychology what they see as an understanding of what is successful – and that is one of the most obvious traps. I don't think any of us have been tempted into that."

Rough Trade certainly have not been tempted into using their "hipness" as a source of extra sales. They won't have anything to do with gimmicks like coloured vinyl, 12-inchers, limited editions or whatever. When a Rough Trade single appears in a picture bag, it always appears in a picture bag. They loathe the idea of being arbiters of taste. As Richard said, "We're not worried about Rough Trade's image and all that kind of thing. We don't conscientiously try to present an image in art form…"

However corny it might sound, the coil-spring behind Rough Trade (which is now up to 10 employees in toto) is pure, fan-derived excitement, not only about music but also about the present community of ideas between new bands. Geoff cites the example of Mayo Thompson, whose Red Crayola has effectively been dormant since the late '60s.

"The fact that Mayo feels he can make music again, after all those years, is only because he feels a climate of social relations exists in this country, where what he does can be understood. The fact that, say, Mayo talks to Scritti Politti and Scritti talk to Genesis (P-Orridge) is very important.

"If we stop finding people that we felt some kind of community with, there'd be no point in doing it. That's the only thing that really keeps us alive. And when we stop meeting those bands, then we'll just go home!"

Ironically, Richard brings up the single by Television Personalities.

"It's a fantastic sense of excitement getting a TV Personalities single in on a Tuesday or Wednesday, talking to a guy in Australia and knowing it's going to be on his counter on the Friday or Saturday and the guy sells it."

But don't for a moment imagine that Rough Trade, despite their escalating success rate, have all the answers.

Richard: "You construct a certain model around your confusion, to kind of dissipate the confusion. But if you really get into enjoying the confusion, and start to address it, then you're really in a dynamic situation. Dynamic doubt as opposed to static certainty." *Ian Birch* •

"Not finished"

The toxic fallout of the SEX PISTOLS continues, and Malcolm McLaren is locked in legal combat with the band. "I bear enormous anger when I think of Rotten and Branson," he says, from exile in Paris. "The swindle has come round on me."

— MELODY MAKER FEBRUARY 24 —

AS JOHNNY ROTTEN savours his first victory in the Lydon-Glitterbest case, Public Image Ltd prepare to record a second album with a new drummer, the remaining members of the Sex Pistols ponder their future, and Malcolm McLaren has gone to Paris to cut a single, "Je Ne Regrette Rien". Meanwhile, the fate of the Pistols' film, *The Great Rock'n'Roll Swindle*, hangs in the balance, although its soundtrack has been rush-released both in Britain and France.

After a seven-day hearing, High Court judge Mr Justice Browne-Wilkinson ordered last Wednesday (February 14) that a receiver be appointed to safeguard the assets of Glitterbest, the Pistols' management company, and to exploit the film and related records. The judge said that the Pistols had earned £880,000 in their brief life, but it transpired that only £30,000 remained in Glitterbest's bank accounts. A total of £343,000 had been invested in the movie, the *MM* understands.

The case is by no means over. The announcement that an accountant, Mr Russell Hawkes, is to assess and apportion the band's finances is merely a hiatus in what could be a long and expensive litigation.

Although the judge has recorded that the partnership of the Sex Pistols ended in January 1978, the time of their first and last American tour, Rotten is still seeking to have his five-year management contract with Glitterbest, signed in September 1976, declared void. Should he win this ruling, Glitterbest would receive as earnings, for example, not what was stipulated in their contract with him but what the court regarded as fair. The ownership of the name Sex Pistols also has to be resolved, an apparently complicated issue. When the receiver has sorted out all the finances, then both Rotten and Glitterbest will decide what will be their next course of action. »



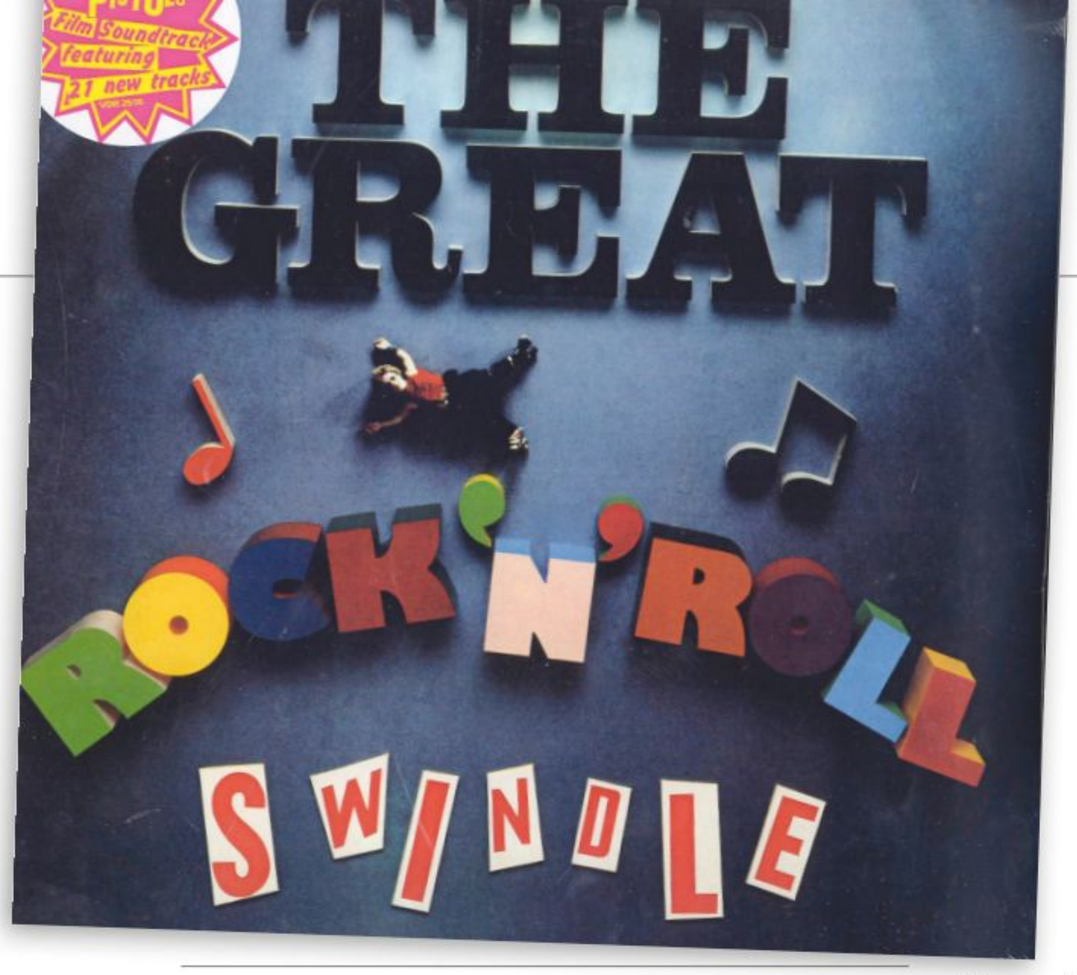
Malcolm McLaren: "I don't mind being sold down the river, but I'm not gonna drown in it, too"

DAILY MAIL / REX

ROTTEN v. McLAREN: NO WINNER

by MICHAEL WATTS

AS JOHNNY ROTTEN savours his first vic-



IN CLASSIC ROCK-BUSINESS fashion, what arose spontaneously out of a group of disaffected kids has ended up amidst the sober atmosphere of the law court. It may be too much to claim that the Pistols case marks the death knell of punk rock, but certainly it exposes the financial realities that any style of successful musician ultimately has to face. At the crunch, the Sex Pistols hearing has in essence been no different from The Beatles suing Allen Klein: it was a question of money.

As with the Beatles break-up, great rancour has also been generated. Rotten and his lawyers are now free to view *The Great Rock'n'Roll Swindle*, which is apparently being edited, and he has said he is not considering preventing the film's release; after all, through the film and soundtrack he could make a lot of money. But, should the film include scenes detrimental to him, he could try and stop it. He may also continue to feel bloody-minded towards Malcolm McLaren, his former manager.

There is no doubt that the case has gone very badly against McLaren. Depicted by Mr John Wilmers, QC for Rotten, as "a Svengali" whom the film script (with its references to Jack The Ripper, Moors murderess Myra Hindley and the Cambridge Rapist) showed to be of a dubious moral character, McLaren emerges as a businessman who handled in a cavalier fashion the lives and money of the Sex Pistols. Guitarist Steve Jones and drummer Paul Cook were represented as toeing the line on his many projects, particularly on the notorious trip to Brazil to film and record with Great Train Robber Ronald Biggs. Rotten, patently, had ideas of his own.

The future of Glitterbest at least looks decidedly shaky. According to McLaren, who flew off in some bitterness to Paris as soon as the verdict was heard, it may go into liquidation. He estimates he has liabilities of between £50,000 and £60,000, and should he be pressed by his creditors, the receiver appointed by the court could apply for a liquidation order.

His problem is that, although ownership of the Sex Pistols has yet to be settled, he is not allowed to raise money on their name, which would go towards paying off his debts. He has moved his operations, therefore, to Barclay Records in Paris, who distribute the Pistols records, to try and make money on his own efforts. Barclay, it seems, were impressed by his version of the Max Bygraves song "You Need Hands", which is on the Pistols soundtrack album.

"They think I've got a great voice," McLaren told me on Monday, speaking from the Barclay offices. "It's got to be total exploitation on my part from now on, because if I have to go to court again I'm going to need £100,000 to cover that and the last hearing.

"I suppose I feel if anything can be prostituted now it's myself, so I'm gonna do everything – acting, too, if I have to. I'm not finished by any means, though I suppose it was the end of one career in that court. The irony is that the swindle has come round on me."

McLaren's reference is to what he sees as a conspiracy, by the music business, especially Virgin Records and, to a lesser extent, Warner Brothers (the Pistols' record company in America) to stop him working in the rock industry. While stressing that he has tried to be rational about his feelings, he says that six months ago he was told by people in the music business that there were elements out to get him for "rocking the boat" when he started with the Pistols three years ago: "I guess the comeuppance was the court."

He declares that Virgin, to whom he signed the Sex Pistols 18 months ago, considered him a nuisance and have used the court case to clip his wings. He suggests that since Rotten supposedly has no money, Virgin had funded his prosecution. "He was the pawn because he had a big grudge."

During the case, he goes on, Richard Branson, the head of Virgin, made "incredible efforts" to turn Cook and Jones against him by offering them money which subsequently was not forthcoming. And that Branson, while attempts were being made to settle out of court, wanted McLaren to sign a piece of paper saying he would stay out of the music business for five years.

"I bear enormous anger when I think of Johnny Rotten and Branson, and I'm not being overly suspicious. I think Branson has been enormously clever. I know now that it was a hoax on Branson's part to say that we could all go to Miami and record, because he knew about that trial coming up. And I just wasn't prepared for that trial. I was thrown by Sid's death and all that.

> "Glitterbest fucked up... But they can be proud of themselves"

"You see, the next case may not come up for three months, and they're all of the opinion that if McLaren doesn't have the money, by then, then there'll be no trial and all my assets will be wound up. First they take away every means of you making a living and then they send you into the bankruptcy court. I just think my number has come up on this case. It was writ there after the second day. I knew then I'd lost. I saw how it was all set up."

The judge had suggested that McLaren be appointed as a sub-manager to help the receiver sell the film, but McLaren informed me that, although he wanted the film to be finished, he did not currently feel that he wanted to assist someone who had forced him to leave the country. Rather than working for himself, he would then be acting for the court, the Sex Pistols partnership and Virgin Records.

"I don't mind being sold down the river, but I'm not gonna drown in it, too. It's like wiping your face in your own shit. The facts are that without me that group wouldn't've existed, and I feel that if I couldn't spend that money on the projects that I thought were right, then they should've thrown me out years ago."



MCLAREN'S VIEW OF the case and his relationship with Virgin Records is supported, rather controversially, by one John Varnom, who has been associated with Virgin since its beginnings in a Bayswater crypt in London eight years ago. Varnom has designed ads for the record label, and for almost nine months last year was head of marketing at Virgin until he was made a director of Virgin Leisure Division in September. Then, at the end of this January, he was fired for what he describes as "passing information to the enemy".

This entailed, in effect, swearing out an affidavit in Glitterbest's favour – an affidavit, however, of which only parts were read out in court. "Other parts were considered too heinous," Varnom himself allows.

GETTY

Sections of his statement, it appears, detailed highly personal opinions of Rotten. But the gist is that when Rotten went to Jamaica shortly after returning from the American tour, it was an inducement on Virgin's part to keep him "out of the clutches" of McLaren, with whom relations by then had become fraught. Varnom even states that Virgin held a meeting in January 1978 in which the notion of taking action against McLaren and the other Pistols was discussed; ultimately, however, it was rejected as having possible repercussions on the label. However, he says that the idea of Rotten suing was considered a satisfactory substitute.

Another affidavit from a former Virgin employee, Rudy Van Egmond, a record plugger who actually travelled to Jamaica with Rotten, also supports the tenor of some remarks by McLaren. This, too, though, was not heard in court.

Varnom, who was held by many people at Virgin to be a highly creative but wayward figure, had, in fact, got to know McLaren very well by the time of his sacking. He is just completing a book about the history of the Pistols, to be rushed out first in France, for which he was offered a £3,000 advance by McLaren. He says, however, it was rejected as having possible repercussions on the label. However, he says that the idea of Rotten suing was considered a satisfactory substitute.

He told me: "After weighing up the merits of each side in the case, I decided that the rights lay with the Sex Pistols and Glitterbest. Since it was likely that Rotten would win the case from the first, Virgin backed him.

"I think McLaren is a very trustworthy person, and to say he has mismanaged the Sex Pistols is probably the most absurd thing I can think of. But his view all along was that Glitterbest would be wound up and Richard [Branson] would get the assets for much less than what they're worth."

He went on to explain that the relationship between Branson and McLaren had always been highly charged; both were men of some panache. When Branson had signed the Pistols, he felt an underlying motivation had been to succeed where EMI and A&M had previously failed.

"Richard thought he could handle the Pistols. He loves a good game. In fact, he's a bit of a fucking loony, when it comes to games."

Varnom, it should be added, continues to have an association with Virgin. He still drives around a company Alfa Romeo, and he has designed the ad for the forthcoming Sid Vicious single. This is a Vicious Action Man doll shown in a coffin with the heading of "From Beyond The Grave".

"Sid loved Action Men," he says.



February 8, 1979: John Lydon on his way to the High Court in London, seeking an injunction against Malcolm McLaren's Glitterbest company

BRANSON HAS REFUTED the allegations made against Virgin by McLaren and Varnom, and was particularly disturbed by what Varnom has to say. In tones of regret, he said that he had fired him because for the last three months he had hardly turned up for work (Varnom concedes that his attitude was "obstructive"), was uncooperative with other employees, and frequently spent too much money on advertising campaigns. "He once spent £20,000 on the Pistols when it was budgeted for £10,000," he said.

Branson seemed pained by the breakdown of relations with Glitterbest and said that, far from siding with Rotten and paying his legal costs, Virgin had done its best to try and stay out of the dispute: "Before the case we tried to get it settled out of court, and then, when Rotten's lawyers said it had to be done counsel to counsel, McLaren got upset and got John [Varnom] to do an affidavit. He asked us, too, and we refused."

Branson says that a big attempt was again made to settle the issue during the middle of the case. McLaren proposed to him that £100,000 be paid by Virgin to Rotten in full settlement of all his claims, to which he agreed. But then the finances became more tangled.

It appeared that another £100,000 would have to be paid to Jones, Cook and Vicious' estate, and £75,000 to finish the movie. In return, McLaren would give Virgin 35 per cent of the movie and Rotten five per cent. Then, however, there were tax complications over the movie, and Vicious' lawyers were not there to agree to the new finances.

"In the end," he says guardedly, "one or two people may have decided it was better to go to the receiver after all."

Denying the allegation that Virgin was trying to muscle in on Rotten's management by whisking him off to Jamaica, he said that, on the contrary, they wanted to keep the Pistols together: "We had a No 1 record at the time [presumably "Cosh The Driver"]. There was no way we wanted to see the Sex Pistols break up." And McLaren's view that he was being industry-bashed, including the remark that Branson wanted him to sign himself out of the business, he thought preposterous.

"I don't believe that we've ever actually wronged Malcolm," he gently reproved. "I think he's a brilliantly creative person who didn't tie up the loose ends as he went along.

"He believed that what he was doing would work out in the end best for all concerned, but he didn't stick by the contract. He went ahead and made records and films in the hope that he'd be able to settle whatever came up. He felt he utterly controlled the situation, I think.

"So, administratively Glitterbest fucked up. They didn't organise their affairs correctly. But they can be proud of themselves. They've done brilliant things."

With McLaren retired hurt to France and pursuing his personal ends, and Rotten entering the studio soon for a second PiL album, what happens to Cook and Jones, all that's left of the old Sex Pistols? Especially now no one is at the helm.

Branson says they have six more albums to do for Virgin. "I think Malcolm can offer an awful lot to them if he continues with them."

McLaren: "I suppose they'll have to serve their time on Virgin."

Jones, who has always been the Pistol closest to McLaren and his partner Vivienne Westwood, may well stick by him. And then Cook has always stuck close to Jones.

But that's the Money-go-round. An old story. *Michael Watts* •

EVENING NEWS / REX

“Anyone can be weird”

That’s not the aim of THE HUMAN LEAGUE. Computer boffins pursuing democratic, people’s music, the Sheffield band are on a principled pop mission. “If we get a thousand people in a hall, we try and impress every one of them. It’s the floating vote we’re trying to capture.”



JOHN BENTLEY / ALAMY

— MELODY MAKER FEBRUARY 24 —

I SUPPOSE YOU COULD trace it back to the early days of Stiff. Taking a cue from Beserkley, the world’s once-most-flexible record label developed an inspired approach to marketing. Their brilliant throwaway graphics, advertising campaigns, publicity stunts and catchphrases trod a new line between dastardly disrespect and loving expertise. What’s more, it worked.

The art of clever packaging had surfaced. People would only buy singles if they were 12-inch collector’s items in picture bags. Nevertheless, in ’77 the gimmick was still generally regarded as, first and foremost, fun. However, come ’79, the emphasis has shifted. It’s now becoming – to borrow a nifty line from Fast Records – “difficult fun”.

The reasons are several. “New wave” is almost three years old and its initial impulse to attack the sleepy old »

November 1979: Phil Oakey on stage with The Human League in Sheffield

corporations has decidedly ebbed away. The musicians are older and a great deal wiser to boardroom tactics. Many of them now want to be part of the star system that they once reviled. Internal jealousies revolve less around getting a contract and more around how much money their label backers are willing to lavish on that first trip to the States. Complete control is less a stand against being a manipulated pawn and more a carefully plotted policy to ensure maximum business.

This increased awareness amongst the first flush of bands has naturally filtered through to both the hopefuls waiting in the wings and the newer contenders still associated with vanguard subversion. As a result, the latter (let's take as examples The Mekons, the Gang Of Four, and – our men of the moment – The Human League) are almost preternaturally wary of rock's mechanics. They not only want to be involved at every stage of the process, they also want to be responsible for every stage of them. In addition, they want to expand on all the packaging possibilities that have been hitherto available, introducing a kind of DIY multimedia blitz.

The three bands I mentioned are all on Bob Last's Edinburgh-based Fast label, which is trying to be less a record label than an audio-visual attack (appropriately, The Human League see themselves as "an audio-visual team").

As well as releasing singles, to date Last has issued what I can only call packaging projects. Fast's generic umbrella is *The Quality Of Life*. The latest package, *Sexex*, is a plastic folder of xeroxed consumer images (for example, a lonely toothbrush in a glass tumbler beside which is inscribed "sexy").

Getting confused? Well, the covering note to *Sexex* should help elucidate. It explains how information can only be mass-produced via packaging, and rather than get upset about this, one should consider the positive aspects. For instance, more people can get in on the act. The letter concludes that this isn't a new gimmick, but "just rearranging and disarranging what's already there".



"We always try to realise there's another viewpoint"

NOT SURPRISINGLY, THE Human League work hand-in-glove with this notion. Their advance publicity includes an "Electronically Yours" sticker, catchphrases like "beware of sugar-coated bullets", a computer print-out of the band's, er, world-view, and a demonstration tape that splices music and self-satirising commentary.

The multi-media blitz emerges more forcibly in their stage act, where modern technology has a ball with pulp culture from the previous two decades. Very much the descendants of glitter rock, Bowie, Roxy Music, The Velvet Underground and other innovative bands like Kraftwerk, Can and Faust, they are fascinated by the power of images, "noise", and 20th-century hardware. Punk provided the impetus and the cottage-industry confidence.

Consequently, they don't use the conventional rock lineup. Drums, bass and guitars have been jettisoned in favour of two synthesizers, controlled by Ian Marsh and Martyn Ware. Because of this, they have been repeatedly classified in lazy journalistic pigeonholes alongside other new electronic combos like Throbbing Gristle, Cabaret Voltaire, Scritti Politti and Prag Vec.

Ian explains the contradiction: "They use electronics to treat standard acoustic instruments, whereas we use synthesizers as synthesizers."

Phil Oakey simply sings, while Adrian Wright remains unseen as he operates a projector. Every number is accompanied by a slide show which complements the music and lyrics, with varying degrees of obviousness. The overall effect is one of science-fiction romance: *New Scientist* diagrams cheerfully collide with shots from *Fireball XL5*, Hammer horror movies and Sunsilk-shampoo-styled erotica.

The band certainly don't want their presentation to stop at that point. They have plans for video, incorporating computers into their act (in an "organisational" rather than "creative" sense, you understand), and perhaps even selling inexpensive copies of the slides they use at gigs. When videodiscs hit, they'll surely be panting.

THE GROUP STARTED at the tail-end of '77. Ware and Marsh, both computer operators, had toyed around with a possibility called The Future. It was primarily orientated towards instrumentals. There was a third member, but in the cryptic terminology of that computer hand-out, he was "deleted due to malfunction". Enter Oakey, a hospital porter, who opened up the vocal dimension. None of them are trained musicians, in any sense of the word; their uniting factor was a keen interest in electronics.

They played some gigs in Sheffield, their home town, and then met Bob Last, through Paul Bower, who edits the local fanzine, *Gunrubber*, in-between playing with his own band, 2.3. In June last year they released their first single, "Being Boiled"/"Circus Of Death" on Fast. (John Rotten promptly denounced them as "trendy hippies" – a silly remark.)

After the single, Wright – who had dropped out of art school and was driving an ice-cream van – joined the ranks, and opened up the visual dimension with the help of his dad's camera. Sporadic gigs followed, a tour with Siouxsie And The Banshees took place, the word spread, and recently Virgin signed them to a publishing deal. They gave up their jobs and are currently shopping around for that major record contract. Polydor have made vigorous overtures.



If you're beginning to think that all this talk about packaging and the rock process and sequenced backing tracks means that The Human League are a kind of fashionably dehumanized bunch of aesthetic cybernauts, then breathe again. They are adamantly anti-elitist, repeatedly emphasising their desire to appeal as popular entertainment on the widest scale possible.

Martyn: "Anyone can sit around and be weird. The very early stuff we did, we wouldn't even consider letting people listen to it now, but it would compare favourably with a lot of the output of those other bands that have been compared with us, because it was more overtly experimental.

"Are people into that? I don't believe they are. It's a matter of discipline. What we're aiming for is to be professional. People are going to be more impressed if they think a lot of work has gone into something than if you


The Cyclic And Random Lyric Organisation System

great deal wiser to board-room tactics. Many of them now want to be part of the star system that they once reviled. Internal jealousies re-

shamble on stage and do something that you self-consciously think is very valid and arty, and tell them they can either take it or leave it. We're not interested in that.

"If we get a thousand people in a hall, we'd like to try and impress every one of them – not just the few at the front who're really into it. I think it's the floating vote we're trying to capture, rather than just the fanatics." Beneath the modernistic trappings lies an old-fashioned cardiac pump.

Referring once again to that original computer print-out, it reads: "Interested in combining the best of all worlds, the League would like to positively affect the future by close attention to the present, allying technology with humanity and humour." They set self-parody and quirkily stylised humour alongside commitment and gentle experimentation.

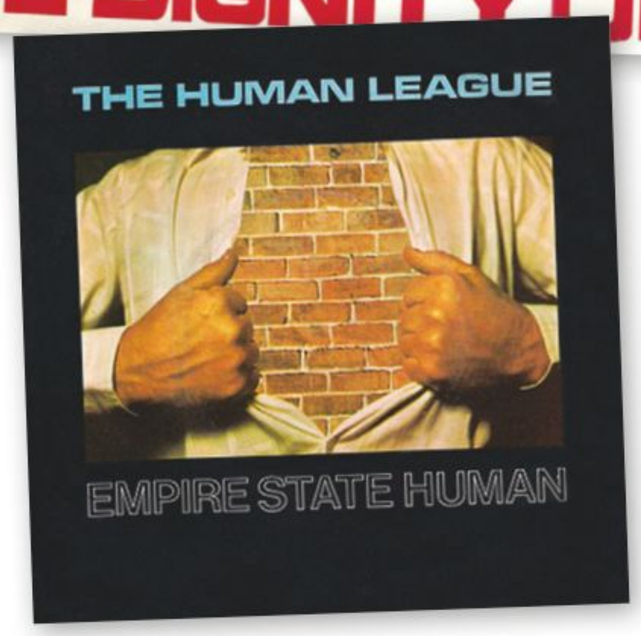
Martyn: "Half the time we're stating something forcibly, and half the time there's the opposite viewpoint, somehow. We always try to realise that there is another viewpoint… Oh God, we're so fair!" Multiple interpretations are almost a biological necessity in a band that "has massive arguments about everything all the time".

Another angle on their deliberate accessibility is the inclusion of evergreens in performances. At the moment they do deliciously sparse replicas of Gary Glitter's "Rock & Roll" and The Righteous Brothers' "You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin'" – a pound to a penny that Polydor will want that as their first single if the group sign the dotted line.

They want to do more cover versions, and have already earmarked two Walker Brothers songs – "Make It Easy On Yourself" and "No Regrets" – for serious consideration.

Martyn: "Basically, we love ballads, torch songs." By relocating this type of song in an electronic context, they can neatly show how apparently mechanoid combos can be as emotive as, er, Jimmy Pursey.





THE SLIDE SHOW, which pans between two different screens, also offers huge potential for increased entertainment and personal interpretation. Quite often, the individual members of the group don't know the significance of certain slides. Adrian, an inveterate pulp fan who is currently compiling a book about '50s sci-fi movies, will slip in images that had not been originally planned.

During the interview he explained to the others, for the first time, what two slides contributed to "Zero As A Limit", an enactment of an emotional tussle that results in a car crash. "There are pictures of Lolita because I'm trying to tie up sex with cars."

They are beginning to put the actual song titles on slides, which inevitably militates against the idea of a frontman. That responsibility would traditionally devolve on Phil, as the singer, but he refuses to have any part of it.

"I can't do it," he says. "That was one of the reasons we had slides right from the start. I can't dance." Ian continued, "If you can't dance, there's no point in trying, because you just look stupid. There are too many people around who do dance and shouldn't."

An obvious future step is to start making their own films for use on stage. They'll do it as soon as finances permit. Martyn: "I think we're more influenced by films and TV than by rock. I'd much rather go and see a good film than a good rock band. You see a film and you're caught up. For that period of time you're not a person sitting in a cinema; you're part of that experience. Whereas, watching a rock band, it's just some guys up on stage."

> "I think we're more influenced by films and TV than by rock"

But what about communication; a rock gig is essentially a live experience. The celluloid experience is trapped, immovable. That turns out to be exactly what they like about movies.

Phil: "You stand more chance of having accidents on stage. With a film they've got exactly what they wanted to put out. It's correct."

So they don't think, then, that accidents can be beneficial sometimes?

Phil: "Well, they can be."

Martyn: "We've always done that in our compositional technique anyway. Like the way we composed 'Circus Of Death' was a complete freak."

That song, in fact, grew out of an attempt to cover Iggy Pop's "Nightclubbing". Martyn: "We had the echo unit doubling the beat and creating another beat, and we decided this is too good to use for 'Nightclubbing', we'll use it for a track of our own. We do have an abnormal compositional technique. It's only myself and Ian who can actually play instruments, and we usually start off with some rhythm. It all builds up from there. So we're more or less using studio techniques to create the songs we play live."

Ian agreed: "The more natural state for us is in the studio, and the difficult thing is playing live – which is the reverse of most bands."

This technique is one of "selection". They have countless snippets of music on tape, which are either developed individually or patched together in a kind of jigsaw assembly line. There is also a communal wire basket where lines or isolated words are collected (Bowie's use of Burroughs' cut-up method springs to mind).

Indeed, in their early days they used a system called CARLOS, or the Cyclic And Random Lyric Organisation System – which, to put it briefly, was a sort of home-made fruit machine that substituted words or phrases for the normal fruits. The more words/phrases that they fed in, the greater the number of resulting permutations. Weirdness at the pull of a handle!

The experiment was, however, short-lived. Apart from saying that they lost faith in the system and that it "had a tendency to make things over-staccato", they (or rather Phil) weren't sure why CARLOS slipped away into the night.

Nevertheless, if you can imagine a Phil Spector production stripped down and translated into a digital delay system by an apprentice Giorgio Moroder, besotted by late-nite American TV, with only a synthesizer in the studio, you're in the right frame of mind for The Human League.

Ian Birch •

1979

JANUARY—MARCH

March 2, 1979: after a support set from Wire, Bryan Ferry fronts Roxy Music at the Congress Centre, Hamburg

Roxy's Swedish love night

by ALLAN JONES

“Why did you have to turn up?”

Cloaked in secrecy, ROXY MUSIC return. The media, they explain, have historically caused them problems – Tony Parsons once interviewed them in a restaurant, informally dressed. “How dare he interview us in a vest?” says Andy McKay. “It’s a wonder he wasn’t mistaken for one of the cooks.”

— MELODY MAKER MARCH 3 —

HERE COMES THE weekend; and with it, a beckoning wave from Sweden. I fly into Stockholm’s balmy Friday night feeling vaguely like the world’s most travelled hack, already afflicted by that sense of personal dislocation provoked by being so suddenly transferred from the comfortable and familiar to an alien and foreign environment. You know: one minute you’re enjoying a pint in the Rose & Crown, the next you’re skating across the tundra. All right for some, hey?

The airport rolls away behind the inevitable snow drifts. Eyes are peeled, alert now to any possible evidence of the presences of Roxy Music, whose tail we are chasing here. The Roxy Reunion charabanc will tumble into action tomorrow night in Stockholm; but don’t ask me where yet.

Roxy, inevitably sensitive and perhaps not a little paranoid, have offered no specific information about either their exact whereabouts or their definite intentions – indeed their resident media consultant Simon Puxley had only days before been insisting with a rare determination that the Roxy Euro tour would open not in Stockholm, but Berlin.

We rumbled that one straight off the bat.

One could understand their apprehension. There lingered, still, an aura of cynical suspicion about the individual motives for reviving their career – did Bryan really need the extra crackers a reunion would bring? Was Phil’s bank balance, after the expense of financing the commercially ill-fated 801 projects, a little thin? Was Andy finally tired of *Rock Follies*? Whatever the reasons, it was made clear by Puxley’s attitude that Roxy would not violently encourage the presences of this paper (nothing personal – they were offering a welcoming hand to no one else, either) at the opening night of their tour.

Still… once there, they could hardly have us deported.

I check into the Sheraton.

Investigations at the desk fail to draw any positive response. No, there are no reservations in the names I mentioned. No Ferry, no Manzanera, no Mackay, no Paul Thompson, no Dave Skinner (Eddie Jobson’s replacement), no Gary Tibbs (the most recent bass enlistment). No Simon Puxley, either.

I attempt to compile some kind of list of alternative hostelries, with the intention of tracking down our elusive targets. The Sheraton switchboard barks back at me in Swedish (a language Lou Reed, with whom I had last visited the country, once likened to a tongue disease). I understand not a single word; »

ULLSTEIN BILD / GETTY

though I have the uneasy feeling that I am for some reason being dictated the results of that afternoon's chariot-racing in Gothenburg. Something like that, anyway.

I retire to the Sheraton bar, occupying a vantage point opposite the main entrance in the faint hope of confronting the group arriving. I am quietly excited by the idea of Ferry driving up in some sleek carriage, swathed in furs and Cossack boots, a pack of Borzoi hounds barking about his heels.

It was not to be. I learn later that at this time Roxy were, in fact, rehearsing frantically some last-minute addition to their projected concert repertoire at ABBA's studio, where they will be hard at it until 3am.

I settle back on this unlikely guard duty, surrounded by jabbering Swedes. At 2.30 I feel that I have, for one night at least, done enough. I relinquish my post, hoping that the morning will bring its own reward for such patient dedication to duty.

AND INDEED, SATURDAY morning brings with it a minor breakthrough. Roxy Music are residents, I am thrilled to learn, of the Grand Hotel, a handsome establishment on the Sodra Blasieholmen, overlooking the harbour.

There are groups of pubescent Swedes in anoraks and ski boots clustered around the hotel's doors, clutching copies of Roxy albums and waiting for autographs and a glimpse of the chaps. Photographers and journalists wander through the lobby, confirming my informant's disclosure that Roxy are here. I had heard that there might be a press conference at one o'clock, or perhaps individual interviews. A woman from Polydor's Swedish office approaches and addresses me in Swedish. I look bewildered!

"English?" she asks.

"Yes."

"Are you from a paper?"

"The *Melody Maker*."

"You would like an interview with Bryan Ferry?"

"Uh… yes."

"I am afraid they have been cancelled now. Perhaps you can do it later. The group is having to go to the soundcheck. We are having to rearrange the interviews… perhaps later this afternoon; we can arrange it…"

"Fine," I say, eagerly.

"They are expecting you?" she then asks anxiously.

"Probably not…"

"Aaaaaah," she says. "Then perhaps you should speak to Simon Puxley."

"Yes, perhaps I should."

Puxley is sitting at a table with another Polydor rep. He looks characteristically harassed, like an unmade bed in a state of some panic.

"Hello, Simon."

"Hi…" He looks up. "Oh, no. I thought they were joking. Oh, dear… Oh dear…"

If he hadn't been sitting, I think he might have collapsed, or not to wax too dramatic about all this – at least staggered a little.

"I wish," he says, "that I could just hide you for the rest of the day. Bryan… Bryan doesn't know you're here, does he?

Not, I think, unless, he's recently been blessed with powers of telepathy.

"Perhaps," says Puxley, distracted, "I should tell him you're here… Mmmmmmmm… Maybe I'll leave it for the moment… Mmmmmmm… Ha, oh dear. Why did you have to turn up? I hope you're prepared for Bryan to throw a punch at you later on."

"Everybody else has thrown one," I reply.

"I don't know why everyone's so worried," says Tibbs. "Some fucker was bound to turn up."

Phil Manzanera arrives at the bar.

"Allan Jones," he says. "Well, well… don't tell me you happened to be passing and just dropped in. You know," he continues, "that we'll have to tie you up, gag you and lock you in a wardrobe until after the gig."

"He thinks we're joking," says Puxley. He looks out onto the harbour. "There's a vast expanse of water out there. Do you think anyone'll miss him?"

"Send someone for the concrete overcoat," Manzanera suggests. "Or, perhaps, we could arrange a quick mob lynching."

"Mr Jones…"

"…Mr Ferry."

"So – this explains the excess baggage I had to fork out for yesterday. I was wondering where the extra weight had come from."

He turns to Puxley. "I'm going back to bed, Doctor. I've had enough shocks for one morning…"

He walks away. "Where did he come from?" asks Puxley.

"There's no one else coming, is there? You haven't arranged any more little surprises, have you?"

I mention quickly that I've heard that Tony 'n' Julie are on their way and are likely at any moment to wander hand-in-hand through the revolving doors.

"I think I'd shoot myself," says Puxley. ("Tony Parsons," Andy Mackay will later recall. "He interviewed Bryan and I in an Italian restaurant. He was wearing a vest, I remember. How dare he interview us in a vest? It's a wonder he wasn't mistaken for one of the cooks.")

The photo session completed, the group is settled into their limos. Ferry is accompanied by a brace of local journalists, who have been persuaded to conduct their interviews in the back of the car on the way to the soundcheck.

"Anyone else going to the gig?" someone shouts. "We've got room for one more."

I take a tentative step in the vague direction of the limo.

"NO!" shouts Puxley. "No one else."

We walk back into the hotel.

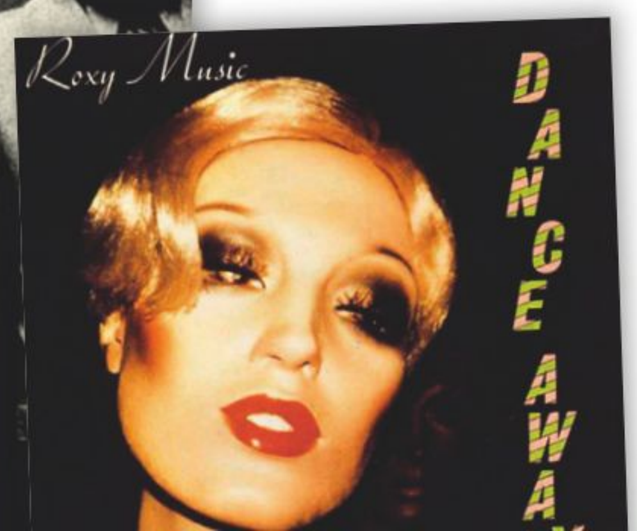
"I suppose," says Puxley, wearily, "that you want to come to the concert."

"Yes – I already have a ticket."

"You have a ticket… fuck," Puxley swears. "Then you'll just have to get through the security cordon we've arranged. They'll all get copies of your photograph and explicit instructions about how to deal with you if you try to get in."

> "I wish I could just hide you… Bryan doesn't know you're here, does he?"





THE JOHANNESHOV ISSTADION is about the size of the Wembley Arena. When Liza Minnelli appeared here, they crammed in more than 9,000 people. Rod Stewart attracted a similar audience.

Tonight there are 5,000 ardent Swedes clomping about the premises, in anticipation of Roxy Music's first public appearance since the autumn of 1975, when they announced the temporary suspension of their activities as a group. The air almost physically crackles with tension and excitement. ("YOU were nervous?" Andy Mackay will say later. "I can barely stand.")

Wire will be supporting Roxy on most of their European tour, but Sweden, it transpires, does not encourage the appearance of support



bands at rock gigs. The authorities, it seems, are convinced that audiences will become too excited by the interval and are likely to lay waste to the surrounding environment instead of sitting comfortably in their seats with cartons of ice cream and jugs of Kia-Ora orange juice. So Wire are off tonight's bill (though Puxley, I remember, has insisted they would play – in an attempt, perhaps, to dissuade me from turning up on time and thus causing me to miss most of Roxy's opening salvo).

The curtains slowly draw back as the lights dim; Roxy's new stage set, which has been designed by Anthony Price (who's more usually responsible for Ferry's wardrobe), is revealed.

Three massive pyramid structures retreat in dramatic perspective on either side of the stage; a painted black cloth, behind Paul Thompson's drum-rise, continues the perspective (from where I'm sitting it's difficult to see where all this finally leads). The general effect is very Nuremberg – one searches the balcony for Leni Riefenstahl directing a remake of *Triumph Of The Will* – very stark and austere. ("It wasn't too Pearl & Dean, I hope," Anthony Price will say after the gig. Ferry will think it looked perhaps too cramped: "It's meant to look epic.")

It successfully reflects the dramatic quality of much of the new Roxy music; especially the opening opus, "Manifesto", the dark introductory chords of which are introduced by a sombre keyboard drone over which Manzanera dribbles thick clusters of notes. Thompson and Tibbs provide a resonant rhythm, the tempo unflagging as Mackay's oboe strays across the viscous surface of the music. Manzanera leads the group into a more clearly defined theme as Ferry, whose entrance has been delayed until this suitably dramatic juncture, strolls into a cold-blue spotlight.

The audience is at once upon its feet, eager to discover just what sartorial image Ferry has selected for this tour. They might be disappointed that he has elected for nothing as extreme as the notorious gaucho ensemble of the *Country Life* tour, or the *GI Blues* chic of the *Siren* jaunt.

No – it's more a case of another tour, another suit. He is wearing a sharkskin suit, similar to the one he wore the last time he appeared at the Albert Hall during the *In Your Mind* concerts.

Indeed, the more cavalier aspects of Roxy Music's visual appearance have largely been abandoned: their appearance is sober, dark suits and a hint of Chinese militia – in Mackay's threads, of course – are the order of the day, here. The lighting scheme concentrating for the most part on harsh chiaroscuro effects, with very little colour being deployed.

The sound, at this point, is less than satisfactory. There is an echo bouncing back from the rear of the hall so thick you could eat your dinner off it – plates of sound, it says in my notebook. Ferry's vocals are also suffering; the lyric content of "Manifesto" is therefore comprehensively obscured. I can mention only that if its opening reminded me of Bowie's "Station To Station", its climax aspired to the epic sweep of "In Your Mind".

The subsequent version of "Trash" is lively, with the Thompson-Tibbs rhythm axis thundering with a potent urgency (the sheer muscularity of Thompson's playing has not diminished during his absence from the boards). "Thank you – it's great to be here again in Stockholm," Ferry announces after "Trash"; it's the most voluble statement he will make during the evening.

Thompson kicks into another volatile rhythm, and Ferry begins a curious little dance, his arse poking out beneath the hem of his jacket, his knees locked together. He remains an awkward, inelegant mover and reminds me suddenly of those occasional newsreels we see of Prince Charles attempting the Watusi with maidens in grass skirts somewhere on the shores of Africa.

The number evolves into a slightly modified reading of "Out Of The Blue" – the only substantial innovations to the original being the discofication of the bass/drums duet and an extended solo from Manzanera, during which Ferry leaves the stage and the guitarist and Andy Mackay combine in a sonic assault on the senses. It's quite delirious stuff, and the sound is becoming clearer as the engineers begin to overcome the acoustic deficiencies of the stadium.

My doubts about the pertinence of the Roxy reunion are already beginning to melt in the heat of the sheer enjoyment to be derived from the conspicuous thrill of the music; by the end of the next number they have evaporated completely.

The version of "Mother Of Pearl", which quickly succeeds "Out Of The Blue", is simply terrific; Manzanera gallantly leads the opening attack, his guitar assault falling away as Skinner's florid piano introduces the section of the song (his playing here recalling Roy Bittan's work on "Station To Station", incidentally).

The piece begins to grow, building to a glorious climax. Its final slow fade is rather abruptly terminated as the group heave into "A Song For Europe" with an awesome weight, of a density and propulsion that no other group has really been able to achieve. The song's mood of lurid despair may seem ludicrously exaggerated now, but it still retains a considerable emotional impact.

The stranglehold on the audience is cleverly relaxed with two new songs from *Manifesto*, both lighter in tone than the two songs we have just heard from *Stranded*.

"Cry, Cry, Cry" is by comparison almost flippantly infectious – though the lyrics I could decipher sounded jaundiced, with a venomous edge; musically it had something of the vintage thrust of, say, "Serenade", though it lacked, perhaps, verbal felicity.

"Still Falls The Rain" proved even more impressive; its intro slow and seductive, with Manzanera playing a discreetly haunting melody behind Ferry's falsetto vocal. Mackay adds brief stabs of saxophone and the number ends with a long solo from Manzanera, who seems more eagerly disposed to grabbing his share of the spotlight than ever before.

There followed a number – again from *Manifesto*, I supposed – which denied any attempt at identification. I'm afraid my notes refer only to a brutal solo from Manzanera, Mackay's chilling oboe and Skinner's ethereal keyboard contributions. Whatever, the piece gave way eventually to Mackay's striking introduction to one of Roxy's most ingenious creations: "Ladytron". Thompson's galloping drumming urges the performance to an exciting, breathless climax, the fascinating fade which graced the original production replaced here by a smashing, feverish race to a hysterical conclusion.

Another of Roxy's principal masterpieces – perhaps their greatest ever song – "In Every Dream Home A Heartache", follows; a model entirely faithful to the recording, its eerie eroticism perfectly intact, Ferry's role as the detached voyeur brilliantly defined. Masterfully, it's succeeded by the acerbic bitterness of "Casanova"; a violent, tortured reading which ends with Ferry smashing a fist down upon one of Thompson's cymbals.

Another new number is briefly featured: "Ain't That So", which might have appeared on the first side of *In Your Mind*.

The guy next to me introduces himself over the opening chords of "Love Is The Drug". He is the president of The Runaways' Swedish fan club. He also idolises Kiss. "I am a hard-rock freak," he announces. "This is sending me to sleep."

The effect of the music upon the rest of the audience is clearly less than soporific, though. "Both Ends Burning" is thrown out to the hungry mass.

"Re-Make/Re-Model" – boisterous, knockout stuff here, with screeching sax and pounding drums and Ferry at his most raucous – brings down the curtain; the audience in the stalls clamber upon their seats.

Clearly Roxy will return for the obligatory encores. I put my money on "Virginia Plain", followed by either "Street Life" or "Do The Strand", maybe both.

Ferry leads out the group. They play "Virginia Plain" – marvellous to hear it again; nostalgia be damned – and "Do The Strand". Manzanera fluffs the guitar part on "Strand" (see – they are human!), while Ferry performs a strange little dance which makes him look as if he's riding an imaginary horse. A final wave and they are gone.

"What did you think?" asks Andy Mackay, back at the hotel bar.

I tell him that I enjoyed it.

"But what are you going to write?" he counters.

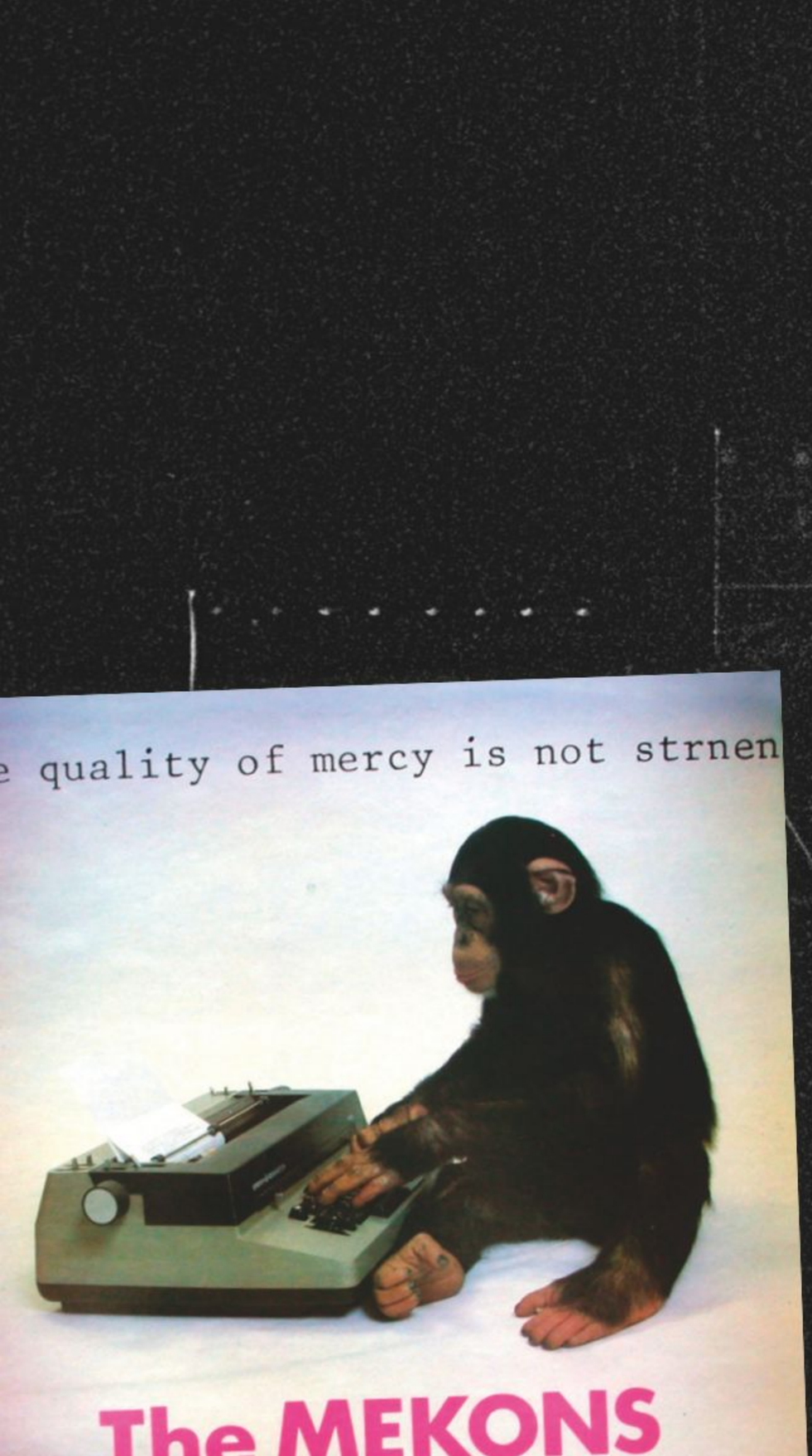
I tell him to buy next week's paper.

"We'll have it flown out," says Puxley. "And if it's a bad review the hit squad will be around in the afternoon."

Such drama! *Allan Jones* •

1979

JANUARY – MARCH



The MEKONS

“We didn’t want to be stars”

THE MEKONS are a smart band with great charm. Everyone thinks they’ll make it – but they are less sure. “Most of the songs are about social life,” says Mark Mekon. Things like sitting in pubs…”

The Mekons at the Marquee, London, in January 1980: (l–r) Andy Corrigan, Mark White, Tom Greenhalgh

DAVID CORIO / GETTY

— NME MARCH 3 —

"No one is better than I/I know I'm just an average guy"

ONCE UPON A time there was a rag-tag gang of Fine Arts students at Leeds University. They huffed and they puffed with a youthful enthusiasm that was tempered, wisely, by the wits they kept about them. But the house they would tear down was of a more complex construction than they had anticipated, its foundations deeper than they could have foreseen…

The tale of The Mekons isn't over yet. In fact, if my guess is correct, it has barely begun. But The Mekons' fairytale has come down to earth with the proverbial thump.

Prefacing this piece was a quote, admittedly out of context, from Little Stevie Wonder's '60s R&B smash "Uptight (Everything's Alright)" which in its own eloquent way explains what The Mekons are about – or at any rate the feeling I get from them – more readily than any amount of reasoned, or even impassioned, polemic. There is also the small matter of an unconscious – meaning effortless, spontaneous, uncontrived – dance-tune sensibility that Stevie Wonder once had at his fingertips, and which The Mekons, in a similarly unconscious way, can at the right time and in the right place deliver.

It's an earthy, natural pop joy and you can find it on one side of their second Fast Product single, "Where Were You?", or go and see them live for proof proper.

But it's that sentiment that is at the heart of the matter; that expression of pride and humility that says, "I'm great, I can do anything, but I'm nothing special. You could do anything too."

If you've been paying attention you'll know that there were once any number of Mekons but now there are basically six, and they began their band life by accident – sneaking in and making the most horrendous din on their mates' equipment while the latter – Gang Of Four as it happens – were having their tea break.

Serious intentions were the last thing on their minds – if someone had dared to suggest in a year's time they'd be a more or less stable entity with a second single that had sold nearly 20,000 copies, The Mekons would have laughed that person out of the room. But if there were no real ambitions, there was still an underlying approach, attitude, ideology even, that very soon crystallised.

Kevin Mekon, who plays guitar (a battered old Burns, the result of a self-imposed budget of £10) spells it out thus: "That anybody could do it; that we didn't want to be stars; that there was no set group as such, anybody could get up and join in and instruments would be swapped around; that there'd be no distance between the audience and the band; that we were nobody special."

"But they were very quickly shattered," adds bass player Mary Mekon.

Inevitably, the first to go was the anybody-can-have-a-bash dictum, which at an early gig precipitated a horrible uproar of guitar solos and impromptu versions of "White Riot".

"It just wasn't practical to do that," explains vocalist Andy Mekon. "If we wanted to foster that kind of spirit in other people… Basically we have to play some kind of music that people will actually pay money to come and see, and with the best will in the world, not many people will pay money to come and see things like that."

"A lot of the things we started out saying," admits the other Mekons guitarist, Tom Mekon, "…we didn't ever think we'd be in a position of having to rethink or to live with them. We just said them off the top of our heads. If someone had said, 'Think about the possibilities of what you might become'…"

Kevin recounts a "protracted discussion" they had with a writer who, after tiring of accusing them of being "commies", went on to accuse them of compromising their original ideas – compromise and commie being dirty words to his specious brand of dogma (which, curiously, still finds plenty of time for The Clash).

"We tried to explain to him that it's not a question of compromise. All the time you have new information coming along, and that's bound to change the conclusions you make. You can't have these sets of ideas that you put on a pedestal. They become like articles of faith, which is ridiculous."

An admirably clear-headed analysis of the situation. Idealism based on a sound measure of pragmatism is the surest way to avoid getting caught in your own hypocritical trap. Ideals have to be practical; otherwise they are simply irrelevant.

"If The Mekons had stuck to their original ideas, we would have become like ATV, playing to 20 people in a field."

"We wouldn't even have done that. We'd have just played one gig and that would have been it."

"There was a time," says Tom, "when people thought, or seemed to imply, that there was something wrong with becoming a big group; that there was some sort of moral dilemma involved in becoming successful."

"There's nothing morally wrong with becoming a working band," comments Jon, The Mekons' hard-working drummer, "doing a job of work like playing or entertaining, and actually getting enough money to live on out of it."

"The point is" – Tom again – "you are inevitably, or as luck would have it, going to get bigger. And when that happens I don't think you should immediately turn around and say, 'Right, that's it. Time to knock it on the head.'"

The Mekons' approach – punk, if you want to call it that – which is not exclusive to them but for which they have become a kind of figurehead, is perfectly commendable. But to not follow it through would be in a way a cop-out. If you adopt a certain way of doing things, there's almost an obligation to see how far you can take that way of doing things.

"But if what ended up," argues Mark Mekon, the other half of the vocal team, "was a group that used whatever ideas we had – the way we behave on stage, what we say here, any of the things we hold dear – and it just became this rather tatty piece of image they carted around… totally meaningless… The Mekons





show… Then I think we should stop – if it became just a selling point rather than the real justification."

"But I think," says Andy, "that it would be very hard for us to decide when it did become like that!"

"I think," says Mary, "that we've just reached a stage where it's beginning to be like that!"

And that, dear reader, is the very crux of the problem. It's also a rare insight into the heart of a band, something you're not likely to hear admitted so frankly in a long, long while.

The Mekons have come all the way to the fair city of Dublin to participate in a 24-hour punk marathon, the inaugural gig of the Project Arts Centre, a whitewashed warehouse partitioned off into two stage areas and a disco.

Bands play simultaneously and incessantly throughout the night, too many and too diverse to tally, to crowds that don't seem to give a hoot about the makeshift organisation and field-tent toilets. They party and pogo all the way into the next morning. The shoot punks, don't they?

Public Image and Throbbing Gristle are scheduled. The former pull out because their leader is in court and they're drummerless; the latter – so word has it – because it's too cold. But The Mekons show up, braving iced-over roads and bitter winds, lugging their amps and drums and guitars by hand on the Liverpool-to-Dublin ferry. They're being paid well for the gig, and need the money to bring the band kitty back in the black.

"It doesn't make sense," says Mark, as we while away the seven-hour ferry ride, "but now that we're playing more gigs and usually getting paid more for them, we seem to actually have less money. I don't understand it, but it's true."

The Mekons, despite persisting rumours, are still unsigned. They've had offers, and the interest has been met by some exacting demands on their part. They openly admit their perplexity about the "biz", yet acknowledge that sooner or later, one way or another, they will have to come to terms with it. Independence is a fine thing. The Mekons are able to be autonomous at present because they live on their student grants. Most of them will be taking their finals later this year.

So why, with all these factors conspiring to corrupt their original motivation, do they do it?

Seeing them live answers that question. The first time I saw them I hated it. Confronted with the vastness of London's Electric Ballroom, The Mekons seemed to be playing for themselves, projecting none of the warm, amateurish charm that is their infectious trademark.

It took a second exposure in more amenable circumstances to unearth the quality of their songs – simple, quite irresistible songs, like "Hong Kong Garden" or some Buzzcocks material, music that invites your surrender. The titles: "What Are We Going To Do Tonight", "Lonely And Wet", "Like Spoons No More", "Trevira Trousers", "Rosanne", "Dance And Drink With The Mekons".

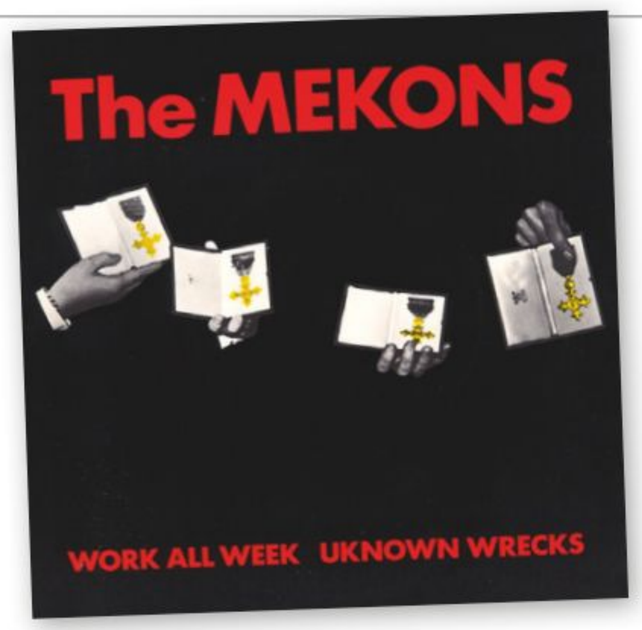
"Most of the songs are about social life," says Mark, who should know since he write the words. "Things like sitting in pubs… with the emphasis on clothes and behaviour patterns and everything else that's supposed to make up the real you," he adds disparagingly.

The Mekons go on stage in Dublin at 3.30 on Saturday morning. They had set out for the gig a full day and a half earlier, but whatever strain that might entail vanishes the moment they start playing. They smile and laugh a lot and dance incessantly. The fun they are having is tangible – they really can foster that spirit that Andy mentioned.

"Vulnerable," says one onlooker. "Innocent," says another. "Aw, come on," says a third. "I could do that."

know of a reputable lawyer (which, incidentally, I don't). They complain, with good reason, about the lack of reliable and available information about the biz. And how certain professional classes protect their self-interest by maintaining a mystique about what they do – something found in all strata of everyday life, no less in the business of music.

> "There was no set group as such – anybody could get up and join in"



Jon: "A lot of those early punk bands were putting across a message that anybody could do it."

Kevin: "That's the part that has been cleaned up the fastest. Just read the reviews. Words like 'musicianship' and 'professionalism' and 'craftsmanship', which weren't around a year or so ago, are coming back again."

And there I was thinking the value of ideas and energy over mere technique had been well and truly established… On reflection, though, it was inevitable that as the punk bands play more, so they become more technically proficient, with all the dangers that holds. And as they become more famous and more polished, so they become less accessible – the potential rebellion point for a new generation of malcontents.

Andy: "You go that route when you start putting yourself on stage. We had these ideas about having no photographs, no personalities. It's obvious that personalities do start to emerge as soon as you go on stage. It would be very easy to say we're going to be more honest, we're going to be our real selves. That's absolute shit… but we can try.

"And yet an important constituent of pop music is the personalities that make it. There's no getting away from that. But there must be a way of presenting personalities that are complementary to what we are musically, and aren't insulting to people's intelligence, aren't condescending."

Kevin: "And also aren't implying to people that that is a desirable personality to be."

Andy: "That's what I mean by condescending."

Kevin: "A group can suggest ways of acting without being so oppressive that you haven't got any way of making up your own mind about how to do things."

Tom: "We were saying the other day that it's nice to see people actually smiling at groups, which is what they tend to do to us, when they're not actually pissing themselves laughing! I can't see how we could ever be idolised in any way."

But they could, of course. Just as they could never have foreseen Bob Last's offer to make a record with them after their first gig with the band more or less as it is now, how can they foresee the circumstances they might find themselves in, beyond a few shrewd guesses?

Maybe it would have been better that The Mekons had called it quits after that first gig. Maybe it would have been better if these pages were left blank, and then you, dear reader, could have been true to the spirit of The Mekons and filled them in with a few words about yourself and your thoughts.

But there is a certain momentum that develops in these affairs that is outside any individual's control. The six average, intelligent, good-humoured members of The Mekons are aware of the dangers of losing sight of their founding goals – which, in case the point has been missed, is much more involved than a simple question of whether to sign or not to sign. Their awareness of these potential traps naturally puts them in a better position to deal with them.

So maybe this time they – and by implication you – won't get fooled again. *Paul Rambali* •

THE MEKONS SAY their evolution has reached the point where they are just about to crawl out of the water. Their guiding line when faced with a decision of any material consequence used to be "giggle and run". But now Mark is asking me if I


THE GROUP WHO FELL TO EARTH

THE MEKONS step down from the space ship of idealism and come face to face with Rock Reality.

1979

JANUARY—MARCH

Puttin' on the anti-style

“Real punks – not posers”

How THE UNDERTONES went from hire-purchase guitars and a cliquey amateur scene in Northern Ireland to popular acclaim and the mania of a mainland tour. “We were doin’ somethin’ different from the word go,” explains singer Feargal Sharkey.

September 1979: The Undertones visit the USA for the first time, playing support to The Clash at eight shows

GETTY / EBET ROBERT

— MELODY MAKER MARCH 10 —

THE FACTORY RESEMBLES the scene of a fully fledged riot. Smashed bottles and glasses lie strewn across the floor. Worn-out bodies are slumped in corners, searching for the second wind that will take them into the night and home. A group called The Undertones are the provocateurs of this carnage but remain unaware of their influential role.

"We keep waitin' for somebody from Sire [their record company] to come up after seein' us play and say, 'What the fuck did we sign you lot for? You're useless.' We don't understand any of this at all."

Manchester is the location for the second gig of The Undertones' 12-date British tour. Having become accustomed to playing perhaps one gig a week at home (Derry, N Ireland) for the previous two years, this little jaunt around the mainland assumes monumental, and – for the band – horrific, proportions.

"Two down, only 10 to go. God, that's an awful long time to be away. We're all feelin' kinda homesick at the moment. We don't like to be away from Derry for too long."

The tour opened the night before at the Norwich Boogie House. It was, by all accounts, quite an evening, a more frantic and hysterical reaction even than Manchester – which, I'll tell you, takes some doing. Such was the excitement in Norwich that one fan suffered a broken leg, another couple fainted in the heat, and the police were eventually called by the management to bring a semblance of normality back to the proceedings.

The Factory – normally a West Indian social club – is set in Manchester's notorious Hulme estate (highest suicide rate in GB). The Undertones are interested in the news that high-rise flats in the area are held up to the world of architecture as an example of how not to build multi-storey dwellings.

"They should go to the Rossville Street flats in Derry," The Undertones observe. "They're falling apart, far worse than these."

By the day, The Undertones – all of them under 21 – are living and learning. Their provincial naivety, so often lacking in the personalities of the more image-afflicted English bands, is more a strength than a weakness.

Everything they do, from travelling in a mini-bus to sleeping in cheap hotels to playing on stage, is touched by their bubbling enthusiasm for the novelty of it all, an attitude exaggerated even more by their sheltered home life. This is so vastly different from anything they've ever experienced that almost every little incident is marked by their incredulity

At the same time, they're no fools, and they react to the everyday routine of gigging with a professionalism that should be noted by more established bands. They turn up for soundchecks on time. When they're told to be on stage at 10pm, they'll be launching into the opening number on the dot, and afterwards their dressing room is an open house for anybody who wants to pop in and say hello.

They have very little time, too, for fashion, turning out in their street gear. The audience looks more like stars than they do, but that's another part of The Undertones' charm.

"We're just not used to this sorta thing," says singer Fergal Sharkey when we talk about the drastic change in pace from one gig a week to a constant run of shows. "It's very different. We're startin' to get a bit used to it now… but it's not as good. This really knackers us, although it's not as tiring as the tour we did supportin' The Rezillos. Christ, that was the first we'd ever played three nights on the trot. I was runnin' around permanently asleep."

"The days seem longer now," Bradley interjects. "We weren't used to playin' every night, y'know. The weeks seemed to fly when we played once a week in Derry. Now, every day is like a week. We're just sittin' around all the time, doin' nothin'."

The Undertones aren't too enamoured of life on the road. Their attitude, in fact, contrasts with that of probably every other new-wave band. They don't see any fun at all in hauling their young bodies around the British club circuit and, at the moment, certainly don't have any plans to undertake tours that take them away from home for more than two weeks.

"If we get through it," Sharkey cautiously replies when the brevity of this tour is pointed out. "We might just decide to go back home one day." And you know he's not joking. "Touring like this takes the fun out of it for us, particularly when you're playin' the same set night after night. After four nights, you just start thinkin', 'Here we go again.' It's really hard work to keep the thing fresh. It can get a bit boring.

"We never toured before, so we didn't know what it would be like. Touring to us is just… ah…necessary evil, I suppose."

John O'Neill is the chief songwriter in The Undertones. He's quiet and distant, but when he does speak his comments are concise and to the point. He is particularly disenchanted with touring. "It's a very serious situation," he suggests. "It's not actually being away from home that gets us. It's being away from girlfriends." So they don't believe in a rock'n'roll life of da booze, broads and brawls? "That's a myth," he drably replies.

Surely, though, in forming a band, the intention was to break out of the confined local environment, where, after all, they were hard put to find just one gig a week, and into a more lucrative and fulfilling circuit?

"Naw, not really," O'Neill considers. "All we wanted to do was make records. I mean, we never thought anything would happen anyway. I mean, if I hadda had the hindsight I have now, I wouldn't have signed up at all to Sire. Why? 'Cos it means being away from home an' all.

"We coulda had records out on Good Vibrations [a local label] and that would've done, as long as we had records out. Mind you, I probably would've got fed up just being on Good Vibrations, too, puttin' out records and nobody sayin' anything about them. I'd probably just quit."

> "Days seem longer now. We weren't used to playin' every night"



Fergal Sharkey on stage: "After four nights, you just start thinkin', 'Here we go again'"

FIN COSTELLO / GETTY

DERRY CITY IS situated in the north-west corner of Ireland, 90 miles from Belfast and 200 miles from Dublin. Politically, it is also known as Londonderry (a legacy from the London Society's involvement with the city) and has one of the highest unemployment levels in the UK.

It's more widely known as the centre where the current Northern Ireland troubles originated with a civil rights march on October 5, 1968, and has since been the location of many significant events in the North's recent turbulent decade. Set in an inspiring and beautiful landscape of valleys, the city is bisected by the River Foyle, and although Derry has never had Belfast's concentration of sectarianism, the North Bank is dominated by a Catholic population and the South by a Protestant community.

Derry is the home that means so much to The Undertones. They come from the Rosemount, Creggan and Bogside districts, all of which have seen their fair share of incidents since the troubles started. I mention this as a background to the environment that the group grew up in, since they were all aged about 10 when it all started and their teenage years came and went with shootings, bombings and riots.

The troubles, though, have an overt influence on the group's music. If anything, The Undertones' link with the Derry troubles is that they are the antithesis of those depressing years. Their music is lively and poppy, a reaction against their surroundings. I can't believe the group when they say that they were completely unaffected by events. I used to live there, and I was affected.

The lack of entertainment, a by-product of the troubles, was probably the most influential factor in the formation of The Undertones. Derry, three years ago, offered little in the way of fun to the energetic 16-year-old. The local bands churned out carbon copies of hard-rock classics; if you didn't like hard rock, then your listening habit was curtailed even further.

It was against this backdrop that The Undertones wrote their own little underground play. The title came from Billy Doherty and was intended as a parody of country & western showband names.

The idea of forming a group came from John O'Neill and his younger brother Vincent. That they didn't have a clue how to play wasn't a consideration at the time; the object of the exercise was purely to keep themselves amused. They contacted school friends Billy Doherty and Mickey Bradley, which led them directly to singer Fergal Sharkey, Doherty's classmate at school. When another O'Neill, this time youngest brother Damian, bought an electric guitar – the others had been learning on acoustics – he was drafted in to take Vincent's place.

None of the band was interested in an academic life. John got bored with the discipline of St Columb's College, found a job as an apprentice compositor, missed school holidays, went back to school at the Derry Technical College, and quickly became bored again. Damian left St Columb after O-levels and Bradley and Doherty quit school at St Peter's Christian Brothers Secondary after the same examination.

Sharkey, late of St Peter's, found a job repairing televisions shortly after forming the band. The Undertones would act as a diversion from mundane everyday life.

With the lineup complete, the band bought equipment through a mail-order catalogue, each paying £1 a week for two years to clear off that debt. When the gear arrived, they started learning in earnest, copying from the Stones' *Get Yer Ya-Ya's Out* until they had six songs off by heart.



ALBUMS
REVIEW
1979

Blitzkrieg pop

MM MAY 5 The Undertones' debut LP has hooks to spare.

The Undertones The Undertones SIRE

For some reason, this album reminds me of a scene in Kate Bush's live show, the part where she plays a rifle-toting trouble-shooter on "James And The Cold Gun", pumping bullets mercilessly into the writhing bodies of three gunslingers/dancers. It strikes me that this album could be the rifle; the 14 tracks are the bullets.

Except that this isn't so much a single-shot Winchester as a Sten gun with the clip on repeat. The Undertones blitz their way through the two sides, and by the time the 14th track – a brief shot of "Casbah Rock" – fades, you half expect to find the walls behind you peppered with bullet-holes. So you put the album on again and try to grasp some essentials this time.

And still you can't recognise whether it's important or irrelevant. So you play it again. And finally you decide that it's both, an album that is as disposable as it is essential, depending on the mood of the moment. Not an album to discard carelessly, but one to leave on permanent stand-by.

The Undertones themselves exude that take-it-or-leave-it attitude. The sleeve is tacky, with virtually no group information, not even who plays what, not even who's who. There's an ominous epitaph printed roughly inside that suggests a brief future in the music business. "Puttin' On The Anti-Style" – the *MM* headline a month ago – couldn't have been truer.

Once more, then, the Undertones are Fergal Sharkey (vocals), John O'Neill (guitar), Damian O'Neill (guitar), Michael Bradley (bass) and Billy Doherty (drums). Power-pop is far too tame a description of what they play. Let's call it Blitzkrieg-Pop. They play in the direct style of the Ramones, with a hint of the subtler textures of the Buzzcocks; but it's in the perfected quiver of Sharkey's voice contrasted to sweet backing harmonies that they find their own identity.

The songs are short and to the point. Perhaps it's a reflection of their Northern Irish background that the tunes are usually formed around a slogan like "*Keep it in the family*" (in "Family Entertainment"), "I *wanna be a male model*" ("Male Model"), or "*We're the jump boys*" ("Jump Boys").

"You can't help but assess each track as a potential hit"

The hooks are hypnotic, as we've already discovered from the earlier singles, "Teenage Kicks" and "Get Over You", neither of which reappear on this album. You can't help but assess each track as a potential single, and in doing so you pick "Family Entertainment", "Jump Boys", "Here Comes The Summer", "True Confessions" and "I Know A Girl" as certain hits.

"True Confessions", in fact, is the album's most fascinating track. Presumably prompted by producer Roger Bechirian, The Undertones prove that they can be as artsy-fartsy as the next band. A variation on the original arrangement which appeared on the flip side of "Teenage Kicks", this one almost verges on disco, relying on a heavy percussive backbone, a jabbing guitar chord, a synthesizer heartbeat, and lots of studio effects on the vocals.

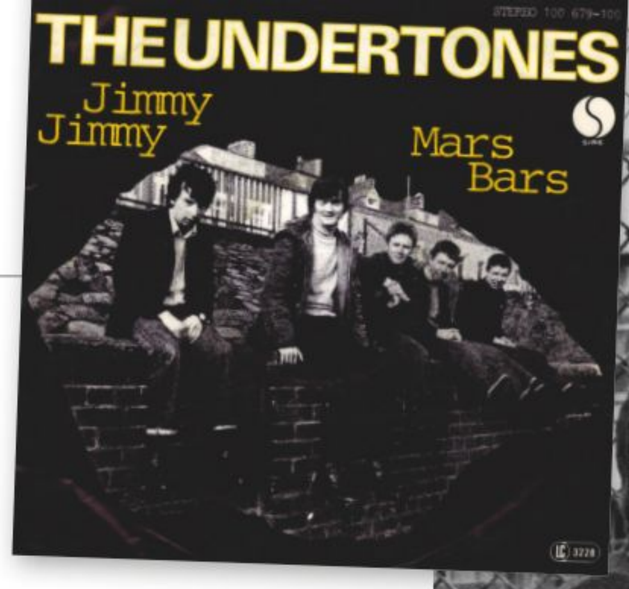
At last, then, a competitor for *Abba's Greatest Hits*. *Harry Doherty*

When they decided that they were ready to go out into the world, the boys found that all the routes were blocked off. Derry wasn't quite ready for a new-wave band. The Undertones weren't part of the new wave in the city. They *were* the new wave, and as such, felt the full backlash of the hard-rock community, which had the pub circuit fairly well sewn up. "All the groups in Derry had interchangeable members," O'Neill recalls. "It was a clique. They all knew each other. They were all over 21" – an indictment.

Bradley: "We always thought, 'We're gonna make records and be a real group.' I don't think any of the other groups in Derry thought that. They were just content to play part-time. Most of them were married and only wanted to make a couple of pounds on the side. That was about the height of it for them.

"All those other bands thought we couldn't play. They thought that it was all a bluff, 'cos we weren't playin' the heavy-metal stuff, but we were never interested in playin' all that. We thought we could do somethin' reasonable, and then we surprised ourselves when it actually sounded OK."

"And even for Derry, what we were playin' at the start was a change," Sharkey interrupts. "None of the other bands were doin' anything like »





that. We were doin' somethin' different from the word go anyway. The other bands were payin' no attention to us at all – it was a laugh to them. We weren't 'musicians', part of their wee clique, so they were sniggerin' and laughin' behind our backs. We were like Derry's token punks."

"…an' they were all sayin' things like, 'What are you gonna do when punk dies?'" Bradley adds, a hint of triumph in his tone.

Did they consider themselves punks?

"Aye," O'Neill anxiously asserts. "Real punks. Punk in that we were tryin' to be different, 'cos that's what punk is, not like some of the posers you get over here. We still try to be different."

Despite the animosity, The Undertones battled on, making their stage debut at a school concert on St Patrick's Day, March 17, 1976. They played their rejuvenated Rolling Stones standards, and by that time had also fastened onto the R&B textures of Dr Feelgood, nicking "Back In The Night" from them. They were encouraged to continue.

From personal experience, I know that it couldn't have been too easy being outside the mainstream in Derry. Every form of entertainment is geared towards the majority, and if you didn't like the hard-rock pub bands, then the only alternative was the showbands in ballrooms over the border in Donegal. If you didn't care for either, then you were in trouble.

Having played only three gigs in 1976, The Undertones got wind of the new-wave explosion across the Irish Sea, but the inadequacy of local record stores, who sold nothing but chart material, prevented the band from pursuing the interest. They did manage, however, to borrow a New York Dolls album, and eventually got their hands on the first Ramones album. They were sources of inspiration to the beleaguered punks.

"We had more or less agreed that if we hadn't made a record by last October, we were gonna pack it in. There's no point in messin' around," Sharkey says.

With that in mind, the boys hired a four-track studio usually used for local radio discussions in the city's Magee University. That session included two songs called "Teenage Kicks" and "Get Over You", and the band proudly sent their tape off to Stiff, Chiswick, Radar and John Peel. In the meanwhile, they had been spreading the net slightly to take in the occasional gig in Dublin and Belfast, with a couple of pub appearances, at a place called the Casbah, in their hometown. There was no reaction from the record companies at all to their efforts.

The band, too, were somewhat annoyed that John Peel was reeling off names of Belfast bands on his programmes without the slightest nod to Derry's pioneering Undertones. Billy Doherty phoned Peel to complain, and Peelie was taken by the 'Tones to such an extent that he kept his ear firmly to the turntable when their name was mentioned.

At the same time, the independent Good Vibrations label was giving Belfast bands the chance to record, and The Undertones once again felt left out. A friend, Bernard McAnaney, knew the label's founder, Terry Hooley, from art school, and offered to take their demo tape to him. That was when The Undertones' fortunes started to change.

"Our ambitions changed at different stages," Bradley says. "The first ambition was to actually play a song. Once we did that, we wanted to write a good song, then to play in a pub for an hour, then to make a record and then to get signed up…"

"And then to break up," O'Neill ominously adds. "We used to break up all the time. We were really fed up beating our heads against a brick wall. We had nothin'. We'd get slagged off walkin' the streets.

"Then, after last August, we started gettin' our own followin' and that was what kept us together. If it hadn't been for those people comin' to see us, we would never have stuck it out."

O'Neill, surly at the best of times, becomes decidedly melancholy at the memory of home: "Friday nights used to be really great when we played at the Casbah. People used to come, not just to see us, but to meet other people, to be a part… It definitely had something of a community spirit about it. We met most of our friends in Derry through the group. Last summer was great.

"I know that couldn't have lasted forever. Lookin' back it seems great, but we were breakin' up all the time anyway, so it couldn't have been that good. But it'll never be as good as that again, no matter what. Never. We could get to No 1 now and it still wouldn't be as good. I mean, I even doubt if we were hated by those other Derry rock groups. It was probably all in our heads that they hated us, just to give ourselves somethin' to think about."

ENGLAND, AND PARTICULARLY London, holds no fascination for The Undertones. They won't worry if they go no further than this, headlining at places like the Factory in Manchester and Eric's in Liverpool.

They've achieved all their ambitions. They've formed a group. They've put out an EP on Good Vibrations, the leading track being "Teenage Kicks". They've signed to a major label, Sire. Their session for John Peel, their guardian angel, has been featured four times on Radio One. They've been on *Top Of The Pops*. In Derry, they're heroes, and there's nothing like making it at home. They could go back home tomorrow, turn their backs on rock'n'roll and the glamour, and not be bothered by it.

"If it came down to it, and we had to move to England," Fergal Sharkey argues, "London would be the last place we'd go to. London's just totally crazy, as far as we can make out. They're all just 'Bleep, bleep, bleep'. Look after number one. They don't care about anyone."

Bradley picks up the theme: "But we'd never leave Derry anyway, 'cos we'd never let the group take over that much. Jesus, it's not that important that we have to uproot everything and move off to England just because that's supposed to be where everything's happ'nin'. It's good being here, as long as we know we can get back to Derry. That's all we care about, really."

The Undertones forcibly maintain, too, that the Derry troubles have exerted no influence on them, and looking at their music and lyrics, it's impossible to disagree with them, except to suggest, as I did earlier, that their material itself is a reaction.

O'Neill: "The Radiators [from Dublin] thought it would be a good idea for us to write songs about the troubles. We thought, 'No way.' That would be tryin' to cash in on the troubles. There was no way we could do that, so I suppose we kinda deliberately steered away from it."

O'Neill, in fact, once wrote a song about the local situation, called "Talk Talk Talk" (on the subject of politicians), but says that he was so aware of the subject matter and where it came from that he refused to use it. It was the first and last political song he wrote.

"It sounded so corny," O'Neill flinchingly remembers. "Stiff Little Fingers are so corny. I mean, they're a group that's done that sorta thing. They've done some good songs, but their words are so corny. I mean, the words on their LP just state the obvious. As well as that, it can't be too good for them to say, 'We were advised by a journalist to write songs about the troubles.'

"We were never under any pressure to become involved in the troubles at home. I don't know how people get involved, although I know a lotta boys who are in it, but that's their choice. A couple of years ago, when it first started, we were younger and probably didn't have an opinion. Now we have an opinion, like



The Undertones: (l–r) Damian O'Neill, Billy Doherty, John O'Neill, Michael Bradley and Feargal Sharkey

I resent the British Army being in Ireland. But we were so used to the troubles that it never occurred to us to write about them.

"And that leads to another thing. We're always put in the category of being a pop group, and being a pop group is as contrived as being a political group.

"We're just a group. We don't think about what we are. We just listen to records and then try to do one of our own that's as good. The songs are a lot more personal than just commenting on a general situation like the troubles.

"What Stiff Little Fingers do seems very contrived to me. But we're just jealous that they're gettin' all the publicity and we're not.

"It is a very obvious way of gettin' publicity, isn't it? I don't really know what they're tryin' to do – are they tryin' to tell people in England about it, or are they tryin' to tell people in Ireland? If they're tryin' to tell people in England about the troubles, then they haven't a hope.

"They come out with statements like somebody came up to them and cried when he heard 'Wasted Life' and he changed his mind and didn't join a paramilitary group. That sounds so corny. I find it hard to believe that a song could do that to somebody, to anybody. All we want our songs to do is to be listened to and enjoyed."

Bradley: "It could be true, like, 'cos they're from Belfast and Belfast is… er… strange."

O'Neill: "Aye. I suppose that's true."

Saturday is Liverpool and The Undertones are playing, for the first time ever, two shows in one night. The first is a matinee at 6.30 pm for kids under 18. The idea appeals to the band, who seem chuffed that they'll be playing to an audience that is younger than them.

This audience is also conquered by The Undertones' fresh, baby-faced approach, and the uninhibited reaction to the band's raw power once again emphasises that the group represents an alternative attitude vastly different from English bands, and even at variance with other Irish bands from more cosmopolitan centres like Dublin (The Boomtown Rats) and Belfast (Stiff Little Fingers).

> "Writing about the troubles would be tryin' to cash in on it"

They have a power that they haven't yet found out about. It's in the songs, and it's in the band. John O'Neill's compositions are perfect pop. Songs like "I Know A Girl", "Listening In", "Mars Bars" and particularly "Family Entertainment" will all be clocked as minor classics when the group's first album comes out in April.

The hard rhythm machine of the O'Neills' guitars, Doherty's drums and Bradley's bass will challenge the Ramones' wall of sound. Fergal Sharkey has already been noted as one of the best new singers around.

The band, meanwhile, remain oblivious to all this. They don't understand any of it. They don't understand why *Melody Maker* is writing about them.

"We don't think we're interestin' enough for somebody to write about," O'Neill contends. "Like when we heard the record company was interested in us, we laughed. An' then we're on *Top Of The Pops*. We couldn't do anything but laugh. When John Peel thought the record was great, we thought there must be something wrong. 'Why is he sayin' that? Is it because we come from Northern Ireland and he's sympathisin' with us 'cos we're war babies?'

"If we broke up next year, it'd be cat [Derry term for 'lousy'], 'cos we wouldn't have a nice easy job with plenty of money, but we still wouldn't care. We've no ambitions to become stars. It would be good to have the money, but to become stars we'd have to do more than we're doin' now, an' there's not much chance of that.

"We're just not prepared to tour all the time. The group isn't the all-important thing. It's secondary. I think we'd like to become a studio group. I'd love to build a studio in Derry. That would solve a lotta problems."

The Undertones may do just that, become studio buffs. Derry's own Phil Spectors. *Harry Doherty* •

EBET ROBERTS / GETTY

1979

JANUARY – MARCH



ALLAN TANNENBAUM / GETTY

May 10, 1979: Debbie Harry and Chris Stein in Media Sound Studios, NYC, where they are recording *Eat To The Beat*

“It’s a psychic thing”

Round to BLONDIE’s for dinner. Chris Stein does business while Debbie Harry roasts the bird. Life-size plaster nuns, a feud with Tony Parsons, “underground videos” – it’s all in a day’s work for the increasingly huge band. “The record company want me to sell my body again...” shrugs Harry.

— MM MARCH 3 —

NEW YORK, SUNDAY: Picture this (if you can): Deborah Harry, pin-up Empress of the Lipstick Vogue, stands alone in the kitchen of the modest penthouse apartment she shares with friend and business associate Chris Stein. She wears a bright-red sweater and a bewildered look.

She seems to be studying intensely some form of literature. A closer examination reveals that she grips an empty pumpkin pie tin in her left hand while perusing a volume titled *The Joys Of Cooking*.

“Aw... shit!” Debbie sounds mildly irritated. “It doesn’t say if it should be served hot or cold.”

She moves towards the cooker, where a pumpkin lies in a pot. She adds a pint of milk. I examine the result and fail to suppress a brief chuckle.

“I wouldn’t laugh,” she snaps. “You’re gonna be eating this.”

The blonde head with the black streak stoops. Debbie opens the oven door to reveal a roast duck. She stabs it in the breast. “D’you think it’s ready?” But before an opinion is offered, the bird is cooling on the sideboard.

“Right,” she mutters. “I gotta go out an’ look at some clothes.” She puts on her Supergirl outfit and slips out into the New York cold. Dinner will be served when she returns.

I mean, can you picture this? »

The mod couple

SATURDAY: REALISING HARRY and Stein's preoccupation with psychic phenomena ("sometimes we don't have to speak to know what the other's thinking"), I was sure that they'd appreciate that "Heart Of Glass" is playing, loud and proud, on the radio in the cab which ferries me from La Guardia Airport into New York.

"Phone us soon as you get in," Chris Stein had instructed me, and Debbie's voice welcomes me when I check in.

"Hold on a minute. I'm just scrubbing the bath."

This introduction to the domestic Debbie Harry comes as a shock. It seems interestingly at variance from our usual vision of the lady photographed licking a record on the sleeve of *Picture This*. Subtitle this: breaking down the walls of fantasy.

Debbie summons her mate to the phone. He has, she tells me, risen from his bed this minute. Over the next couple of days, Stein's attachment to the mattress becomes very apparent. "C'mon over," he drowsily blurts. "Dunkley'll be here too."

Dunkley? The way he says it implies my knowledge of the person. [Renowned British DJ and Hawkwind MC] Andy Dunkley? The Living Jukebox? Nah, couldn't be.

I jot down the address and hit the streets of New York, aiming for the Harry/Stein residence on Seventh Avenue.

4.30pm: I enter the apartment. I don't know what I expected (it being a penthouse "suite" and this being Seventh Avenue), but what I saw persuaded me that "penthouse" does not necessarily equal "deluxe". Luxurious this was not. Comfortable and homely it is.

On the left is a neat, compact kitchen – the tidiest room in the house, in fact. It would have looked perfectly normal, were it not for a five-foot statue of a nun ominously lurking in a corner.

"Uh? Oh, that. Chris bought it somewhere for $10," Debbie explains. "See those marks on it? What happened was that we used to share a place with Tommy and Dee Dee Ramone, and they were so freaked by the presence of the nun that they kept attacking it with daggers, trying to kill it. Eventually Chris had to cover the thing with a blanket."

Next to the kitchen is the living room, which isn't really the living room because it doubles as Chris and Debbie's music room. Papers, books and tapes are thrown about the place. A battery of reel-to-reel and cassette machines is flanked by two guitars, a Fender bass and a six-string, on their marks and ready for action should Stein and Harry wish to record demos for the next Blondie album. With studio time booked for the next week, the music room has been used a lot recently.

No, if you want the living room you must advance to the bedroom, which, apart from serving as the sleeping quarters, is transformed in the daytime into Chris Stein's office.

Stein's business acumen has increased considerably in the past year, following management mistakes in the early part of Blondie's career. So as often as not he's holed up in the bedroom, telephone to ear, conducting conversations with record-company promoters, management, publicist and whoever. Occasionally he even conducts business meetings in the room. In the evening, it reverts to the role of leisure room, where friends from a very tight circle meet to talk and watch television.

Again, the sparseness of material effects is striking: the furniture is confined to a couple of chairs, a double bed and, of course, the TV – the main source of entertainment in the household.

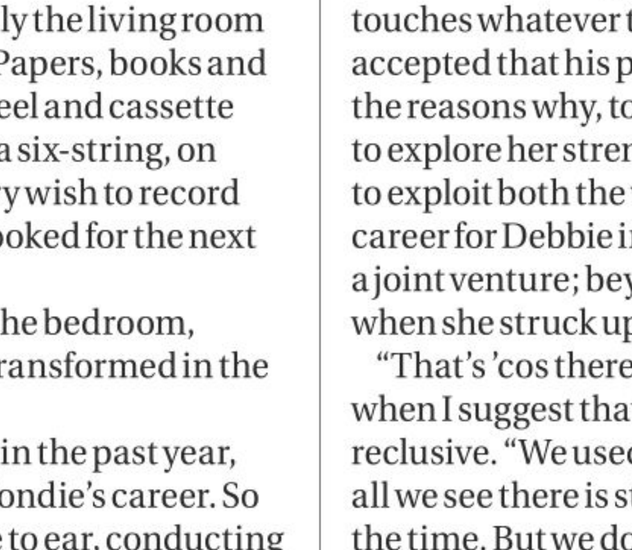
So this is the home of Blondie's celebrated sweethearts, an unassuming pad which employs a double lock to hold the madness of the music business at bay, and to ensure that they stay out of the in-crowd. It was once occupied by Hollywood actress Lillian Roth, during a particularly heavy drinking spell in the '30s. Its present occupants are very different. In a rare unguarded moment Debbie will express a wish for more of this life. "I'd like to spend more time fixing up the place. There's so much to do. But we just don't have that kind of time yet."

The relationship between Stein and Harry is an intimate kinship that touches whatever they become involved in. Stein has unselfishly accepted that his partner will always hog the limelight and understands the reasons why, to the degree that he is constantly seeking new avenues to explore her strengths and potential. Rock music was an obvious choice to exploit both the voice and the looks. Now he's encouraging a parallel career for Debbie in movies. For her part, Harry is forever hinting that it's a joint venture; beyond question, she realises that her fortunes turned when she struck up a relationship with Chris.

"That's 'cos there's nowhere to hang out any more," Stein will reply when I suggest that his life with Debbie in New York seems somewhat reclusive. "We used to hang out in places like Max's and CBGB's, but now all we see there is strangers. Also, we got all these people pestering us all the time. But we don't just sit around. Most of our free time is spent working on side projects. Boredom is what causes a lot of hanging out."

WHEN I ARRIVE, Debbie is soaking in the bath, preparing for a photo session later in the evening with Mick Rock. Chris, as is his wont, is prostrate on the bed. Sure enough, perched next to him like an attentive psychiatrist, is Andy Dunkley. Dunkley has dropped into New York en route to South America for a month-long holiday. Somebody must be pumping more than 5p into this livin' jukebox.

Stein, meantime, insists on demonstrating the versatility of his TV set by flipping through a string of channels via a remote-control unit on a bedside cabinet. America is famous for its multi-channelled television system, but Stein gets double the normal



"There's so much to do": Chris Stein and Debbie Harry at their apartment on Seventh Avenue in Manhattan

LYNN GOLDSMITH / GETTY

number of stations because he subscribes to Manhattan Cable Television. This afternoon, though, it's pretty boring fare, so, in an unprecedented burst of energy, he struggles off the bed and opens a cupboard to show Dunkley and me a couple of pieces of art. The first exhibit is rolled up like a poster, but Chris calls it "the only real piece of art we have in the place".

He unfurls the roll to reveal an Andy Warhol copy. Not an original, mind you. A copy. What I see there is a cow, just like any cow. Except that this cow was photographed by Andy Warhol, who has signed it with a dedication to Chris and Debbie. Dunkley – and I don't care what he says – looks as dumb and apathetic as me. "Great, ain't it?" Stein enthuses. "Yeah," Dunkley tentatively agrees. "Great." I maintain a dignified silence.

The second exhibit is a rough of the album sleeve Stein has photographed and designed for the new Robert Fripp release – "a supernatural album".

Stein and Harry have built a solid friendship with Fripp since the ex-King Crimson figure made his home in New York two years ago, and were probably instrumental in reactivating the guitarist at a time when all sorts of stories about his withdrawal from public life were sailing across the Atlantic. He's jammed with Blondie a couple of times, and made a guest appearance on *Parallel Lines*, with an off-the-wall solo on the album's strangest track, "Fade Away And Radiate".

Stein is justifiably satisfied with his stab at graphic design on the Fripp cover, especially as it looks certain that it'll see the light of day. He had a couple of dummies drawn up for the last Blondie album, but they never got past the planning stage. The graphics and photography are part of the "side projects" he referred to earlier.

"Photography is easy to pursue because I'm already set up to do that" he says. "And I went to art school and studied graphics too, so I'm just utilising what's at my disposal. My mother was a beatnik painter; I've been around artists all my life."

As Chris collects his scraps and puts them away, Debbie makes her first appearance of the day, resplendent in kimono and dripping hair. She is frantically waving a note allegedly carrying a personal message from Gene Simmons of Kiss.

"Meet me for a drink and talk," Gene pines in the note. The girl of his dreams does a crude parody of his vile tongue-wagging role in Kiss. "A phone number for the black book," she mumbles through a rolling laugh. Chris takes it a little more seriously. "You'd better not call him… or else." The number goes into the book all the same.

By early evening, the Harry-Steins are preparing for the photo session. Decisions, decisions. Debbie is having a furious argument with herself over what to wear, but eventually settles on a beige mini-dress/maxi-jumper, with matching wool tights and black heels. Chris has his suit ready, and pulls on a pair of boots that might be described as hobnails without the nails. Debbie is wide-eyed with disgust.

"Jesus, Chris, you're not wearing them, are you?" she screams, staring at his feet in horror.

Chris, lethargic as ever, remains unruffled. "Sure. He's not shooting our feet."

"I hope not," sighs an exasperated Ms Harry, and we set off downtown to Mick Rock's studio.

It's a strange sensation, standing with Debbie Harry in a main thoroughfare in Manhattan. Stars should not be ignored in the street, but that's what's happening here. In the freezing cold, Debbie shuffles towards the shelter of a shop front, seeking warmth. Meanwhile Chris is stranded out in the iced road, fruitlessly waving for a cab. They motor past. There are a few close things, but Chris loses out every time.

Debbie is fed up and barks, "C'mon, Chris, for Chrissakes."

Stein explains his predicament, but Debbie remains unsympathetic. "Ya gotta be aggressive. That's the only way you'll get a cab. Be fuckin' aggressive." A few minutes later, a cab is driving us towards the photo session.

The rest of the group, plus girlfriends, are already at Mick Rock's studio by the time we make it. Rock, who used to work for David Bowie, speeds about the place organising the set, having earlier despatched his juniors to collect as many old radios as they could find.

The changing room looks like Take Six in Oxford Street, the boys in the band having brought along their Sunday best. Nigel Harrison has resurrected clothes from his glitter days with Silverhead. "Mark my words," he warns in a suave English accent, "glitter is returning."

After primping and preening, the members of Blondie look so smart that they could pass for models in Freeman's Catalogue. "Heart Of Glass" can be heard on the radio. Clem Burke loses no time in pointing out to me, "Hear this? This is New York's number-one disco station."

The significance of that, of course, is that "Heart Of Glass" has attained credibility with the disco buffs. Who, a year ago, would have dreamed that a new-wave band would have a No 1 disco single?

The song was written by Stein and Harry, and was born out of their fondness for R&B and soul material – plus the influence of the disco phenomenon itself. "To us, it sounds like Kraftwerk," Debbie maintains. "It's certainly influenced by them. It's just a syncopated sound. It's disco, yet at the same time it's not disco. It's neither. We really like Donna Summer and you don't make a big political deal outta it."



"With me, it's a psychic thing," Stein continues. "It has to do with the beat. The 4/4 rhythm has a calming effect on the listener. It's that heartbeat beat. That's why it's so popular, whereas rock, which has an erratic offbeat, creates excitement. It's a physical thing. It's biological.

"I like some disco songs, and I don't like other disco songs. It's sorta like an alternative to punk rock. It's a gut emotion. I can't really see disco as being the death knell of live music. Not at all. I think what people object to about disco is the dumb straight people in suits makin' out that they're John Travolta, goin' to discos, listenin' to disco muzak and thinkin' they're hip. I find that very distasteful, but that side of it is just bullshit and has nuthin' to do with it. I mean, people were doin' that to Jefferson Airplane too…"

> "Disco's sorta like an alternative to punk rock. It's a gut emotion"

Listen out for another couple of disco-orientated tracks on the next Blondie album.

The session completed, Debbie and Chris, not usually noted for painting the town red, decide to leave for home; Frank Infante heads for Max's Kansas City, where the Heartbreakers are staging yet another comeback (or is it farewell?) gig; Burke and Jimmy Destri are Broadway bound to see their former buddy Gary Valentine play at a relatively new NY club, Hurrah's.

Hurrah's has been acquiring a healthy reputation with kids and bands alike. It merges rock with disco so subtly that neither audience loses credibility by hanging out there. Its trendy mirrored architecture makes it a safe place for the more fashion-affected kids to visit, while the wide range of bands – The Only Ones made their New York debut there – attracts the earthier audiences.

It wasn't a particularly inspiring night for Gary Valentine, though. One wonders why he ever left Blondie in the first place. This gig proved that he is neither a guitarist nor a singer, but there were a couple of good songs that a singer of Debbie Harry's style could have done justice to. You may recall that Valentine wrote "Touched By Your (Presence Dear)". You wouldn't if you heard him sing it. If Gary would realise that his vocation is writing songs, and not performing them, he might find a more fulfilling path.

"Yeah, I know what you mean," Harry later agreed. "There were a lot of ego clashes with Gary, within the band, and that's what led to him leaving. He was always wanting to change things. The difference between us is that I know how to sell a song."

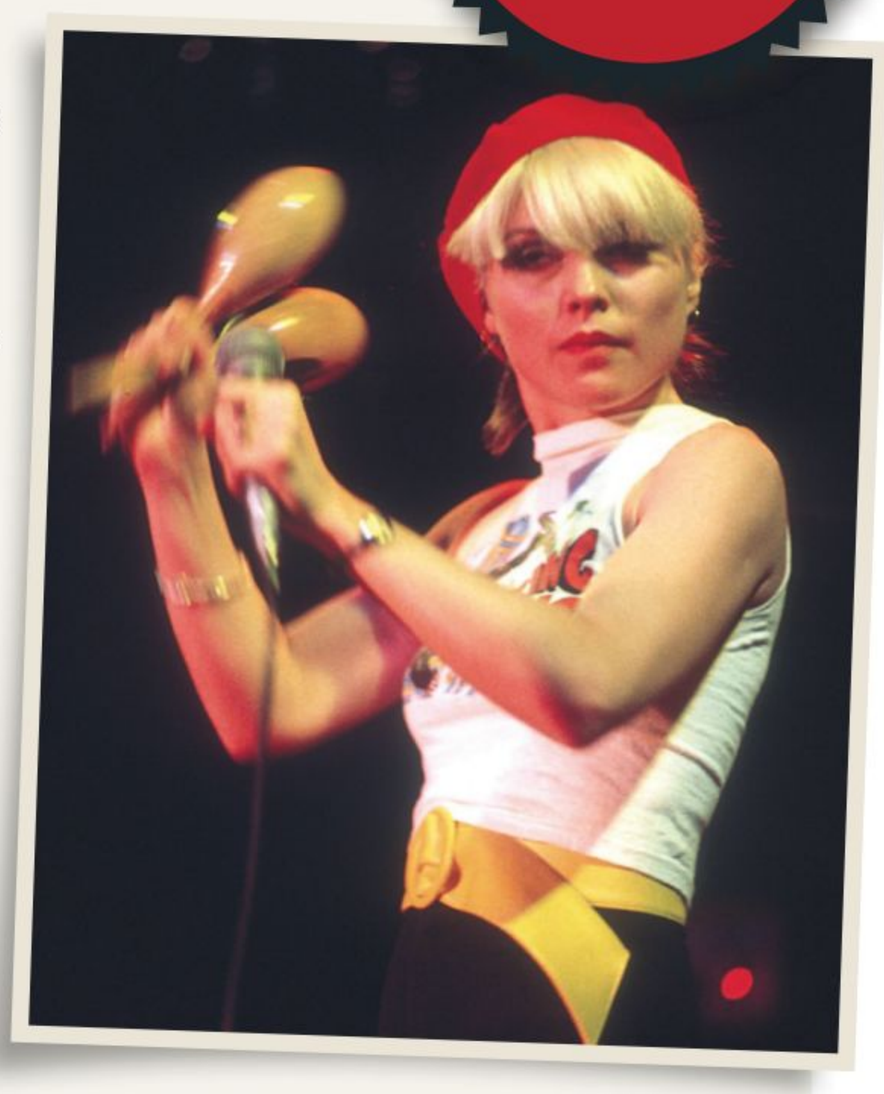
SUNDAY, 4.30PM: DEBBIE is sweating over the cooker while Chris conducts a business meeting – in the bedroom, of course – with a representative from Shep Gordon's office. Gordon is »



Something special

PINECREST COUNTRY CLUB, CONNECTICUT
LIVE!
JUNE 27

MM JUL 7 Blondie stick to pure pop for their first big US tour.



BLONDIE'S US TOUR should provide some interesting results when it ends in eight weeks' time. It could, for instance, determine just how willing American audiences are to participate in the gradual advance from formula FM rock to a more interesting, pop-based new wave.

In the past year there have been many new and different bands, from Dire Straits to The Cars to The Police to Elvis Costello. But, although they have bought the records, it remains to be seen whether US audiences are willing to shun the gross showbusiness overtones of "coliseum rock".

Enter Blondie. Blondie are the new-wave band that got a No 1 with a disco record ("Some people are under the impression that we are an English disco group," it says in the US concert programme). Blondie's album *Parallel Lines* has achieved platinum status in America. That, of course, means that they have a major home audience to play to, which isn't quite as simple as it sounds.

Blondie's American tour – their first real major jaunt around the country – is interesting in that it has the twin edge of posing both a challenge ("Take us for what we are...") and a threat ("But be warned, we're different") to audiences there. Kiss, Boston, Foreigner, Kansas, etc, give Americans what they want, ie, straight-ahead, uncomplicated, pretty rock. Blondie offers contrasts. Blondie offers pop. This Connecticut audience was a reasonable sample of a mainstream US rock audience. They didn't know how to react.

Shelton, the first gig of the tour, is a backwater district of Connecticut. The Pinecrest Country Club sounds grand but is actually open-air, a field with a stage at a one end, and located behind a nightclub. Two thousand turned up to see Blondie.

The most surprising facet of the gig was that Blondie stubbornly refused to compromise to suit any trends. If anything, they have become more poppy than on any of their British tours. They played almost all of their debut power-pop album, which is literally unknown in America; ignored most of the second, *Plastic Letters*, the music on which is geared more towards American FM; and, of course, picked freely off *Parallel Lines*.

The audience were bemused as the band swept through a slick set. But they knew that in Debbie Harry they were seeing a star. Blondie played 17 songs in little over an hour. Three of those were from the forthcoming album, tentatively called *Eat The Beat*.

"Slow Motion", with a very strong Motown influence, was particularly impressive

"Dreaming" and "Slow Motion" follow in the Blondie tradition of pure pop. "Slow Motion", with a very strong Motown influence, is particularly impressive. The third was "Underground Girl", the encore, sung and written by Frank Infante and Debbie Harry and a progression on their last collaboration, "I Know But I Don't Know". "Pretty Baby" is one of Blondie's finest songs but on stage lacks the Spectoresque chill of the recorded version. "Heart Of Glass", though, lost none of its charm, working round a keyboard riff and neatly utilising bland disco lights.

It was a good show but it will test the endurance of American audiences. I imagine that the Connecticut crowd woke up last Thursday morning and finally realised that they had witnessed something very special. *Harry Doherty*

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES / GETTY

---

interested in taking over Blondie's vacant management. He has a lot of clout in the States, but Stein is being very cool. Twice bitten, he's third time shy.

Back in the kitchen, waiting for the duck to roast, Debbie pulls out a few Polaroids from the previous night's session with Rock. They look impressive, the boys bunched around their singer in their high-street suits, holding the radios that the photographer had liberated from market shelves, all set against a striking red background.

"At least we've already got a cover for the next album from that session," Debbie says, noting her own sensuous pose in the shot. "Get out the cheese board! The record company wants me to sell my body again."

While she batters the living daylights out of the pumpkin pie, Debbie reveals that she, too, is working on a "secret project," and then is slightly taken aback when I tell her that I know it's a film – and it's not *Alphaville*.

The project is, indeed, shrouded in secrecy, and both Stein and Harry are unwilling to divulge too much information about it. As the day wears on, I learn that it's a psychological thriller, that it's a low-budget production, that it will only take a week to make (which was instrumental in Debbie's decision to accept the part), that shooting starts the next day... and that she will play a "tortured housewife."

She has, it appears, been offered a host of movie roles. She turned down ("Thank God!") a part in Stigwood's *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, and is frequently plied with scripts. This one was accepted because of the brief schedule, and because it had an exceptional script that appealed to both Stein and Harry. They also see the venture as a comfortable introduction to acting, which will serve her well when it comes to filming *Alphaville*, probably some time later this year.

The *Alphaville* project has come to a temporary standstill, after the introductory blaze of publicity sparked off by an *MM* front page picturing Harry and co-star Robert Fripp. Stein and Fripp had used the publicity to attract financial backers, and now they're considering the offers. It hadn't, however, originated as a movie project. Stein, having secured the rights to the book, wanted to record an album based around it until a close friend, former *Interview* editor Glenn O'Brien, persuaded him to go a step further and put it on celluloid.

While Stein views the move into films as an exciting new frontier, his other half remains sceptical about her future under the lights until she feels the temperature.

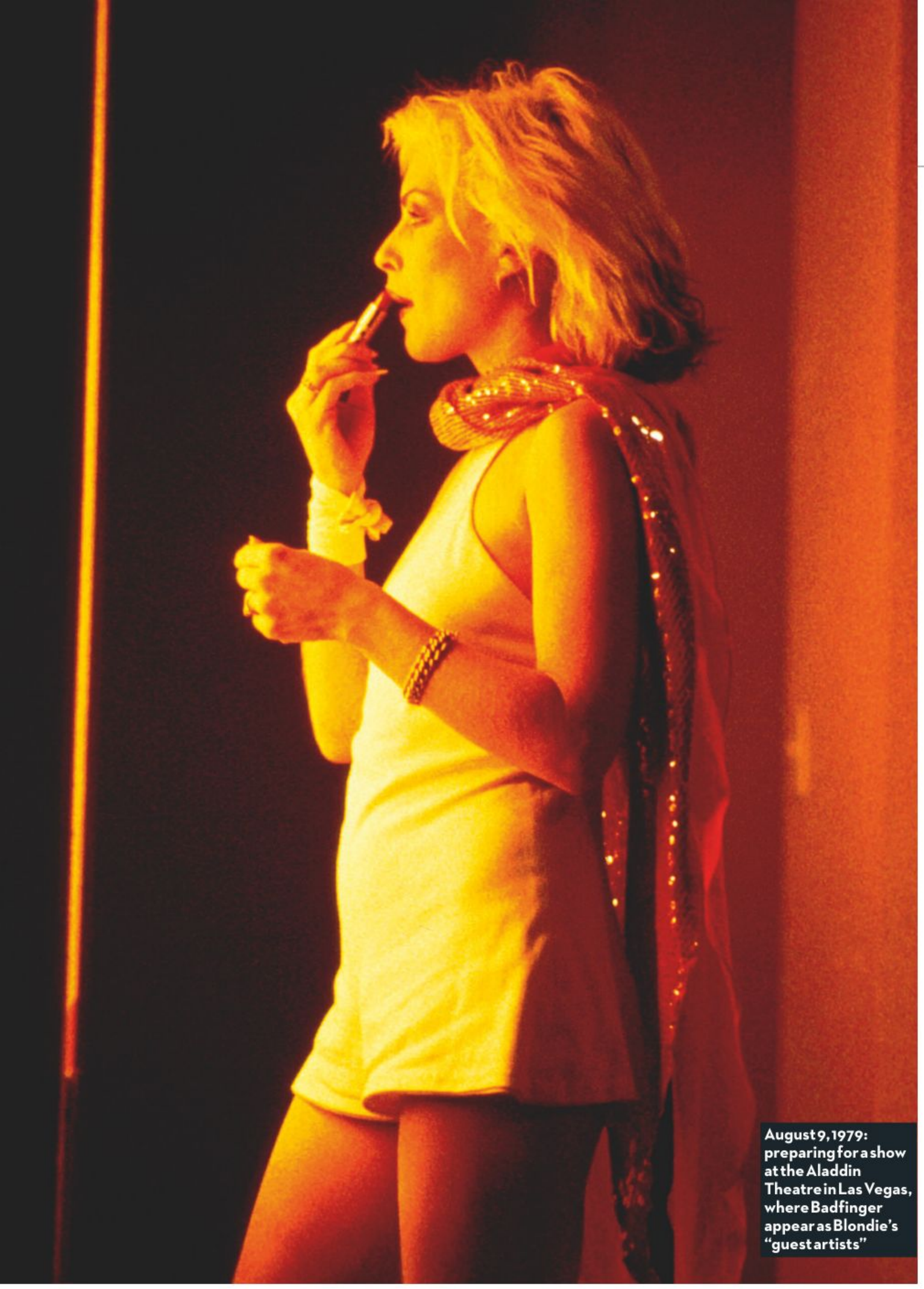
"It's a whole different sense of timing and pace of working," she muses. "I guess it's much drier, and it's certainly more personal. You don't need to have an audience response. You just do it, and if you do it good, you get turned on. It's that personal. The director is there, and the crew, but everybody is, like, busy, busy, busy.

"I haven't really done any acting before... just a couple of underground videos. Not like this, not like... ah... official. An' it's really complex. You have to choreograph. You have to time. It's the same thing with music – but with music, you have the music to carry you. It's a challenge, and I'm looking forward to it.

"It's so different from rock'n'roll. There's a lotta things about rock'n'roll that I don't like. I love being on stage, and I love the excitement, but I don't like the business that much. For some reason, the rock business hasn't dignified itself.

"After the movie industry was around for 20 years, it was dignified. They forced themselves to become dignified. They were protected. They could work in certain ways.

"In rock'n'roll, a lotta people get misused physically – and a lotta times mentally. The movie industry has all these unions, like the Screen Actors' Guild. Those things are very strong. Your working conditions have to be of a certain calibre. But in rock'n'roll you get constantly faced with very fuckin' wild conditions, y'know. Like, for me a lotta times they seem really rugged – freezin' cold theatres,



August 9, 1979: preparing for a show at the Aladdin Theatre in Las Vegas, where Badfinger appear as Blondie's "guest artists"

stuff like that. I dunno if that happens to actors or not. Anyway, this is my first experience of doing a movie. If I like it I like it. If I don't, I'll knock it on the head."

WITH DINNER ALMOST ready, Debbie excuses herself to pop out and check out her wardrobe for the impending seven days on the film set. Which leaves me in the company of Mr Stein, who has now completed his informal talks with the aspiring manager.

Stein is content to spend a lazy afternoon waiting for dinner – a full-scale meal of this sort doesn't happen too often in this household – watching TV, this time switching between sport and films on the cable channel.

On the bed lies a copy of *UFO*, the magazine, which brings up a discourse on one of Chris' many eccentric theories. For instance, he believes that the CIA (who else?) have extraterrestrial beings captive in the White House, an opinion encouraged by an article in this month's copy of *UFO*.

"The CIA have been involved in so many weird cover-ups," Chris will argue earnestly. "I wouldn't put it past them."

While on the subject of radical theories, it's worth adding that Stein believes that Crosby, Stills & Nash were planted on an unsuspecting population by the government in the early '70s to calm the increasing political consciousness and activities of the '60s. And who'd argue with that?

It turns into an amusing afternoon of TV and Stein philosophies. The peace is shattered, though, soon after Debbie returns, when she receives a call from a friend who's just finished reading Tony Parsons' and Julie Burchill's *The Boy Looked At Johnny* and wishes to point out the observations made by this other odd couple concerning Stein and Harry. Debbie calmly puts the phone on the receiver and explodes. Chris wanders out to discover what all the fuss is about. He lethargically returns and flops on the bed, casually reporting, "She wants to sue Tony Parsons."

After a few minutes' thought, he returns to Debbie in the kitchen. She will not be placated.

"I didn't say those fuckin' things," she cries. "He's tellin' lies."

Stein's voice is so soft and controlled that I can't hear his reply. Debbie is outraged by his diplomacy, and attempts a more direct approach to stir his anger.

"Did you see what he said about your fuckin' photographs? He said you're a lousy photographer!"

Chris is stirred, but only because Debbie's outburst is irritating him,

"So what? I don't give a fuck what he says."

Stein again returns to the bedroom, giving no clue of the proceeding battle. "Some fuckin' friend that was on the phone," he murmurs.

The incident emphasises Harry's mistrust and suspicion of the press. She is loath, these days, to be roped into an interview, and though she was usually the picture of charm in New York, she became decidedly cagey and unsettled if a discussion moved towards any seriousness. Blondie's relationship with the papers, and particularly the British papers, has deteriorated rapidly over the last year, the rot ironically coinciding with the band's outstanding success in Britain. Stein, for instance, puts the recent rumours of a split down to "one of our enemies spreading malicious gossip. A lot of stuff that's written about us has a high percentage of inaccuracy."

Nevertheless, Stein is the more tolerant of the two, showing an implicit appreciation of the power of the media, and an anxiety to exploit it whenever possible.

"Some of them have obviously turned on us 'cos we're too successful. We're outta the grasp of power-mad critics. It makes them very nervous when they know they can't make or break you any more. The bigger you get, the more imaginative the lies they'll print.

"It isn't that we get misquoted a lot. It's just that it's taken out of context. It's different here, though. The American press is less opinionated, on the whole, and more musically analytical."

Debbie cools down, and while carving the duck doubtless thinks only of Tony Parsons.

During the evening, it should be reported, Debbie's hair changes colour – from blonde to light brown with the first rinse, to slightly darker brown with the second. For the movie, you understand. Stein is impressed.

"Hey, that's really good," he raves. "It makes you look younger."

Debbie doesn't know what to make of that one.

MONDAY 7.30AM: "MAKEUP call for Ms Harry."

7.30pm: at the home of Debbie Harry and Chris Stein.

Harry: "Nervous? This mornin' I was scared shitless. I was gonna call you up. I was almost in tears."

Stein: "Why? D'you think you couldn't do it?"

Harry: "Yeah, I thought, 'Oh shit. Here I am. I can't do it.' Like, I was really freakin' out. That was it. I was really fucked up."

Stein: "An' what happened? You did it, didn't you?"

Harry: "Well, y'know, I would feel how freaked out I was and then I would just say to myself, 'You can't let this happen! You gotta do it. What're you gonna do? Quit?' An' I just had to talk myself back into doin' it."

Stein: "So then what happened? Didn't you do it? Whadda you worryin' about?"

Harry: "So then in the afternoon I just beat the words into my head. I just studied the script."

Stein: "What couldn't you do? Remember the lines?" »

ROBERTA BAYLEY / GETTY


Debbie & Fripp — a screen sensation

Chris Stein, Blondie's guitarist (and Debbie Harry's

Blondie by the Hudson river near Union City, New Jersey: (rear l–r) Nigel Harrison, Chris Stein, Clem Burke and Jimmy Destri; (front) Frank Infante and Debbie Harry

Harry: "Yeah. Like, I was havin' terrible trouble. I couldn't choreograph the words an' the movin', put the endin's at the right time or the beginnings. I was so fucked up."

Stein: "You were a little nervous. What's the big deal?"

Harry: "Dennis [Lipscomb, actor] could do it right away."

Stein: "Well, he's done movies before."

And it goes on.

> "We always wanted Blondie to be a multimedia commune"

IN THE COURSE of the evening, with Debbie completely exhausted after a hard day's work, we talk more about the "side projects". Debbie says that she was interested in producing a group, the B-Girls, but the plan was abandoned when the lead singer and guitarist had a fight. Movies now take care of Debbie's spare time.

Stein, however is taking on as much as he can handle. Apart from photography and graphics, he's also been producing an album for a friend, violinist and electronic musician Walter Steding, and at the mention of his name heads for the tape deck to play a result of the collaboration. It's a rather far-fetched version of "Hound Dog", with a solo by Robert Fripp.

Steding, according to Stein, is the antithesis of Blondie's pure pop. They first met a couple of years ago, when he supported Blondie at places like CBGB and Max's Kansas City.

"Producing him is great, because there are no preconceptions whatsoever and there are no references to music or anything else that I can think of, except to jazz, and that isn't deliberate. It's sorta like psychedelic jazz. It has a good sense of humour, too, which appeals to me. It satisfies my desire for abstraction. Blondie's music is much more regimented and mapped out carefully.

"I should say, too, that there's a definite trend now towards free-form rock and jazz in New York. Even the B-52's, who play tight, have these weird abstractions on top of the driving rhythms. It's a backlash against the regimentation of punk rock. It's like you play faster and faster – and finally you can't play any faster, so you just play erratically."

Other members of Blondie, too, have been involving themselves in solo projects. Jimmy Destri has been producing an excellent local band called the Student Teachers, as well as working on his own material, while Clem Burke was recently playing with Chris Spedding. Within the framework of Blondie, Stein sees it as a very healthy practice.

"It's easier for me to create things now, because I feel like there is really an audience and people will look or listen to whatever I do. We always wanted Blondie to be a multimedia commune. It's not supposed to be just a band. Actually, we're gonna go into religion pretty soon.

"We view it as a long-term thing. You see, if I'm bald I can't appear on an album cover, but I can still produce records and stuff. All the boys in the band are worried about their hair. I'll bet Joe Strummer would worry if he was bald. Some people can pull it off, like Eno can do it gracefully. Actually, Debbie should shave her hair off. That'd be great."

Framing Harry and Stein within Blondie can be a delicate matter, especially when the issue of internal conflict is raised. They argue that most of the problems have been eradicated now that the various members have settled into their own apartments, and now that they are looking for a new manager. They claim to be in complete control of the situation.

But I'd guess that there's still a certain amount of friction within the band. In some ways, Harry and Stein have a different outlook on rock'n'roll than the rest of the band. For instance, some of the band are anxious to get out on the road gigging, while Stein and Harry are reluctant to drag their bodies across the United States.



CHRIS GABRIN / GETTY

They don't deny that there are problems. "All these projects act as a valve and give us a lotta satisfaction," Debbie says. "There are so many strong personalities within the band that you have to find a channel to release the rest of the energy, otherwise you get a lotta bickerin'."

Stein once stated, in a *Rolling Stone* interview, that touring is "for morons".

"That was misconstrued. What I meant is that if a band has to tour incessantly, it's not really for morons but it's just, for people who don't have the right kind of hook that can be grabbed by the media. Bands like Kiss and Rush have to tour constantly, because they can't get the right type of media coverage. That doesn't necessarily mean it's moronic, but it's a lifestyle that we don't adhere to. We want to use the media – which is there to be used, after all.

"Being on stage is great. What I don't like about touring is the rest of the day. You spend an hour having a good time, and you spend 22 hours sleeping or lazing about a bus. That's a real drag. I mean, you're never not tired on a tour. You're always tired because you always gotta get up too early."

Maybe they didn't like the lengthy tours because their relationship is one which doesn't allow for participation in the on-the-road raving that many bands maintain keeps them sane.

"Well, it makes it a lot easier when you have somebody to bounce off. Now that we have a little more money, when we do tours of the States the boys take their girlfriends with them, too. It's more fun. It's a better atmosphere."

Many bands think that it's taboo to take girlfriends on tour.

"Yeah," Stein says. "But everybody has cool girlfriends in Blondie."

BEFORE I LEAVE, Stein has one more treat in store, a visit to an underground television programme that's beamed on cable TV. He's genuinely excited by the prospect. *TV Party*, as it's called, goes out every Monday right at 11pm, and is masterminded by Glenn O'Brien. It is, truly, Alternative TV.

Chris explains that it's a sort of community venture and that the studio, off East 53rd Street, can be hired for $40 an hour. It's available to any crank who has some message for the nation; one night there was a woman so in love with her goldfish that she acquired the studio to tell Manhattan about them. She had a potential audience of half a million.

A couple of weeks back, Debbie – who decides tonight to rest at home – went on *TV Party* and gave lessons on pogo dancing. It's that sort of programme.

When we arrive at the studio, the audience and artists are mingling. They come in all shapes, colours and sizes – the lunatic fringe, Stein calls them. As the hour approaches, the studio is a scene of unrelenting chaos, with the calm O'Brien presiding, but when the clock strikes 11, a loose band of Stein, Walter Steding, a bassist, a percussionist, a sax player and a singer play and sing the first thing that comes into their head. So this is free-form jazz.

O'Brien launches into his introductory spiel. Michael Aspel he is not. "Cold enough for ya? Welcome to the station that doesn't say, 'Cold enough for ya?'"

And on it goes, with spontaneous anecdotes and a guest appearance by Peter Hammill, who looks as if he's just stepped into another planet (which, of course, he has). Stein is called upon by O'Brien to give a few words. He imparts his theory of extra-terrestrial beings at the White House. Steding calls for more venues in New York, mentioning that CBGB has gone downhill (an opinion with which the audience vociferously agrees).

The hour flies by, and Stein dismantles his equipment in a corner of the studio.

"You were asking about the people we hang out with," he says, casting an eye over his eccentric court.

"Well, these are our friends." *Harry Doherty* •

Fulfilling a fantasy

ALBUMS REVIEW 1979

NME SEPT 22 More slick pop and disco-rock on Blondie's fourth LP.

Blondie Eat To The Beat CHRYSALIS

Blondes have more fun. They also sometimes sell more records. This puts our subject in a rather invidious position. The temptation to sneer at Blondie's rise from trash pop pariahs to bona fide teenybop idols has not been widely resisted. That's what you get for making it all look so easy.

The fact that Blondie are merely fulfilling the fantasy they were first rooted in has been widely overlooked. They make good singles, it is grudgingly acknowledged. They make albums that contain good singles; that will be bought by many and remembered mostly for the singles.

This is no exception. Come Christmas, with by then perhaps two more hits to their name, grandparents all over the country will enter record shops and say that name. Blondie are that close to being a genuine pop phenomenon.

I don't want to belittle their labours by harping on the phenomenon's foremost aspects, but it's hard not to. As an album, *Eat To The Beat* ranks ahead of its immediate predecessors – a varied, rounded, more confident display of the things they do well and those they insist on doing regardless.

But as a rock band Blondie cut little ice. Catching them live on their first tour supporting Television proved a big mistake. Debbie Harry's frail presence could hardly even front an army of toy soldiers, never mind a live jiving rock division (should she have one to front). But it's just this presence that's been exploited so well in other ways. Her slight voice, too timid for rock, has the perfect coy quality for pop, especially the pop Mike Chapman produces.

That his brand of guileless teeny pop (Mud, Suzi Quatro, lest we forget) is back might have been anticipated. All part of the richly disposable tapestry of the early '70s that feels uncannily near right now.

If The Knack are The Sweet, Gary Numan is David Bowie, Spizz might yet be Marc Bolan, and even Sparks are back in the charts, then what can that make Blondie? All I know is the cover of *Eat To The Beat* already looks like a page in *Smash Hits*. So, let's forget the thesis and take a stroll around the contents. They assimilate quickly. The title track, "Victor" and "Accidents Never Happen" follow the band's infatuation with modish rock, not the most rewarding avenue. The first four cuts lead straight to the heart of their appeal: "Dreaming", the single, adds the lilt of "Sunday Girl" to the rumble of "X Offender", but what Richard Gottehrer made sound like a roller-rink, Chapman adapts for an English church hall youth club disco.

"The Hardest Part", redolent of early Bowie/Alomar collaborations, replays their favourite Cold War foreign-movie theme in stop-frame bursts. "*The hardest part of the armoured guard/The man of steel behind the steering wheel/Need to feel some hardened steel...*" she squeals. Bear in mind that Lois Lane is in fact a brunette.

"Union City Blue" is another "Sunday Girl" or "Presence Dear", relating to the movie *Union City* that Debbie stars in, while "Shyla" is pure dream candy; the cotton-wool sound of "Going Back" as once rendered by Dusty Springfield.

The first four cuts on the other side find the Blondies at play: throwaway reggae ("Die Young Stay Pretty"), some Motown locomotion ("Slow Motion"), a throwaway lullaby ("Sound Asleep") and a fail-safe Euro-disco extension of something you may well have heard somewhere before.

If you're planning a move to Tibet then by all means buy this album, but if not you're going to hear the best of it in the circumstances best suited to it anyway. One more thing. Debbie Harry has a past that belies her glossy image, and that disturbs certain people. But she's never tried to hide it, and I like her for that.

As (I'm not) "Living In The Real World" (no more), the Britpunk sprint that finishes the album attests, she's not quite what popular myths have assigned, and Jayne Mansfield sealed, about du... (oops) blondes. Her tongue is pretty certainly in her cheek. *Paul Rambali*





1979

APRIL – JUNE

TOM WAITS, THE JAM, B-52'S, GARY NUMAN, DAVID BOWIE AND MORE

"Government plans to appeal"

MM APR 28 Was Keith Richards' sentence too lenient? The Canadian government insists so...

WITHIN 24 HOURS of playing two concerts for the blind in Toronto, Keith Richards was handed formal notification that the Canadian government plans to appeal against the sentence imposed on him for drugs offences. The government has protested that the sentence – probation plus the two concerts – was far too light for the offences, and wants harsher penalties. Richards received official notification of the intention to appeal on Monday, less than a day after the concerts.

He played one show with the Rolling Stones, and one with the New Barbarians, the touring band put together by Ron Wood for his solo tour. The concerts received prominent attention from the British press on Monday, with headlines like "Stones Charity Fiasco" focusing on claims that a blind charity would lose money because of the hire of the hall, but a Stones spokesman in London said that Richards had only been ordered to give the concerts – which he did for free – and not to make money for the charity.

The New Barbarians' lineup, which is now touring America and is planning to tour Britain in the summer, possibly including a festival appearance, is Ron Wood, Keith Richards, Stanley Clarke (bass), The Meters' Joseph "Zigaboo" Modeliste (drums), Ian McLagan (keyboards) and Bobby Keys (tenor sax).

RICHARD E. AARON / GETTY

April 22, 1979: the Stones play one of two fundraising concerts for The Canadian National Institute For The Blind in Oshawa, Ontario



Four of the seven Specials on stage in 1979: (l–r) John Bradbury, Neville Staple, Sir Horace Gentleman and Roddy Radiation

"It's actually happening"

MM MAY 19 Introducing The Specials, a band whose mixed-race lineup is not a policy – just a way of life.

ROCK FOLLIES, SERIES 3. Scene: a London pub. The band is on stage, pumping out fast body rhythms, rock energy fuelling an urgent, irresistible package of ska roots, bluebeat blood and modern fire that hits the audience in the hips. Delirium on the dancefloor.

Back from the dancers, a phalanx of record-company talent scouts and executive bigwigs stand shoulder-to-shoulder, absorbing the music and assessing its effect on the audience, trying to imagine them in a studio, possibly seeing the first album cover, calculating sales chances and breakthrough potential. To their right, more people press forward to see the band over the heads of the furiously skanking dancers. Among the observers is Mick Jagger, in town trying to organise his divorce on his home territory. His face shows a relaxed but definite interest in the group on stage.

The band finish their last encore, the record-biz folk gather in huddles, knowing the battle is hotting up and the auction is on as various meetings with the group are arranged. One company is recognised as the leading contender, but the others express quiet confidence in the size of their chequebooks. Fade.

Back to reality and the scene is still the same – only it's not part of a scriptwriter's fantasy. The pub was London's Greyhound in Fulham, the date was Tuesday last week and the band was The Specials, also known as The Special AKA.

"I find it all a little incredible – it's just like *Rock Follies*. In fact, I'd like to see that series again, because this time round it won't seem so incredible. It's actually happening to us."

The speaker is Sir Horace Gentleman, a van driver by day and bass player with The Specials by choice.

"I'm still incredulous about it – it's amazing that it's happening to us," he continued.

While its certainly the dream of most aspiring bands to be pursued by the heavyweights of the rock biz, including personal attendances by the likes of Jagger, Horace and The Specials are reacting with a caution that borders on reserve.

"The Rolling Stones used black music to start off, and they seem to have got on OK"

The hunters are headed by Chrysalis, and strong runners include Warner Bros, Island, CBS and Virgin, with Arista and A&M still in the field. Temptation for any band, but The Specials know what they want out of a record deal, and they aren't going to compromise for less. A distribution deal for their 2 Tone label is the plan, with the freedom to record as they want and sign other groups of their choice.

The Specials' emergence as one of the leading lights in the resurgence of ska as a popular live music shows them standing at the crossroads of a fascinating mix of musical and social forms. The seven-man Coventry band was formed out of the musical fire of punk and heavy reggae – the tension between the two is still evident in the striking power of the band on stage – and the last couple of months have seen the growing of a devoted column of London skinheads who crowd the front of every Specials show and throw up a barrage of "rude boy" chants. The two-tone ethnic lineup of the band also gives a vivid but natural example of racial unity, a theme extended in a song like "Doesn't Make It Alright" – *"He may be black, I may be white/But that doesn't mean we have to fight."*

Questions to the band about the racial mix surprise them – they live it, don't analyse it – and the frontline of Terry Hall (cropped hair and street-kid vocal power) and Neville Staples (dancing force) consolidates any doubts about the intensity of the band's existence.

The Specials were formed in mid-1977, when keyboard-player and chief songwriter Jerry "General Dankey" Dammers, rhythm guitarist Lynval Golding and Horace teamed up after acquaintance at college, followed by the arrival in early 1978 of guitarist Roddy Radiation, from a punk outfit called Roddy Radiation & The Wild Boys; Terry Hall from Squad, a second-generation new-wave band; and Neville. Drummer John "Brad" Bradbury joined just after Christmas, initially just to play on the sessions for their debut single.

Much mouth work got the band the support spot on last summer's Clash tour and a meeting with Bernie Rhodes, then Clash manager. He impressed the band with his ability to converse, but a potential


BLUEBEAT & SKA: 1

The new Skinhead Moonstomp

RAY STEVENSON / REX

management agreement was never concluded. "The Clash, Bernie's number-one sons, were in the process of breaking away from him and he sent us to Paris for a club residency. It was dreadful, the whole thing, like a Peter Sellers disaster movie," Horace explained.

Since then the band have been managing their own affairs, with financial help from a Coventry businessman after Christmas to finance the single. Now publicist Rick Rogers is helping with management and the group is looking at its future every night.

"We started playing punk rock and heavy reggae because they were the elements in the band at the time, but it didn't work," said Horace.

"Both sides have compromised, and the logical step is into ska and bluebeat. Ska has that offbeat that the mods used to dance to, then it got slowed down and became rock-steady, and then reggae. Ska started in New Orleans, broadcast from the radio stations that were picked up in Jamaica.

"It seemed fitting that New Orleans is also where R&B started, and that gave rise to the British rock'n'roll scene. The Rolling Stones used black music to start off, and they seem to have got on OK. Now we're trying to find our own direction from the ska and bluebeat roots."

Some of the traditional ska material featured in the band's set – such as "Guns Of Navarone" and "Skinhead Moonstomp" – is culled from their early listening days. Or as Horace put it, "I've been beaten up many times to the sound of "Liquidator" and "Long Shot".

Mention of being beaten up brought the conversation around to the band's new skinhead following.

"It started a couple of months back. We played the Lyceum with The Damned and the UK Subs, and the Subs have a skin following, who now come to see us.

"They've been great, but before we realised they were OK I was a bit scared. There's been that thing that's happened with the Sham Army – I would hate to be in Pursey's position. I think that the nice thing with The Specials, apart from the fact that there's no violence in our music, is that we don't live in London, and we have nothing to do with the territorial hierarchy that dominates the skin thing. One of the skins told me that what they needed was a band from outside."

Now that The Specials have found both an audience and a responsive industry, they're keen to develop their 2 Tone label.

"Once that's established, we want to start recording other bands who complement us, people like Dexys Midnight Runners and Madness, the two or three bands in the country who are playing the same sort of music.

"That way it'll come over as more of a movement, which it is, and I think people are more interested in a movement than a particular group. I suppose I could be pessimistic and say the interest in this sort of music is coming about because there's nothing left to revive, but really that isn't it. The reason for us is solely our involvement in black and white music." *John Orme*

The show will consist of a brick wall

MM MAY 19 The new Pink Floyd album has a heavy concept.



Roger Waters: the mortar in Pink Floyd's next album, *The Wall*

THE PINK FLOYD, who are currently recording their new album under utterly punishing conditions in Nice, have settle upon a novel concept for the accompanying stage show. The album, the whisper goes, is called "Bricks" (oh, well – it's only taken them two years). It's being produced by Bob Ezrin, whose presence will have done little to curb their exaggerated grandeur.

The stage show, continuing the kind of modest presentations favoured by the Floyd (as they are affectionately known by their fans), will consist of a brick wall, which will be erected along the front of the stage. Through this remarkable edifice, the audience will be able to see only the hands and the instruments of the internationally acclaimed combo. At the conclusion of the set's third song (three-and-a-half days into the performance), the wall will EXPLODE! Oooooh! The audience will be showered with bricks.

We presume the "bricks" will be manufactured from expanded Polystyrene or loose portions of Roger Waters' brain. Or something similarly soft and harmless. Typical, really, of tax exiles to be able to spend so much time designing such exciting theatrical distractions.



Joe Strummer of The Clash

A special benefit

MM APR 7 The Clash plan a gig for arrested gig-goers.

THE CLASH, WHO turned up at Saturday's punk protest at the closure of London's Beaufort Market, but did not play, are considering playing a benefit show for the 100 or so protesters arrested during the demo.

Stallholder and demo organiser Jack McDonald said the band had verbally agreed to play a special benefit to help those charged with various offences, from assaulting police to criminal damage. Among those arrested were McDonald's two brothers.

The Clash were due to headline a series of bands playing at Beaufort Market, in Chelsea's Kings Road, but backed off in the face of a writ served by the police.

Preparing to film

MM APR 7 Ex-Bonzo readies Sir Henry Rawlinson for big screen.

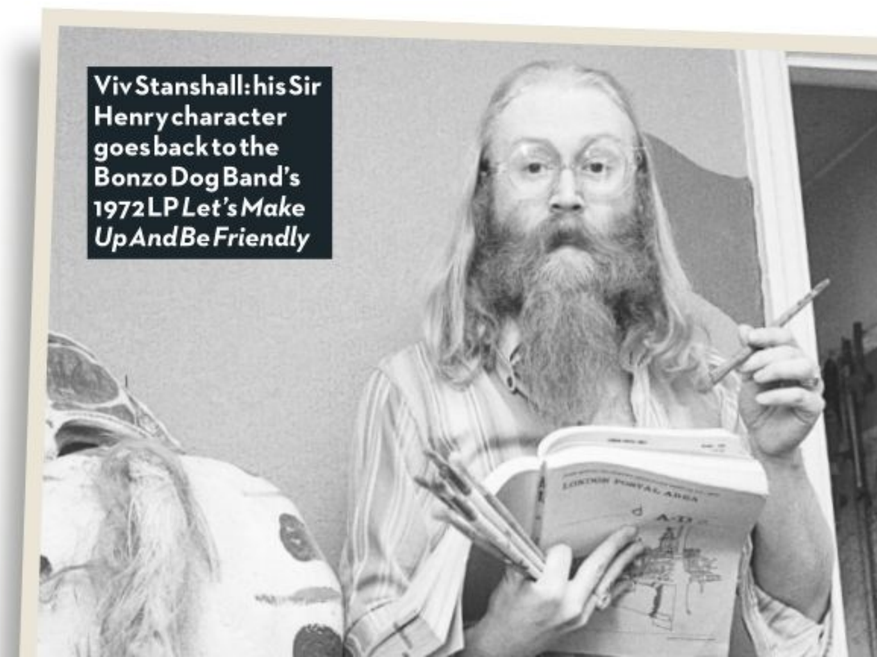
VIVIAN STANSHALL IS preparing to film a 90-minute version of his creation *Sir Henry At Rawlinson End*, and will present his last live performance this year of the Rawlinson End saga in a fortnight at London's Theatre Royal. The feature film will be shot in July and August, and will be based on the album that brought Stanshall back into the recording scene last year.

Stanshall's Theatre Royal performance is on April 18, and the support act will be Bert Jansch's band Conundrum, which features Martin Jenkins (violin, mandocello), Polly Bolton (vocals) and Nigel Smith (bass).

Tickets are priced £4, £3.50, £3 and £2 from Harvey Goldsmith's box office and the theatre.

Stanshall is currently in a studio in Gloucestershire recording a follow-up album to *Sir Henry At Rawlinson End* and a single, and among the musicians involved is Steve Winwood.

RICHARD MCCAFFREY / GETTY, ALLAN TANNENBAUM / GETTY, LES LEE / GETTY



Viv Stanshall: his Sir Henry character goes back to the Bonzo Dog Band's 1972 LP *Let's Make Up And Be Friendly*

“Don’t you ever say that to me!”



After a triumphant London show by LOU REED, members of the press are invited to join him at a restaurant. There, an unseemly spectacle unfolds, as Reed scraps with former patron DAVID BOWIE. What was said? “Ask fucking Lou,” says a battered Bowie.

— MELODY MAKER APRIL 21 —

THE WORD WAS that Lou Reed wanted to see me back stage after the show. He also wanted to see Giovanni Dadomo, a freelance writer who had recently contributed to *Time Out* an enthusiastic preview of his solitary London engagement.

Howard Harding, the Arista press officer who had been dispatched with the invitations, led us backstage. We lingered a while in the bar, to allow Lou a minute or too to cool down after his performance. We had a drink and lingered. There was no sign of Louis. We had another drink and lingered. There was still no sign of Louis. We lingered a while longer. Harding went off to find Lou.

He returned five minutes later.

“Aaah,” he said, “Lou’s gone.”

Bloody typical, we all agree.

“I’ll try to find out where he is,” Howard Harding promises.

Lou, he informs us upon his return, is having dinner at a restaurant in South Kensington. He is with David Bowie.

“He says he wants us to go over,” Howard tells us.

Dinner with Lou and the Thin White Duke seems an attractive proposition. Howard notes our enthusiasm and agrees to drive us to the restaurant – the Chelsea Rendezvous in Sydney Street. »

RICHARD McCAFFREY / GETTY

May 1979: following dates in Europe – and a fiery encounter with David Bowie – Lou Reed's The Bells Tour hits San Francisco for five shows at the city's Old Waldorf Theatre

FIGHT OF THE WEEK

The Great White Hope

versus

The Thin White Duke

"They'll be on the pudding by time we arrive," Giovanni Dadomo reflects.

Lou and David are huddled together at the head of their table when we arrive. Lou has his arm around David's shoulder. David is smiling. Lou is laughing, slapping the table. David seems content to play a supporting role. Lou talks. David listens, hands cupped together, elbows on the table.

We are shown to our table. Howard presents himself to Lou, tells him that Giovanni and I have arrived.

"Lou says to go over," Howard tells us.

Giovanni leads the way. Lou takes him firmly by the hand. I play gooseberry.

Bowie looks up.

"Allan," he says, extending a hand.

"David," I say, taking it.

"Nice to see you," says David. "How are you?" Bowie's charm is overwhelming.

"Allan," roars Lou.

"Lou," I reply, less raucously.

He clasps my hand, nearly breaking a finger in the process. He yanks me across the table. I almost end up sprawled in David's lap. I have an elbow in the remnants of Lou's dinner.

"Do you know Allan?" Lou asks Bowie.

"We meet occasionally," he tells Lou.

"Did you see the show tonight?" asks Lou.

"I'm still recovering," I tell him.

"Good," says Lou. "What did you think of it?"

"I felt like I was being given a good pistol-whipping."

"You probably deserved it," Lou snaps.

I decided to leave them to their supper.

"Yeah," says Lou. "Go."

I go. Lou turns back to David. They get their heads down. The old pals' act well under way.

Lou gets up and waddles down the restaurant to talk to some people at a table adjacent to ours. He deposits some dirty dishes on the floor, grabs a chair for Bowie who's followed him. There is a considerable amount of mutual backslapping, good times remembered. They exchange dates; contemplating some joint project in the near future, it appears.

Lou orders Irish coffee.

It is delivered.

Lou and David raise their glasses in a toast.

"To friends."

It is a touching scene.

They return to their original places, resume their conversation.

Five minutes later, the place is in uproar.

Bowie has said something to Lou. Lou is not entirely enamoured of the comment. He fetches David a smart crack about the head; fists are flying. Most of them are Lou's and they're being aimed in violence at Bowie. David ducks, arms flying up above his head. Lou is on his feet, screaming furiously at Bowie, still lashing out.

"Don't you EVER say that to me!" he bellows hysterically. "Don't you EVER fucking say that to ME!"

About nine people pile on Lou, wrestle him away from Bowie, drag him away from the table. There's an arm around his throat. He continues to spit insults at Bowie, who sits at the table staring impassively, clearly hoping Lou will go away. Lou shrugs off his minders (or are they Bowie's?). There's a terrible silence. People are watching open-mouthed in incredulity. Howard Harding looks as if he might die.

Lou sits down next to Bowie. They embrace. There is a massive sigh of relief. They kiss and make up. We wonder what on earth provoked the argument and Lou's fit of violence.

"Perhaps," suggests Giovanni Dadomo, "David tried to pinch Lou's Bakewell tart."

Meals are resumed. More wine is brought to the tables.

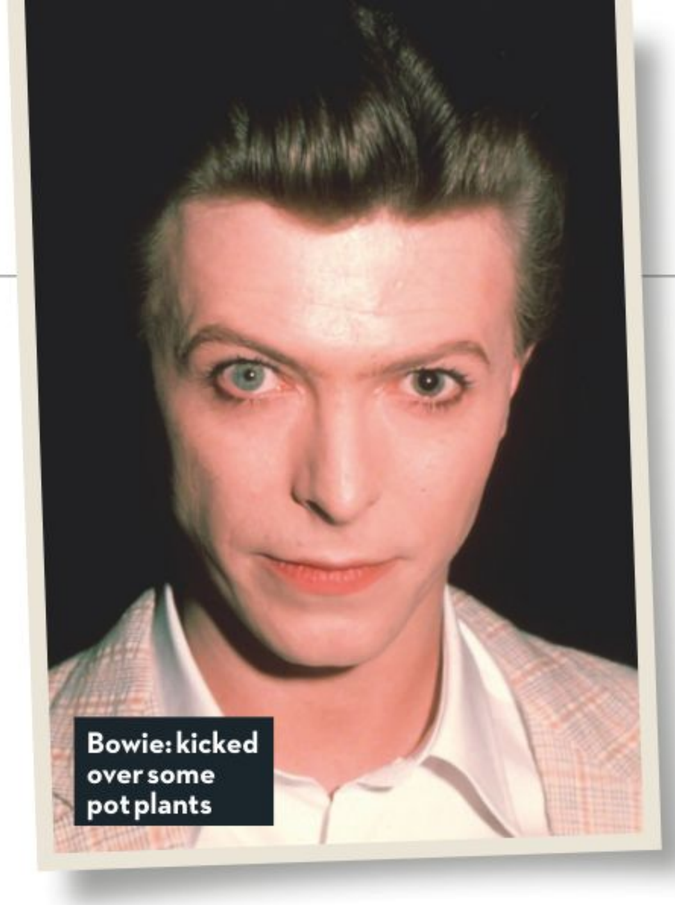
It looks as if the tiff has blown over.

The next thing I know, Lou is dragging David across the table by the front of his shirt and fetching him a few more smart slaps about the face. The place explodes in chaos again. Whatever David said to precipitate the first frank exchange of conflicting opinions, he's obviously repeated. The fool. Lou is beside himself with rage and rains down slaps upon Bowie's head before anyone can drag him off.

"I told you NEVER to say that," Lou screeches, fetching the hapless Bowie another backhander; another flurry of blows follows in hot pursuit. Lou is batting David about the top of his head. David cowers; Lou looks like an irate father boxing the ears of a particularly recalcitrant child for pissing in his slippers. He gets in a few more whacks before the minders haul him away from Bowie. He will not calm down. He tussles and struggles, tries to launch himself again at Bowie.

The silence that follows is ghastly. Lou's party decide to leave. Lou is escorted from the restaurant by an especially large fellow. He has his arm around Lou's shoulders; less in support than restraint. Lou has a look of ferocious blankness; his face is set in a fierce scowl. His eyes looked dead. He leaves with his party.

"Good Lord – what happened?" asks Howard Harding.



Bowie: kicked over some pot plants

BOWIE IS LEFT at the head of the table. It's a desolate scene. The table is covered with the debris of the meal and overturned wine bottles.

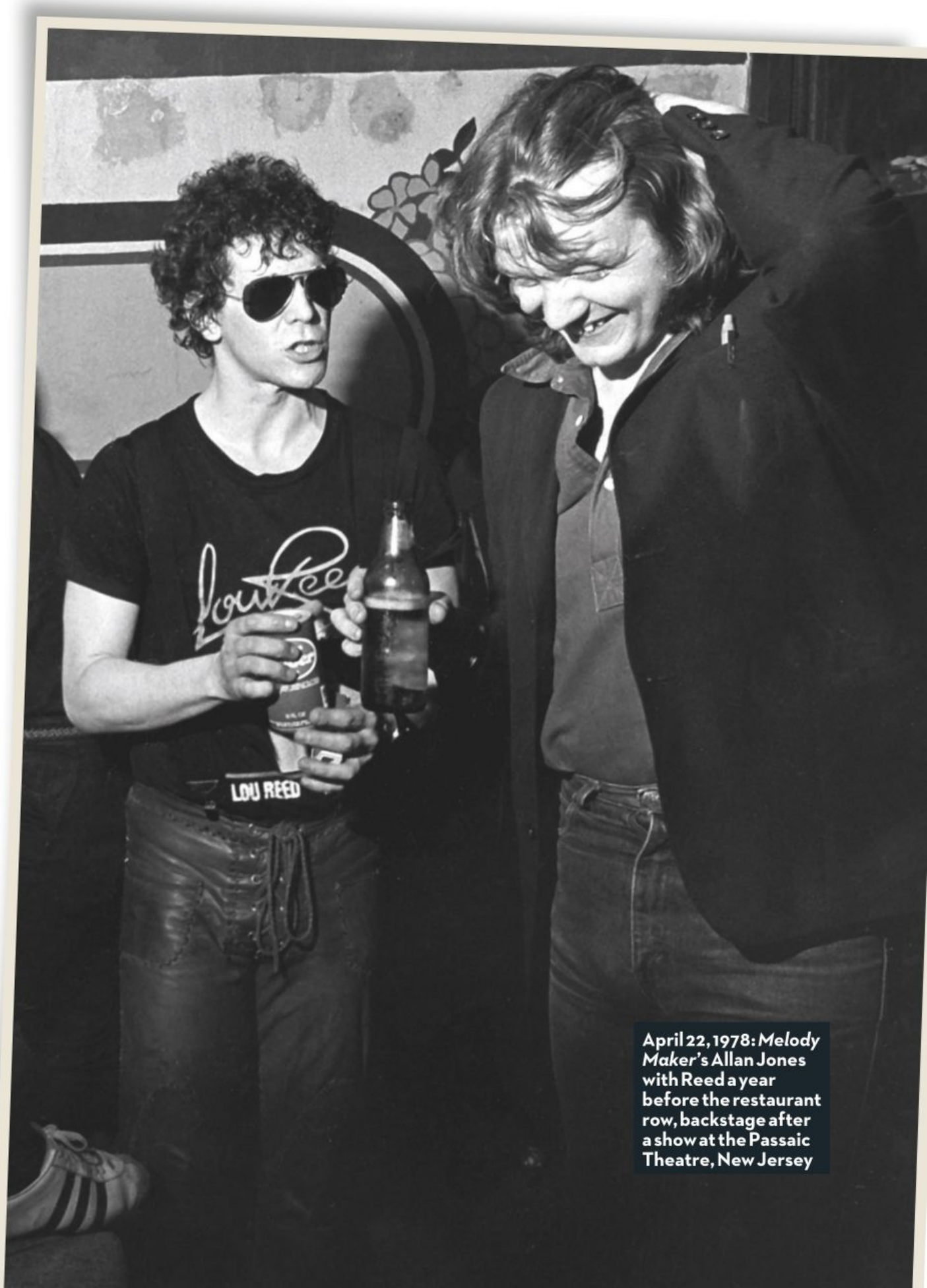
He is joined by two friends (a man and a woman; they are never successfully identified). Bowie sits with his head in his hands. He appears to be sobbing. He seems to be trying to explain what had happened between him and Lou.

I decided to play the fearless reported and went over.

"I've just come to say goodnight," I said.

"Oh," says Bowie. "Why don't you join us?"

"There isn't a chair," I tell him.



April 22, 1978: *Melody Maker*'s Allan Jones with Reed a year before the restaurant row, backstage after a show at the Passaic Theatre, New Jersey

ROBIN PLATZER / GETTY

"Then sit on the table," he replies a little testily. I sit of the table.

I tell him that I'm sorry that his reunion with Lou seems to have ended so disastrously. "I couldn't hear what was going on… Lou seemed very upset…" I mutter.

"Yes," says Bowie, wearily. He seems close to tears.

"It was nothing. It's all over," says his female companion.

"It isn't," says Bowie, hands clenched, eyes glaring.

"If it hadn't been for the heavies, they would have bloodied each other's noses and it would have been all over and they'd have been all right," his companion says.

The idea of Bowie bloodying anyone's nose seems remote.

"Are you a reporter?" somebody asks.

"Yes," I admit. "But don't worry – you won't see any of this on the front page of the *Daily Express* in the morning."

This is intended as a feeble joke. No one is amused.

"You'd better go," I am told.

"David's just invited me to stay," I protest quietly. "I was just wondering what happened."

This does it. Bowie leaps to his feet.

"Fuck off," he shouts. He means me. "If you want to know what happened you'll have to ask Lou Reed. Don't bother me with your fucking questions. Ask fucking Lou. He knows what fucking happened. He'll tell you."

"But he's already gone," I remind Bowie.

Bowie, angry, with tears in his eyes, turns on me. He grabs me by the lapels and shakes me and shakes me. I fear he might rip my jacket (recently worn on stage by Mike Oldfield in Berlin, it is of considerable sentimental value).

"Hey," I protest eloquently.

"Just fuck off," Bowie swears, shoving me back. "You're a journalist – go and fuckin' find him. Ask him what happened. I don't know."

He pushes me again, turns away, knocking over a chair. I am grabbed from behind and dragged away. I return to my table.

"I think you've upset the Thin White Duke," remarks Giovanni Dadomo.

"I think perhaps I have," I reply.

Bowie sits down again. Then he stands up, furniture starts to fly.

"Aaaah fuck" he declares.

He pushes his way down the restaurant, chairs are kicked out of the way. He begins to climb the stairs to the street. Most of the steps on the stairway are decorated with potted plants and small shrubs, and a palm tree or two. Bowie smashes most of them on his way out. He kicks a few, up-ends the others. There is a most terrible mess on the stairs.

The remaining guests are speechless at this further outburst. The waiters look on, astonished. We share their amazement.

The damage, it turns out, is not expensive. I discover later on in the week from the manager of the Chelsea Rendezvous that Bowie has sent "a bodyguard" to the restaurant to pay for replacement of the demolished plants; a cost of about £50.

The cause of the altercation, however, remains obscure. Lou flew out early the next morning to Dublin, cancelling all engagements, including a photo session.

The most popular explanation suggests that Bowie had been discussing with Lou the possibility of producing his next album. Bowie, though, is said to have demanded one thing before committing himself to the project: that Lou clean himself up, and get himself together. If Lou didn't clean up his act, David would refuse to work with him.

Lou, perhaps, was outraged at the suggestion that he was too untogether ("Don't you ever say that to me," he yelled, remember), and replied by belting David. The bully!

A further irony is added to the tale the following morning when it is announced that Bowie's new single is called "Boys Keep Swinging".

Oh, how we laughed. *Allan Jones* •

A desire to disappoint

NME APR 28 Lou tries playing it vulnerable on album nine.



Lou Reed The Bells ARISTA

Ah the bells, the bells... Somehow I don't think this is what Victor Hugo had in mind all those years ago. However, what Slick Vic had in mind is currently of academic interest only, whereas what Lou Reed has in mind is, as ever, open to conjecture. Reed is possibly the most infuriating Major Artiste in rock'n'roll: so often his work demonstrates either a seemingly total creative bankruptcy or else an almost perverse desire to disappoint. Almost every album he releases makes me swear never to bother to subject myself to another clapped-out insult of a Lou Reed album; every casual play of an old Velvets album makes me realise that this man cannot be written off no matter how lame he seems to get, which is plenty.

Oh well. Lou clearly ain't making records for us duffers who're too stupid to appreciate his titanic talents; he's making them for the hip, aware folks who think he's the Dostoevsky of the overdose: the people who live in the world he describes and thereby substantiate that he knows whereof he sneers, and the ones who don't live there but like to go slutting by dropping in on Reed's freakshow.

The Bells is a delusion disguised as an album: I'm not entirely sure whether Reed is attempting to delude his listeners or whether he is himself deluded. Its most immediately notable feature is that our protagonist has – for the nonce – unilaterally discarded his "Lou Reed" voice, the dry, cracking streetwise sneer that gave a certain credibility to even the duffest of lyrics and chunes. Naturally that isn't why he used it or why he's now dropped it. He now sounds as if he's having a go at Real Singing: a more demonstrative, expressive and black-influenced style. Unfortunately, the quavering, simpering result is reminiscent of someone attempting an impression of David Bowie and failing. Bowie's Reed impression is considerably better than Reed's Bowie – no wonder they came to blows.

The songs mostly attempt to be jolly and vulnerable: two qualities not particularly associated with Lou's past work. On "Families", Lou casts himself in the role of a prodigal phoning home to explain why he doesn't come back much, why he can't take over the family business, why he never married. It's oddly affecting (mostly because Reed is making no attempt to sound tough) and by far the best song on the album. The other best cut is "Disco Mystic", a throwaway modern instrumental with the title chanted in a deep, mock-impressive voice. Light, small fun.

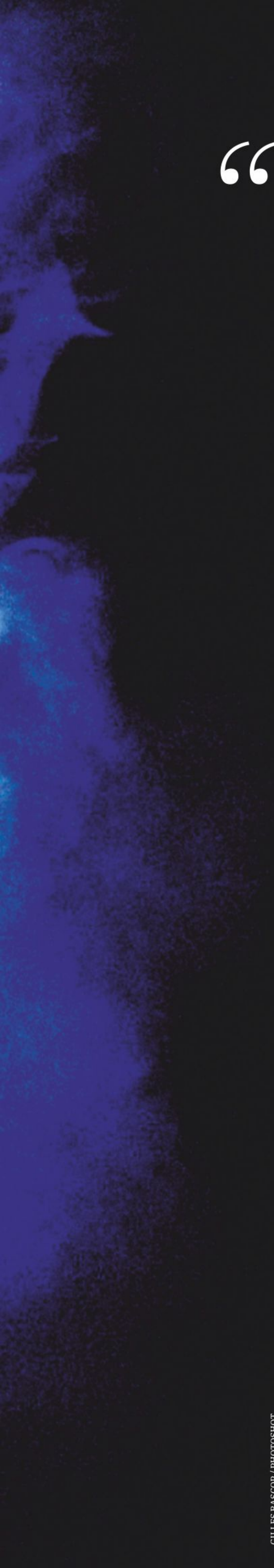
The overall instrumental sound is heavy, turgid, synth-laden, indigestible, lumpy. The overall vocal sound is quavery, unstable, unsteady, insubstantial. On the opener "Stupid Man" – co-written by Nils Lofgren, who is evidently overdue for a check-up – Reed just sounds as if he's burbling. The word "ninny" ought to fit in here somewhere, too.

Elsewhere Reed appears as soulful seducer on "I Want To Boogie With You", desperate carouser on "All Through The Night" and bass-voice goon on the Chaplin tribute "City Lights". Finally, he falls flat on his face with the title track, on which the brilliant trumpeter Don Cherry is hauled into the operation to blow his soul out and gets rewarded by being mixed so far down that Reed might as well have played the part himself on synthesizers for all the audible difference it would have made.

The Bells are alive with the sound of changing faces. Reed is no longer playing the part of Lou Reed (you know "Lou Reed": that sneering, mirror-shaded purveyor of Amphetamine Gothick), but he's still stuck with that character's limitations. He's traded "Lou Reed's" derision and damnation for a jerky vulnerability that would almost be charming if it wasn't for (a) the lamentable quality of most of the material and (b) the fact that it's Lou Reed and I don't trust the bugger an inch. After all, Lou Reed pretending to be a Nice Person is almost inconceivable. Isn't it? *Charles Shaar Murray*



May 1979: Tom Waits goes through his hobo shtick on stage, using a truck tyre, petrol pump and cigarette smoke as props



"I twist whatever I see"

TOM WAITS is in Copenhagen, a city where, as *MM*'s man puts it, "they know an eighter from Decatur from a baked potater", and where the singer's deadbeat persona is doing very good business. "I don't care who I hafta step on," Waits sighs, "on my way back down."

— MM MAY 5 —

"Now the dogs are barking
And the taxi cabs parking,
A lot they can do for me."
– "Tom Traubert's Blues (Four Sheets To The Wind In Copenhagen)"

MORE OF A flounder out of water than the Little Mermaid herself, Tom Waits hunches against the canal wind on an intersection of the Old City quarter of Copenhagen – verdigris green spires and turrets and palaces, one upright heritage – and flags at the passing cabs with a deuce of lunch-hooks no burgher would let near the Lurpak, accompanying each signal failure with a gesture copped – guess I'm guessing here, soldier – from some 37-year-old knock-nutty pug still indelibly inked as The Kid, while the smart money in this town rides on Danny Kaye, fare, tip and anthem.

It is a diligently disseminated no-secret that Tom Waits resembles a freightcar arrival and frightwig, one of those collar-up shiverers atop the spine of a transcontinental B&O, who yet feels the iron jolt of unofficial locomotion deep in the tendons of his right hand, and broods upon a new-leaf future of panhandling with his left. Copenhagen ain't buying, and delivers the back of the neck.

"Mmugh – cabbie!" he roars, as dairymaids churn by on bicycles, and hausfraus and hubbies snug in reindeer-motif knitwear with the pewter clasps stride a wide berth. "Mmugh – taxi!" Hell, maybe it doesn't translate…

A curious joint to open a tour, and he has Vienna, the Palladium, Dublin and Australia yet to come, all of which sounds more like a B Traven predicament than a tilt at the stars. A tricky talent to place, undoubtedly, but this itinerary recalls the Palookaville Scenic, no offertory boxes or blood-bank credit accepted.

"Trying to cut down onna road because everything gets run down. I get run down. Lotta travelling. No sleep. Bad food. Get tired of myself, usually wanna get 12 hours of sleep and some 12-year-old Scotch.

"Huh-huh. Trying to get healthy. Doing push-ups now. In the hotel room. All by myself. Feel kinda stoopid. Hafta do something." »

GILLES BASCOP / PHOTOSHOT

He ducks under his elbow and chafes the back of his head like a man rotating a bowling-alley ball to try the fingerholes. Heavy, everything's heavy, and the white black delivery just about manages to swat the trigger words – road, hotel room, sleep, Scotch – before dipping before the barometric pressures.

He prowls the thickets of his voice-box, somewhere near the threshold of speech, and it's like watching a pair of six-ounce Everlast gloves pick up a nickel from the canvas.

The '50s marketed two extremes of style, and Tom commutes between both. The method boxers, Brando as Terry Malloy, Newman as Rocky Graziano, dumped us with the premise that illiterate spells integrity, and Stallone – with whom Tom Waits collaborated on *Paradise Alley* – is mumbling out a retread for the '70s, so don't ah worry 'bout a t'ing, Ma.

The beat poets took the opposite route to the same righteous end, Kerouac in particular loosening the lexical sphincter and pulling the critical verdict from Norman Podhoretz that "what you get in these books is a man proclaiming that he is alive and offering every trivial experience he has ever had in evidence". We have been here before, and then some.



April 1979: Waits outside Copenhagen's famous Montmartre jazz club

IN THE LOBBY, we talk across the tables and chainsmoke. Didn't Ann Charters' biography of Kerouac prick the myth, the king of the beats spending much of his life in his mother's parlour?

"No. I actually'd prefer to see the other side. He wasn't a hero who could do no wrong. He saw a lot, got around. He wasn't nearly as mad and impetuous as Neal Cassady. Fact, after Neal died, Kerouac would not admit that he was gone. 'Neal's coming – Neal'll be here', you know. Never admitted that he was dead. Kept him alive."

"Jack was sittin' poker faced with bullets backed with bitches/Neal hunched at the wheel puttin' everyone in stitches."
– Jack & Neal

Tom drew an ace in a beer puddle on the tabletop. " Ace is a bullet, bitches is queens. He died in St Petersburg. I was in St Petersburg, played a concert, thought a lot about Kerouac."

He retreated back into a cloud of tobacco smoke. There was a long silence while he rummaged among his wreaths.

"Emmett Kelly just died," he announced. "Famous American clown. Sad clown. Sarasota, Florida. S'where all the old carnies live in the off-season. Ringling Brothers, Barnum & Bailey circus. Yeah, he died. He was taking the garbage out. Just fell down on the lawn, died. He was old vaudeville."

American heroes. He is collaborating with *Rock Dreams* artist Guy Peellaert on a book of heroes from Meyer Lansky to Lenny Bruce. He loves lists, hip lists and shit lists, tends to brandish them as credentials, or to rope off the stand from the squares. It's that kind of era: no originals, wide readers.

"I don't know how I'm looked upon in the context of American culture. It has to do with how long you stay around. How long you're allowed to stay around."

We climb into the hotel lift, a phone-booth-sized creaker with a vestigial mezzanine memory, falling short or overshooting the designated floor by a foot or two. Maybe Tom brought it with him.

He utters a cloud of smoke. "I'm trying to do an R&B album when I get home. Trying to do something a little more – uh – mix-it-up. Trying to find a way to combine it, because I don't get played on the radio. Ever. Marcel Marceau gets more airplay than I do. I heard myself once in North Dakota, that's all. I was in Michigan somewhere and I was listening to the radio, and I called the disc jockey, I said, 'Listen – I just played a concert, sold out a twenty-five-hundred auditorium and I'm bustin' my chops, would ya mind, you know?' He said, 'Who is this?' I said, 'My name is Tom Waits.' He said, 'No it isn't.' Hung up on me.

"I'd like to make some kind of breakthrough. When I get home, I've got two months to write an album and I've got no idea of what I'm gonna come up with. I'm waiting for it to drop on me. I usually go to a room and I stay there until I'm done, and that's where my real rewards are. It's a little difficult for me in the studio. I don't feel comfortable. It's like so antiseptic, you know. I pull away from anybody who's tried to give me any sort of direction, never had anybody look over my shoulder, tell me what to do. I don't turn it into a party or anything.

"I don't wanna play beer bars for another seven years. In the States I'm starting to play auditoriums now, old movie theatres. I like that fine."

The lift gulped to a halt, and we clambered down to the carpet. He went off to his room to rest. "How can I miss ya if ya won't go away?" he said.

HE HAS MADE six albums since Herb Cohen heard him at an audition night at the Troubadour, Los Angeles, in 1972. Back then, Tom Waits was scuffling as a dishwasher, toilet attendant, fireman, ice-cream truck driver, bartender and doorman, summed up for him in the phrase "a jack-off of all trades". He sang Ray Charles material before getting his track on 4am and his pipes have grown harsher and heavier since his debut on *Closing Time*.

"Uh – they're ALL low notes now. Don't like to listen to my first coupla albums. Sound like a little kid."

Fact or fiction, he is trapped in his own image now, can't extend beyond the hip coterie without endangering both. Last Christmas he wrote a screenplay called *Why Is The Dream So Much Sweeter Than The Taste?* about a used-car dealer in downtown LA.

"It's about a guy who's a success at being a failure, and a guy who's a failure at being a success; and it all takes place on New Year's Eve. Hope it's as good as I think it is. Never done anything that large before."

There's a Super 76 petrol pump on stage at the Montmartre, from the painting *Gas, 1940*, by Edward Hopper, painter of The Great American Loneliness: *Night-hawks*, *Automat*, *The Barber Shop*, *Corner Saloon*, *Drug Store*, *The El Station*, *Four Lane Road*, *Freight Cars*, *Hotel By A Railroad*, *Two On The Aisle*, *Second Story Sunlight*. There's also half a Buick in the wings, unattributed, but the beat photographer Robert Frank, who directed *Pull My Daisy*, might have titled it *US 90, Texas*.

None of this seems to bed down too well in the Montmartre, Denmark's premier jazz club, which for some reason is done up like a home for voles and riverbank folk, with tree roots and plaster boulders and elves'-picnic gingham tablecloths all working outta the Kenneth Grahame bag.

"Anybody know where I can buy a silver dining service set?" asks Herb Hardesty, from a stool on stage, which wouldn't be anybody's first-choice characterisation for Fats Domino's original tenorman. "Everything I've seen has been too dear."

"Ya wanna get married, Herb," says Tom from the piano. "Get given one for free." He fools with a little blues, very Avery Parrish, half-a-yard of jawbone canted back like the shank of a violin. The band leans into "Gee Baby".

They take a break, and Tom goes behind the bar for a beer. It could be better. No brass rail, no pretzel bowl, no sawdust, no bartender's horsecock equaliser, no spitoons. It's nothing like Nelson Algren's Tug & Maul Bar, which carried the shingle over the counter: "I've been punched, kicked, screwed, defaulted, knocked down, held up, held down, lied about, cheated, deceived, conned, laughed at, insulted, hit on the head and married. So go ahead and ask for credit; I don't mind saying NO".

Tom drinks from the bottle, handling it as he handles everything, with the mannered gawkiness of a newsie's first foray without the fingerless

TOM SHEEHAN

gloves. Mismatched halves of a black suit, tongue of tie hanging below the vest, hair springing strongly from his head like a Sov-Art inspirational sculpting, billy goat gruff goatee.

"Where I live, Tropicana Hotel, Santa Monica Boulevard, guy in a rockabilly band has had Eddie Cochran songs tattooed all over his arms. He's committed. When I first played the Roxy with Jimmy Witherspoon, all the lights fused along Sunset Boulevard. I dunno."

"Frying Cody Jarrett on Alcatraz?" I ventured. What was his obsession with gangsters? "*Small change got rained on with his own .38.*"

"Where I live it takes all you can muster up just to drown out the sirens every night. No, when I don't hear them, I get nervous. I write a lotta homicide stories."

Did he get "Burma Shave" from the Nick Ray movie, *They Live By Night*, from 1948?

"Yeah. That's the one. In fact, that's a great story. Very sad at the end where he gets mowed down at the motel. Farley Granger does soap operas now, I think. He was in Minneapolis and this woman disc jockey played it for him and he got a real kick out of it. He always played the baby-faced hood. He don't work much any more. I guess Sal Mineo got most of his roles. Yeah, I used that. I kept coming back to that movie image.

"Also, I have a lotta relatives in this little town called Marysville, and a cousin, her name is Corrine Johnson, and every time I'd go up there from Los Angeles in the summers, she was always like, you know, 'Christ, man – I gotta get outta this fucking town. I wanna go to LA.' She finally did. She hitch-hiked out and stood by this Foster Freeze on Prom Night, got in a car with a guy who was just some juvenile delinquent, and he took her all the way to LA where she eventually cracked up. Burma Shave was a shaving cream company. Abandoned in the late '50s. Useta advertise all along the highway. I always thought it was the name of a town."

He took a slug of beer, backed away from further definition. "I twist whatever I see, you know. Most of my writing is a metaphor for somethin' else. This buddy of mine, Paul Hampton, he married this millionaire, got in tight with her old man, and he was like in charge of all the money. He came home one night and caught his wife in bed with the chambermaid and he pulled out a .38, put it in her ear and – then stopped.

"He was writing at the time, so he wrote this real strange story called *Two Hour Honeymoon*, which is about an automobile accident. It starts with the sound of a car crash, and then – 'AAAGH – don't move me!' – you know, all that, and in the background is a screaming arrangement sounds like 'Harlem Nocturne'. I would never have made the connection between him and his ex-wife and an automobile accident, you know." He set fire to another cigarette. "So… there's always something underneath."

Who chose clarinet for "Potter's Field"?

"It was a collaboration between myself and Bob Alciver. All I had was the story and a bassline, so I came in and we managed to stretch it a little further. I was gonna do it with tenor and upright bass, but he said no. So we took it in sections, divided the whole story into sections. Clarinet was like the opening of 'Rhapsody In Blue'. That was what I had in mind."

What I had in mind was Widmark on the prow of a barge, bringing Thelma Ritter's coffin back from the paupers' burial ground of Potter's Field in a grey dawn: *Pickup On South Street*, Sam Fuller, 1953. Why the identification with losers? Or was that just LA, where every second cat is a failed something-or-other?

"Yeah, it's kinda sad. The girls still come from like Nebraska and stuff, go out there and, you know, wanna be in pictures. Where I live, I hear a lotta them stories. They end up on their backs in one of the rooms. Yeah, there's a lotta sadness. I see a lot from where I'm living. I don't see much hope. Can't go any further west."

But he wasn't a loser, and he still came on romantic about failure?

"I guess so. Two impostures, huh? I don't care who I hafta step on on my way back down."

And if the career runs out of gas?

"I BEG your pardon? Are you looking as if you're predicting the future? OK – you mean IF it all comes down. Uh. I'll move out to Palmdale somewhere, live in a trailer, raise a family, dunno…" He turns to the stage crew. "Hey – wadda we gonna do with the pump? Leave it draped? Uh-huh."

> "Most of my writing is a metaphor for somethin' else"

SOMEWHERE IN COPENHAGEN there must be a couple of cats who know an eighter from Decatur from a baked potater, because the Montmartre packs solid for the show, wall-to-wall skimmers and stubble, and Herb Cohen finally breaking cover with the kinda expression that reads Stick-With-Me-Kid-And-You-Can-End-Up-Wearing-Stripes.

Tom Waits holds the mic stand like a rum-dum adhering to railings, stands on one leg, and rubs the back of his head. On stage, the gesture, which is habitual, takes on the dumb wonder of the wino who wakes on an all-alley-cat audience. He shields his eyes from the light, releases a cloud of cigarette smoke, and staggers. Choreographically, he ain't shit, but he does occasionally get a row together that would not be disowned by, say, Slapsie Maxie Rosenbloom, the Lord of the Ring. In the lights, he is pavement-coloured.

He lurches into a frowsty "One That Got Away", Greg Cohen's bass walking sweetly, Arthur Richard's guitar whining and withering on the stem, Big John Thomassie's drums – now tamped down with a cushion in the bass drum – cracking them out.

He does "Step Right Up", psufferin' psuccotash delivery, all confidential snake-kiss sibilants and birth-flesh cavernous eversions catch one word in five. "Jitterbug Boy" slides into "New Orleans", Waits' mission-hall piano clinging to nostalgia, times gone, loves lost, like convolvulus onna bumsite. For "Sweet Bullet" he beats a guitar, fitting as neatly as a grifter in a sandwich-board. He does "Muriel", dedicated to Ernie Kovacs' widow, dons a stingy-brim for "Pasties & A G-String", and it's here we go down 'n' dirty for the step, right up Little Egypt bump 'n' grind.

The spotlights drill for the grainy black-and-white old movie stock finish. A few numbers come dunked in hellish red or a cold Spears & Jackson midnight mortuary blue, and there's a bandage-yellow beam that would look good on a gum-shield. Smarter 'n a shit-house rat, got th'ole experience, you betcha, Tom Waits plays it for the house percentage, milking "Summertime" for "Burma Shave", "Waltzing Matilda" for "Tom Traubert's Blues", and leaving the audience with that flush of familiarity that breeds contentment.

BACKSTAGE IN THE bar, he sits dumped and despairing. He stank, he says. He didn't even come up, he says, to his own snuff. He looks as self-recriminatory as Wallace Beery waking with a hangover and his boots on in a Wendy House. It's not like back home, he says, where his father turns up at his performances with a bunch of good loud buddies to heckle him.

The memory cheers him up. "Well… huh. He always tells me, if it's difficult – do it. And tell ya kids the same thing. Not that anyone'd marry ya. Hafta be crazy."

We sit at the bar.

"Y'ever see this?" he says, unslips his tie, drapes it outside his collar with an end in each hand. "Guy I see in Amsterdam, blue-collar workingman, wearing a tie to work. I asked this girl, why does he do that? She said, 'He's an alcoholic. Shakes all the time. Can't hold a glass, so…" Tom winds the tie around two fingers and grips his beer, draws on the other end like a pulley to hoist the hooch to his mouth.

I trade him the story of the Durham miners' wives. They buy butcher's hooks, decorate them with sequins, stab them into the bar counter as hangers for their handbags on Ladies Night Out.

"I kinda like that," he says.

"I kinda knew you would," I tell him, but there was a better Tom Waits story waiting for me and Tom Sheehan out in 4am Copenhagen. In the only bar they'd forgotten to dust, we hit on an All-Woman Eskimo Chapter of the Hell's Angels and one solitary Mancunian drunk. Copenhagen was a great place, he said. He'd been there two years, slinging hash in a pizza house. Before that, he'd been slinging hash in a Torquay pizza house in the holiday season. He had fallen in love with the summer's sunburned blondes from Scandinavia, couldn't get them out of his mind through the winters, so he'd pulled up stakes and moved direct to source. Copenhagen was where it was at, he said, waving his Carlsberg in the general direction of the Eskimo Chapter, and he came here every night. Soldier, you got it made. *Brian Case* •



1979

APRIL – JUNE

“Statements about now”

GARY NUMAN starts 1979 with two hit singles. A Bowiephile and a bit of an oddball, he makes dystopian electronic pop with support from mum and dad. “When I was at school, they sent me to a psychologist” he says. “The psychologists were stupid. It was a load of cock.”

— MELODY MAKER JUNE 9 —

GET THIS FOR a set of contradictions: this man has an abnormal, tearful distrust of people, yet wants to entertain them; loathes large crowds, yet wants to play for them; and now has a hit single where his mentors-slash-heroes Ultravox failed.

The man around whom these contradictions revolve is Gary Numan, leader and occasional embodiment of Tubeway Army, the entity which has inspired in critics a surprisingly virulent loathing.

Not often seen or heard, because of his professed reluctance to play live, Numan seemed to attract flack prompted by the glam pose he adopted on the current *Replicas* album sleeve. Suddenly, though, with a surprising chart entry in “Are ‘Friends’ Electric?”, at No 27 and rising (predicted a Beggars Banquet man happily), the aforementioned writers – or their patrons, at least – had to take notice of him. If only to dig out an explanation for its success.

Thus this meeting has been arranged, in a backroom of Beggars Banquet Earls Court record store – above, it would seem, the tube line, so conversation is punctured by the persistent passing of trains.

Twenty-one and nervous, Numan is strikingly different in appearance from the blond black-clad mannequin of the album sleeve. His hair now dyed black to replenish its health after all that bleaching, he’s just returned from a photo session. Far removed from the studied poses of the album picture and his TV appearances, he slips easily into conversation, cracking little jokes, beginning by offering probable reasons for the rise of “Are ‘Friends’ Electric?”.

“It was a picture disc, to start with, and I’m sure that got it off the ground. It had already got to 48 by the time we got to do *The Old Grey Whistle Test*.

“Maybe we were just lucky with the timing, but the press coverage, or the ads at least, did help and the picture disc helped it sell enough to get us on *Top Of The Pops*. We thought we might get onto *Old Grey* »

REX FEATURES


Alone in a crowd

Has Gary Numan's acute paranoia

hopes his doomladen observations will provoke thoughts in others, as did his sources with him. His third

school, asked to leave seconda school and college because I did

Gary Numan in the video for his UK No 1 hit single "Cars", taken from his third album (but first under his own name), *The Pleasure Principle*

1979

APRIL – JUNE

Faultless inanity

NME SEPT 8 Album three from synth ham Numan.

Gary Numan
The Pleasure Principle
BEGGARS BANQUET

And people seethe at the Golden Boy. Let's forget the threadbare rock'n'roll bitch that it's all been done before by "proper" artists – Bowie this, Kraftwerk that – because although the groundwork was laid down by lots of clever folk long ago, nobody has done what Gary Numan is doing right now.

Outside of Moroder, electronic music has always avoided commercial success with its accent on extended aural think pieces (hi, Tangerine Dream), or indulgent student pranks (hey, OMD).

But Numan is knocking out a bunch of important-sounding Moog anthems that never threaten to stray from ABC pattern, gives them a traditional rock backline and stammers through the most obvious of "futuristic babble" lyrics – and thus lulls the punter to believe that their musical tastes are taking leaps forward.

Simply, Numan is making intelligent music for people who aren't intelligent. This outlook I have confirmed by the amount of people, mainly boys, who will trot up to my DJ podium and ask for something by "The Tube". When I have to decline their requests, they invariably step back and with the look of a conqueror on their face say, "What, is he too weird for this place?" then stride away with the air of a person of great discernment.

And Gary is their Hero. I think Numan is harmless enough. I certainly don't believe the man himself is overly smart, which is probably his biggest selling point. After all, anyone with a bit of suss would shrink from penning anything as embarrassing as 90 per cent of the lyrics here. Example: "*These are no faces/This is my complex... Am I a photo/I can't remember...*"

No, the signs point to old Gal being a bit of an intellectual earwig by anyone's standards, which is what gives him the bottle to be free from all yearnings of "critical respect" that all rock/pop crossover acts so desperately try to maintain. He sincerely believes in that *1984*/Modern Man pantomime and his introduction of riffing synths has tapped a very, ah, rich vein.

The Pleasure Principle is pure Big Brother Status Quo. The lyrics are rarely more than duosyllabic and, by picking out the middles of sentences, they try hard to remain obscure – not that they are about much in the first place. I imagine Gary would love to be the subject of "in-depth" features where he could be quizzed as to What It All Means, and then he could be even more tight-lipped and spin his bluff out even further.

But at the moment he seems to have forgotten that it is a bluff at all. Like, *National Lampoon* couldn't have got together a better "future-pose" sleeve than this. No, our Gary is just a ham with a synthesizer and, by God, the British public does love a ham.

The lyrics are rarely more than duosyllabic

The music is easy and listenable – albeit not for too long – and the production – by Gazza himself – is excellent. Only "Metal" is as good as "Are 'Friends' Electric?", but it will certainly be a No 1 record; its faultless inanity is irresistible.

It seems to me that the instant Numan wises up – well, that's when he stops selling records. *Danny Baker*

Whistle Test, but we never thought we'd get onto *Top Of The Pops*..."

Released on May 4, the single's rise has been phenomenally fast. If its successes surprise Gary, that's only because, in his master-scheme, the next one ("Cars") was scheduled to be The Hit. Obviously he's not deterred by his upset plans.

Why he's made it, while his acknowledged foremost influence Ultravox failed, he puts down to the efficiency of their respective record companies. Coming under the umbrella of WEA, Beggars Banquet have at their disposal the machinery to make it. The company has a proven record of breaking acts through picture discs. But after its initial flurry of sales, when all the pretty pictures are gone, its success is ultimately down to whether people like the record or not.

Ultravox's failure saddens and mystifies Numan, who displays what is bordering on reverence for the band. He makes no bones, either, about how much he actually got from them, once admitting that most of *Replicas* is based on their music. "Are 'Friends' Electric?", though, owes less than other tracks.

"I prefer to listen to 'Slow Motion' [an Ultravox single] to my single, but whether it's better or not I don't know. I'm obviously too close to my own music to make any value judgements about it."

What sets him apart from most other plagiarists is that he admits and acknowledges his sources, pre-empting criticism. Whether that makes you want to listen to his music, rather than to its source, of course depends on you.

Because of Ultravox's perennial unpopularity, Numan claims that nobody even noticed his debt to them until he pointed it out. Writers previously related his music to David Bowie's, although the latter's influence is minimal – or so he says, despite an earlier assertion that when he was 16 he did his own private version of *Ziggy Stardust*, basing each of his songs on those from the album.

His regard for Bowie doesn't rise above fan status – David is, he says, up there with Ultravox and Human League in the short list of people he would swallow his fear of gatherings to go see. His music and Bowie's is probably more genuinely linked by common sources, insofar as he was led to writers such as William Burroughs by Bowie's constant references.

Burroughs and science-fiction writers like Philip K Dick provide the acknowledged basis of many of his songs. The Gary Numan writing technique goes something like this: "I don't listen to stuff as a fan; I listen to stuff to get ideas from. I listen to what other people are doing with tones with synthesizers, with rhythms, the way they use structural ideas and the way they link things up. The words I get from writers like Burroughs, Philip Dick and... who's that other guy's name? Oh, Vonnegut, but I didn't get a lot out of him, though it was a good book. *Breakfast Of Champions*. It was funny.

"It was Bowie who got me into Burroughs. There was so much talk about him that I read him to see what all the fuss was about. And it was good; I could see why Bowie relies on him quite a lot well. I don't know, maybe he doesn't. I think Bowie relies on him for actual technique, whereas I rely on him more for words and structures.

"But I don't do anything like cut-ups. I take a line out of a book, and I'd have a lot of lines written down in a notebook. So when I write a song I go through all the lines I have got, I've got pages and pages of them written down, until I find one which is what the song is about and then I cross it out, so I don't use the same line twice. I use those lines to spark off lines of my own."

His reliance on others for material obviously gives his work a distracting second-hand feel. But he hopes his doom-laden observations will provoke thoughts in others, as did his sources with him. His third album, set for autumn release, will have a lighter feel, he says, related more to himself than the previous two, with their sci-fi connotations.

"The next one is more statements about things now. Well, not things, but me now. There's a song called 'Observers', which is about when I go out. I don't go up to people and chat away; I'll just stand in corners and observe people. Basically it's about the fact that I just don't talk to people."

You don't like talking to people?

"Well, yeah, I don't mind talking to people – it's just really weighing people up, deciding

ALBUMS REVIEW 1979





Numan and his live band in 1979: (l–r) Paul Gardiner, Billy Currie, Cedric Sharpley, Trevor Grant and Chris Payne

whether they are worth me getting to know or not. It's a position I've maintained more in the past few years than when I was younger…

"When I was at school, they sent me to a psychologist, because they thought I was a bit random. One day I'd be talking happily, then another I'd be dead quiet, then another I'd fight. I didn't think there was anything wrong with me.

"The psychologists were stupid. The first one was obviously convinced that it was me mum and dad, that there was friction at home and it was affecting me at school and everything. It was a load of cock…

"My mum and dad are great. They're so into it. Me dad sometimes roadies for us. He roadied for us on the *Whistle Test*, humped away the gear. He's put thousands of pounds, all his life-savings, into us. He drives us to gigs and if there's any trouble at them, he sorts it out. It's fantastic the way he gets behind us. And me mum, she cuts me hair and things like that.

"Before that, they wanted me to have an education, but when I kept getting kicked out of schools and that, they went behind me in this. I was expelled from grammar school and asked to leave secondary school and college because I didn't have enough hours. Well, I did go but never got past the common room. Table football, whoo!

"I used to read books, but they were the wrong ones, the teachers said. My teacher caught me reading Mickey Spillane, and she hit the roof. I thought it was great, but she went really over the top. She said it was disgusting. She said I must have been raised in the gutter.

"But I've always read books, especially big books – *Lord Of The Rings*, stuff like that. I've just read *The Magus*, and that was *baaad*. I've always been distrustful of people, and that book just about finished me off. I'm not that bad, really, but I don't trust people at all. It's: 'Why do they want that? Why do they want to talk to me? What is it about me that makes them want to get friendly with?'

"It's completely the opposite of them thinking that I'm important. It's very hard to explain. They must be after something, not that it's important, but… now that I've been on the telly… it's not easy. I'm not easy to get on with.

"I don't like crowds at all. I'd rather not walk down the high street or go into restaurants when there's a lot of people about. I don't like being in crowds where you're so close to people that, if anything happened, you can't get away. I don't like being in situations where you're restricted, just in case something happens. I like to see who's near me, so I can look at them and decide whether they're going to do anything or not."

He begins to talk about how disgusting he thinks people are: "I don't think much of people, do you? They have two pints and they're looking for someone to hit. They don't get drunk and want to do something nice." (*Numan doesn't drink.*)

Then why did he choose to start his career in a new-wave band? A quick backtrack:

Numan's first band was a more conventional punk affair in which he played guitar and sang, taking an increasingly dominant role. Eventually it evolved into Tubeway Army.

"I did that because it was the only way to get a contract at the time. Anyway, punk and new wave wasn't violent until the press started to write about trouble. That's when it got violent, when people who weren't punks started going just for trouble."

He handled occasional outbursts of fights by playing right through them, hoping that most people would carry on watching them and not notice the trouble.

About getting his contract: "If I'd started by playing the stuff I'm doing now, I'd never have got anywhere. So I started by playing the stuff they were doing then. Get signed, and then you're in and can do what you like. I enjoyed what I was doing at the time. It served its purpose and it was good fun, but what I really wanted to do was always in the back of my mind."

With his general contempt "for the race as a whole", why does he bother to try reaching people through music?

"It's very hard to explain. You read all these things and see the fighting, and you really hate it. But then you see something like a little old man and an old woman driving in their Morris Minor, and they've been in love for 60 years, and you think it's really nice. Then you think, 'Ahhh, it's not so bad', but as a whole it's pretty shitty."

Yet he's now preparing to put himself back in front of people whatever he thinks of them, with a new band. He wants to go straight to larger halls, colleges and universities, for which he's preparing a lavish stage set – providing, of course, he can get the finances or know-how together in time for a projected 12 dates in September.

"Well, it is show business. You go on stage so that people can see you. If they just want to listen to you, they can stay at home and listen to records. I'd rather go and see somebody on stage with big lights and little robots moving about than somebody in jeans and an old mac in the back of a pub.

"I think I'll be giving people what they haven't had in a long time by putting on a good show. People seem to have been brainwashed into thinking that putting on a show is very… just isn't on, you know. So, I'll put on a show and see how it goes. If they don't like it, I'll stop doing live work again." *Chris Bohn* •

> "If there's any trouble at gigs, my dad sorts it out"

JOHN RODGERS / GETTY



"My natural response to disco"

MM MAY 19 Swahili. German pilots. Hawkwind's violinist and "All The Young Dudes" played backwards... Track by track through David Bowie's latest album, his 13th, *Lodger*.

ALBUMS REVIEW 1979

IN RECENT WEEKS, when he's not being slapped around by Lou Reed, David Bowie has returned to something he does rather well, if infrequently – ie, giving interviews. They are all in a good cause, of course – ie, himself.

Next week he releases the third album in the trilogy he has made with Brian Eno. *Lodger* is his jokey way of describing himself in one of his chief occupations of the last few years, travelling around the world, which has furnished him with so much song material.

As he told radio station WPLJ in New York, his biggest influence now was his environment rather than other artists (like Lou Reed): "I have to pick a city with friction in it," he explained. "It has to be a city that I don't know how it works. I've got to be at odds with it. As soon as I feel comfortable, I can't write any more. You can look back on my albums and tell which city I was in merely by just listening to them.

"Each album was fairly successful at illustrating the particular era, or sort of photographing the time I was in. It was a musical time photograph. I'd like to look back at my albums through the '70s and think that I had a little set of photographs of time capsules about what each year was like."

Bowie also had some comments on punk for interviewer Jimmy Fink. He compared it to '60s conceptual art: "One could theorise it, but it was very hard to experience it. And it seems to be a similar situation at the moment."

But movements worried him. It was the old elitism: "I don't like collections of people, whether it be politically, socially or artistically. I've always tried to ridicule those factors.

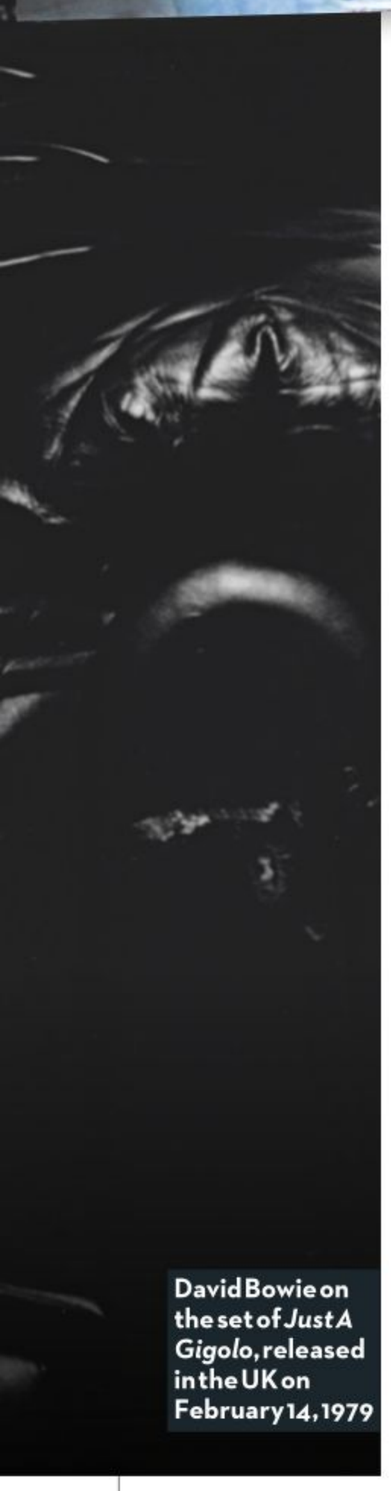
"I slammed out at rock'n'roll when it got very cliquey, and have been known to slam out at politics in a similar exaggerated, cartoonist fashion. Gangs of people frighten the hell out of me. I think it can crucify what's called a movement if it's made into a group of people. I much prefer to call them a group of individuals.

"I think the most defeating part of punk is that there are a lot of bands and artists who have very good individual ideas in musical expression that may be blinkering themselves by being too willing to be accepted as part of a punk-rock movement – they are grabbing for the security of an umbrella category before they've actually had time to evaluate their own writing."

Travel was the only movement that interested him – a statement that he reiterated in an interview with London's Capital Radio on Monday evening. Talking about *Lodger*, he told Nicky Horne that the album could have been aptly titled "Travel Along With Bowie", although there had been other suggestions, such as "Look Back In Anger", "Planned Accidents" and "Despite Straight Lines"; in fact, he and Eno might still work on a purely instrumental album called "Planned Accidents".

EVERETT / REX FEATURES





David Bowie on the set of *Just A Gigolo*, released in the UK on February 14, 1979

He ran through each track as follows:

Fantastic Voyage "Well, that is definitely pop. What's interesting about that is the logistics. We played the same chord sequence four different ways and the same thing exactly occurs elsewhere on the album. You've got to spot it. I wanted to put some sort of point of view forward that was in the narrative fashion right at the front of the album. It starts veering off to the obscure after this, but it's a pretty straightforward song about how I feel, in a very old-fashioned romantic fashion. One feels constantly that so many things are out of our own control and it's just this infuriating thing that you don't want to have their depression ruling your life or dictating how you will wake up each morning."

African Night Flight "You will, of course, have noted the use of Swahili. Translated, that meant hello, goodbye. That came together because in Kenya, especially in Mombasa, in many of the bars, you will find these German ex-pilots who hang out wearing most of their pilot's gear. They are always saying they have been there for 17 years and really must go back to Germany. You've got a good idea why they are there in the first place, but they live strange lives flying about in their little Cessnas over the bushland, doing all kinds of strange things.

"They're very mysterious characters, permanently plastered and always talking about when they are going to leave. The song came about because I was wondering exactly what they are and what they are doing and what their profession is and why they fly around. This track is very interesting. What we did was to take the basic idea of 'Suzie Q' and play it backwards. Then Brian decided to put prepared piano on it. He put pairs of scissors and all kinds of metal things on the strings of the piano. Then we took out the main band so you just had the piano left. It was a case of starting out with one thing, putting another thing on top of it, and taking away the number you first thought of."

Move On "This, of course, is blatantly romantic. The interesting thing about this one is in the middle section: I was playing through some old tapes of mine on a Revox and I accidentally played one backwards and thought it was beautiful. Without listening to what it was originally, we recorded the whole thing note for note backwards, and then I added vocal harmonies with Tony Visconti. If you play it backwards you'll find that it's *All The Young Dudes*. I did this in New York, which is a very enjoyable city at the moment. It's very exciting there and is probably having its heyday as far as the arts are concerned.

The whole arts thing in New York is extraordinary, much more exciting than London, which is a bit patchy.

"I'm so pleased that the conclusion of these three albums has been so up. You never know until you come out of the studio exactly what you've done, and I think it would have been terribly depressing if the third one had been down. At least this one has a kind of optimism."

Yassassin "That's Simon House on violin. He was with Hawkwind. He understood the notation immediately, even though he had no experience with Turkish music before. This song is about the kind of character you find in coffee bars in Turkey. An interesting thing about this track was putting two ethnic sounds together. We used the Turkish things and put it against a Jamaican backbeat. They're both parallel."

Red Sails "Here we took a German new-music feel and put against it the idea of a contemporary English mercenary-cum-swashbuckling Errol Flynn, and put him in the China Sea. We have a lovely cross-reference of cultures. I honestly don't know what it's about."

DJ "This is somewhat cynical, but it's my natural response to disco. The DJ is the one who is having ulcers now, not the executives, because if you do the unthinkable thing of putting a record on in a disco not in time, that's it. If you have 30 seconds silence, your whole career is over. The most absurd thing about this is that I was with John Cale in New York and I played his viola on stage at Carnegie Hall. He called me and asked me to play at a benefit for a radio station in New York. I had never played viola in my life before, but I learned four notes on it and it sounded great. I may learn another four and play it on my next album."

Look Back In Anger "I had this thought about angels and Angels of Death, which is the character that is most revered. But this one is about a tatty Angel of Death. We did one thing on this track which was a lot of fun but terribly frustrating for the musicians. Brian and I came up with a series of cards with chords on. We stuck them on a blackboard and we had all the musicians sitting on chairs in front of the blackboard. Then Brian and I just pointed at the one to play next. It got very intense, and the more intense it got the better it got. We did that for 30 minutes and kept yelling out the style to play in. Fortunately, I'm with guys who are very receptive to what I want to do. They get angry, of course, but only if they're not fully aware of what is going on. Often I can't help them much because I'm not sure what's going to come out of it either."

"'Fantastic Voyage' could quite easily have turned up on *Hunky Dory*"

Boys Keep Swinging "What we did on this one was to have everybody play the instruments they didn't usually play. Suddenly we had Carlos Alomar, who is the rhythm guitarist, on drums and Dennis Davis on bass. What was extraordinary was the enthusiasm that came from musicians who weren't playing their usual instrument. They became kids discovering rock'n'roll for the first time again. "Boys..." has exactly the same chord sequence as "Fantastic Voyage".

Repetition "This is about wife beating – something you are faced with in the American newspapers all the time. I think my voice sounds rather like it did five years ago. 'Fantastic Voyage' could quite easily have turned up on *Hunky Dory*. This album seems to contain things from lots of different areas of my career."

Red Money "This song, I think, is about responsibility. Red boxes keep cropping up in my paintings, and they represent responsibility there." *Michael Watts*



"We were the neatest thing"

From Athens, Georgia, comes a technicolour pop band of the new wave, The B-52's. Theirs is an avowedly simple, upbeat proposition, but it has converted sceptical crowds. "When we went to New York they said people don't dance," says Kate Pierson. "But we played and they started dancing."

The B-52's in 1979: (l–r) Fred Schneider, Kate Pierson, Cindy Wilson, Keith Strickland and Ricky Wilson



— NME JUNE 9 —

"Y'ALL WANT GUMBO?" Kate Pierson peers around the kitchen door, tea cloth slung across a sunburnt shoulder. Her deep Southern accent tells us that her deep Southern dish is ready.

Ricky is asleep on the sofa, Keith is reading, Fred is upstairs resting his back, Cindy is drying her hair and gazing at the ocean. The ocean is not responding. The Bahamas lie on a latitude that's almost tropical, where dusk falls still and the evening air subdues the citizens. Nobody even stirs.

The bright, modish furnishings of the Delaporte Beach house where The B-52's have been staying for the past three weeks are conspicuously tidy. On the table are copies of *National Enquirer*, *OMNI* and a book of Dylan Thomas' stories, offering between them: frontier technology, mystical anointment and the real truth behind *Charlie's Angels*. Piled in the corner is some black snorkelling equipment, and some pink snorkelling equipment; a big gaudy beach ball is slowing deflating on the sideboard. The only casualty is the sofa, which has collapsed at one end, and the only luxury is Keith's portable compact tape system, still going strong.

Native African Top 40 music beats out a tattoo in the night. Heady stuff. Kate and Cindy both agree that this is one of Keith's best tapes. The mode – black church music – is familiar, but the drums and the patois are strange and hypnotic.

I let my bare feet rub the deep pile in appreciation.

One more time…

"Y'all want some gumbo?" Here it is. »

LYNN GOLDSMITH / GETTY

KATE WAS BORN at 9.30 on a Tuesday in Hackensack, New Jersey, and grew up in a house whose senior offspring dug the folk protest scene: Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger. They gave her a Bob Dylan album for her 14th birthday. On her 18th birthday she left New Jersey for the first time ever, to go to college, a fruitless episode, followed by a two-year odyssey in Europe, sampling life in the underbelly, working menial jobs for the thrill of new experience.

Nowadays she lives in a tenant house on a farm outside Athens in Georgia, a rough homestead she shares with two goats, Angie and Sappho. "I had to build a drip-tank to catch rainwater on the roof, because I grew tired of fetching my water from the well every day."

Kate is resourceful, petite, polite, but secretly very sharp. She sings and plays organ, keyboard bass and second guitar with the B-52's, a neoteric pop group. She likes to dance and swim, and apart from African Top 40 and James Brown records, she is also fond of Yma Sumac, Nino Rota and music of the upper Amazon. She hopes The B-52's get to tour South America so she can visit the (vanishing) equatorial rain forests.

Her favourite sound is the sound of "insects at dusk". She remembers "dreaming I was terrorised by the Jolly Green Giant as a small child".

Cynthia Leigh Wilson also lives in Athens. She is bongo player and vocalist with The B-52's. Born, bred and educated in Georgia, Cindy possesses the kind of sassy Southern lilt that adds "h"s rather than drops them, a complement to her blonde-belle looks and vivacious personality.

Her hobbies are raising chihuahuas, dancing and improving her posture. The place she would most like to be found is in a bathtub in the tropics. Cindy likes James Brown too, but her favourite record is the *Jackson Five's Greatest Hits*.

Says Cindy, "When I was a kid I saw two hairy beings walk down the hall. At the time I thought they were the famous Boogie Men… Now I don't know what they were."

Keith Strickland, sometimes known as Bam Bam, plays the drums with The B-52's. His parents run the Greyhound bus station in Athens, where Keith used to work with Cindy's brother Ricky, The B-52's' soft-spoken, self-effacing guitarist.

Keith, in contrast, is robust and cheerful. It was he who named the group. "We thought for months about what we were going to call ourselves, and finally I suggested B-52's because that's the name of a bouffant hairdo and the girls had started going on with their hair all teased up."

Then there's Frederick W Schneider III. Fred sings and plays toy percussion with The B-52's. Without the moustache, his features resemble an anaemic Kenneth Williams, and like that comic his tone is permanently dry, almost despondent and unwittingly funny.

He was born in Newark, New Jersey, and went to Athens to attend the University Of Georgia, more or less, he admits, as a means of evading the draft. "It obviously didn't do me any good, I almost had a nervous breakdown. But I met my friends and I learned a lot after dropping out."

Since when he has worked for a meals-for-the-elderly service, which he quit because of the low standards involved, and was also a waiter at the El Dorado vegetarian restaurant. Otherwise… "a career of loafing, so to speak". He mostly likes just soul and Tamla, and his all-time favourite record is "Dancing In The Street". Fred, the eldest of the group, is adamant when he says that the '60s were more alive than the '70s. The others aren't so sure, but they all seem to share the legacy he carries from that decade of a strong ecological awareness. Nukes and "bad attitudes" provoke his ire.

"When that Harrisburg thing happened, most Americans just didn't realise what was going on. They think you can put a blanket around a baby's head and that will keep radiation away. In Philadelphia there were official warnings to close windows to keep the radiation out. Close windows? That's the sort of level of awareness."

His favourite film stars are Jayne Mansfield and Wilma Flintstone. One of his hobbies is comparative grocery shopping and he remembers once shaking hands with Pope Paul.

"Ah jus' love gumbo." Cindy wipes her bowl clean.

"Mmm-hmm." Keith is too busy eating to talk.

Gumbo is a Creole regional special: rice, sweetcorn and okra cooked in tomatoes and hot peppers.

"I just love tomatoes, " Kate declares, "anything with tomatoes. And they're so easy to grow. I grow them all the time back home."

Tomatoes are easy to grow. They are also, incidentally, the third biggest industry in the Bahamian islands, to which the B-52's have come to make their debut album. The second biggest is fishing and the biggest is tourism. These figures exclude any offshore banking business facilities this tax haven might have to offer. Not that The B-52's are in any position to benefit…

To come to Nassau, the capital, on a small island seven miles wide by 20 miles long, they had to pool all the money they had between them, a total of $600. It is only the second time that The B-52's have ever been inside a studio. Nine months ago they spent a day and a half recording two of their songs, "Rock Lobster" and "52 Girls", because a friend of Kate's offered to lend them the money and it seemed like a good idea. The album they are making with Chris Blackwell and Robert Ash at Blackwell's Island Records studio will eventually cost the group somewhere around 10 grand.

Now, in Nassau, as at all resorts, there is a curious sense of ennui: a mood of abstract boredom created by the desperate pleasure-seeking of tourist life rubbing up against the slow, even measure of the island's real life while the hot sun burns down on the dry scrubland.

You can hear it in the way people here greet each other; a jive-talk "wa's happenin'?" answered in kind but never directly. The question just hangs there, like the heat dancing on the roads. "Heey! Wa's happenin'?"

THE B-52'S. THAT'S what. Ask any rock culture vulture the news and they'll tell you The B-52's. They might even add that they bought "Rock Lobster", oh, ages ago, before they'd read anything about them, and isn't it great? One of the best singles of last year… Aside from which, The B-52's are an unknown commodity, assigned hot property and so hip that it hurts.

At the end of July, or perhaps in August, Island will release their first album, the contents of which will promptly eclipse "Rock Lobster" (really one of their lesser songs) and will generally surprise everybody with its wit, style and variety. Then they will tour. That is certain.

Beyond that… There is a great deal of confidence. The B-52's seem to have inspired the people around them. The producers' faces beam with a kind of conspiratorial pride as the rough mixes are slowly worked into their proper shape.

"I'm looking for something I can sell all over the world," states Blackwell, talking about the difference between cult and mass appeal.

The B-52's?

"Obviously. I don't think I would have signed them otherwise…" But I think he would. So would a lot of other companies, given the chance, because though the B-52's are by no means a straight commercial gambit, they do have something.

"We had offers from all over," recalls Kate. "All these people from the companies were taking us out to dinner at expensive restaurants. Chris just came backstage after one of our shows looking like a playboy who had just stepped off a yacht. He said, 'I'd like to make you an offer.' Simple as that. I think it was his smile that did it."

"Are you all sure you're happy with that?" Blackwell scrutinises the faces gathered in the air-conditioned, hermetically sealed studio control room. A studio, to the layman, is like a hotel bedroom: once inside you could be anywhere. The B-52's glance anxiously at each other… "Because if you aren't happy, now is the time to speak up. Once the record is made, it'll be too late. That's it. It will always be The B-52's' first album."

Kate, who takes the most diligent interest in the protracted and distracting mixing process, pipes up first: "Do you think you could push Cindy's voice up a little at the end? When she slides up the register on the '*red hot lava*' harmony… the effect is kinda lost."

Keith also applied himself, ensuring that none of the group's tightness is submerged. He wants to hear the guitar brought up a little. Or something.

So a new mix is made of "Hot Lava", a wickedly lascivious song equating love with lava, and featuring Ricky's experimental guitar tunings. Ricky has been playing guitar since he was in high school and now has an old Epiphone and two Mosrite "Ventures" models tuned to exotic chords and also minus certain strings. But it's a secret.

"Lotsa guitarists do it," he says. "And they won't tell either."

He enjoys a chaotic relationship with his guitars; which, being somewhat warped and decrepit,



often tend to go out of tune. "And sometimes, when I get real excited, I turn around to change guitars between songs and I can't even remember which one to pick up!"

Ricky likes the new mix. Fred, meanwhile, is still wrestling with a conundrum. He thinks his voice sounds like a chipmunk. Nobody else does, mind you. He looks dejected, as if he'd just become the butt of his own joke. Fred writes most of the words to the songs, while Ricky and Keith concoct the music, and the girls supply the icing. His themes tend towards the offbeat. "Hot Lava", for instance, is an extended metaphor involving lines like "*Turn your lava lamp on!*" and "*Don't let your lava turn to stone*".

"Well," offers Fred, "I was looking at the 'V' volume of an encyclopaedia, and I saw volcano and had an idea."

Other songs – "Dance This Mess Around", "6060-842", "There's A Moon In The Sky" – are less whimsical. They are essentially about people and desires and the distress that sometimes results. There's nothing ponderous about them; they would be non-starters in any intellectual sweepstakes. But they are very sly, though, full of double-entendres and little snares to make your imagination do a double take.

It's no great surprise to find that Fred admires Captain Beefheart's ability to conjure so vividly with words. He is, however, overly diffident about his own achievements.

"They're just nonsense songs," he demurs.

Not quite. If The B-52's didn't bring their songs alive so well they would long ago have been dismissed as a novelty, a downhome Bonzo Dog Band. Yet clearly Fred has lost some sleep over how the songs will be received, especially the more risqué sections.

"We often wondered whether things in our songs would cause problems, but we just figured… so what? Lyrics like '6060-842' are just, well, funny, whatever, but people are always looking for intent or message.

"And rock'n'roll lyrics have always been sorta suggestive," adds Kate. "Yeah, you know, puns and so forth. On the other hand, we aren't consciously trying to load our songs with hidden meanings."

But they do seem to feel the innuendo, which is heightened by the sexy vocalese of the two girls as they trade off Fred's croaking deadpan. Cindy's voice is strong and abrasive, seething with emotion, like early Patti Smith. Kate's is more controlled, able to deftly characterise. She says "6060-842" is just… "another dirty little song".

"It's not dirty." Fred is taken aback by this suggestion.

"I never thought of it as dirty, I thought it was another moon song," muses Cindy, more than a little mysteriously. "Heey. Maybe churches and schools will try to stop people from playing it!" She quite relishes the thought, and its historical precedent. Rock'n'roll would always rather be the devil.

TO UNDERSTAND THE B-52's' relative cultural position and the factors which have singled them out so swiftly from the hopeful hordes requires certain background knowledge.

Like the fact that Athens is primarily a college town, with a large student population and an inevitable reputation for revelry. A few years ago, *Playboy* voted its university the wildest campus in the US. *Animal House* was due to be filmed there until the administration decided it wouldn't exactly boost the image of a place that still holds the all-time mass streaking record.

"And after that, nothing happened." Fred doesn't know why. "It's become very conservative in the fraternities and sororities."

Another section of the town's society, meanwhile, had different ideas. Before The B-52's became The B-52's, they and their friends operated some sort of loose alliance called the Bon-Vivant Society, dedicated to most of the usual vices and sub-divided in to small mobile units…

"There was The Waitress Club, The Waiters Club, The Roller-Skating Society, The Laundry Club… There was a laundromat that had a jukebox and everybody could get together and go dancing while they did their laundry. There was a liquor store nearby too."

It appears that the primary form of social action in Athens is the "dance party". Dig this: James Brown and Ray Charles grew up in Georgia; Little Richard and Wilson Pickett were born there. The records played at these parties were "lotsa dance music; soul, people like Junior Walker and James Brown.

"When the first Ramones album came out, everybody heard it and started to 'pony' intensely. It was a whole different thing of course, but it was very popular at the time. So was Patti Smith's first album."

The B-52's never really gave a thought becoming the B-52's back in February '77. According to Cindy, "we just jammed. It was for parties. It was this girl's Valentine's party at an old rented country club – a dance party – and we just thought it'd be fun."

So Ricky and Keith made a backing tape of guitar and drums and everybody jammed. "I hid behind the curtains. Ricky played with his back turned. We all talked between songs. Once the tape came unplugged. But people thought we were the neatest thing. They were fascinated. They didn't care."

A few parties and six months or so later they discarded the backing tapes and went live, though they still use tapes for rehearsing and for sharpening up their superior song arrangements, honing them to the bone.

Because, make no mistake, they play for dancers. And everybody, these days, wants to dress up and jump back. Why?

"Seems like people would always be in the mood to dance if there was something there to dance to," Kate conjectures. "Except if it was really out of vogue and they were afraid."

"There was a time when dancing really went out," adds Fred, "but I guess it's because there wasn't much to dance to. It's hard for us to play at places where people can't move around. We're a dance band basically. We always try to have a dancefloor. When we went to New York they said people don't dance up there and I just couldn't picture it."

"But we played and they started dancing."

Their reputation precedes them. In the year that they've been playing the US clubs they've accrued a fanatical following. People like to get down low and do a lot of screaming when The B-52's get into town.

"And dancing too… It's impossible not to dance at some places when it's really packed, because everyone else is moving around so much," says a friend of the band. "And they're completely different on stage – not at all the relaxed people they are off it."

As a group of people The B-52's seem to enjoy a cordial existence. As a band they are remarkably indivisible.

"It's strange," thinks Chris Blackwell, "but they don't have an obvious leader. Most bands have someone who seems to become the spokesman. But not them."

You can hear it in the music. There's no slack at all. Everybody contributes as much as each other, though perhaps in different ways, and the sum of the parts has given some pundits problems – they've had to find them a brand new bag.

"I think it's because people don't know exactly what we are," opines Kate. "It's hard for five people to identify… to put their finger on the same thing. We do have a certain image – what we do on stage – but it's not easy to translate that into the mass media."

"We were lucky, though," Fred admits. "All the companies said they'd let us do whatever we want. We wouldn't work any other way."

"We were worried that they might want to change the arrangements and things," says Ricky. But if anything is going to sell The B-52's it's going to be themselves. It would be foolish to tamper. "We didn't know if they'd realise that. They might have wanted to make us a bit less unusual."

"Or try to build up an image and sell it," interrupts Fred. "We sort of dread being the next camp band; being blown up into something awful and artificial.

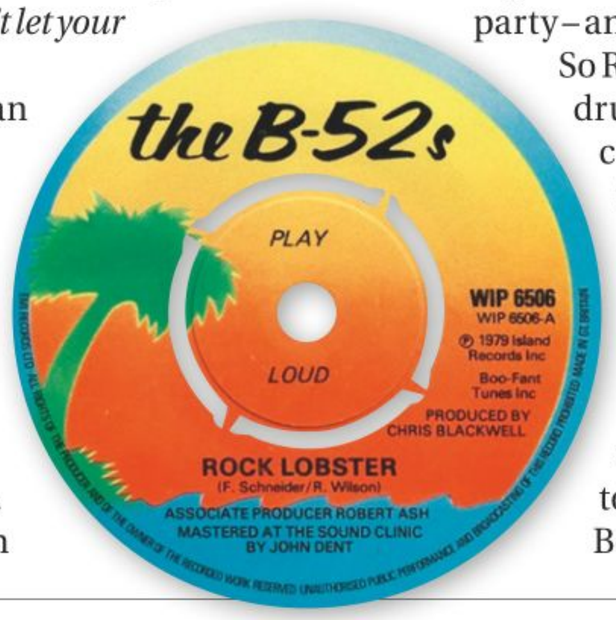
"I try not to be a ham. It would kill me if I ever thought I was a ham. I'd stop playing."

Then what would you do?

"I'd probably get another job."

And Kate?

"I'd go jump in the ocean." *Paul Rambali* •



"It's hard for us to play at places where people can't move around"



PALLADIUM NEW YORK
LIVE!
APRIL 14

"You want to be *everything*"

MM APRIL 28 British Invasion! The Jam undertake a US tour. Sheer commitment wins out over radioactivity and equipment trouble, just about. "In the end we gotta break through. Everybody's gotta win in the end."

IT WAS ONLY as we drove into Philadelphia that realisation struck. "Isn't this near where they had that nuclear accident?" gasped Angela, Polydor's ultra-efficient press person.

Of course it was! How could we have been so stupid as not to make the connection? How could we have been so stupid as to, er, come...? I instantly studied the cityscape. That bubble of radioactive gas was lodged in the power plant at Three Mile Island, which is just outside Harrisburg, which in turn is just a thyroid gland or two away from Philadelphia. On the atomic scale, 90 miles is a drop in the ocean. Civil disorder had to be round the next corner.

However, everything looked so normal. The headlines screamed panic and talked in terms of the worst nuclear disaster ever. Farmers were apparently worried about contaminated milk supplies; engineers fretted over infected water. So where were the thousands fleeing to safety? Why wasn't there a military curfew to prevent looting? Where were the hucksters peddling overpriced Geiger-counters?

All apocalyptic fantasies vanished when the only evidence of any public concern turned out to be a couple of trestle tables manned by protesting students and a downtown cinema showing *The China Syndrome*.

And, obviously, the cinema was not concerned with making any heavy-duty political statement. It was simply cashing in on the current "meltdown" obsession with a thriller that depicts a near-catastrophe at a plant outside LA. As someone remarked when the film was over: "I go to the movies to find out what's happening in the papers."

In fact, nothing much was happening in Philadelphia as we kicked our heels waiting for The Jam to arrive and play the celebrated Tower Theatre. At almost exactly the same time last year they had played the Tower, supporting the Ramones and Runaways. Now they were headlining, and the switch in status indicates how much ground they've covered in the intervening 12 months.

Nevertheless, they still have a long, uphill struggle ahead of them before they crack the massive American market. They may have topped the bill at the Tower, but the place was only quarter-full. Such apathy didn't stop them putting on a superlative set. Indeed, it spurred them to heights which, despite technical hitches, they didn't reach the following evening in New York when the Palladium was sardine-packed with adoring disciples.

The band's reaction is exactly what you'd expect: they view it from a realistic historical perspective. Paul Weller constantly refers back to the British invasion of the States during the '60s, noting the differences and seeing the parallels.

The Beatles, he reckons, had few problems because they were already such a phenomenon in Europe and delivered "nothing really new", whereas "all the really innovative British bands like The Kinks and The Who, it took them a long time anyway".

While you might not agree with his quality judgements, his comparisons with The Who and Kinks in terms of winning transatlantic recognition is perfectly on target. This is the group's third trip over the water and they know that, barring a marketing miracle or a modern-world equivalent of something like the Monterey Pop Festival, there are several more such journeys in store before The Jam become anything like a household name.

Every gig, then, means another round of photographs, another round of interviews when the same questions are asked and the same level of ignorance displayed, plus another round of meeting the Polydor representatives. At one point Bruce Foxton sighed, "We should give them a tape of our answers. We can't keep coming up with new answers to the same old questions."

EBET ROBERTS / GETTY



"What we give is what we get": The Jam at the New York Palladium, April 14, 1979

To be fair, The Jam really believe that they have nothing new to say to the press. The only aspect that matters to them is playing live and releasing records. Paul said, "We've been talking about this a lot recently... especially the press point of view. They've been trying to find something different to write about us for good copy... like deep meanings about what we're about. What we're about is being on stage and the records... just what we say in the songs. Yet if you say that to someone it just sounds so simple, and then they say The Jam are a bunch of thickies. It's so difficult.

"You want to be everything. You want people to come and dance to us and enjoy it and get off on that level. We want people to listen to what we say, and make their own minds up. We're not preaching from any particular stance. We just strive to be the perfect group, better than any other group is.

"The only people who always get it right are the fans. The thing is, we don't affect your life. We're not going to change your way of thinking. All I'm saying is that the fans are in touch. Most of the time they don't have to ask these things, because they know. Instead of them coming to say, 'What's this song about?' they say, 'I understand that song because it meant this or something has happened in my life', which is exactly the same thing.

"It's taken four years of hard work and believing in ourselves and not listening to other people saying we're shit or something. It's a question of maturing, growing up fast. I tell you... a great quote I saw in the paper the other day comes from Stevie Wonder's song 'Uptight'. The line says, '*No one is better than I/ But I know I'm just an average guy.*'

"That really sums it up, as far as I'm concerned. It's a question of saying we're just the same as everyone else, but we have our pride and self-respect and we know we're good. As far as I'm concerned, we're the best... but anyone can do it."

At the moment The Jam are going through a vital transitional period, which is when a band's tensions and contradictions show more than ever. The band don't want to be "big"; they crave it. In Britain their name is made, and they know that they can only go on to consolidate that success.

More importantly, they consider that they achieved this with the minimum of compromise, and they want to do exactly the same in the States. It'll be an awful lot harder; even Elvis Costello allowed CBS to remix and add strings to "Alison" before they put it out as the first single. Consequently, The Jam are almost embarrassingly grateful for every piece of ground that they gain, and never stop showing their determination to get more the honest way.

For example, it was once suggested to them that George Martin produce the next album "in order to get the American market". Paul sighed, "It's just like The Clash getting Sandy Pearlman. They're always suggesting people like that."

Bruce took up the point: "It would just become George Martin, or Phil Spector, or whoever it is. It wouldn't be The Jam any more."

In Philadelphia, Paul barked at the audience, "Last time we said we'd be headlining when we came back. Next time we're here, there'll be fucking queues outside."

In New York, he announced, "I have to say in all honesty this place ain't really us and I'm sure it ain't you either. What we give is what we get." By this time they'd only played four numbers, but Paul – quite rightly – realised that the band were slack. The prestige of a Big Apple gig together with their fanatical commitment never to put on a poor show made them even more desperate.

After a patchy version of "Strange Town", where the guitar solo was strangled and Bruce fluffed his usually brilliant harmonies (on record they're pallid; on stage they're rousing), Paul blurted out, "In the end we gotta break through. Everybody's gotta win in the end."

But fate was cruel and the situation just got worse. During "Down In The Tube Station At Midnight", Paul's amp blew. He covered up by using his mouth as a harmonica, almost doing permanent damage to it in the process.

Then, as a parting shot, Paul introduced "A Bomb In Wardour Street" with, "This song we feel is very, very close to us. It may take you three or four years. We don't know." The song, accompanied on stage with a battered tenement backdrop and exploding smoke bombs (they aren't above a bit of traditional corn) is, of course, all about the Vortex, punk's second home after the Roxy. Predictably, the audience went bananas.

New York is a Jam stronghold, as an incident earlier on in the day confirmed. DJ Mark Simone from Radio WPIX held a competition on air to give away 50 tickets for that night's gig. He would stand at a certain crossroads in New York, and the first 50 people to recognise him would get a freebie. Hundreds of fans turned up and caused a minor commotion. The police appeared and tried to smuggle Simone away in one of their squad cars.

But the traffic was so bad that following the car was easy. So everyone arrived at the police station and started to lay siege to what should have been a place of safety for Simone.

A more major source of change, however, is the band's growing musical maturity. When *All Mod Cons* and the two successive singles came out, critics noted a new depth to Weller's songwriting. He's beginning to deal with a larger and more subtle spectrum of emotions, embodying them as often as not in a wider array of characters. Some artists use characters to hide their own feelings; Weller does the opposite.

"I use characters to express the way I feel. I'd use a character to bring myself out more. It's easier for people to relate to, instead of saying, 'This is just about me and do you dig it?' The whole thing is so ambiguous that they can make up their own minds and inject themselves into it."

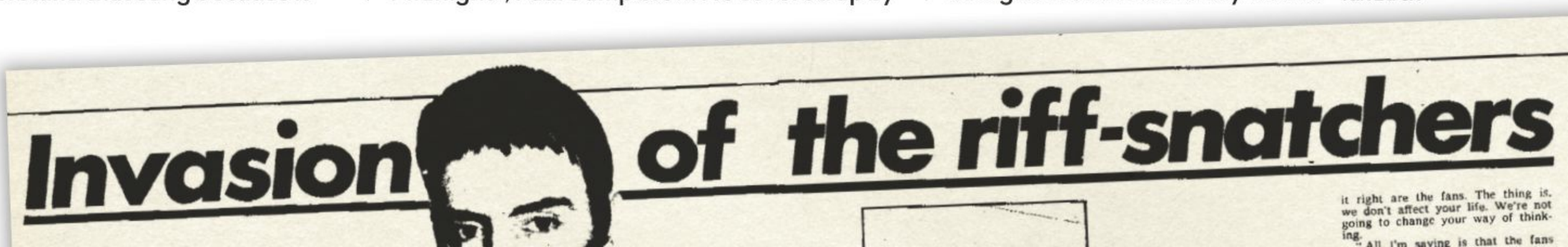
As a result, bigger and better things are constantly expected of the band. Everyone seems to be waiting for Weller's masterwork, and more and more Paul finds himself being treated as an "artist" – which brings its own dilemmas. Did he think that such elevation would make The Jam less accessible to fans?

"That's the only drawback. Like having an idea for a song... we could never get away with doing anything avant-garde, or even vaguely avant-garde... even if we wanted to, and I'm not saying that we do.

"We could never get away with doing anything avant-garde"

"The whole punk thing started because people were alienated by crappy music, obscure lyrics and references and everything.

"We don't want to get into that. That's what everyone was fighting about. Some people might not have meant it, but we did. But also we don't want to suppress anything that wants to come through naturally. We've overcome it in the past, so maybe we can keep on doing it. It's difficult. The day that we stop being accessible is the day we die." *Ian Birch*



Invasion of the riff-snatchers

it right are the fans. The thing is, we don't affect your life. We're not going to change your way of thinking.
"All I'm saying is that the fans

THE HISTORY OF ROCK

The History Of Rock is a magazine series celebrating 50 years of the music that changed the world – starting in 1965.

Month by month, it builds up into an unprecedentedly detailed chronicle of the music and musicians we love.



DON'T MISS A SINGLE ISSUE!

Subscribe today and save 22%

Pay only ~~£9.99~~ £7.75 an issue and get every edition delivered to your home

VISIT WWW.UNCUTSUBS.CO.UK/HISTORYOFROCK1979

OR CALL 0330 333 1113, QUOTING PROMOTION CODE 10R

(Lines are open 7 days a week, 8am–9pm) Closing date: 06/10/2016

For overseas orders please call + 44 (0)330 333 1113

(Lines are open 7 days a week, 8am–9pm, UK time)

NEED ANY BACK ISSUES? SEE PAGE 144

Readers' letters

MM JAN–JUN RIP punk, the Pretenders' golden Hynde, a reject writes and more...

Punk *is* dead

So Sid Vicious is dead, and with him must go the last festering remains of the punk movement which, ironically, Vicious was partly responsible for killing. Had the true face of punk rock been maintained – ie, setting up an alternative culture and pointing out, through that culture, the faults of conventional society – they would still be with us.

But, of course, human instincts caused people like Vicious and various others to take advantage of the movement for personal glory and commercial gain.

So many groups conned us, by using the images created by the Pistols (Matlock-Rotten version) to achieve their present position, and then selling out to record companies in order to maintain that position.

When I saw Sham 69 in January '78 in Brighton, I would have laughed at anybody who said they would produce the crass commercial trash they have recently.

And what has living in a hotel in New York, making massively publicised feature films and printing T-shirts with your face on them, got to do with punk? About as much as Margaret Thatcher.

DAVID JONES, Rudwicks Close, Felpham, Bognor Regis, West Sussex (*MM* Feb 24)

Sandy: it'll take a long time

It is just over a year since Sandy Denny died, and though I never knew her, it still hurts.

Contrary to most of the write-ups following her death, I do believe that Sandy reached her full potential. How can she have been any better? Her graceful combination of strength and sensitivity is an irreplaceable loss. Perhaps it is that some of us had not reached our full potential as listeners.

MARIYLN BENNETT, West 16th Street, NewYork City (*MM* May 19)

Chrissie: why pretend?

So Chrissie Hynde of the Pretenders doesn't want to become the front lady of the band. Thanks to Mark Williams and the *MM* photographers, she's halfway there.

In the Pretenders feature that Williams penned for the *MM*, he states, "Unfortunately the system has a tendency to single out any girl in an otherwise male group, making her star of the show."

Dead right!

He continues to say that because Chrissie is a good guitarist she's more a part of the band than just a front for it. So what? Debbie Harry is a good vocalist and her voice is an integral part of Blondie's music. Williams then states that Chrissie "won't let it happen". If it is the system that idolises females in otherwise male groups, then how can she stop it – split up the group?

Besides this, the majority of the interview revolved around Chrissie, her previous work in other groups, etc, and how long it took her to form the Pretenders. To complement this, Chrissie's photo appears on the front page, titled The Great Pretenders – despite the fact that they're not there.

On the first page of the interview another big photo of Chrissie appeared, again titled as the group's name, but they're absent – again. Anyone who merely glanced through the Pretenders feature would soon grasp the fact that Chrissie Hynde has a backing group called the Pretenders.

Also, when the *MM* reviewed the recent Pretenders single, accompanying the review was a photo of Chrissie Hynde minus the Pretenders yet again. So despite the fact that Chrissie claims (via Mark Williams) that she doesn't want to steal the limelight from the rest of the group, the *MM* are doing it for her.

JIM JACKSON, Home Farm, Beningsbrough, York (*MM* Mar 3)

A Stiff talking-to

The other day I got provoked enough to write this letter: the first, incidentally, I have ever penned your way. To the point: I received a rejection letter, one of many I collect unwittingly from record companies. Yes, the struggling musician trying to get somewhere with a tape – I'm told we are quite a species.

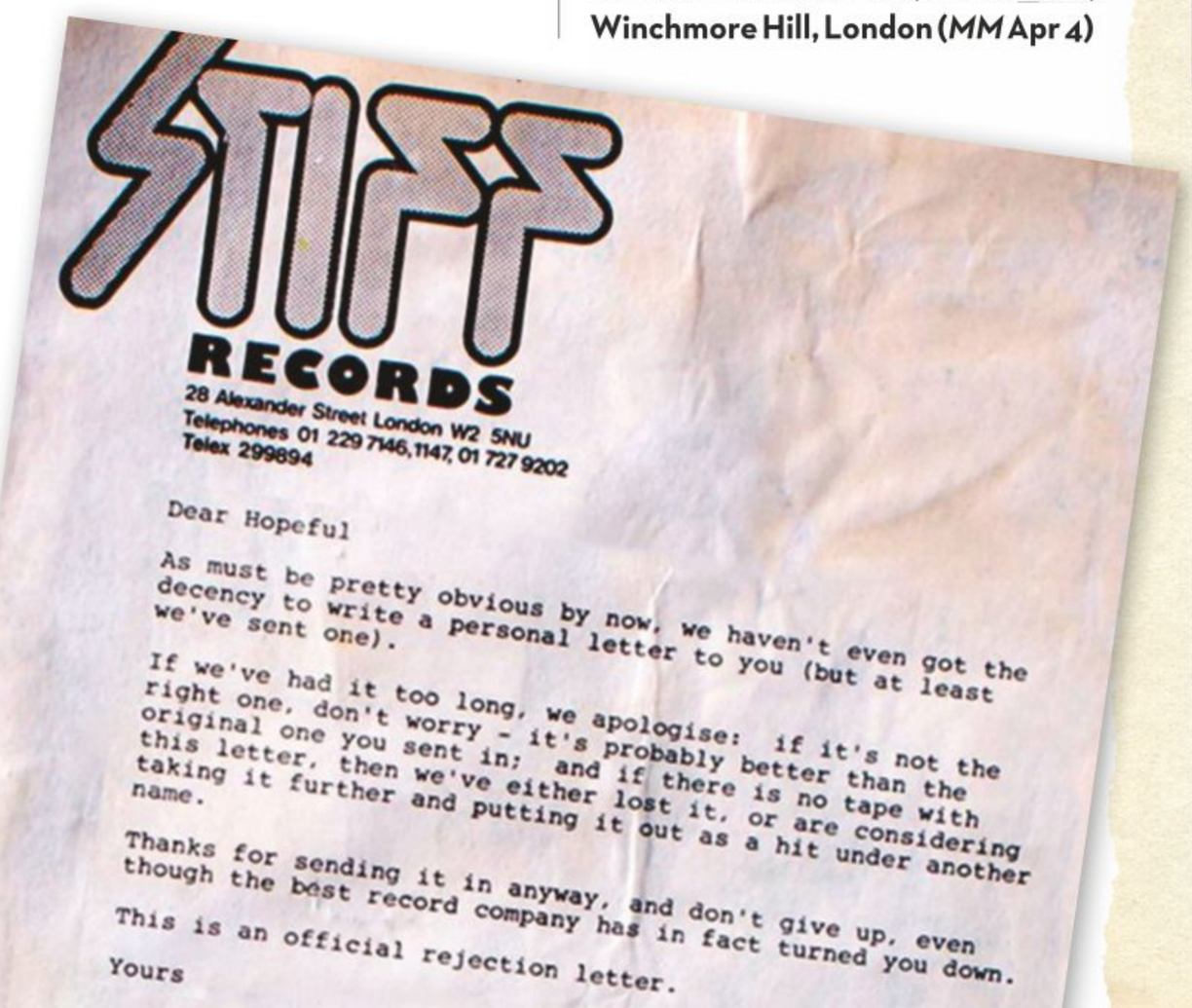
Anyway, I enclose a copy of this letter just to let your readers see the sort of mentality our record industry A&R (Artists and Repertoire) people have. Yes, I am bitter, because I think that the time it took pea-brained friends (Stiff Records) to create this could have been better spent signing me up!

Well, Messrs Dury, Lovich, Sweet, Wallis and co, what have you got to say in your record company's defence? What possible good can come of a letter like that, created only to please the morbid sense of humour we, as musicians, see our profession afflicted with?

You A&R people need a slap across the wrists with a sharp razor. People spend time and a lot of money crating demo tapes. We don't need your time-wasting "lap of the gods" nonsense. Why not just send the tape or cassette back with something constructive attached to it? Oh, I forgot, you "don't have the time to deal with each tape individually". Bollocks; if you don't employ more people! I'm sure there's enough cash floating around your well-lined pockets to pay them.

Well, there goes my chance of a deal. Who cares? At least I'm still kicking.

PETER POLYCARPOU, Broad Walk, Winchmore Hill, London (*MM* Apr 4)


STIFF RECORDS
28 Alexander Street London W2 5NU
Telephones 01 229 7146,1147, 01 727 9202
Telex 299894

Dear Hopeful

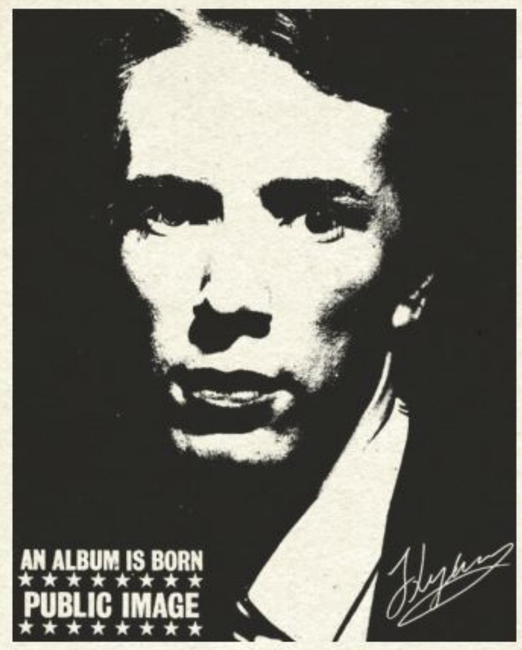
As must be pretty obvious by now, we haven't even got the decency to write a personal letter to you (but at least we've sent one).

If we've had it too long, we apologise: if it's not the right one, don't worry - it's probably better than the original one you sent in; and if there is no tape with this letter, then we've either lost it, or are considering taking it further and putting it out as a hit under another name.

Thanks for sending it in anyway, and don't give up, even though the best record company has in fact turned you down.

This is an official rejection letter.

Yours







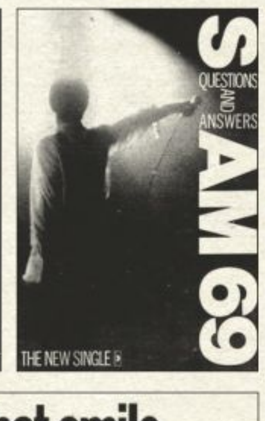




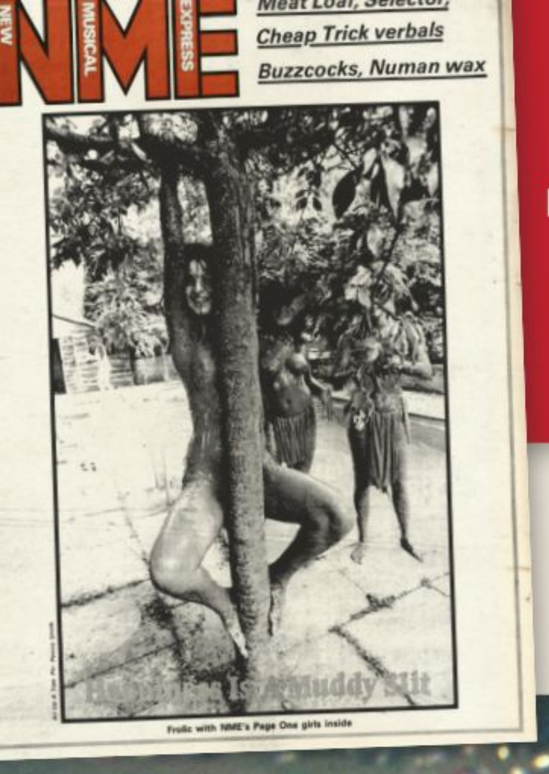












1979

JULY – SEPTEMBER

PRETENDERS, TALKING HEADS, THE DAMNED, JOY DIVISION AND MORE

August 4, 1979: back on a British stage for the first time since 1975, Led Zeppelin play the first of two huge concerts at Knebworth House in Hertfordshire



"A considerable number of complaints"

MM AUG 18 Zep or no Zep, not everyone is delighted about the staging of rock concerts at Knebworth House. "The bands played very late..."

KNEBWORTH, THAT MONUMENT to open-air festivals which, over the past fortnight, has hosted the cumbersome rebirth of rock pre-history (Led Zep) and the tired burial of a band that should have been snuffed in the umbilical stage (the New Barbiturates) is itself on its knees waiting for the blade. The annual haggling over whether or not the hordes of fresh-air-'n'-vibes freaks exceeded the number agreed on the licence has reached terminal proportions after promoter Fred Bannister allegedly allowed in thousands of excess fans to the first Zep show.

The man responsible for licensing the event, Gordon Dumelow, chairman of North Hertfordshire Council's Environmental Health Committee, said on Monday that he will oppose the renewal of the Knebworth licence next year, and if his committee looks like going against him, he will make it a matter of confidence; if they say yes to Knebworth at their October 18 meeting, he resigns.

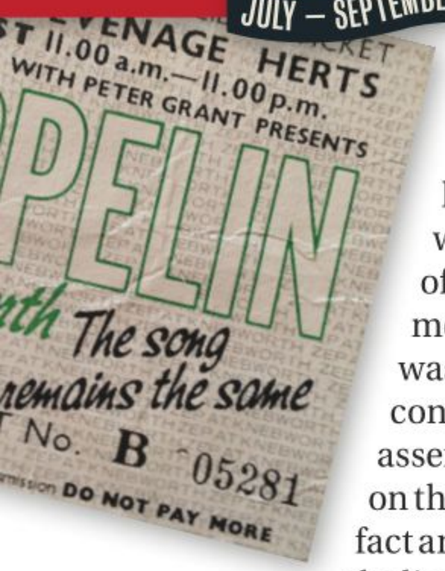
"After four years of having our rules broken, it's time to get this sorted out," he says. "Even the agreements reached two weeks before the first of this year's events were not honoured. The bands played very late on both occasions, and there were other infringements of the agreements reached between the council, the promoter and the licensees. If the vote goes against me, I would consider it a lack of confidence in me."

Dumelow lives in Knebworth, and claims much local backing. One of the central points in the dispute between council and promoter – the numbers of fans on the site – nearly wrecked the second Zep show two days before it went ahead, and only half a day of confrontation and argument between Bannister and Zep's manager Peter Grant allowed it to continue.

Grant was concerned at reports – backed by the estimates of Dumelow and his officers – that the total attendance for Zep Mk 1 was around 150,000 which is 30,000 up on the top figures of 120,000 »

Knebworth's final encore?

NEAL PRESTON



allowed under the licence. As some bands were on a percentage deal of the gate, the figures meant money, and Grant was not immediately convinced by Bannister's assertion that the attendance on the first Saturday was in fact around 100,000, well below the licence limit.

The afternoon's discussions ended with an agreement that Grant's staff would keep an eye on the gates and ticket flow – a move Bannister said he asked Grant to make for the first show – and Bannister has also instituted an independent check on the ticket stubs for the first gig – not only counting the tickets, but also putting them in order, from number one to the very last.

Dumelow at North Herts Council will be getting a breakdown of attendance figures prepared by Bannister's accountants, but he indicated that the list might not put an end to the attendance wrangle. "We estimate that about 150,000 people were at the first concert, and the promoter's accountants are currently in disagreement with Led Zeppelin's accountants on this figure," he says.

"All the tickets will be produced, and our licensing officer will act as presiding officer at a count attended by the two sets of accountants. But it's not just a question of attendance – I've had a considerable number of complaints about the festival."

When Bannister spoke to *MM* after his lengthy meeting with Grant last week, the proximity of potential disaster was apparent.

"We've sorted something out now. It is back on, and we are all systems go," he said. "There was a problem over numbers – the chairman of the licensing authority said we were once again in contempt of the licence – but that's not the case. We did not exceed 100,000. We don't cheat. After our meeting, Peter [Grant] was cool. Everything is happy."

"There was a problem over numbers. We didn't exceed 100,000. We don't cheat"

But he did go on to say that the problems of keeping the site intact for a week between concerts was considerable: "We haven't had enough time between concerts, and expenses have escalated enormously in the week. I don't think I'll even do another of these consecutive gigs."

Meanwhile, as his costs rose, an estimated 60,000 to 70,000 people turned up for Zep 2 – about half the alleged figure for the first show.

With Chairman Dumelow and his committee riding him hard, and Peter Grant with money on his mind, Freddy Bannister, currently taking a rest, needs more than the Seventh Cavalry to come over the hill to ensure that August 11, 1979 was not Knebworth's swansong.



KEYSTONE-FRANCE / GETTY, MICHAEL PUTLAND / GETTY

Guiding spirit of Little Feat

MM JUL 7 RIP, Lowell George.

LOWELL GEORGE, THE founder and guiding spirit of Little Feat, died in America last Friday after a heart attack. George, whose singing and guitar-playing had been featured with Little Feat from 1971 until their final split earlier this year, died in Arlington, Virginia, during a tour to promote his first solo album.

Following a concert in Washington DC on Thursday night, George woke up in the Marriott Twin Bridges Hotel on Friday morning complaining of chest pains. His wife called an ambulance, but George died within half an hour. He was aged 34.

George earned respect and admiration primarily as a slide guitarist, and played on many sessions for other artists – notably Van Dyke Parks, Bonnie Raitt and Robert Palmer.

But it was through Little Feat that he found fame. Among his compositions for the band were several songs which became rock standards, like "Willin'"and "Sailin' Shoes".

The last few years of Little Feat's life had featured several well-publicised internal disputes – but, ironically, once having made the break, George had been receiving highly favourable reviews for the recent concerts with his own band.



September release

NME JUL 7 Bob Dylan's *Slow Train Coming* debuts on British radio. Is Bob after a DJ slot on Capital?

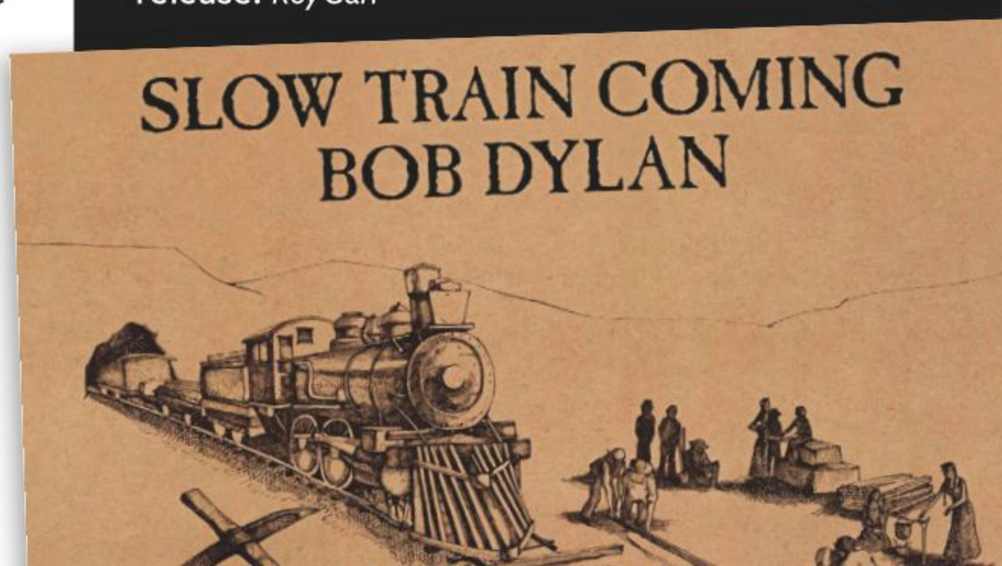
NEVER MIND GOD moving in mysterious ways, check this out for weirdness. On Tuesday (June 26) Bob Dylan's US attorney turned up, unannounced, at the offices of London's Capital Radio with the tape of the next Dylan album (*Slow Train Coming*) and a personal message from The Zim himself. The said attorney introduced himself to the station's surprised programmers, played them the master tape of the album and stated that he'd return the next afternoon with an un-refusable offer!

Seems that during his last visit to London Dylan took a liking to Roger Scott's intelligently presented afternoon show and the gist of his personal message was that he'd be obliged if, immediately following the Wednesday four o'clock news break, Scott would premiere "Precious Angel", one of the tracks from *Slow Train Coming*.

An extended medium-paced strummer based around the "Sweet Jane" riff, sung in a *Blonde On Blonde* voice and sounding like a [Dire Straits'] *Communiqué* outtake, it features an ambiguous love lyric which could be directed to either a woman, God or both.

However, in granting both Capital Radio and Roger Scott this world exclusive there was one small proviso. In return Dylan asked for a taped segment of the Scott show featuring "Precious Angel", so he could personally judge how the track scanned within the context of a regular British radio programme.

That's The Zim's story as put forward by his attorney. However, we here at Thrills reckon the man is after Gerald Harper's *Sunday Affair* slot on Capital. And just for the record, *Slow Train Coming* is produced by Jerry Wexler and features Dire Straiters Mark Knopfler (guitar) and Pick Withers (drums) with Barry Beckett (keyboards), Tim Drummond (bass) plus The Muscle Shoals Horns and a few back-up singers. It is scheduled for a worldwide September release. *Roy Carr*



The Rock 'n' Roll Doctor



The Specials: (l–r) Roddy Radiation, Neville Staple, John Bradbury, Terry Hall, Lynval Golding, Horace Panter and Jerry Dammers

First releases on 2-Tone

MM JUL 14 Coventry band The Specials turn label impresarios, with a debut single from Madness.

THE SPECIALS HAVE announced the first releases on their own 2-Tone record label. The debut single is from London band Madness on August 10, called "The Prince", coupled with "Madness".

The Specials release a second single in August and a debut album in September. Their current single, "Gangsters", is now being distributed by Chrysalis. Another signing to the label is Coventry-based band The Selecter, who go into the studio next month to record a single for September release.

The Specials will reopen the newly soundproofed Electric Ballroom on July 21 with a special 2-Tone Night. Confirmed to appear are The Specials, Dexys Midnight Runners, Madness and The Selecter. Doors will open at 7.30pm and tickets will be available from agencies and Rock On Records priced £2.

More Specials dates for August include the Bilzen Festival, Belgium (17), Manchester Fun House (10) and a benefit for one-parent families at the Hammersmith Palais (21) with Linton Kwesi Johnson.

A major UK tour is planned for September and some extra European dates in August.



"Breathing space"

NME AUG 18 Chaz Jankel says he's leaving the Blockheads. Again.

CHAZ JANKEL, keyboardist/guitarist and musical director with Ian Dury's Blockheads, this week revealed that he was to quit the band at the end of the month. Claiming that the band's music wasn't stimulating enough and was stifling his creativity, Jankel added that he wouldn't be joining any new band or taking on any commitments as a producer for some time to come. His intention is to head for South America and then travel up through North America.

He also stated that his songwriting partnership with Ian Dury was through and all he wanted at present was a "breathing space". Jankel, who first met Dury after a Kilburn & The High Roads gig at London's Nashville Rooms, has worked with the Blockheads for three years and was the musician mainly responsible for providing Dury's lyrics with their musical settings. However, he claims his departure "doesn't mean a lot" – a sentiment echoed by Blockheads publicist Kosmo Vinyl, who explained, "Though Chaz had always been on Ian's recordings, we've played more live gigs without him than with him.

"He left the band for a whole year once and missed several tours, including the American one. We didn't replace him and just went on as a six-piece, which we could do in the future.

"Chaz doesn't like touring. He even turned down a tour with Van Morrison once and got a job in John Lewis selling shirts instead. Really, it's no shock-horror thing."



Chaz Jankel: plans to go to South America


BLOCKHEAD
BUSTER CHAZ!!

➤ Sham 69 have chosen to finish their career with a concert in Finland later this month. Their Glasgow Apollo concert last Friday is believed to be their last British gig. The occasion saw for the first time on stage the merger of Sham members Jimmy Pursey and Dave Treganna with former Pistols Steve Jones and Paul Cook. The quartet will be going ahead, says Sham manager Tony Gordon, as long as contractual matters can be sorted out. The other half of Sham – Dave Parsons and Rick Goldstein – are likely to form a new band, he adds. Sham's new single, "Hersham Boys", is set for mid-July release. **MM JUL 7**



➤ After a tour with The Damned, The Ruts have London dates at the Music Machine (July 12), Rainbow Theatre (13) and Marquee (19). They follow up their Virgin single "Babylon's Burning" with their debut album, to be engineered by Mick Glossop. **MM JUL 14**

➤ Scritti Politti will be releasing three singles on the same day in August on their own St Pancras label. They are going into the studios on July 3 for three days to record them and on July 4 their second John Peel session will be broadcast by Radio One. They play at the University of London Union with Rema Rema and Good Missionaries next Tuesday. **MM JUL 7**

SUNSHINE INTERNATIONAL / REX, VIRGINIA TURBETT / GETTY, SUSAN ROBERTSON / REX

1979

JULY – SEPTEMBER

June 4, 1979: Dave Vanian and Captain Sensible on stage at Routes in Exeter, where they dedicate "Stretcher Case" to The Ruts' singer Malcolm Owen, hositalised after smashing his head against a cymbal during the support slot

Money. Fun. Boilers

“Anarchy? You’re fucking well going to get it”

THE DAMNED have re-formed, which spells chaos as they hit New York on a quest for money, “boilers” and helicopters. On stage, they destroy everything. Off it, they bamboozle the press. What will they do when they get popular? “Popular?” cries Captain Sensible. “Have you heard our records?”

— MELODY MAKER JULY 7 —

THE LITTLE BASTARDS aren’t here.

Monday afternoon, and The Damned still haven’t arrived in New York. I’ve been stood up. Flight EZ 99038 R had touched down at JFK at 5.30 that morning. New York twinkled below us. It was like landing on a pinball table. Dawn was breaking like a hangover. A Chinese taxi driver had agreed to drive me to the hotel only after I’d agreed to pay him double the normal fare. I staggered into the Gramercy Park at 6.30, daylight swanning with me through the lobby.

And the bastards weren’t there.

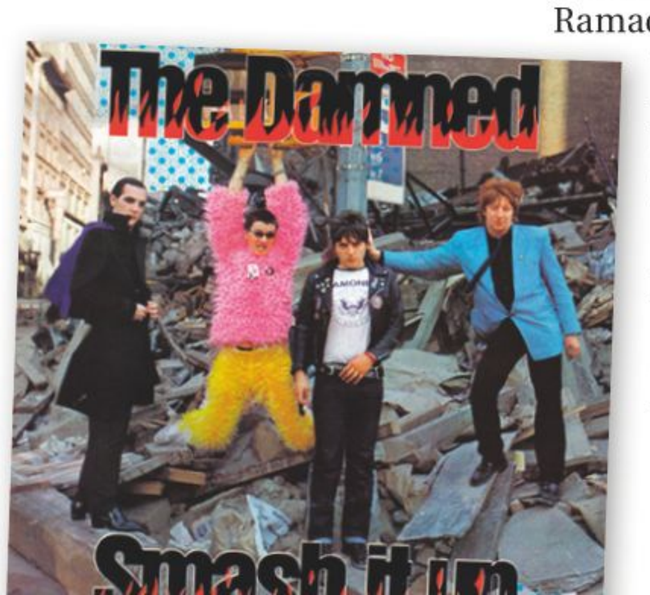
So the reporter went for a drink. There was a bar somewhere around 3rd Avenue and East 14th Street. There was a derelict outside with a tin can and a sign around his neck. “I AM 90% BLIND,” it said. “HELP ME.” I stole a couple of dimes out of his tin and fell into the bar.

By this time I was convinced that I’d been set up. It would be typical of The Damned’s contrary sense of humour – fly some helpless hack to New York on a banger charter flight and leave him there, broke and discarded.

I imagined The Damned lounging around some swimming pool at a Ramada Holiday Inn in California as I trekked the streets of the Bowery. The barman brought me a beer. I imagined Vanian in his bat-person threads enjoying a Tequila Sunrise beneath the West Coast sun, a muted breeze tickling the palm trees, Rat and Sensible howling with laughter at my misfortune.

The reporter is stirred from his morbid daydreams. He is being punched on the arm. Ah, a friendly native.

He pokes me again with stubby fingers. I can feel the bruise already swelling on my arm. He looks like someone’s recently wrapped his face around a lamp-post. His front teeth are on »



VIRGINIA TURBETT / GETTY

vacation. Thith cautheth hith tongue to get thtuck in the gap. Whenever he thpeakth he showerth me with thpit. But I don't care; I'm not proud. I'll talk to anybody.

"Get lost," I smile. "Yew frum outta town?" he slurs. My accent gave me away. "Prick-athhole," he says. Charming. I turn away.

"Down' tern away frum me when I' tawken t'ya…" He begins to mumble. "Thith ith a grayyyt thitty – we down' need thcum like yew heer… Cum heer with yewr fucken dungareeth and yewr long fucken hair – who needth it, bathtid?" He spits on my leg. I protest, vigorously.

"Hey – dat's inuffa dat." It's the barman. "Get owtta heer."

The voice of decency! The oaf beside me doesn't move.

"Getja ass off dat stool," the barman said.

The great oaf still doesn't move. This is hardly surprising. The barman isn't talking to him. He's talking to me. I protest my innocence.

"Hey," the barman says, leaning over the bar. "Dja wanna leave heer widja lip ina sling?"

I limp into the afternoon sun on 3rd Avenue, fuming. Where the holly-go-lightly are the bloody Damned?

EVERYONE THE REPORTER had spoken to over the previous week had laughed up their sleeve at the news that he would be going to New York to see The Damned. Everyone thought the reporter mad. They reminded him of his last adventure on the road with The Damned. And the reporter shivered involuntarily at the memory of Captain Sensible setting fire to his hair as the Damned van slunk through a murky November afternoon on its way to Middlesbrough.

The Damned had split up not too long after that tour. The reporter had run into Captain Sensible at an XTC gig at the Lyceum. The Captain told him that Brian James had dumped the boys that afternoon. The reporter had shed no tears. He thought of all the other hacks who would now be spared the nightmare of accompanying The Damned on one of their ludicrous excursions. The world was suddenly a brighter place to hang up your hat.

Then the little bastards, minus Brian James, re-formed.

They even had the blasted temerity to score a hit record with a chunk of noise called "Love Song". The reporter winced. The Damned were hot copy again. The reporter sympathised with those unfortunate scribblers dispatched by sadistic editors to cover the devils on their British tour.

The routine read like a familiar nightmare – the journalist as martyr to the group's violent whimsy. Sensible and Scabies seemed as cantankerous and full of fierce mischief as ever.

The reporter twisted his way out of every invitation to join them during their British tour. Then he was asked to join them in New York. A large house brick fell on his head. He agreed.

That was when everyone started laughing up their sleeves. They imagined the poor reporter suffering indescribable humiliations at the hands of the Captain and Rat – being dangled naked from the observation deck of the Empire State; thrown overboard from the Staten Island ferry; being incinerated by the pyromaniac Sensible. Oh, how they laughed!

The reporter drowsed on the edge of sleep in the departure lounge at Gatwick. He had a dream, a delirious half-conscious nightmare. He was being suffocated by Captain Sensible. He was being hurled from the roof of a World Trade Centre tower. He was strapped to the Statue Of Liberty with a stick of dynamite in his mouth… The reporter woke up, sweating.

THE DAMNED ARE at Hurrah's. That's where the bloody Damned are. Hurrah's is basically an upmarket CBGB with disco decor.

The Damned don't like Hurrah's. Nothing personal; they just hate everything to do with America. Especially Americans.

This is The Damned's second assault on the bastions of bland. They first played in New York in the early months of 1977. They were the first Blighty punk squad to hit the colony, and the Yanks were set to squabbling about their merit.

Back home they had things pretty well stitched up. They'd played a national tour with Bolan; "New Rose" had been acclaimed as a classic, sniffed some chart action.

The Damned were part of the punk triumvirate that included the Pistols and The Clash. Jake Riviera brought them into America. They were living on five dollars a day; returned broke but cheerful; played the Roundhouse under a banner that smiled "Tax Exiles Return".

That year was alive with promise for The Damned. Then they released their second album, *Music For Pleasure*, and the critics dumped on them. Rat quit. Jake Riviera discovered Elvis Costello, left Stiff and cooled on The Damned. Dave Robinson, left alone at the helm at Alexander Street, had never disguised his antipathy for The Damned. He piled them into the dumper at the earliest opportunity. The group didn't last too much longer.

Sensible screws himself into a ball of disgust when there is any mention of either Stiff, Riviera or Robinson.

"Stiff owe us thousands," he whines. "We never got a penny in royalties off the bastards. They've got this attitude, right, that bands are just bog-rolls. They just throw them away."

"It was our money," Scabies protests, "that launched Ian Dury and Costello. The prats."

When Scabies, Vanian and Sensible decided – after the fruitless individual pursuits of last year – to reform The Damned, they went to Stiff to talk to Robinson, to plead for some kind of financial support.

"You know what he did?" Sensible asks.

I didn't.

"He sat there and laughed. Looked at us and laughed…"

Yeah, I can imagine him doing that. Dave's got a marvellous sense of humour.

"…then he told us to fuck off."

The MU is currently investigating the Damned claim that Stiff owe them royalties on their two albums.

THIS TIME AROUND The Damned are on 20 dollars a day, have a new manager – Rick Rodgers, who also has a hand on The Specials' pulse – another hit single in Blighty, and they've moved uptown, from the Bowery sleaze of CBGB to the rather more refined air of Hurrah's.

The tour so far has been a success. In Washington the audience had even gobbed at Sensible. This he considered the highlight of the tour.

"It was great," he enthuses. "Like home."

Sensible, Scabies and Al Ward (the new bass player) struggled through the initially meagre crowd and onto the stage. They plugged in.

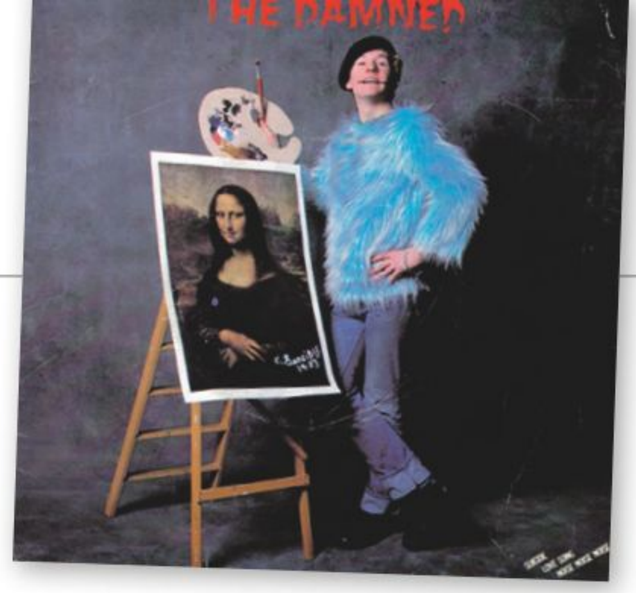
The trio kicked the audience in the shins with a robust version of "Jet Boy, Jet Girl". The audience exchanged confused looks. The audience, as both Sensible and Scabies later tell them, are a bunch of wankers. NY groovers, most of them, playing at being delinquent. Their studied cool winds the Captain and Scabies up to a fierce pitch of hostility; they decide to declare war.

Good old Damned: the spirit of confrontation that marked the beat in '76 is still fighting for breath here, poking its tongue at us and crossing its eyes…

Sensible cranks up the voltage. The big surprise is that he's a much better guitarist than the discarded Brian James. He spins out shuddering blocks of crazed electricity. Hardly melodic, but it bites the balls off the audience. Vanian – whose sudden entrance takes the audience by surprise – stalks the stage; all fangs and little beetle scurries. Ward just stands there: a monolithic boom blasting through the frantic scrabble of noise. Scabies sounds like a one man air-raid, rampaging around his kit as if he's taken an immense dislike to it. Heavy-metal punk is what it is, with splashes of mutant psychedelia.

"This one's for Rod Stewart – it's called 'Stretcher Case'," the Captain informs the audience in his warm and affectionate manner. "And I wish he was one – I wish he





was dead!" It's an old joke. The audience isn't smiling, though.

"YOU SUCK, YOU ROTTEN LIMEYS!" cries someone.

"PUNK! WE WANT PUNK!" cries someone else.

"You don't know fuck all about punk," Sensible berates the Yanks. "It's just a fashion to you… If Ted Nugent had short hair, you'd think he was a punk… It's people like you that split us up," he cries, sounding hurt. Poor darling.

"FUCK OFF!" the audience shouts.

"Shut your fucking gob," Sensible replies in the manner of Peter Ustinov giving an after-dinner speech at Buckingham Palace.

Rat stands on his drum stool, bungs his sticks up his nose and flicks snot at the audience. Charming little monkey. They gallop through "New Rose" – prefaced by a Bad Company burlesque. All-round entertainers, already! They play "Suicide" – "Why dontcha?" someone asks.

Vanian leans over and bites him on the neck. "Problem Child" jumps out of the wings and terrorises our sensibilities. This is music to go colourfully berserk and murder the wife and children to.

"Do you think we're better than The Jam?" Sensible asks.

"Naaaaaaaaaaah!"

Al Ward starts playing the riff from "In The City". This is meant to be a joke. The audience applauds. "Shut up, you shits!" Sensible quips. "The next one's called 'Help' and you need a lot of it, 'cos you're a bunch of wankers…"

"Help" is duly kicked in the groin and left groaning in the gutter. "Stab Your Back" is dragged out of the kitchen and beaten to a bloody pulp. The gig begins to descend into absolute chaos… I remember the Captain and Vanian storming off the stage shouting abuse at the audience.

Rat staggered drunkenly toward the microphone. He picked up Sensible's guitar. He began to remind me vividly of Denis Law.

"So who's gownter plug this guitar in?" he wanted to know.

"Fuck you," someone cries tough.

"If there was half a chance you probably would," Rat grins, an evil glint in his bloodshot eyes.

He plugs the guitar in.

"Okay, shitheads – you asked for this…"

The gig has now become a fierce argument between Rat and the audience. The Captain reappears. He's stripped down to his underpants.

"Cap," Rat shouts. "Tell you the kind of group who'd go down well over 'ere…"

"Oozat?"

"Generation X."

"I'd like to strangle Billy Idol…"

It's like watching a music-hall double act. Sensible starts banging about on the drums. Rat plays "Whole Lotta Love".

"You pricks!" a coffee-table NY punk shouts.

"Right, you asked for this. You want anarchy? You're fucking well going to get it," Rat announces.

He proceeds to ravage the guitar. The decibel level is outrageous; my ears are bleeding and my teeth are falling into my vodka. Scabies swaggers around the stage, sticks his crotch in the faces of the bewildered faithful at the front of the stage.

Rat plays the intro to "Pretty Vacant". Vanian reappears (does he keep dropping down from a perch in the rafters?). Rat bangs someone on the head with the neck of the guitar, looks pleased. He has a grin like an exploding ulcer on his face. The Cap plays a drum solo. Rat grinds the neck of the guitar against the mic stand. It sounds like squirrels being tortured backstage. Al Ward whacks his bass against the amps. Rat swings his guitar against the speakers. Someone rushes from the side of the stage, wrestles with him, snatches the guitar off him. Rat picks up half the drum kit, smashes that instead into the speakers.

Al's bass is now thoroughly demolished. He topples the speakers on his side of the stage; smashes his amp into one of the floor-to-ceiling mirrors that decorate the club. The mirror shatters. Sensible storms through the remains of the drum kit. Rat steams off stage followed by Al and Vanian. The amps are screaming feedback.

Sensible hurls the top of the mic stand across the length of the club; it smacks against the far wall, inches above the head of one of the club's resident sound people. He's just witnessed most of his brand-new equipment being comprehensively trashed by this group of crazed Limeys – and then they have the nerve to try to kill him! He's fairly berserk with rage…

The noise from the stage is still utterly fierce. People are turning away, shell-shocked, relieved that the carnage is finally over.

"Buncha fucken nuts – shoulda dragged 'em outside an' beaten shit outta 'em," one surly individual is telling his chums.

Hurrah's exasperated owner is still on the stage standing in the middle of the wreckage.

"Ahhhhh…" he says. "Tomorrow The Damned will be back," he says weakly.

A bottle smashes against the stage.

> "Stiff owe us thousands. We never got a penny in royalties"

"HEY," SAYS THE interviewer from *Punk* magazine. "I heard you guys smashed the hell outta Hurrah's last night and all ended up in the hospital."

"Don't believe nuffink till you've tasted it," Scabies laughs hoarsely. "Shut up, sit down and 'ave a drink, you moronic American twat."

We are at the bar at the Gramercy Park. Rat has volunteered to handle all interviews today.

"I WANT to do them," he had announced. "I want to see my name in the papers. I want my face everywhere. I want to be famous and rich so I won't have to spend all my time with 'orrible little tossers like Sensible and the Creature…" The Creature is Rat's nickname for Vanian. "I want to have lots of money… and a helicopter."

Rat won't be as busy as he anticipated this afternoon. *New York Rocker* magazine have already cancelled their interview. They thought last night's gig was appalling.

"Shit on their heads, I will," Rat says. "Wait till my solo album comes out and they're crawling around…"

We retire to Rat's room. Sensible is there. They con him into being interviewed. The chap from *Punk* wants to know why Brian James isn't in the band.

"'Cos we didn't want him to be in the band. He's a tosser," says Rat. "A pain to work for. One of life's great losers."

Why did The Damned reform, asks the chap from *Punk*.

"Money," says Rat. "Fun. Boilers."

The chap from *Punk* asks Rat what he thinks of Public Image.

"They're a dustbin full of shit. I love 'em. Rotten's a genius. Ain't anyone who sells shit as well as Johnny Rotten. He keeps shovelling it out and people keep buying it. A genius."

The conversation slides toward Sid and Nancy.

"I think he probably did it," Rat says. "He was a nasty little thug, you know… and, like, there are drugs over here that can make you think that cutting your arm off's a good idea. And Sid was partial to his drugs…"

Sensible, meanwhile, has agreed to be interviewed by a fellow called Brad, from *High Times* magazine.

"Are you from an authentic working-class background?" he asks the Captain.

"Well, me dad repairs street lights… 'Eee's got a truck with a tower on the back. Sort of a crane thing. Ratty's dad was a street-lamp repairer, too… He used to light up the old gas lamps…"

"So," says the fellow from *High Times*, "there's a tradition of that in your families…"

"Uhhhh… 'spose so," says the Cap. "And I'll probably end up doing it in a couple of years as well if this doesn't succeed. And we DO appear to be on a course for self-destruction…"

"What about the future?" Brad asks, concerned. "What if you actually became successful?"

The Captain collapses into a laughing ball.

"Can you really see US becoming successful?" he howls. "Like, after last night – can you see the American public taking us to their hearts and nurturing us… Successful? Popular? Have you ever heard our records?"

The Captain disappears into his bedroom, still laughing raucously.

"The Damned conquer America," he yelps. "Worra fucking joke."

The door slams behind him. *Allan Jones* •

1979

JULY – SEPTEMBER



FIN COSTELLO / GETTY

The Pretenders: (l–r) James Honeyman-Scott, Chrissie Hynde, Pete Farndon and Martin Chambers

“Now is not the time to be a cult hero”

A longtime trier strikes gold with THE PRETENDERS. “I live fighting the system. Now, maybe, I’m married to the system,” says CHRISSIE HYNDE of her steadfastly commercial act. “And when I divorce it, I’m gonna milk it for a load of alimony.”

— MM JULY 21 —

THE PRETENDERS' TRANSIT was hurtling down the motorway, pushing past the legal limit in the outside land. Jimmy Honeyman-Scott was in the front seat next to Dave, the driver. Martin Chambers was sitting behind the guitarist. The group's manager, Dave Hill, was asleep next to the drummer. I was nodding off in the seat behind Hill, opposite Pete Farndon. Chrissie Hynde was curled up in the far corner of the van, behind the bass player, absorbed in a copy of Raymond Chandler's *The Little Sister*.

A soporific mood had descended upon the company, provoked by the heat and a round of early-morning drinks at the motel in Blackburn. I was drifting off into the ozone, head bumping uncomfortably against the window, but otherwise at peace with the world.

Suddenly, there was a frightening explosion. It rocked me right out of the seat. The Transit was careering across three lanes and my heart was in my mouth and racing for the lifeboats. The explosion was so loud I thought God had come screaming feet first through the bloody roof. There was a moment of utter panic, a frantic shower of glass and I thought we were all heading straight for heaven's waiting room for a premature appointment with eternity.

Goodbye world, I thought.

The Transit lurched to a shuddering stop on the hard shoulder, brushing against the grass verge alongside the motorway asphalt. The windscreen was completely shattered. The inside of the van looked like an accident at a glass-blowing factory. Jimmy and Dave were up to their ankles in lethal fragments of glass. The driver's face was bleeding; the guitarist had cuts on his arms. A piece of flying glass had nicked Chrissie Hynde's face.

There was a stunned silence as we sat, nervous and speechless.

"What the fuck hit us?" asked Pete Farndon, brushing glass from his lap. "Skylab?"

We laughed uneasily.

Dave Hill tipped back his pork-pie hat. "Well," he said, "that was very nearly that. I really thought that was the tour over before we'd even started…"

Jimmy chuckled, the colour creeping back to his face. "Well," he said turning to me, "at least it must be good for the old story. Things were getting a little dull."

THE PRETENDERS WERE only two days into their British tour when they so narrowly escaped their reluctant rendezvous with the angels. Chester and Blackburn had been scratched from the gig sheet, but there were 20 or more dates still to be crossed off. An early retirement from the game on a stretch of Midlands motorway might have made legends of The Pretenders, but the rock audience would've been denied the continued, vital presence of a band that some consider to be the most exciting combo on the planks and potential heirs to the throne in the '80s.

It wouldn't have done much for my future, either, come to think of it.

The audience that had been so clearly thrilled by The Pretenders at Smartyz in Chester would have missed them, for sure. So would Elvis Costello. The bespectacled one had zeroed in on the opening night of the tour at Smartyz and left bristling with enthusiasm, promising to write a song for them should they need an addition to their already potent armoury of Chrissie Hynde originals.

"A nice cat," Chrissie had said of Elvis. "An aggressive little bastard, though."

Smartyz had not looked an auspicious venue for the opening salvo of The Pretenders' present campaign. Chester itself had seemed to be slumbering in its own provincial inertia, a town for pensioned-off retirement rather than rock'n'roll action. The kind of place where they bring down the shutters at sunset and roll up the pavements.

The Pretenders, though, are excitement on legs. They could make a graveyard dance. The gig was remarkably free from first-night nerves and blunders. "I'm too nervous to be nervous," Chrissie Hynde had remarked, pacing the tatty armpit of a dressing room before the gig. Elvis had smiled, leaning against a wall with a beer, recognising the symptoms of first-night duress.

The club was small and packed. The audience was crammed tight against the low stage. The heat was so intense it threatened to melt your eyeballs. There was no air to spare and the breath was wrenched from your lungs. I spent the evening trapped three rows from the front of the stage, surrounded by sweating, dancing bodies, feeling as if I was being smacked continuously on the chest by a giant hammer. By the time The Pretenders slammed on the brakes at the end of the accelerating rush of their encore, "Mystery Achievement", I was a walking bucket of sweat; utterly exhausted but exhilarated by the power avalanche of music that had swept over the audience.

The rest of the evening clambered over the fence in a bewildered blur. Tired and hungry, The Pretenders had returned to their motel in search of calories and refreshments. The hotel was all wrapped up for the night. A crusty old night porter directed them to the Dunkirk. He described the Dunkirk as an all-night restaurant. The Dunkirk turned out to be a 24-hour truck stop.

"Lorry Drivers Will Be Served First At All Times", said the sign loosely tacked on the kitchen wall. We weren't inclined to argue. The Dunkirk was harshly lit by bright fluorescent lights; the interior was grim and garish. Pete Farndon headed straight for the pinball machine, an image straight out of "The Wait". Martin Chambers played pool with a gang of local cowboys. Chrissie leaned against the juke-box. Willie Nelson sang "Blue Eyes Crying In The Rain". Jimmy Honeyman-Scott wondered where he could get a drink.

> "I can see right through some of these people trying to build you up"

We sat in the Transit waiting for Farndon and Chambers. Chrissie Hynde cried tough.

"Let's fuckin' leave 'em," she scowled. "I come all the way from Akron, O-fuckin'-hio and end up with a buncha hicks who just wanna play pinball and shoot pool all the fuckin' time. It's disgusting."

"Martin won't leave until he's beaten those cowboys," Dave Hill said wearily. It was 3.30am.

"That's the trouble with these homosexuals," Chrissie growled. "They always think they've gotta prove themselves."

Farndon and Chambers ambled through the night.

"It's all right," smirked Jimmy. "The Liberal Party's just coming."

"Good," snapped Chrissie Hynde. "Let's sleep."

Ah – the glamour of the road!

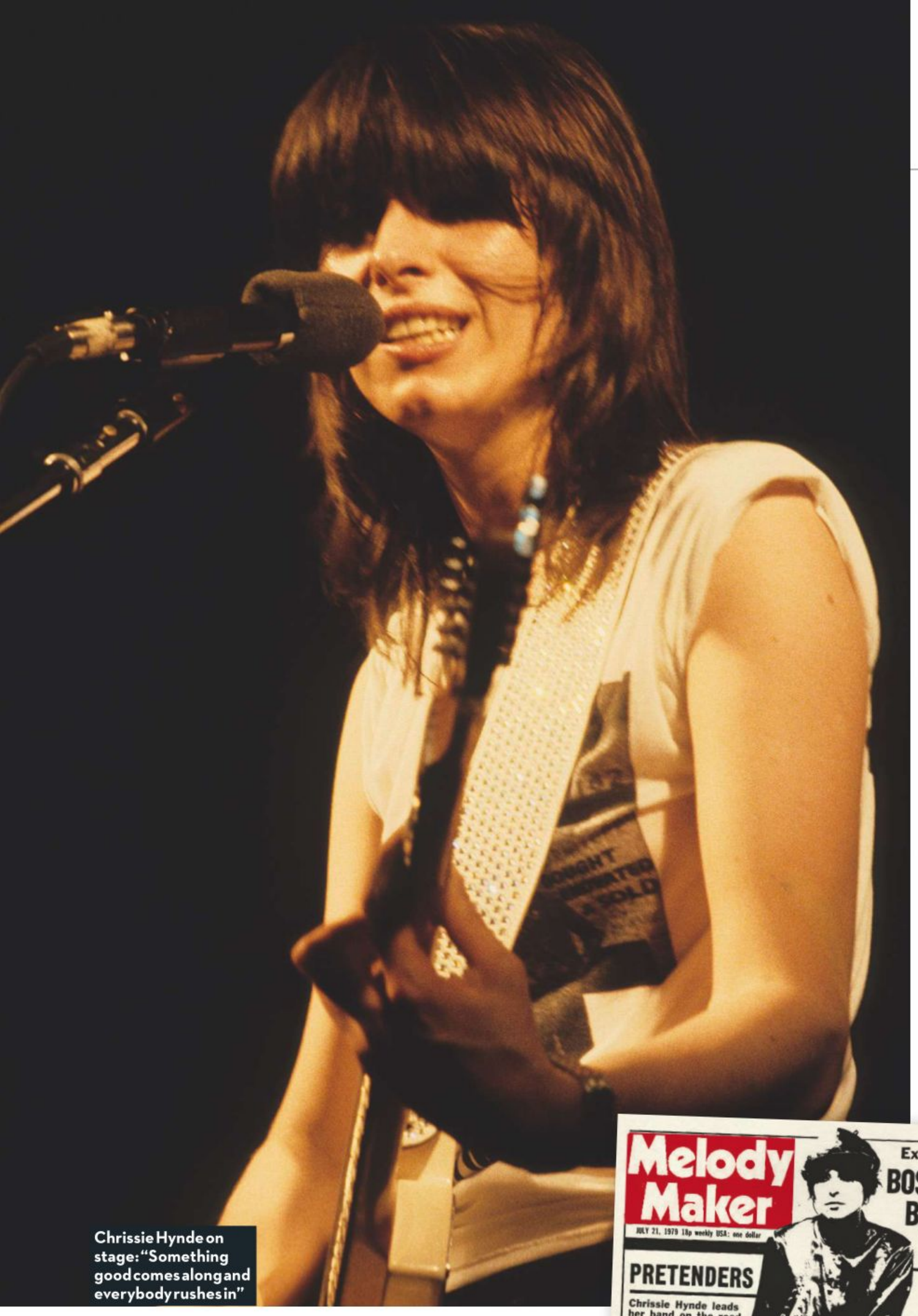
CONTACT WITH THE Pretenders had first been made a week before their tour opened in Chester. They were making a promo film of their new single, "Kid", at a funfair in Gerrards Cross.

The principals of this little adventure had tiptoed through the sunlight to be introduced to the reporter. A curious, even sensitive time, this. The group are wary, checking out the journalist, knowing that for the next week he's going to be living in their back pockets. The journalist, meanwhile, is anxious to make a good impression…

Jimmy Honeyman-Scott is first on the scene. The most obviously extrovert of The Pretenders, he's brash, impetuous and immediately likeable. Pete Farndon is initially a little more reserved. A darker presence, he arrived with a swash-buckling bandana tied around his neck, clumping across the green in heavy biker's boots. A roguish worldliness hangs about him. Martin Chambers strikes a mediating balance between Jimmy's raucous flash and Farndon's quiet inscrutability.

Chrissie Hynde arrives last. She's dressed in black leather and comes on with a brisk impatience and a curt acknowledgement, tousled black hair and a briefly intimidating glower. The press that accompanied The Pretenders' debut early this year portrayed her as a somewhat





Chrissie Hynde on stage: "Something good comes along and everybody rushes in"

temperamental individual, given to flashes of petulance and temper. I had vaguely expected some kind of screaming harridan, loud-mouthed and arrogant – but here she is under a fierce July sun, running through take after take of "Kid", makeup melting in the heat for nearly three hours and not a murmur of complaint or moody shadow boxing with her ego.

Keef, the director of the film, confers with her. She listens, takes his advice, uses his knowledge to her advantage, and works patiently and conscientiously. She is keen for the director to feature the entire band in the film, pushing Jimmy forward during his solos on "Kid" and later on "Tattooed Love Boys". During a break in the filming she generously agrees to a quick photo-session with Tom Sheehan, posing with some guys from the fair.

The rest of the group seem similarly determined to enjoy the afternoon. They don't waste time whining about having to stand about in their stage clothes in the blistering heat. Keef suggest a sequence with them all on a switchback carousel affair. They all clamber aboard (even the journalist and the photographer are enlisted as extras – we weren't terribly satisfied with our performances, though).

They spend a bone-rattling 30 minutes being hurled around the circuit. Jimmy takes his guitar on board, plays his solo whistling around the bends and dips at a ridiculous speed that has the more sensitive among us clenching our teeth and holding on grimly to the contents of our stomachs.

"Right," Jimmy announces as we come finally to a stop. "Everyone into the pub, drink as much as you can for 20 minutes and we'll come back and do it again."



I turn an unpleasant shade of green and promise to meet them the following week in Chester.

THIS PAPER FIRST featured The Pretenders in our February 3 issue. Mark Williams had seen them at the Moonlight in West Hampstead. He returned with an enthusiastic report and petitioned for support. The next week, Richard Williams followed him onto these pages with an equally encouraging review. The week after that, The Pretenders were on the cover and Mark Williams offered us the first printed history of the group. Other publications followed suit.

The Pretenders were the hottest act in town – and they'd only released one single, a cover of The Kinks' "Stop Your Sobbing" (backed by the even more impressive Hynde/Farndon collaboration, "The Wait") and played a mere bagful of gigs. They were overnight media sensations with a single creeping around the arse-end of the Top 30. And hardly anyone outside West Hampstead had ever clapped eyes on them.

The sudden rush of attention could have killed them, however well intentioned the general enthusiasm. The British music press has a voracious appetite for novelty, and The Pretenders were February's candidates for the – deep breath – future of rock'n'roll.

"It really pissed me off," says Chrissie Hynde, reflecting upon the barrage of publicity that surrounded The Pretenders in February. "But I shouldn't have been pissed off, I should've been more hip to the press, I shoulda understood it better…

"But, like, at that stage you don't wanna whole lotta attention. You don't wanna lotta people looking over your fuckin' shoulder when you're just putting something together. You don't really want anyone around. They start giving you advice and you're not asking for it.

"They start pointing you in directions, you know, man, and you're still finding your own direction… And it can be, like, dangerous if you start listening to them when they're, like, on the fuckin' phone and ramming themselves down your throat…"

"There we were," says Dave Hill, "on our first couple of gigs and everybody was saying, 'This is, like, the peak of the group – this is the time to see them – they're firing on all 10 cylinders…' And we weren't. We could really have come a cropper after that kind of attention coming so early.

"You know how it is – something good comes along and everybody rushes in because they want to be first. And that might be good for the papers, but it isn't always good for the band."

Fortunately, The Pretenders, as Hill remarks, had the good sense to pull back from further exposure, to resist the immediate temptation of milking the media for quick rewards.

"I don't think anyone in the band thought, 'Whammmm! That's it, we've made it…' It could have been more difficult with some dodgy little band with no head for that kind of pressure. But this group knows where it's going and they're not going to be taken in by a sudden rush of enthusiasm… We all realised that the group hadn't done anything yet to match our potential.

"I realised that as much as they did, you know. I never believed it would just happen that quickly. The band has to make its own success… It won't be made by all the good press in the world, as grateful as we might be for that encouragement. People will make up their own mind when they see the band. The band know that and they know that it's not something they can achieve with a couple of gigs and a few good reviews…"

"We were never deluded," attests Chrissie Hynde emphatically. "I can see right through some of these people who're trying to build you up 'cos it looks good on them. You know – a new band comes out and everyone jumps on them, someone writes about them and it's like, 'Hey – I've discovered this hot new act!' And they discard you a few months »

PETER NOBLE / GETTY

later after everyone else picks up on you… Fuck, man, I didn't want to get into that one.

"I wanted these people off my back, like now. I don't dig attention when it's not warranted. And, like, we talked with a few people – and that was it. We did it. And at the time there was just no more to fuckin' say. So we pulled back… and you, like, say, 'Well, that's enough – let's wait this out awhile.' Then the next thing you know they're all saying, 'Oooooh, they're playing hard to get. Coming on like fuckin' stars.' But I never went out looking for press in the first place, you know. And we ain't stars. We've just had coupla minor hits, man. We ain't deceiving ourselves. There's just no way you can win in the media game…"

The pressure on The Pretenders at that time came not only from the media. WEA, who distribute Hill's label, Real, insisted initially that they quickly follow "Stop Your Sobbing" with another single.

"There was a lot of pressure from the record company," Hill says. "Maybe if I'd been managing a group like The Damned, say, I would have made them whack out a new single straight away. I mean, I could have rushed them into the studio to record 'Girl Don't Come' with a Nick Lowe sound-alike production and maybe have got them another hit. But that's not the way to do it. We don't need that.

"We have to do it at our own pace – so, sure, there was a great deal of pressure, but the band comes first. Not the record company. The band has to feel comfortable with what they're doing. So they went into the studio, did some songs, and when they came up with something they felt happy with, we released it… You have to resist the temptation to race ahead of yourself."

"Yeah," says Chrissie Hynde. "Like, the moment someone starts telling me what to do and when to do it, man, I just pack up and walk away."

THE PRETENDERS' TRANSIT is motoring down the hill into Blackburn's early-evening silence. The town is dead, deserted. Jimmy is in the back of the van showing off his new haircut.

"It's a lot better short like that," Dave Hill agrees. "I mean, when you joined the band you looked like Björn Borg."

"Played like him too," smirks Chrissie Hynde.

"Thanks-a-fucking-lot," says Jimmy.

Jimmy had earlier been giving his side of the story of how he joined The Pretenders. Something of a local hero in his native Hereford, he had played with a series of bands whose collective contribution to rock'n'roll was positively minimal. The nearest he had come to any kind of notable success was as a member of Cheeks, the band formed by the former Mott The Hoople keyboards player Verden Allen. Martin Chambers was the group's drummer. Pete Farndon, another Hereford musician, recruited Honeyman-Scott when he and Chrissie Hynde were looking for musicians for The Pretenders.

He came to London for a rehearsal and demo recordings: "I just asked for a couple of hundred blues and two grams of speed for the sessions." Chrissie quickly dismissed him as a dishevelled speed-freak. Then she heard him play and wanted him for the band. He wasn't sure, said he'd think about it.

"I thought she was a bit of a monster," he recalled. "She was really aggressive and angry. I'd had enough of all that with the whole punk thing. I wasn't into that at all." Jimmy hesitated and stalled. Then Nick Lowe agreed to produce "…Sobbing". Jimmy needed no more persuasion. Nick Lowe is one of Jimmy's two real heroes. The other is Dave Edmunds.

"I was in like a shot," he smiles.

Jimmy seems to have rather fallen for old Bash in a big way, picking up on several of Lowe's more obvious mannerisms – including Nick's taste for the demon alcohol. This has been a cause of some concern to Dave Hill. Hill's concern is brushed aside by Jimmy. "I just like getting out of it," he states.

It's a dangerous game he's playing, though: he's tasting success and celebrity for the first time outside his provincial stomping ground and it could get out of hand. That's what Dave Hill is worried about. Chrissie recognises it, too.

"He'll have to work it out for himself," she tells Hill after one drunken escapade in Hereford. "Fuck – he's young enough to grow out of it. You shoulda seen me a coupla years ago. Let him ride it out…"

CHRISSIE HYNDE, A couple of years ago, was losing out all along the line, so one respects her advice. 1977 found her in London, hanging on the breadline, still trying to crystallise her ideas for a rock'n'roll band. Her frustrations have been recorded in detail and need not be repeated here, and as she says, she's put the various trials and tribulations into perspective now. She looks back without bitterness or anger on the disappointments and bruised hopes of that period.

"I wasn't scuffling around for that long, really… maybe a long time on the present music scene. You know, these days, someone gets it there and the manager makes them a big star with some gimmick and suddenly there's a market for them and for a few months they're the hottest thing going… But, you know, a lot of guys have been playing in bands for, like, 10 years – fuck, 20 years – and they're still not known. There's a lot of musicians who'll do it all their fuckin' lives and still not be stars…"

The times that depression would cut the deepest were those occasions when people she knew and met at gigs would dismiss her with "some kinda cynical little witticism" when she told them of her most recent attempts to form a band. When she was being discarded as a loser because people like Mick Jones, Scabies and Sensible and Dave Vanian and the Pistols – all of whom she had collaborated with – were up there on the boards while she was left in the audience or at the bar.

"But," she says now, "the fact is, you don't get something good happening, like, overnight unless you're some kinda special fuckin' genius. It takes a long time, you know… You gotta put in a lotta time. And all that time I knew I wasn't ready to do anything. So I'd just go back to my room and knock out a little riff on my own, and, like, learn what it was all about.

"I coulda been up there with those guys. Anyone coulda been up there. Anyone was up there. And I thought it was a gas, you know, it was fun to see them up there. It was good to see people getting up there and fucking around. Even the bands that were the most brutal, musically, it was still wildly amusing, and I don't mean that in a cynical, put-down kinda way. Like, I used to go down to the Roxy every night. And I thought it was great.

"But I didn't want to get up there with them. It wasn't really what I was after. I was into the whole scene… but… well, musically, I guess maybe I felt kinda detached from it, I didn't have that much of a place in that punk scene. It wasn't anything really to do with me. Like, I'm an American. I was maybe a coupla years older than most of those guys. Like, most of those kids were 16, 17, 18, and it was all, 'Let's fight the system…' Some big deal. So I stood back and let them get on with the shouting…

"Fuck, man – I live fighting the system. Now, maybe, I'm married to the system. And when I divorce it, I'm gonna milk it for a load of alimony, you know."



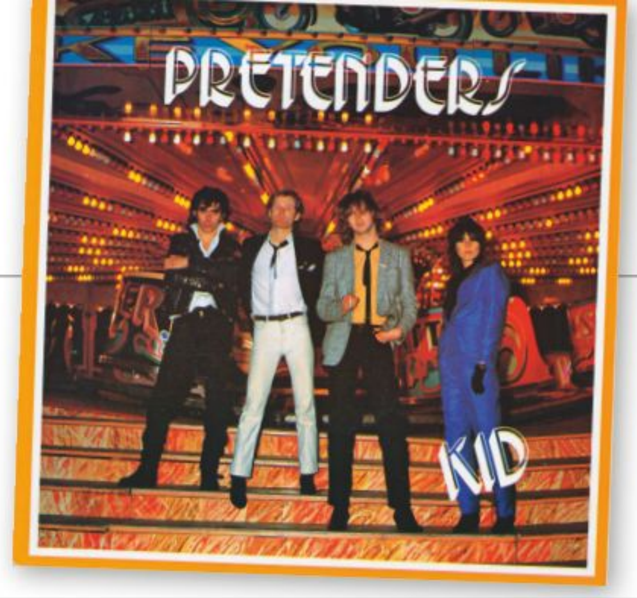
FIN COSTELLO / GETTY

THERE WAS A poster for the Pretenders' gig at Blackburn's St George's Hall. It was, as far as we could tell, the only one in the vicinity. And it was torn and weather-beaten. It probably should have warned us that the night would hold no remarkable promise.

The Pretenders' Transit crawled around the one-way system in the centre of Blackburn; we drove past the doors of St George's Hall. There was a group of kids outside; six, maybe seven of them.

"Is that the audience, do you think?" Martin Chambers wondered. It very nearly was.

"Let's invite them in for nothing," Pete Farndon suggested.



"Fuck that!" Chrissie Hynde declared. "Let them pay, like everyone else."

A young kid stuck his head around the side of the van and spoke to Pete Farndon.

"Hey, mister – can th'gerrus into t'gig wi' yer?"

"Why don't you just go and use your charm on the man at the door?" Pete asked.

"I tried, didn't I?" said the kid.

"And?"

"He told us t'fook off owter it."

Pete took the kid in with him. Ahhhhh.

"Can us 'ave yer ortograff?" some young girls asked Chrissie. Chrissie took their autograph books, scribbled a quick message.

"You know," she said, over her shoulder, "this makes me feel positive fuckin' heroic…"

Chrissie Hynde's response to this kind of fandom is an uncertain mixture of amusement, surprise and concern. It reflects exactly her reactions to the fame that most critics are convinced awaits her.

"It's just so surprising when it happens to you, you know," she says, trying to articulate her feelings.

"It really never occurred to me that it would happen to me. I never set out to gain any kind of adoration and adulation, but when I look at it kinda rationally I can understand it. I mean, I was like that about bands… Like I'd drive a hundred miles to see The Kinks, you know. I never got involved in music thinking, 'I wanna make the big time; I wanna be a big star.' It's kinda worrying…

"It wasn't something I considered… I never wanted anything like that out of being in music. I just do it 'cos I like it. And, like, today – if I got booted out of the band it wouldn't mean that I'd stop doing what I'm doing. I just like it. If someone else likes it and wants to market it or wants to buy it or dance to it or enjoy it – then that's marvellous. That gives me the freedom to do it as much as I want, when I want, instead of doing it alone in my room. But, you know, if I had to, I'd do it alone in my room. But, you know, there's different kinda fulfilment and maybe right now I'd prefer to be out of my room.

"Like, this is a commercial business. Now is not the time to be any kinda cult hero. It might've worked 10 years ago. But it's a different time now. Now's not the time for underground heroes. To me the important thing now is to make good records and get on the radio. That's what's important. That the band is getting along and we're making good music… You gotta be realistic. We've got to a certain stage and, like Dave says, we've gotta sell records. Like you gotta have a place to rehearse, and that costs money. You gotta have gear, and that costs money, and you gotta pay the road crew… There are certain considerations you have to deal with… you gotta get yourself organised. You gotta face the music.

"You know, you can either keep it in the basement of your parents' house for 10 years or you can get out there and dive into it. I never really accepted the possibility of staying in the basement. I just cut out to wherever it was happening the most… Hell, why else would a girl from Akron, Ohio, be down St George's Hall in Blackburn in 1979? I coulda been in Akron in my parents' basement knocking out basement-space music. But I'm not interested in that, I wanna live a little."

> "Musically, I didn't have that much of a place in that punk scene"

THE MOOD IN the Pretenders' dressing room backstage at the St George's Hall in Blackburn is hardly euphoric. There are 152 people in the audience.

"Let's cancel the gig and go for a drink," says Chrissie Hynde. "I mean – have we really gotta go out there and play… There's no one out there, man."

"We could invite them into the dressing room," says Pete Farndon. "It would be more intimate…"

The gig has already been moved into the smaller Windsor Hall, from the main auditorium upstairs.

"If we'd put them on upstairs," says one of the regular staff at the hall, "that audience would've looked like a threepenny bit on that dance floor."

They had The Members on here recently, he says. They had a crowd of around 50. This cheers up the group a little. Then he tells us that The Damned pulled over 1,000, one of the largest crowds in Blackburn's history.

"Where is everyone?" asks the man from WEA.

"Oh," says the guy, "they're all on holiday."

THE LIGHTS ARE down. The Pretenders' taped introduction starts. It's a tape Pete Farndon made of the sound effects on a *Space Invaders* slot-machine affair. Very amusing. Chrissie Hynde leads the group on stage. She looks great, dressed in a scarlet and purple satin jockey shirt, complete with hat and riding crop. She slings on her guitar and gets down to business.

The Pretenders hit the airwaves with "The Wait". The shuddering riff bangs a violent shockwave through the audience. The Pretenders pack a collective clout that can knock you sideways.

Farndon and Chambers are a superlative rhythm section, full of fluent grace and muscular power. Adept, confident, aggressive, inventive. Where most bands swing like a eunuch's balls, The Pretenders ease themselves through their repertoire with a spring-heeled agility. Farndon's basslines pump out, flexible gashes in the overall sound, taut and wiry, forever mobile, looking for new openings. Jimmy Honeyman-Scott's guitar comes screaming in from the terraces in a windswept flurry of colliding notes. His control and timing are a priceless asset, his versatility breathtaking. He can play, as he does during his solos on "The Wait", with all the incendiary fury of, say, Wayne Kramer, and with equal proficiency complement quite perfectly the compassionate melody of "Kid".

And Chrissie Hynde?

Well, I've just never seen a woman attack rock'n'roll with such unselfconscious vigour and determination. Indeed, you forget any question of gender. She refuses to play on her sexuality – she just gets on with the job: flashing out demon rhythm parts, equal to the strength of anything JHS pans out on the likes of "Up The Neck" or the violently paced climaxes of "Mystery Achievement".

And her voice is sheer wonder. Tender and movingly touching on "Kid", spiced with tremulous excitement and sheer wild venom on "Tattooed Love Boys", with her marvellously timed phrasing dazzling the ear as she leaps across the savage riffs. She can sound utterly vulnerable on "Girl Don't Come" and utterly malevolent in the next breath as she scats over the fierce Bo Diddley mutations of "Cuban Slide".

For The Pretenders' version of "The Wanderer" she comes on mock tough and doesn't blow it… but her real vocal tour-de-force comes on the exceptional "Private Life". The song is built around a beautifully managed reggae lope, the melody fleshed out discreetly by the guitarist. Chrissie's lyric is emotionally savage, penetrating and abrasive, and her vocal is by turns anguished, angry, pleading, accusing. The band's collective performance is so accomplished (and they've only been together a year – less, perhaps – remember that) that it takes them into regions and realms most current bands have maybe only ever thought about.

"Thanks for clapping," says Chrissie Hynde as The Pretenders wrap it up and wave goodnight to Blackburn.

CHRISSIE HYNDE IS sitting in the bar of the Green Dragon Hotel in Hereford, wondering what will happen to her when The Pretenders achieve the kind of success everyone is promising them.

"I don't know that I'm looking forward to it, you know. Personally, I just kinda want to be left alone. I want to be able to enjoy what I do. And once you become a public figure, that becomes increasingly difficult. I'm not speaking from personal experience, obviously – like you just have to pick up a newspaper to realise that.

"I mean, Prince Charles just has to pat a horse on the nose and the next day the horse is a potential fiancée. I don't like people getting into my business too much, you know. And… fuck, man… I don't wanna open the paper one day to find that I'm getting married to some fuckin' horse."

Allan Jones •





Totally out of touch: Led Zep's Robert Plant and Jimmy Page

ALBUMS REVIEW 1979

ALBUMS

Led Zeppelin In Through The Out Door SWAN SONG

The grand illusion was popped way back when I was taking my O-levels. Then *Led Zeppelin II* fulfilled the noble function of releasing all the tension built up during a particularly fraught period by battering it against the awesome noise they created. Once the four weeks were over, only a worn-out husk of a record remained, its severe limitations and compromises revealed through intense, repeated exposure, leaving a hollow framework upon which their empty bravado was hung.

Unlike the real heavy-metal masterpieces (like The Velvet Underground's "Sister Ray"), *Led Zeppelin II* continually deflated its own momentum with ponderous, silly, inordinately tame and pompous musical passages, which aimed for some sort of symphonic grandeur and missed wildly. I felt betrayed, got rid of the record and never bought another Zeppelin album again, although people insisted in playing me bits of theirs.

But still the release of a new Zeppelin album is heralded like a message from Mount Olympus, and thus they're given more exposure than they warrant. This dodo definitely doesn't deserve all the attention its gonna get through the Return of the Gods strategy – First gig in "X" years! Before 100,000 followers! God-damn! New album! Wow!

Lushly packaged, you have to break through the sealed paper bag to get to the real cover of *In Through The Out Door* (?)! – a sepia-tinted brown bar-room shot. It's OK. Pull out the inner bag and you've got a treated black-and-white close-up of table contents. Piss on it and it comes up in different colours. So far, so good.

The first play had everyone in the office rolling around laughing, splatting their heads against the wall in an effort to control mirth. (Is this what they mean by head-bangers?). It's that funny. The two real joybringers are the final songs on Side One – "Fool In The Rain" and "Hot Dog". The first begins innocently enough with a pleasantly stated and oft-repeated Page riff, but then in the middle the schlockiest Latin piano this side of Sam Costa starts up; suddenly Bonham kicks over the wardrobe, and the whole band stampedes through an appalling cucaracha before throwing itself back into the afore-mentioned motif.

If that one wasn't meant to be funny, "Hot Dog" probably was. This time they picked on country & western. Plant squeals the title in a silly voice at the start and then it's a breakneck rush through some Texan tale that includes Greyhound buses and other evocations of Americana. A real side-splitter; someone said that it sounds like the Muppet band.

The widely travelled Zeps also throw in a synthesized Middle Eastern intro to the album opener, "In The Evening", which segues into an uninteresting, uninspired song based around Plant's limited vocabulary ("*Ohh, ohhh baby, ohhh yeeaaahhh*"), which he chokes the most out of in a Roger Chapman style.

The subsequent "South Bound Saurez" approximates a lighter rock format, undermined by John Bonham's hamfisted drumming ("sounds like he's nutting them," commented another office wag).

Side Two is the serious stuff, we're assured. All songs begin with bombastic pseudo-classical keyboards stuff, generally followed closely by portentously overbearing riffs. By its length and number of changes, I'd judge "Carouselambra" to be the album's intended masterpiece – but again it's let down by some appalling "romantic" historical imagery: "*Dull is the armour/ Cold is the day-yay/Hard is the journey/Dark is the way-yay.*" (I think that's right – Plant's diction is not too clear.)

The one vaguely charming piece is "All My Love", which has a stately keyboards motif and some pleasantly tinkly Page guitar, but it's marred by Plant's beefcake attempts at quiet ecstasy, and by the chamber-music middle section.

"I'm Gonna Crawl" takes the shape of a slow, moody blues in which Plant admits he would crawl to his baby because she's the apple of his eye – and, what's more, she's his girl.

I'm not sure who's going to get any real objective satisfaction from *In Through The Out Door*. The performances are generally dull, Plant's macho-mannered, self-important singing is in no way exciting, Page is often restrained and low-key, and Bonham seems totally at a loss on all but the loud hooligan bits. John Paul Jones takes a larger role than before – but if his adroitly stepping bass sometimes livens things up a little, his keyboard work largely contributes to the record's sluggishness.

High up there in their own little h(e)avens, Zeppelin are totally out of touch. As Gods, they've feasted too long on former glories, their passion spent on reliving earlier victories. Their orgiastic wallowing in the past (Knebworth) is contemptible.

Led Zeppelin are displaying the first intimations of mortality, and it's time they accepted their fate like men. They squeezed their lemons dry long ago. *Chris Bohn, MM Aug 11*



BRAD ELTERMAN / GETTY

The Tourists The Tourists LOGO

A different sort of rock album, this, and one that will perhaps confuse many people. The Tourists have a set of values that, on record anyway, is untouched by any of the

contemporary trends, so if you're expecting an album that bows a respectful head to new wave, you're in for a disappointment. But The Tourists' unique identity more than makes up for that.

The Tourists hit rock music from some very acute angles. The band is formed around a nucleus of writer and singer Peet Coombes, singer Ann Lennox and guitarist Dave Stewart, who collectively appear to have an obsessive desire to retain their northern roots – Coombes and Stewart are from Sunderland, while Lennox is from Aberdeen.

I've talked about this album to friends and, we're all in agreement that *The Tourists* has a strange but palpable folk quality about it. One mentioned Fairport Convention, which is going a bit far, but that's certainly symptomatic of the response The Tourists provoke.

There are, as I see it, a couple of pertinent reasons to explain this comparison. The most obvious is Peet Coombes' compositional style. His songs have a traditional melodic flavour about them, while his lyrical imagery is fixed on a sort of mystic romanticism that is, in itself, compelling. Then there's the role of Ann Lennox in further characterising this image. She has a soft but forceful voice that beautifully complements the songs, and when she harmonises with Coombes the traditional overtones are just too apparent to dismiss.

But it's when all this is placed in the overall context that the power of The Tourists is made plain. Inasmuch as they have (perhaps subconscious) folk origins, there are also fascinating links with '60s and '70s pop. I can't help but compare them to the Mamas & Papas in that respect. "Blind Among The Flowers", "Don't Get Left Behind", "Deadly Kiss", "The Loneliest Man In The World" and "He Who Laughs Last Laughs Longest" best these aspects.

What I like most about The Tourists, though, is that they have an identifiable sound. It's in the voices and in the melodies, and producer Conny Plank (of Kraftwerk fame) has succeeded in securing a suitably haunting setting. The result is recommended as the start of many good things. *Harry Doherty, MM Jul 7*

SINGLES REVIEW 1979



The Undertones: the catchier sound of alternative Ulster

SINGLES

The Undertones
Here Comes The Summer SIRE

Simple, classy and classic tune, worthy of a Small Faces 45 on the Immediate label, and there's not much catchier than that. Those voices rejoicing about girls on the beach all covered in sand, they're infinitely more moving and mind-jogging that young people are growing up in bombed-out Belfast than any brow-beating Fleet-Streeting anthems from Stiff Little Fingers about exploding barbed-wire. SLF try too hard for instant credibility/sympathy/mileage, like a first-time-caller on an LBC phone-in: "Hello, Monty, I've got no arms or legs, I'm deaf, dumb and blind and me parrot's got leprosy, so I mustn't grumble!" Bah! The Undertones hurt because they look like evacuees. Superior little beat band makes good single. Sounds easy, doesn't it? *NME August 25*

The Jam
When You're Young POLYDOR

Paul Weller continues to recreate the perfect heritage, utilising an almost military, stuttering beat to prove he's the undisputed boss of all this quasi-mod stuff. The quirky use of dub to break down the riff mid-stream is amusing, and serves to tone the listener's reflexes for the steely, one-step-at-a-time guitar solo that sneaks in the back and ricochets neatly off the tail of the bass and drums. Classic Jam, what more can I say? *NME Aug 18*



Secret Affair
Time For Action ARISTA

A "new" wave, a "new" anthem, something else for people too cynical to be impressed by youthful exuberance to be bored with, or mystified by. Its appeal is obvious: it's fast, young, smart and anthemic; the fact that the jumping instrumentation and hook carry not one iota of originality or genuine wit matters very little. Don't bicker about it, either buy or ignore it. *NME Aug 18*

Madness
The Prince 2 TONE

A tribute to Prince Buster, shouted forlornly across the abyss between intention and result. *NME Aug 11*

Lowell George
Cheek To Cheek WARNERS

After the eulogies have lined the cat trays, allow me to mention my own regrets at George's death, as he was a fine chap who was not only the possessor of a large talent but a human who deserved his gifts. "Cheek To Cheek" is drawn from the solo album, and it's a slight but hugely enjoyable gumdrop of fake Mexicana with some exquisite tonsil work. If there was a parallel universe in which Lowell was still on the hoof, I'd say that the next solo album would be very promising. Enough. Onwards. *NME Aug 11*



Peter Tosh
Buck-In-Hamm Palace ROLLING STONES

Like Christ on a unicycle, Tosh intones a paean of praise to the joys of Jah Music over a backing track that sounds like the most mediocre disco imaginable. Makes about as much sense as a James Last version of "Jailhouse Rock". *NME Aug 11*



Dollar
Love's Got A Hold On Me CARRERE

It could be Mickey and Minnie Mouse under the skirting board enjoying a savoury bit of brie together. Dollar were real plain Janes in Guys 'n' Dolls – feathers all fluffy and brown. Then they left and told all the dirty details that went on behind the scenes to the press, kept dyeing their barnet a tartier shade of blonde and notched up two big hits. You are a swan! Now they've lost their way, I fear. If they'd exploited their assets fully they could have been the new Mynah Bird. What a waste. *NME Aug 4*

DONALDSON COLLECTION / GETTY

1979

JULY – SEPTEMBER

David Byrne in Amsterdam in December 1979

“I get taken over”

TALKING HEADS descend on France, with material for another Eno-produced album, *Fear Of Music*. The shy but intransigent DAVID BYRNE proves prescient on “ethnological” music, computers and humour. “I send myself up,” he says.

— NME JULY 28 —

THE SCENE: PARIS, France, July 10. Bastille Day looms, Talking Heads and their “guests” The B-52’s have just completed a mini-European jaunt minus Great Britain. Tonight they played a concert of manic stature in the ultra-chic Théâtre Le Palace before a packed house of 1,500 well-behaved and even better dressed French rockers – now people, night people.

After the show, promoter Frederic Serfati has a party scheduled in a massive mansion on the Left Bank, in a residential/financial/cultural haven. The setting here on the Passage De La Visitation is pretty impressive, even by the bourgeois and luxurious standards of Paris.

This ain’t no ordinary gaff: the entrance hall alone is stuffed with enough antique treasures to furnish the dreams of the most extravagant insolvent. Room after room reveals the splendours of a lifestyle which may not have changed one jot since the demise of the Sun King. Everything is renaissance, Louisian, rich and tasteful.

So what have we here, and who? Meet the president of Rolling Stones records, Earl somebodyorother, who’s holding court.

“You must, simply must meet him,” one partygoer informs the world in general.

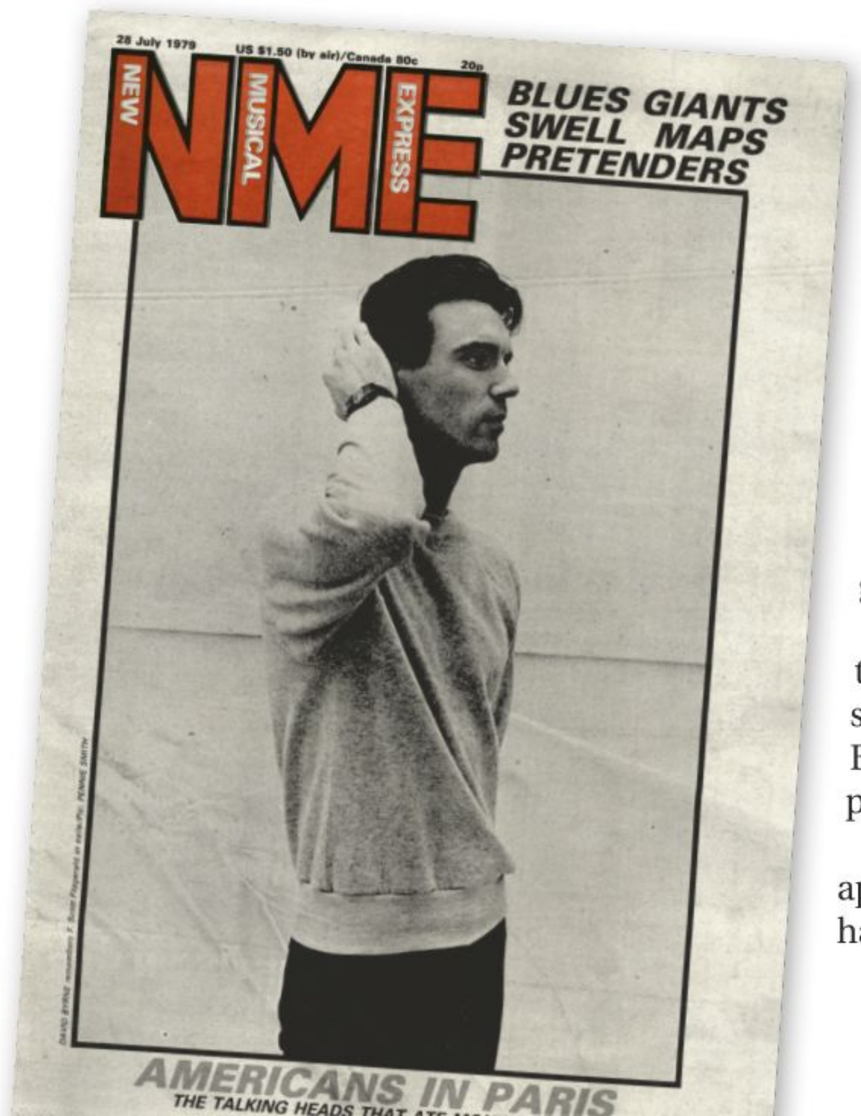
Feeling no pressing need to hobnob with such a luminary, I stagger forward nevertheless, only to be bored stiff by the verbosity of a canny American businessman who fancies he’s some kind of wit.

“Why is it that you British press chaps are always criticising the Rolling Stones?” he drawls, slightly the worse for drink.

Without bothering to wait for an answer, Earl sways benignly, then heads off. Meanwhile in the toot-up room, or one of them, highbrow scenemakers jostle for nasal laxatives and lay out their lines on 18th-century glass-topped tables.

Now, into this divine and decadent soiree (and don’t think I didn’t enjoy it, ’cos I did) stumbles one of the stars of the show. Eyes right for the entrance of David Byrne, the lead figure in the Talking Heads psychodrama, an everyday story of collegiate city folk.

Tonight everyone must make his/her entrance with aplomb. Cindy, the B-52 with the “Georgia Mushroom” hairpiece and batting, wet eyes, makes hers by »



GIJSBERT HANEKROOT / GETTY

1979

JULY – SEPTEMBER



Talking Heads on stage in 1979: (l–r) Jerry Harrison, David Byrne, Chris Frantz and Tina Weymouth

slouching into the walled garden slugging on a bottle of Heineken. All around us lies the debris of the French vine, spouting vintage champagnes, elegant bouquets of Burgundy and scented Château Lafittes, but Cindy has her beer.

She may look decidedly unglamorous when set up beside the immaculately haute-coutured and obscenely beautiful French belles, but for this undying devotion to the trash aesthetic Cindy wins tonight's star prize, a 10-minute chat with old Earl.

Still, the grand entrance is reserved for David Byrne, who recoils from the attention of his hosts with that characteristic neurotic dread of having to exchange small talk. Perhaps it's nerves then, or maybe it was the vodka I saw David imbibing in such liberal quantities earlier on, but here he comes, out of the door, across the path and SPLAT!

UH – OH! David Byrne just fell into a hole. His plate of goodies flies off at an angle, covering the shrubbery with pate de foie gras and mayonnaise. Onlookers stifle their chuckles and David is helped to his feet by umpteen willing hands. He's slightly cut, half-cut, but the shock wears off.

Falling over gets you accepted, even in Paris, and the sight of Byrne's lanky six-foot frame spreading its length amongst the foliage is soon forgotten. Later on he smirks, "I felt so embarrassed, but perhaps that was what was expected of me, that I fall in a hole and spill food everywhere."

Byrne disappears for the rest of the evening to the kitchen, where else? Out of the gaze he proceeds to hit the bottle with a vengeance and converse with Kate B-52, a lovely person who can't get over "everything bein' so old an' all. I bet this picture is real valuable, it's so pretty. Where can I git me a glass of water?"

David Byrne points her in the general direction of the taps and fumbles for a lychee.

By day this man is mild mannered, polite and slightly distant.

"I'm fairly shy, yes. Not too shy – but I don't start conversations with people I don't know, the others are better at that than me. I guess you could say that I meditate a lot, or just observe. Sometimes I watch TV or look out of a car window and I drift off into my world. I never was too gregarious."

CUT TO THE final night of the Talking Heads' French sojourn. Another party has been thrown in their honour in *the* Parisian niterie, an underground disco called Les Baines Douches, formerly a public bath.

Impressions of Paris as a 20th-century throwback to the excesses of Ancient Rome are borne out by this club. Come on downstairs, where the sound system blasts out Grace Jones and Dillinger, and the well-heeled, highbrow post-punk kids are waking up for the late shift. In one corner the complex Heads and B-52's manager Gary Kurfirst is shooting French pool, a bastardised billiards sans pockets, and knocking spots off the locals. Effeminate black boys smooch around the perimeter, blowing kisses. "Anybody wanna make some easy money?" Kurfirst is cleaning up.

A French groover approaches Byrne, who's perched on a wall, meditating. "You want to meet some nice French girls, oui?"

Byrne: "Oh, err, umm, nooo. I wouldn't know what to say to them. Thanks all the same."

Edwige, the former Queen of the Paris punks, a tall blonde with a Fred Perry shirt, is introduced quite po-faced with her erstwhile title. "I 'ave my own band now, eet's better than new wave."

On the dance floor a wild 15-year-old mademoiselle is frugging with total abandon. This is Ionesco, a direct descendant of the legendary French playwright and author. Her microskirt defies the laws of gravity and even the cucumber-cool French lads can't remove their eyes.

My companion tells me that Ionesco was once more beautiful: "When she was 12, 'er mama took some photographs of 'er nekkid; perhaps now she is a bit fat and crazy."

Two people, one of indeterminate sex, have got their hooks onto David Byrne. There's a momentary flare-up, a lovers' tiff, and whoosh, the girl partner sulks off to watch porn movies through the hole in the wall.

Her friend stays put by the green inviting pool. "She is a transvestite, *n'est ce pas*," whispers my companion loudly. Maybe it's the Jack Danny, but I'd swear she just hitched her top down. A breast pops out and is casually tucked in again. Byrne decides this is all too much and departs for the hotel to play his tapes.

LARRY HULST / GETTY



LES TALKING HEADS A LA CARTE

MAX BELL samples the musical menu as Les Tetes Parlantes chew up Paris and spit out the nasty bits.

The nucleus of their set bears testimony to months spent on perfecting each song, and suggests a capacity for improvisation.



LET'S FLASHBACK TO the Palace. Some venue. Given that the French are hell-bent on enjoying the remainder of this century while they can, you have to admit that their style is something else. It's style without the revolt, punk without the punch but with all the trappings fully developed, the sense of occasion, the night out.

Maybe these kids are bored with the high quality of their lives, maybe they feel guilty about their wealth, it could be that they lack a sense of purpose or reality. Or have they just got it right?

The political leaders of the western world are fiddling while their ideals burn, but these people are having fun while David Byrne's.

If the edifices are crumbling, this decadence is the sure sign that the basic superstructure is fucked. But rather than worry about the consequences, get nihilistic and spit on their peers, the French are out to find a real good time.

Even at a rock'n'roll concert there is a sense of civilised frisson. Life is one big party and everyone with a ticket gets in.

Outside a few 100 stragglers fight amongst themselves, but ignore *les flics*, nasty vicious sadists with a licence to maim. Inside the temperature is boiling. The B-52's have just whipped up the standing hordes to the state where underarm deodorant ceases to function and now Talking Heads are ready to deliver their repertoire.

The band has improved immeasurably over the last year. The never-ending journey into the American hinterland has honed up their act and sharpened their cynicism. Any one member of the group will admit that touring is getting them down.

Dig this schedule. Three months roadwork in the States was followed in May by the making of their third album, *Fear Of Music*, with producer Brian Eno, 11 tracks in 10 days. Then they left for Australia, New Zealand and back to Europe. The day after this European trip, Talking Heads were catching a plane back across the world to Japan, the mega yen market, a necessary extension of the thinking rock band's itinerary.

Pretty soon the Eastern Bloc will open its borders to the western scourge. By 1984 there are going to be more potential concert halls in the world than ever seemed likely in the innocent '60s.

The Talking Heads are very much a part of this mad circus, but at the moment they have retained sufficient integrity and independence to stay outside the soul-destroying arena circuit.

They have just renegotiated their Sire contract, are undoubtedly comfortable, but fortunately are not complacent. Having completed a fairly lacklustre set of festivals in Belgium and Denmark, they are primed to deliver the goods in a proper hall.

The nucleus of their set bears testimony to months spent on perfecting each song, and suggests a capacity for improvisation. Having spent two albums and three years working up the chops, Talking Heads are fast approaching that magic moment when, hey presto, learning becomes an escape from technique and the pieces fall together of their own accord.

Tonight is a classic set, beginning with the staple diet of "Big Country", its lazy C&W diatribe set off by a ludicrously funky husband-and-wife backbeat. Then the opening of the rock star's secret journal, "Warning Sign" combining myth and truth – "*I've got money now, c'mon baby*". Ordinarily, the man wouldn't say boo to a goose, but on stage he's transformed, a real live wire, a nutcase, an exposer of every frayed nerve ending.

Byrne's own performance is staggering. It encapsulates everything that seemed interesting in Bowie and Ferry all those years back and creams them with a totally original approach. His thyroid glands are pumping towards the red zone, danger level. What goes through his head?

"I get taken over by the live act. The adrenalin rush for me is complete. I seem to be running around while everyone else is in slow motion. It's exciting but frightening and wonderful.

"The only thing that disappoints me is when a crowd shouts out for the better-known songs – that's not likely to boost your opinion of an audience. But audiences will tire of the obviously manipulative stuff.

"My own perspective when I go to a show is I hate that pop-star routine. I assume that our audience wants to be treated with respect. We made it a rule never to use artificial crowd responses. Then again, we try and play in decent places – comfortable halls or clubs with good acoustics.

"Of course we don't always succeed. Sometimes the venues are far from ideal. The bouncers manhandle the audience when there will only be a few troublemakers on quaaludes. Promoters tend to assume the worst. Because of a minority they mistreat the majority. I admit that a lot of times we end up playing in terrible places, but you just try your best."

This particular night there's no hint of an audience who've come for the hits. Instead they are treated to a daring set which includes the resurrected "Love Goes To Building On Fire" ("We dropped that for a year, then realised we were missing it"), plus five brand-new numbers from the August-scheduled *Fear Of Music*.

> "Even after three years, I get physically ill before concerts"

The quality of the band is apparent in ensemble playing that stretches beyond the narrow confines of quirky rock. Jerry Harrison coaxes all manner of weird, engrossing textures from his small arsenal of keyboards, conventional and synthetic. His rhythm guitar work, never more than effectively rudimentary in the past, has taken an appreciable step forward.

The innovations that the Harrison and Byrne axis have up their musical sleeve stamps the group as legitimate purveyors of a vibrant melodic understanding. They are ready to stand comparison with the champions of any age, while possessing a custom sound as taut and delicious as prime Television.

And spare a thought for the extramarital thrills oozing from the Tina Weymouth and Chris Frantz rhythm section, funk ascloseasthis being a real rarity in normal white terms.

Before the show, Tina and a small party of the English-speaking contingent converge on a street cafe to while away her pre-gig blues. The diminutive, blonde bassist chainsmokes her edginess into the distance, a bundle of wiry worry and stomach-turning fear.

"Even after three years, I get physically ill before concerts. We used to look nervous on stage, too, but that doesn't show any more – it's just the waiting that gets to you. If I ate anything now I'd be sick."

The pressure is greater tonight than usual. Talking Heads are in the invidious position of topping over a support band, B-52's, whose current star is so high in the critical eye that any amount of shoddiness owing to lack of match practice seems to have been completely forgiven.

Ironically, Heads enjoyed a similar licence when they toured Europe with Mrs Ramone's favourite sons in 1977. Today the two bands are not in direct competition with each other, but the tension of record-company hype lingers in the background. The Palace is chock full of B-52's posters but not one Talking Heads poster. Little things like that can sap a band's confidence even before they've stepped on stage.

Talking Heads have also suffered some indignities at the hands of their New York counterparts. There have been riling episodes with Sire stablemates the Ramones over bill-topping and dressing-room status, Joey Ramone allegedly proving to be a particularly obnoxious and paranoid individual when any threat to his ego is at stake.

There again, the Patti Smith Band, once the doyens of the New York artistic clique, have done their best to sequester their position and shove it down their peers' throats. Tina lets slip tales of snubbing at the hands of Miss Patti Lee that don't bear repeating.

To their credit, Talking Heads are not the kind of people to pull any such stroke on lesser-known kin. The B-52's are afforded every courtesy they could wish for. When the audience takes them to its collective heart, the headliners don't adopt the "Let's go out there and blow these novices off »



stage" rap. Instead they pay credit to their guests' ability to put the crowd in an up mood.

The band's dislike of a cushioned reception is most obvious in their handling of the best-known numbers, "Thank You For Sending Me An Angel", "Take Me To The River" and the inevitably popular "Psycho Killer", replete with French chorus and singalong rock'n'roll lingua franca.

It's here that the hard work and sense of adventure pays off in spades.

While it would be easier to rest on the laurels of "motions" performance, Byrne whips himself into a state of controlled frenzy that inspires his vocal nuance, his postured, jerky electric dance and his instrumental expertise, which now rivals that of Tom Verlaine for inflection and attack.

He moves as if brain and voice were slightly at odds with each other… watch him work the changes, dramatically and emotionally. Whoever said this band were cold or premeditated must have been brought up in the wrong rock environment. On the contrary, Talking Heads today are as involving, intriguing and as plain danceable as any band on this planet. Period.

DAVID BYRNE'S HOTEL room is dominated by his closest travelling companion – a sophisticated tape-deck stereo system that packs into a brief case. Amongst his current listening selection there are tapes of the new Neil Young and Bowie albums, Steel Pulse, Ultravox and Kraftwerk, Berlin Zoo, Ennio Morricone and, of course, Talking Heads.

Byrne's bedside reading includes Dr Hunter S Thompson's *Fear And Loathing On The Campaign Trail 1972*, *Paris Metro* and *Actuel*, a French almanac for the '80s where the standard of imagery and the breadth of the articles puts any English magazine to abject shame.

Aside from these mental relaxants Byrne travels light. Two months' wardrobe fits into one holdall. He makes no distinction between on- and offstage attire, preferring his familiar garb of sweatshirt, black trousers and sensible shoes to anything more flashy.

Despite this conservative, college-boy clean-cut demeanour, there is one aspect of his appearance which causes him pleasure. David Byrne evidently sets great store by his hairstyle; his grey-flecked black straight hair is his most assertive superficial characteristic.

Facially, Byrne modulates through stages of chronic introversion to private, wicked thoughts and an openly sardonic cheeky grin with a hint of wolverine around the edges.

His speech is slow and checked by qualification, as if the words were being weighed on a spring balance. Usually he tilts towards self-deprecation and irony, taking every question at face value and avoiding any hint of conceit or artistic justification.

Given the artificiality of any interview, the instant opinion and the discretion of the journalist, Byrne is quite at odds with the picture I had of him as a wilfully oblique person. His assertiveness is greater than his internal solitude, even to the extent that when the interview is first mooted and other members of the band express a desire to attend, he rebuffs them firmly – "No, I want to talk separately."

While the band zip down to Montmartre to shoot a photo session, Byrne leaves me in his room to listen to the new album, *Fear Of Music*, a far remove from *More Songs…*. Lyrically, the material maintains Byrne's favourite device, the third-person narrator, but the subject matter is more advanced, moodier and abstract.

Many of the titles are simple nouns, "Mind", "Paper", "Cities", "Air", "Heaven", "Animals" and "Drugs" (formerly "Electricity"). Themes and styles are unfamiliar, save for the now recognisable group "sound". The move towards complex rhythmic structures and the contrast of vocal idiosyncrasies with melodic texturing is immediately clear.

"The people who disliked what Eno did to the second album will probably dislike this one more," Byrne mutters with a grin. He picks up a Swiss Army knife and runs his thumb down the blade.

"See, they assume that it's all his doing. Every time they hear a weird sound it's, 'Aah, there he is' – when a lot of time it's us, our ideas."

This sense of misunderstanding is a sore point, then?

"Well, people have missed the humour, or at least undervalued it; especially in the singing – I send myself up a bit. I have fun with it. Some of the quirky little things that end up on record I think are real funny – the first coupla times anyway. Jokes always wear off after a while. It isn't obvious humour; there are no knee-slappers."

The first song, "I Zimbra", utilises an African rhythm, lush percussive effects treated by some spectacular synthesizer colouration. It's the kind of deceptively simple sound that Brian Eno experimented with on *Taking Tiger Mountain By Strategy* or "The Lion Sleeps Tonight", but with a more integrated, less self-conscious appeal. The vocal is a multi-layered nonsense babble, African esperanto. Towards the end, Robert Fripp contributes a fragment of a solo.

Byrne has a selection of South African music with him, notably *Rhythm Of Resistance*.

"Some of that stuff is difficult to listen to. It's not something you grow up with. With the ethnographic records you have to concentrate to hear what's going on, and for me it isn't always easy. But with Fela… stuff like that, you know… just listen to it. It might be chants or something, but it's no trouble, no sweat."

Byrne's interest in ethnic musical forms goes beyond the hip, elitist viewpoint, being both academic and practical. The title of the album, *Fear Of Music*, was drawn from a technical book called *Music And The Brain*: "It has long sections devoted to musically associated diseases. There was a word with a long Latin title, a phobia that certain people have, a real fear of music. Any kind of music is obnoxious to them and they have to be sent to live in the countryside.

"It's such a contradiction of the attitude we have to music that it appealed to me. The album is also a bit frightening; not shocking, but spooky and melancholy. I enjoy it.

"It's my ambition to write some really sad songs, but I haven't succeeded yet. People assume that when you perform a sad song you need to use some method acting to get it in the right mood. Actually it works the other way. If the song is well constructed it will cause the emotions.

"It's true that there are hardly any songs about relationships this time. Only 'Mind' comes close to being a love song. It's best to get away from them. I mean, I like a lot of other people's love songs, but it's a horrible thing to have to sing about every night. Eventually the subject becomes meaningless."

> "The album's a bit frightening. Not shocking, but spooky and melancholy"

I put it to Byrne that he's been damned in the past by writers who assume that the lyrics reflect his own viewpoint, whereas they are often fictional devices, vehicles for all manner of contradictory statements.

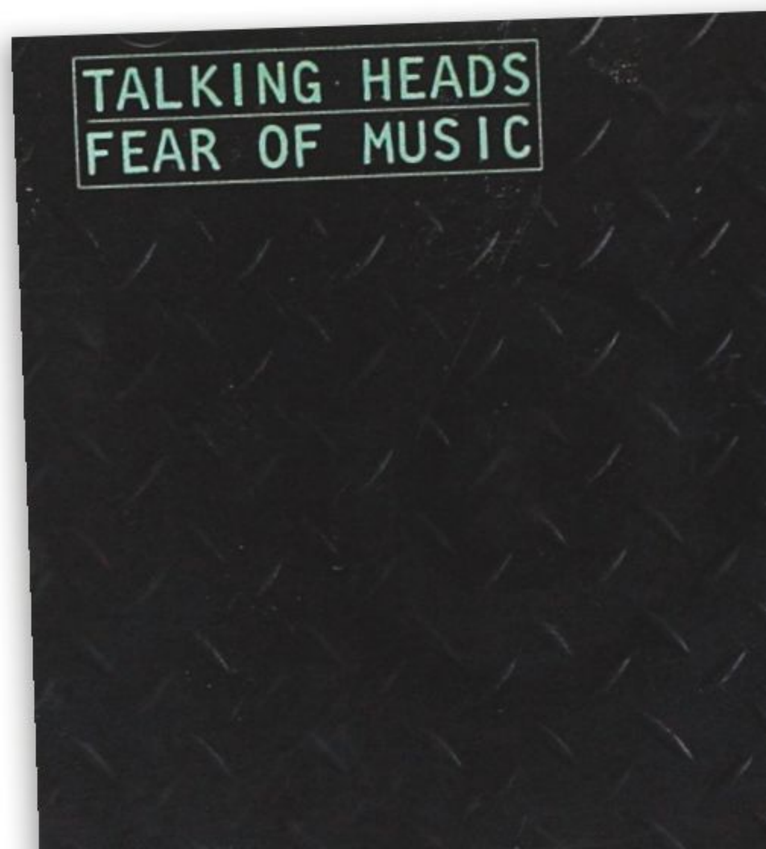
It's obvious Byrne uses the stage as a platform for expressing many opinions which he'd be too reticent to say to a person's face: "I might express the ideas privately but not so drastically. In a song I can spout off an idea that would sound ridiculous in a conversation."

The best example of this on *More Songs…* was "Artists Only", which Byrne didn't even write. Predictably, some of our brethren took exception to the line "*I don't have to prove that I'm creative*".

"A guy called Wayne Zieve wrote the lyric on that. I don't know anything about it. He was crashing at our place [the Byrne and Harrison residence] and he used to scribble messages on bits of paper and leave 'em round the room. I just liked that one, so I wrote some music for it. Now he gets royalties, which spoils the effect somewhat.

"Generally, writers understand a bit of the band, but they naturally focus on the lyrics, 'cos it's hard to write more than a couple of sentences about music – there's not a lot you can say about a guitar solo.

"As far as the band goes, they don't mind the words too much. They wouldn't mind writing, but they're good about it. It's hardest for Chris and Tina when we're in the studio. They play and that's it.



Brian Eno (left), co-producer on three Talking Heads albums between 1978 and 1980, and David Byrne in a DJ booth in New York City in 1979

Brian [Eno], Jerry and me play with the mixing. Chris and Tina like to be around, but it gets boring after a while. That frustrates them…"

To avoid this inequality *Fear Of Music* was recorded in a mobile studio hooked up to the Frantz family's Long Island loft. The band rehearsed for 10 days, working up basic tracks, then recorded half the album in two days. Most bands in Talking Heads' position would spend three or four months on a third album and a lot more money.

"Eno got back to London from Bangkok. I phoned him and he came straight over. He played less on this one than before, so though it's said he's like a fifth member, he isn't there when we record basic tracks. It was my idea to be on our own, without a producer for a while; we did OK, we didn't fight too much.

"We made the record in two sessions on the mobile, and it worked better; it was more relaxing. Initially, we achieved a near-live sound. There was none of that stuff with headphones and engineers and 'I can't hear the drums' nonsense.

"Of course we treated it with studio care. We spent a lot of the time sequencing tracks. I've never liked the variety approach where a band show how clever they are – y'know, following a ballad with a rocker, then a lush song. We try to group them for similarities. That sounds premeditated, though; it was an afterthought."

One of the strangest songs on the record is "Animals", which starts off as an oddball paean to animal characteristics – "*Animals are pretty smart/They shit in the park/They see in the dark*" – until suddenly the listener realises the furries have taken over and they're not domesticating the humans.

"That was the last song I wrote. It was a conscious attempt to go back to the old style, but it ended up more complex; it has a 7/4 rhythm or something… I don't understand. It's jerky, but I can't play the guitar part and sing it live yet. I got excited when I wrote it, though. There are lots of lyrics I didn't use."

Byrne takes a childlike delight in his own words, which remove a lot of cryptic and sinister veils from his subconscious.

The most immediately evocative song on *Fear Of Music* is the most harrowing: "Life During Wartime", set in a fictional future, say tomorrow – when snipers on the streets and suburban guerilla warfare are the norm.

Byrne reckons he's ready for the inevitable: "Living in New York, you have to be. There will be chronic food shortages and gas shortages and people will live in hovels. Paradoxically, they'll be surrounded by computers the size of wrist watches. Calculators will be cheap. It'll be as easy to hook up your computer with a central television bank as it is to get the week's groceries.

"I think we'll be cushioned by amazing technological development and sitting on Salvation Army furniture. Everything else will be crumbling. It doesn't bother me too much, but it isn't something to look forward to. Government surveillance becomes inevitable, because there's this dilemma when you have an increase in information storage. A lot of it is for your convenience – but as more information gets on file it's bound to be misused.

"Electronic banking, where you never meet a teller or stand in a queue, is already common, and that system can only get more prevalent.

"A funny thing is that as computers do inventories the crimes may be fewer but are far more costly to the company. People can alter the programme, spin money off and go undetected for years.

"I read a book about computer crimes before I left. For example, one guy printed up a number of fake deposit slips and hid them with the blanks they keep in banks for customer's use; they all had his personal number on. After three days in which people had been depositing huge sums of money into his account, he withdrew it and split. There was no way to catch him.

"Another person had a touch-tone phone hook up to the General Electric master computer in Los Angeles. He was ordering vast supplies of wire, cables, you name it, storing it in a warehouse then selling it. These companies are so huge they don't figure anything is up. Eventually he got too arrogant and tried to sell them their own gear back."

It's hard to know where Byrne fits into the framework of his own subject matter. Very few Talking Heads songs feature his first-person experience, and the lyrics tend to focus on observed relationships, cliches and generalisations. This may be a defence mechanism, an extension of his diffidence, but it is also a fine way of illuminating other people's foibles.

The fact that this is usually a novelistic or cinematic technique makes the songs that much more absorbing, although it tends to polarise listeners who recognise their own faults being mocked. »



WARING ABBOTT / GETTY

1979

JULY – SEPTEMBER



October 26, 1979: David Byrne fronting Talking Heads at the Aragon Ballroom in Chicago, Illinois



January 28, 1978: Talking Heads backstage at the Roundhouse, London, where they top a bill with Slaughter & The Dogs and Dire Straits

For someone so shy, Byrne has a genius for provoking a reaction: "I've tried to write songs that are far from my usual point of view, about getting drunk and chasing after girls, but they're never successful. I don't think I can chase… See, if I use the third person it achieves distance. It's slightly humorous. It isn't always very nice.

"The songs 'Heaven' and 'Mind' are set in parties and bars, places where people get together, except in one of 'em the party is in someone's mind and they want it to stop. Eventually they decide they like it."

Byrne turns away to the wall, fiddling with a Camel packet and laughing manically to himself.

"One title, 'Drugs' is a psychedelic song. I like those '60s numbers where they try and describe the experience… They're stupid. There's a big resurgence of acid in Paris apparently. The people from the disco where we played go on huge acid binges, hiring trains and stuff. That's a little intense for me."

DAVID BYRNE GREW up in Baltimore, Maryland, then attended the Rhode Island School of Design in 1970, where he met Frantz.

In those days Byrne played violin and ukulele. His first rock band was The Artistics, cover-version specialists who lasted as long as his college career. (Byrne dropped out, natch.)

He now lives in the Ukraine neighbourhood of Manhattan, the sort of area estate agents like to call "seedy but bursting with character".

"I'm from near Glasgow [he was born there]. Baltimore was quite similar – a lot of slums, rough. People don't have a very nice time of it. It's strange to go back to Glasgow… I still have a lot of aunts and cousins there – I get the feeling that things have never been a lot better there."

In the past, Talking Heads' catalogue has been dominated not by sex or love, the usual boy-meets-girl routine that serves as brain fodder in the majority of popular styles, but by the work ethic. I wondered if Byrne saw the band as a job…

"Well, I don't think about being an artist. People assume there's a dichotomy whereby you either make commercial music or interesting music, but we go for both. I like to mix cliches from love songs and office jargon… 'take a week off', 'a job well done'… I've never had an office job, actually. My experiences were all more menial."

Byrne makes one concession to the Peter Pan mythology of rock'n'roll. The people in his songs are always boys and girls, never men and women: "Even people older than me I never think of as men or women. I also tend to draw stereotypes. That annoys Tina. If I say, 'Oh, girls always eat puddings but boys prefer savouries', she goes nuts."

TALKING HEADS IN 1979 are in an intriguing position. Their creative and practical muse is at a peak, but the demands on their attention span are getting too big. Both Byrne and Frantz, the original members, claim to have reached the watershed as far as touring goes. For the drummer this means a tolerance of the rock lifestyle which he began by despising:

"We were always anti-stardom. Where the Stones were sexy we were frigid, where Elton John was glamorous we'd be ordinary. Now I feel more sympathetic to those people. We didn't try to be intellectual or smartass, but because of our college backgrounds people assumed we were cerebral. I find a fair amount of passion in the music – it isn't a mental exercise."

And for Byrne: "I'd like to be doing other things. Touring puts you in a rut. It takes up most of the year, and the way it's organised you waste so much time. That bothers me more than anything else. You're there to play, but it only takes an hour to do that."

Wherein lies the threat to any intelligent band – boredom.

Japan, Europe, the Antipodes, the American wasteland… rock warfare goes on in all of them, capturing territories, spreading the message. Talking Heads have come out of the New York underground and lasted the course, the only truly new wave band from the area to do so. Reality for the idealistic group means there is no standing still; expansion is enforced.

When they started, Heads reckoned it would take them five years to make an album, just to get accepted. They were wrong, Byrne recognises the dilemma: "The business is very self-conscious. A lot of it is terrible, but it could be no other way.

"Anyone who tries to be naive these days is a fool. The 'innocent' rock band that isn't aware of the history and the mechanisms… these people are in a dream world. I know that most of it is just merchandise."

> "A band that's unaware of the mechanisms is living in a dream world"

Last March, Byrne contributed a short essay to *High Times* magazine titled 'It Ain't Rock And Roll But I Like It', which set about revealing the techniques behind what we westerners call "ethnic music".

Here are some samples you can apply to your life; they also give a fair indication of the Byrne modus operandi:

"There is a Chinese legend that the emperor Huang Ti 'ordered' the invention of music in 2697 BC…"

"The Pima Indians of the American Southwest believe that songs already exist and that the composer's job is to 'untangle' them…"

"In Japan there have been a number of recent popular songs that deal with the bribery of government officials by the Lockheed Corporation. A couple of titles are 'I Also Would Like to Get Peanuts' and 'Playing Innocence'…"

"In Dosso, Niger, there is an oboe-like instrument called the djerma that, when played by experts, produces sounds with phonetic equivalents that can be decoded as a message by a skilled listener. Sometimes these instruments are used to make fun of individuals, without their knowledge."

Next time you listen to Talking Heads, bear this information in mind, especially the last entry, then see if you can answer this simple question: Why did the artist cross the road?

That's right, "because it was there" is the answer. And I forgot to tell you, the best track on *Fear Of Music* is called "Electric Guitar". Maybe David Byrne is just fooling around after all. *Max Bell* •

PAUL NATKIN / GETTY; CHALKIE DAVIES / GETTY

A journey to Manchester to meet JOY DIVISION and their circle, after the release of *Unknown Pleasures*. "We don't want to get diluted, really," says singer IAN CURTIS. "We're free to do what we want. There's no one restricting us."

"No security"

— NME AUGUST 11 —

LET ME DRAW back the curtains on a probably wet and no doubt freezing night last winter. A midweek night of no special significance, save that Joy Division had come marching into town.

It wasn't much of a welcome. It wasn't one of those hot jam-packed little-league sell-outs where you can't get in for the length of the guest list and where breaths are bated in anticipation of something about to turn big. Nothing of the sort. Down in the basement confines of a celebrated Islington watering hole it was relaxed and cool.

In front of the intimate stage, though, a gaggle of about a dozen or so modern boys staked out their territorial rights like there was some sort of conspiracy afoot. Minions were dispatched to fetch the pints. The space stage-front was jealously guarded. Their spick-and-span muted green tribal colours set them apart from the otherwise dowdy crowd.

They had come, heaven knows where from, for Joy Division. Another Manchester Band.

The last time somebody counted, there were somewhere in the region of 72 musical aggregations in Manchester and surrounding areas. Can you believe that? Since the Pistols played the Free Trade Hall with the fledgling Buzzcocks, Manchester's home-grown activity has bloomed. It's become a vital and rich part of the English music spectrum, and will be more so with the increasing nationwide diversity of music and lifestyle.

But with the exception of passing enigmas such as Jilted John, The Fall and John Cooper Clarke, the main bearers of the Mancunian standard have been the Shelley/Devoto axis. And unless one of the snotty, smart, toothsome pop outfits that seem to populate the city lucks into a chart hit (most likely candidate: The Distractions), the band that looks dead set to follow Buzzcocks out of merely local and underground acclaim and into the wider limelight – going not least on the rapturous critical reaction to their first album *Unknown Pleasures* – is called Joy Division.

A lone overhead spot floods the centre-stage microphone and spills out onto the heads of the aforementioned gaggle of sartorial hot-shots. Heads that start to bob furiously at the first pulse of streamlined rhythm, attached to bodies that lurch back and forth, attached to legs that jerk up and down at the knee and arms that swing in a loose crawl or elbows that flap madly. It's the modern dance that everybody will be doing in the coming months – the one that has succeeded the »

PIERRE RENÉ-WORMS / AGENCE DALLE

"It'd be easy to knock another one out. But we don't": Ian Curtis on stage in 1979

pogo – and it's a hybrid of the style that John Lydon copped from the Rastas and the one Mary Mekon of The Mekons invented for herself.

Ignorant of this, and uncaring anyway, the huddle of sophisticated steppers is meanwhile whipping itself up into a frenzy that won't subside until Joy Division have left them utterly spent.

The spot picks out only this pool of bobbing motion, and the singer Ian Curtis. The rest of Joy Division are shrouded in darkness as they pour out their harsh metal thunder. The singer's body shakes, rocks and palpitates, a mad dervish of motion and movement all caught in that one mad spotlight.

Were you to shine a torch around this subterranean scene you would see the young, tidy faces of Joy Division and notice perhaps the ordinary, neat cut of their clothes. An unremarkable image, with the barest hint of the regimental overtones of their name in the flap-pocket shirts two of them are wearing. You might also notice the growing excitement in the faces of the onlookers, by now all locking into the irresistible motion of the music. Easily the strongest new music to come out of this country this year.

It owes nothing to the after-punk cult of the amateur. If it's pop, that's purely accidental. And if it plays with musical perimeters, it does so in ingenious, never pretentious, ways – by building carefully on their standard rock basis and using the sounds that can be coaxed from the instruments as textures with which to construct a song. It's a technique that anyone who listens to the radio these days will be familiar with, from "I Feel Love" to "Public Image", to give but two examples.

Insistent two/four rhythms bait the bristling surface hooks, and their powerdrive is overwhelming. Like The Stooges or early Subway Sect or even Blue Öyster Cult and Buzzcocks.

The themes of Joy Division's music are sorrowful, painful and sometimes deeply sad. Nothing as badly refracted and joyless ('scuse me) as Doll By Doll – they're too compassionate for that – but still music that gives often harrowing glimpses of confusion and alienation. Joy Division walk alone, with their heads bowed.

At least, that's my interpretation. Joy Division aren't giving anybody any clues. They don't agree with lyric sheets, and that's something they are very adamant about.

"You get people who seem to think you should put your lyrics on so you can get your message across," says bearded bass player Peter Hook, with obvious disdain. "They ask us what our lyrics are about and we say, 'Well they're whatever you hear, really.'

"We've said to people, 'Haven't you ever been listening to a record where you've been singing a certain line and when you find what it really is you feel let down?' But they just won't admit that at all. They still wanted to know what our lyrics were about.

A labyrinth that is rarely explored

NME JULY 14 Joy Division's stark, defiant debut LP is "memorably psychotic".

Joy Division Unknown Pleasures FACTORY

Just when the year's vitality was threatening to be expunged by a non-stop parade of rehashed fashions, "ordinary geezers" with French Riviera yachts and the acceptable face of cuddly popular music, the Manchester band Joy Division snuck in by the back door, quiet and unannounced.

Joy Division's reticent foursome – Bernard Albrecht (guitar), Peter Hook (bass), Stephen Morris (drums) and singer Ian Curtis – have hinted at these "unknown pleasures" in the last 18 months; their contributions to 1978's *A Factory Sample* were intriguingly alien to the prevalent mood. Their own 12-inch sketch "An Ideal For Living" was more to the point – hard-faced, sombre, neanderthal and manic, an inverted shape cast in heavy metal, never conforming to the expected thrust of the beat.

Admirers of this new sound who managed to check out the animal on its live patch were pleased and maybe shocked to hear that Joy Division weren't joking. Never funny peculiar, funny ha-ha or clever-clever – the lot of most of the bands trying to slip into the current avant-garde – their music clearly fuses all the frayed ends with a new, unforced simplicity, a direction beyond expectancy.

Their music fuses all the frayed ends with a new, unforced simplicity

Joy Division's atmosphere is uncomfortably claustrophobic in meaning, but its structures and dynamics are accessible. Although the band and their producer Martin Hannett have constructed something memorably psychotic, I'd hesitate to linger on their background of mental institutions and the vocabulary of the psychologist – for fear of encouraging images of contrived banshee rant and postured metal machine thrashing, all of which has its place but is not the guiding experience here.

Joy Division music worries and nags like the early excursions of the better known German experimentalists. Investigate these confined spaces, these insides of cages, this outside of insanity. They all bring to mind endless corridors where doors clank open and shut on an infinite emotional obstacle course. "Disorder" and "Insight" start out slow and smooth, echoing Can's *Monster Movie* pattern, but the monotonies and deviations are Joy Division's unique territory. The root causes of Curtis' lyrical "insights" – industrial and urban decay – are ignored in favour of the end result; the noises are human and the effect is shattering, literally. So, the brutal numbness of "Day Of The Lords" bears a slight resemblance to the well-planned spookiness of a Bowie or an Osterberg, except that Curtis' voice conjures up a withdrawal from response and an immunity to anaesthesia. There is "*no room for the weak*" in this world and no cheap pity either. Joy Division are solitary men, but assured and confident.

All the material bears the mark of obsession and personal experience; it's stark, alarmingly defiant. Curtis delivers his parts with dramatic flatness, as semi-chants, matter-of-fact monologues, pushing out the meaning in spurts. Alongside his compelling vocal the three instruments sift through gaps on graphic frequencies, producer Hannett distorting the orthodox conceptions of sound level, balance and attack. This fragmented logic is most evident on the closing pieces, "New Dawn Fades" and "I Remember Nothing", where negative stasis confronts the listener with his/her conception of ordered existence. At their most compelling Joy Division invite you to participate in their journeys to the edge of chance. Try the mental hang-gliding of "She's Lost Control", "Interzone" or "Wilderness" (a blood-pulse of a streamlined account of a time traveller who witnesses the agony on the cross face to face).

In many other hands Joy Division's relentless litanies would appear pompous, tasteless or just plain vicarious; the Sex Pistols, for example, turned out to be all three. But Joy Division are treading a different tightrope; what carries their extraordinary music beyond despair is its quality of vindication. Without trying to baffle or overreach itself, this outfit step into a labyrinth that is rarely explored with any smidgeon of real conviction. By the time they experiment with the dialogues of schizophrenia on "I Remember Nothing", they have you convinced of their credentials.

Unknown Pleasures is an English rock masterwork, its only equivalent probably made in Los Angeles 12 years ago: The Doors' *Strange Days*, the most pertinent comparison I can make. Listen to this album and wonder because you'll never love the sound of breaking glass again.

This band has tears in its eyes. Joy Division's day is closing in. *Max Bell*

ALBUMS REVIEW 1979





Joy Division: (l–r) Peter Hook, Stephen Morris, Bernard Sumner and Ian Curtis



"Don't you think it's wrong to pin somebody down like that? Our lyrics may mean something completely different to every single individual."

Is that what you want?

"We'd like it, I suppose… It's like I just said. You could hear one thing; the bloke next to you could hear something completely different. It means something to you; it means something to him. Why cut him out?"

Why not write gibberish, then? On a variation of the monkey-and-typewriter principle, it's bound to mean something to someone sooner or later.

"The songs mean something personal to us, but that's not the point. It's like saying, 'What did Max Escher mean when he did that painting?'" He points to a giant print of one of Escher's typical perspective puzzles that hangs on the wall of Manchester's Central Sound Studio, where we are now located. "He might just say, 'I was pissed.' We don't want to say anything. We don't want to influence people. We don't want people to know what we think."

Do you want to know what Joy Division think? What they feel? What makes them angry, bored, sad, amused, anything? What sort of cereal they eat in the morning? What prompts a mournful song like "Day Of The Lords" or what lies behind a lyric like "*She took my hand and turned to me and said she'd lost control again*"? You're probably curious, but I doubt that it's as important to you as the surly, defensive Hook seems to think.

That's how Hook sees it, though, and that's all he will tell you about himself and how he sees his music. Besides adding that "people think the lyrics are the guiding force, but we like to think that we influence Ian as much as he influences us; that if we stopped playing Ian would never write again."

Ian, who writes the lyrics, broadly speaking shares these views, but is less reticent. He is offstage the virtual opposite of what he is on. His speaking voice is high and faltering, not swarthy and assertive, and his shyness you would not guess from his onstage abandon.

> "We like to think we influence Ian as much as he influences us"

Stephen Morris, the drummer who completed the foursome a few months after Ian joined, lives, like Ian, in Macclesfield, and owns a huge record collection, partly inherited from his jazz-enthusiast father.

"He took me to see Count Basie once. So I took him to see Hawkwind. He was getting all dressed up and I had to explain that, no Dad, it's not that sort of concert…"

He bought his first drumkit by chopping up the furniture in his house to sell as firewood, and he's still searching for that elusive copy of John Cale's *Academy In Peril*.

Which leaves only Bernard Albrecht, who plays guitar, and went to school with Peter Hook. By contrast, he is astute and eager to explain himself.

"I don't like a lot of music," he admits, "but the music I do like I get more out of than from anything else in life. I want to put the feeling that I get out of music back into music as well.

"We're not ashamed of anything we've done in the past. When we started off, none of us could play. But each time we go one step forward – and that draws you on. It's like… I don't know, it's just a really good feeling. I think that's why a lot of people get disillusioned, 'cos, like, the music dries up."

While Joy Division are talking, Martin "Zero" Hannett is busy inside the small studio mixing some demos of a new version of "She's Lost Control".

Aside from managing John Cooper Clarke and running the odd live venue and a record label called Rabid, Hannett produced Magazine's first demos (and their forthcoming single), Jilted John's hit, the John Cooper Clarke and Joy Division albums, and the latter's contribution to the *Factory Sample* EP.

He works like some sort of wizard of the console, occasionally chuckling to himself as he fiddles with the digital devices he's brought in for the »

PIERRE RENÉ-WORMS / AGENCE DALLE



March 14, 1979: Joy Division on stage at Bowdon Vale Youth Club, Altrincham, Greater Manchester

FACTORY NIGHT: ACKLAM HALL — KENSINGTON, LONDON —
LIVE!
MAY 17

Stylised claustrophobia

MM MAY 26/NOV 17 Joy Division in London: in a package and in support.

FOUR DIVERSE SAMPLES of current Mancunian Factory products: dopey comedian John Dowie; a cute pop duo called Orchestral Manoeuvres In The Dark; A Certain Ratio of young men desperately portraying themselves as artists; and finally Joy Division, whose unequivocal, energetic approach was doubly welcome after the engaging but ultimately tedious naivety of the preceding players.

Making a rare appearance in the capital, Joy Division certainly deserved the affection of the few who heard their insistent, well-defined pop. Fronted by a jerky, disciplined singer in Ian Curtis, they were as exciting to look at as they were to listen to.

The singer's twitching robotic outbursts between vocal contributions provided the visual equivalent of relief through movement from the confined claustrophobic rhythms of drummer Stephen Morris and bassist Peter Hook, constantly clawed at from the inside by Bernard Dicken's nagging guitar playing.

Also interesting to a lesser extent, were A Certain Ratio ("*Looking for a certain ratio...*" – from Eno's "A True Wheel"), who were last Thursday very conscious of their roles as artists, what with their uniformly severe haircuts and baggy trousers.

In contrast Orchestral Manoeuvres In The Dark, a keyboardsman and bassist/vocalist, played airy electronic pop, like Kraftwerk during their lighter moments. Cute at the moment. Hope they don't get coy with it.

Out of the four samples Factory had on display, Dowie's daft humour was the least attractive. Still, his presence proves the eclectic, adventurous nature of the label – which in Joy Division, definitely has the basis for a solid future. *Chris Bohn*

ON CURRENT FORM, Joy Division should have been the best thing happening on Friday night, and the Buzzcocks camp knew it too. Consequently, they treated their guests to a lousy sound, which dampened Ian Curtis' passionate vocals, throwing him into an uneven struggle with superior forces of technology. Inevitably he lost, but the spirit of resistance was there.

Stripped of their strongest asset, Joy Division still managed a few peaks with highly intense, compact versions of "She's Lost Control" and "Transmission", which carried the impact of mini-epics. Their stylised claustrophobia might eventually constrict them, but for the present it's exciting, and their expansion on it in the future should be worth watching.

Unsurprisingly, the sound improved immensely for the Buzzcocks, discounting a few hiccups at the start; that they failed to make the most of it, after Joy Division's struggle, is doubly frustrating. The Buzzcocks looked tired and jaded, making little effort to pep up their zitzy pop. Instead, we were treated to a criminally short 35 minute run-through of hits and standards; they only livened up when Steve Diggle took lead vocals for "Mad Mad Judy" and "Harmony in My Head" – the latter sung very badly, but at least it was enthusiastic

Diggle's songs, though, aren't what people go and see the Buzzcocks for, as Shelley's centre-stage position indicated. Directionless and despondent, he didn't spark on "Ever Fallen In Love" or "Nothing Left", seemingly saving himself for the final, halfway-decent "I Believe". When Shelley doesn't try, the counterbalance of his fragile preciousness topples to the heavier rough-'n'-ready approach of Steve Diggle and drummer John Maher, who aren't the reasons why I go see the Buzzcocks.

"She's Lost Control" carried the impact of a mini-epic

They Buzzcocks used to be a vital, invigorating band. On Friday they displayed no interest whatsoever; consequently they're no longer interesting. But that's still no excuse for what they allowed to happen to Joy Division. But then, if they don't help themselves, why should they help anyone else? *Chris Bohn*

RAINBOW THEATRE LONDON
LIVE!
NOVEMBER 9

MARTIN O'NEILL / GETTY

session. His productions are imprinted with a generous but supple use of electronics. He has the auteur's mark and the entrepreneur's eye and in the years to come he's unlikely to fade away.

Joy Division regard Hannett as their sixth member, the fifth being manager Rob Gretton. Gretton was the DJ at the Rafters Club back in December of '77, when Joy Division changed their name from Warsaw and played the Stiff Test/Chiswick Challenge night. Seventeen bands slugged it out – Joy Division coming on last at three in the morning and playing two songs.

Tony Wilson, presenter of the bold but badly received *So It Goes*, now Factory Records majordomo, was in the audience. "The bands were all good and they were all boring. But Joy Division were wonderful and they had something to say. I thought so and so did Rob, 'cos after that he became their manager."

Wilson recalls another incident from that night. He was sitting next to someone whom he later found out was Ian Curtis, and this someone turned to him, by way of introduction, and said, "You bastard. You put Buzzcocks and Sex Pistols and Magazine and all those others on the telly – what about us then?"

As events turned out, Wilson paid for the recording and release of Joy Division's first album out of his own pocket. Ten thousand copies were pressed for a total cost of £8,500. If all the copies sell, and it's likely that they will, Wilson will recoup his money, and both he and the band will show a profit.

Wilson can afford to be altruistic, since his main income comes from his work as a TV journalist for Granada. Nevertheless, the album, *Unknown Pleasures*, is pressed and packaged to the standard of any other release, if not better, and it's readily available if you shop around for under three quid.

It's relatively easy to trace the stealthy progress Joy Division have made from their aggressive, noisy, unkempt beginnings in '77 to the superb controlled heat they generate now. The former is documented for posterity on Virgin's *Short Circuit: Live At The Electric Circus* album, the transition caught on their own *An Ideal For Living* EP, and a glimpse of their current form was provided by their two tracks on the *Factory Sample*.

But up until now Joy Division have been dogged by business problems, stalled by personal problems, and ignored. They mistrust the glowing reviews they now get, and wait, dispassionately, for the backlash.

Being on the outside has made them very insular and possessive about their music. It has also given them their strength; not a resentful, we'll-show-'em sort of strength, but the satisfaction they derive from their music.

"All the business side – that really fucks you up," moans Peter. "Once you get back in the rehearsal room and there's just the four of us with instruments we're back where we started. It still hangs over you like a cloud – but once you get your instrument you're free…"

"You're always working to the next song," says Ian. "No matter how many songs you've done, you're always looking for the next one. Basically, we play what we want. It'd be very easy for us to say, 'Well, all these people seem to like such and such a song'… it'd be easy to knock out another one. But we don't.

"We don't want to get diluted, really, and by staying at Factory at the moment we're free to do what we want. There's no one restricting us or the music – or even the artwork and promotion. You get bands that are given huge advances – loans really – but what do they spend it on? What is all that money going to get? Is it going to make the music any better?"

Well, it'll buy more equipment. Whether that makes the music any better is a moot point… But we digress.



"Another good thing about it," says Stephen, from the heart, "is if you've got some sort of frustration, something eating you, something you perhaps couldn't talk to anybody about – you can get it out just by playing."

"The thing is, if you've got a brain," explains Peter, "obviously you want to do something with your life, or whatever. I'm sure a lot of people feel like that. Now that we've got this, we don't."

Ian disagrees: "You say that and you're taking away someone's self-respect. It's like that group – what were they called? – someone wrote a song about women at home, and they said, 'This is a song about all the women who should be out doing what they want.' That's taking away someone's self-respect."

Bernard takes up the issue: "People who don't like what they're doing either go one way or another. They get out and do something else – whether it's going off round the world or forming a group or even living the rest of their lives on the dole – and it takes a bit of courage to do that. Or they just settle down at work and just take the weight of the job on their shoulders – which also takes a lot of courage. It's terribly sad, but then there's a vast amount of people who don't even think about it. All they want is a pint every night and two weeks in Benidorm every year.

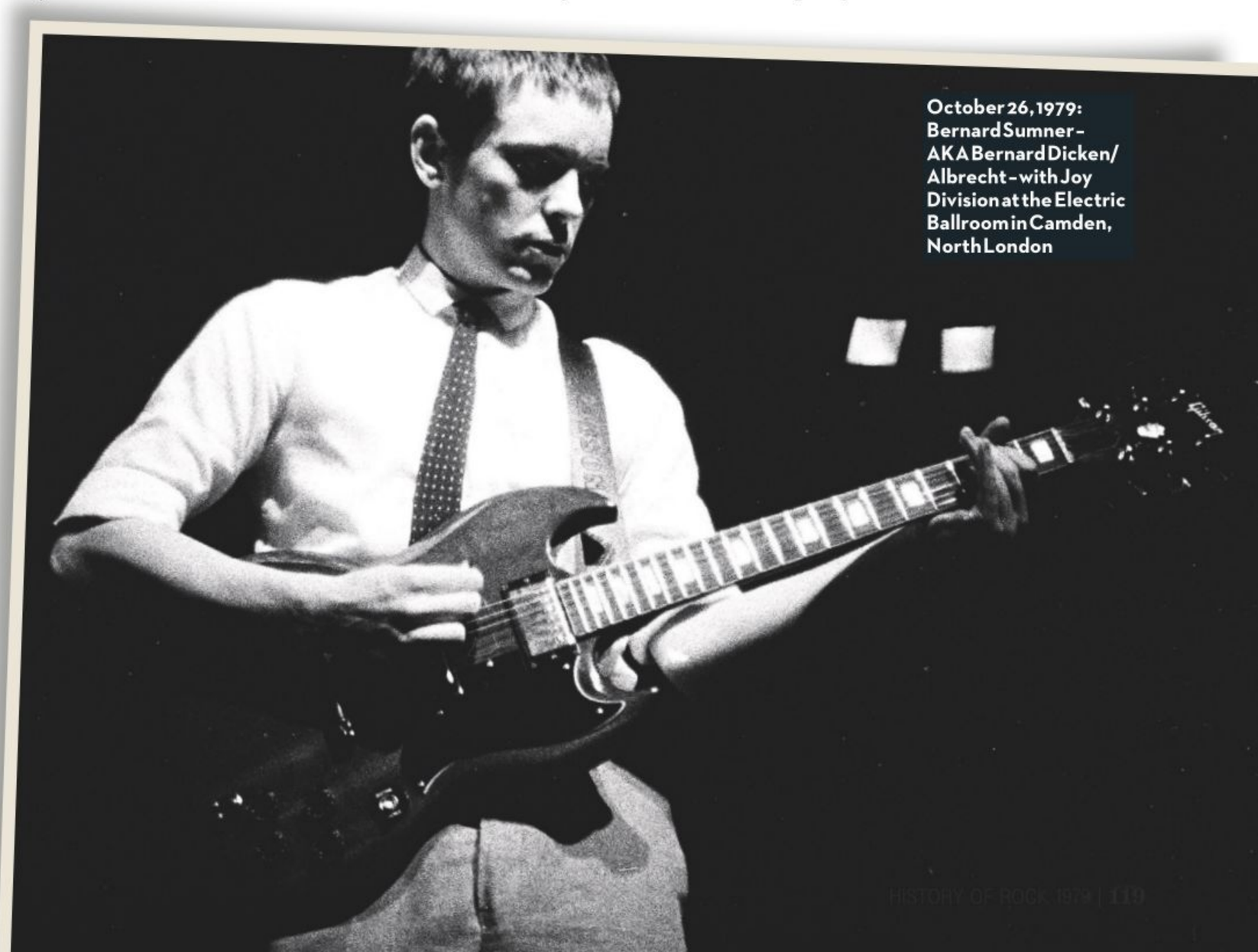
"And then I bet there are people who think we're stupid because we're going into a position where there's no security – it's not going to last us a lifetime. That's why we don't want to state what people should be and how they should interpret our songs, because you just can't say whether someone's right and someone's wrong. Both people can be right at the same time."

"Everyone's living in their own little world," reflects Ian. "When I was about 15 or 16 at school, I used to talk with me mates and we'd say, 'Right, as soon as we leave we'll be down in London, doing something nobody else is doing.' Then I used to work in a factory, and I was really happy because I could daydream all day. All I had to do was push this wagon with cotton things in it up and down. But I didn't have to think. I could think about the weekend, imagine what I was going to spend me money on, which LP I was going to buy… You can live in your own little world."

Too true. But whichever world you choose to live in, the chances are it'll sooner rather than later coincide with Joy Division's. They're here to stay.

And one more thing… All over Manchester the sewers have collapsed, the sewage pipes choosing the moment almost to the day to simultaneously end their century-long lifespan and fill the streets with a foul stench. But what you make of that is up to you… *Paul Rambali* •

STEVE RICHARDS / REX FEATURES



October 26, 1979: Bernard Sumner – AKA Bernard Dicken/ Albrecht – with Joy Division at the Electric Ballroom in Camden, North London



July 3, 1979: Ian Dury & The Blockheads on stage at the Brighton Centre

Jolly good fun

NME AUG 18 Is Ian Dury in danger of losing his edge?

HAMMERSMITH ODEON LONDON
LIVE!
AUGUST 8

HAMMERSMITH ODEON IS soft and warm, awash with beer and love. The landuryandtheblockheads Experience is well under way: funk, farts and folk wisdom. Across the stage, the ensemble are strung out in a wavy line playing elasticated pinball music, rocking and bouncing like champs.

Davey Payne looks like a punk Dr Who and sounds like a flock of enraged geese; Mickey Gallagher sits inside his suit and goes wheeooop wheeooop; Chaz Jankel keeps his hat on his head and his cards close to his chest; Charley Charles puts the fear of God into his drums; Norman Watt-Roy resembles Mick Jones with jaundice and makes his bass go boing; and John Turnbull looks normal and demonstrates without a shadow of doubt his unalienable right to own so many guitars.

Add up the figures in the left-hand column and the digital readout says that describing the Blockheads' music as "compulsively danceable" would be only slightly less inane than complaining about the shortage of good pubs in the Gobi Desert. In other words: a wonderful band (in case you couldn't tell).

From the one-two sucker-punch curtain-raiser of "Wake Up" and "Clevor Trever" through to "Lullaby For Franci/es" and the band walking off a houselit stage while Andy Dunkley spins a biscuit and gives the congregation their marching orders, the landuryandtheblockheads show was as cuddly and heartwarming an experience as any reasonable person could demand for their ackers. And that was the bloddy trouble!

Since *New Boots And Panties* became "the working man's *Tubular Bells*", Ian Dury has been adopted as some sort of mascot: as treasured and beloved an emblem as a battered teddy bear with a ripped ear and scorch marks on its fur. Qualities for which Ian Dury is loved: all-round strike-a-light chirpiness, acute observation, assimilation of the common parlance (which, of course, lays him open to all the boring old garf about who's-more-working-class-than-who-then), his deft wit and sleight-of-word, his beery anthems, his winning streak of danceable fluff singles, his warmth, his compassion... his excellent band!

So his shows are comfy and furry, all hands-knees-and-whoops-a-daisy and jolly good fun, and it's a telling demonstration of the way audiences take what they want from bands and leave the rest at the side of the plate. In a way, it parallels the way that the harsh urgency exhibited by The Boomtown Rats when they were dodging hails of sputum in crappy clubs gradually got eroded as the records sold and they became stars.

On Dury's first major outing in his current incarnation back in Live Stiffs days, his show was riveting because it balanced the cheerful and the macabre, the sweet and the savage, the darkness and the light. Dury was a genuinely awe-inspiring figure, a victim taking his revenge, a vision of terror as well as delight. In terms of sheer emotional power and impact, he took on Elvis and the Attractions and beat them hands down.

The success he received was nothing less than his due. For his courage and his humour and his wit and his acuity, he was duly rewarded and recognised. No problem!

But now Ian Dury is a family entertainer. A great family entertainer beyond a shadow of a doubt (I ain't knockin', y'understand), but a family entertainer nonetheless, putting on a show where everything is flattened down to one dimension: that of bawdy warmth and cosy sentimentality.

The balancing factor of darkness and terror is all but gone

The balancing factor of darkness and terror is all but gone as even songs like "Plaistow Patricia" and "Blockheads" itself (key example, that) have become cuddlycosynice by dint of sheer familiarity and repetition. As has most of Dury's show.

Keen amateur environmental semanticists will have clocked the "most". Apart from the evergreen and utterly wonderful "Sweet Gene Vincent", the most authentically affecting moments in the show were the darkest.

First there was "Waiting For Your Taxi", an insidiously chilling exercise in mounting menace wherein Dury is impaled like a broken moth at the centre of rapiers of light beamed from all corners of the state, a horrific allusion to the Union Jack for which kudos is due to the lighting chaps. Why won't the taxi come? What are the consequences of its non-arrival? Is it, in fact, a taxi at all? Why are you staring at me like that?

And the real tour de force comes with "Dance Of The Screamers", far and away the most magnificent Dury opus thus far. Here his compassion blends with anger rather than sentimentality, and rather than congratulating his audience, he reminds them that just because they've taken one victim to their hearts doesn't mean they're entitled to pat themselves on the back for the rest of their lives, because this society is full of people going under for lack of love and support.

Here, for once, Dury doesn't just twang your heartstrings with a chuckle and a grimace, he hangs a 16-ton weight off 'em and then fires it out of a cannon.

However, the echoes of this harrowing moment are swiftly dissipated by a return to jollity and the de rigueur volley of Oi-Oi! call-and-response routines.

There is a massive audience for the type of stylised music-hall funk he can churn out with seeming effortlessness, and he can stick with that for as long as he wants and people will sentimentalise him and love him and all will be tickety-boo. Alternatively, he can take a step back and delve into the darkness which is the true source of his power and bring sweetness and light back from that.

Both aesthetically and commercially, the latter option is the tough one. Songs as heavy as "Dance Of The Screamers" are hellishly hard to write (involving as they do no little psychic strain) and equally hard to take if you're just out for beery bawdry, but they're the ones that count.

I think it's time Ian Dury started shaking up his audiences again.

Charles Shaar Murray

ROGER BAMBER / ALAMY

A cheap boogie band

MM AUG 18 Squeeze can't recreate the magic live.

DAVITT SIGERSON WAS right a couple of weeks ago when he described Squeeze as the new-wave ELO. They have the same penchant for creaming favourable influences and shaping them in their own vision – an asset that perhaps explains Nick Lowe's admiration – but, again like ELO, they fail to carve any sort of strong character on stage, and that anonymity was what made their performance on Sunday so miserably disappointing.

Squeeze have a curious perception of their live role. I'd imagined a band that would at least try to create the subtle moods of their records, where they cleverly manipulate extremes of grossness and cuteness (as personified in the contrasting sweetness of Glenn Tilbrook's angelic looks and voice with Chris Difford's dark seediness). Not so. Squeeze take a much more conservative route.

The band insist on selling themselves dreadfully short on stage. Instead of projecting themselves as the excellent and inventive pop band they are in the studio, Squeeze mysteriously decide to make it as a cheap boogie band. There's a part of the show, for instance, where each member of the band is asked to dance by Tilbrook. True, it stirs some mild hysteria within the audience, but talk about stooping to conquer. Dull.

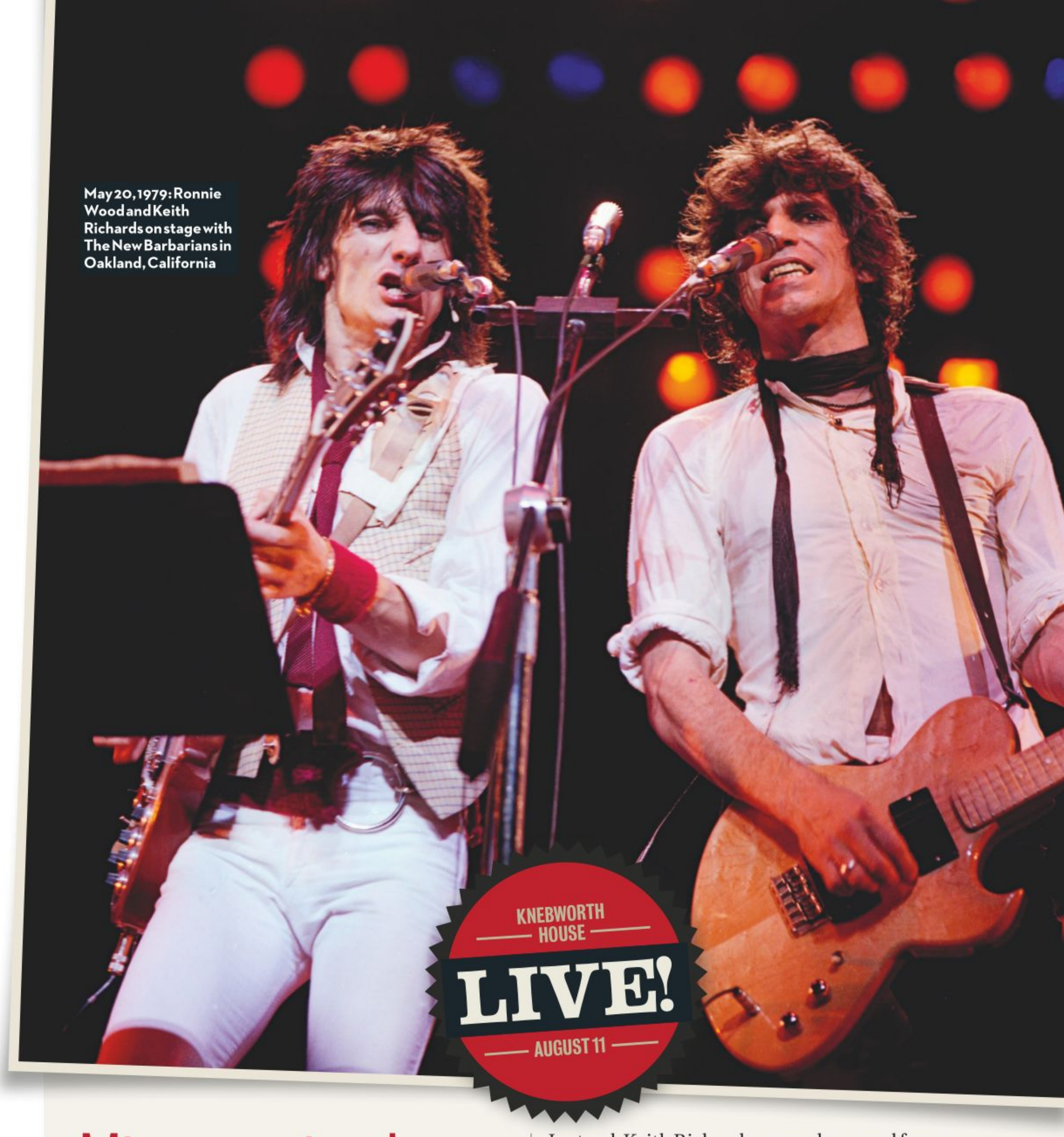
It was ironic, too, that Squeeze were at their most lethargic when they played (in succession) their three hit singles, "Take Me I'm Yours", "Cool For Cats" and "Up The Junction", each performed with a listlessness that almost seemed to suggest a distaste for their own achievements. I don't understand their reasoning.

OK, so Squeeze want to be a good-time boogie band – as manifested in a treatment that took "Goodbye Girl" from its perfect mid-tempo pace into a raging, and uncharacteristic, rocker – but they should remember that their songs just don't allow for such reworking.

And in a field that contains the likes of Dr Feelgood and Rockpile, they're non-runners.

Harry Doherty

LYCEUM LONDON LIVE! AUGUST 12



May 20, 1979: Ronnie Wood and Keith Richards on stage with The New Barbarians in Oakland, California

KNEBWORTH HOUSE LIVE! AUGUST 11

Misconceived

MM AUG 18 Ronnie Wood's New Barbarians fail to sway the masses.

THE STENCH OF over-spilled sewers drifted across the massed festival-goers part way through the New Barbarians' shoddy set. It seemed the most appropriate comment on a totally misconceived venture.

The Barbarians, put together primarily to promote Ronnie Wood's recent album *Gimme Some Neck* in America, were no doubt capable of moments of high comedy and inspiration, as once were Wood's old band, the Faces. But evidence that they were already falling apart came with Stanley Clarke's departure a few weeks back.

The message was doubly driven home when Clarke's supposed replacement, Willie Weeks, was himself replaced by Philip Chen – who, it's rumoured, had nine hours with the band before the concert. In a basically ramshackle outfit such as this, a firm but flexible rhythmic foundation is essential. This one was so rigid that it eventually sank and drowned under its unwillingness to move.

But, with the two best chugging rhythm guitarists in the business up there, the music should have chopped more than it did.

Instead, Keith Richards was only roused from his lethargy for a tautly drawn intro to "Honky Tonk Women", which Wood was incapable of capitalising on vocally.

Concentrating on his role as amiable frontman, Wood proved unable to sway the masses. His efforts to compensate for his band's emotional sterility grew more and more strained, bringing him to an utter standstill one moment, when he was forced to resort to the perennial "Are you all right?" call.

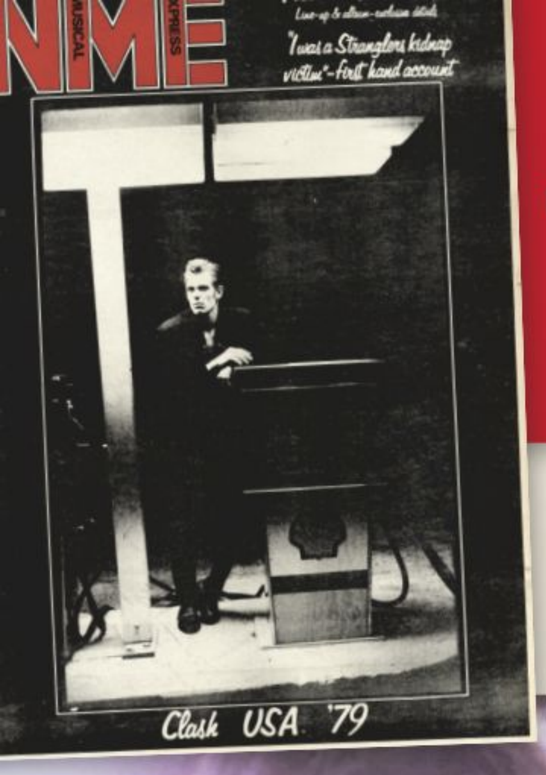
Frankly, Ronnie, no. It's just not good enough for a smiling Face to bolster his pulling power with a famous Stone's presence, because it quickly becomes apparent who the crowd is really interested in, especially when the former's weak material is fit for nothing but a bar-room hoedown.

Three songs stood out from the rest, not because they were particularly strong or well performed, just that their format varied from the pasty boogie that surrounded them. They were Dylan's OK "Seven Days", the aforementioned "Honky Tonk Women", Richards' "Before They Make Me Run" and a rushed encore of "Jumpin' Jack Flash".

For the record, Bobby Keys gave the occasional kiss of life, Sugar Blue blew some sweet harp, and Ian McLagan did what one would expect of him. The others also ran. *Chris Bohn*

ROCKY W WIDNER / GETTY





1979

OCTOBER – DECEMBER

KATE BUSH, THE CLASH, THE SPECIALS, PUBLIC IMAGE LTD AND MORE

Encouraging response

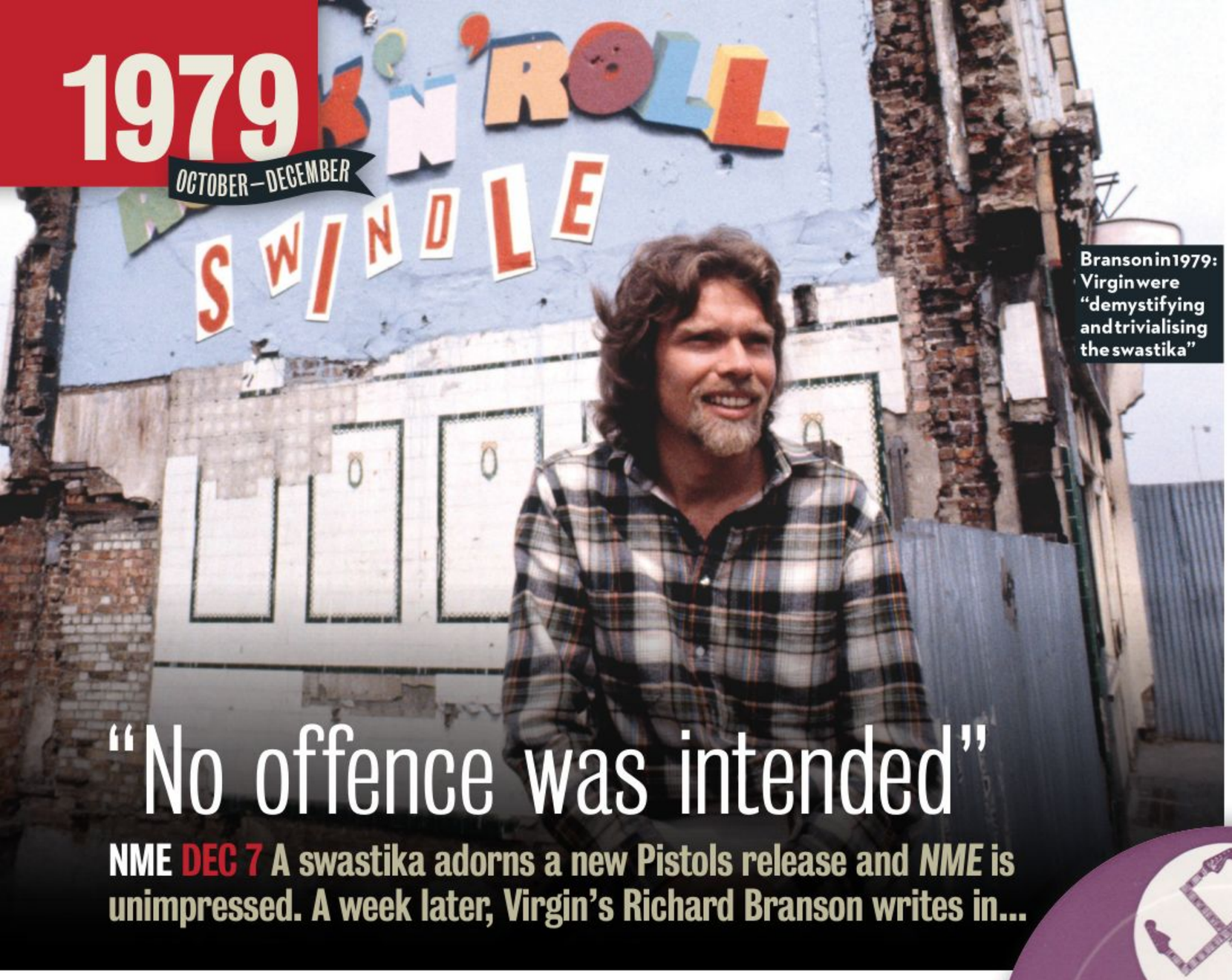
MM DEC 1 U2, a young Irish band, visit the UK mainland.

DUBLIN BAND U2 fly into London this month for a series of dates after the encouraging response in Britain to their debut EP, *Three*. The band play (all London dates): The Moonlight Club (December 1), Nashville (2), 101 Club (3), Hope & Anchor (4), Rock Garden (5), Electric Ballroom, with Talking Heads (7 and 8), Canning Town Bridge House (11), Dingwalls (14) and Windsor Castle (15).

MARTYN GODDARD / GETTY

U2 in 1979: (l–r) Larry Mullen Jr, Adam Clayton, Paul "Bono" Hewson and David "The Edge" Evans

U2 BREW



Branson in 1979: Virgin were "demystifying and trivialising the swastika"

"No offence was intended"

NME DEC 7 A swastika adorns a new Pistols release and *NME* is unimpressed. A week later, Virgin's Richard Branson writes in...

PURCHASERS OF *Sid Sings*, Virgin Records' heartfelt tribute to the man they are said to have plans to turn into the biggest posthumous star since James Dean, will already have had an opportunity to check out the wacky, finger-on-the-pulse satire of the artwork prominently displayed on the label.

Other readers will no doubt be delighted to learn the label boasts that oh-so-meaningful of 20th-century symbols, a swastika, wittily created by Pistols' situationist art-form chappie Jamie Reid from the necks of four Fender Stratocasters. This motif has already been used elsewhere: on a poster currently being distributed by Fast Product for the Dead Kennedys' "California Über Alles". The poster also displays marijuana plant-decorated swastikas, which, says Reid, is intended to symbolise how hippies sold out. (Ah-hum).

The Stratoswastikaster motif was originally designed for another album that the fabulous House of Virgin were projecting for Christmas release titled *Flogging A Dead Horse*, apparently a Sex Pistols' Greatest Hits LP – and you thought that was what *Never Mind The Bollocks* was! *Dead Horse* is apparently now being held until *The Great Rock'n'Roll Swindle* is finally released.

Accordingly, Jamie Reid utilised the distasteful motif in question in the Dead Kennedys artwork. When Thrills pointed out to our Jamie that all this flaunting of swastikas was getting a bit tedious, he replied that he wouldn't expect "radical chic journalists" to understand how it was in actuality a stunning condemnation of the repressive nature of the music business. Hence his imaginative usage of Stratocaster necks to form the swastika.

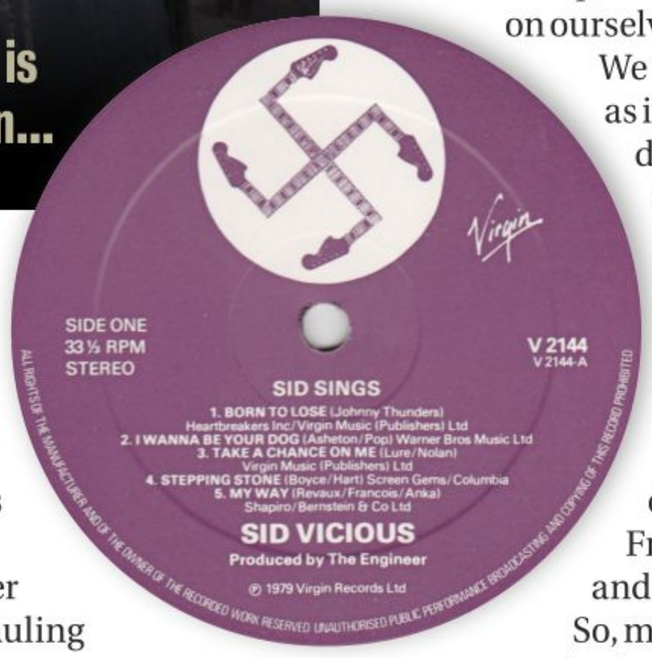
"I find the whole hysteria that surrounds the swastika quite amusing – it's just a bunch of old Leftists getting tied up with dialectics rather than facing up to the real issues," he added.

Unfortunately the relatives – those who survived, anyway – of six million or so people killed in the Nazi death camps do not laugh so easily at the notion of the swastika.

As muddled as Reid's thinking may be, however, he does take some sort of philosophical stance, no matter how garbled or specious it may be.

Virgin Records marketing man Charlie Dimont, however, appears only able to think in terms of profit margins, no matter how evil the methods of hauling in the money:

"The record's just meant to be something of a retrospective album. For people who want to collect all the Pistols' stuff. The swastika's just meant to be an amusing statement about the music." Ha ha.



NME DEC 15

FOLLOWING LAST WEEK'S review of the Virgin *Sid Sings* album and the Thrills piece on the swastika logo carried on the record label itself, the *NME* was contacted by Virgin boss Richard Branson.

Branson was disturbed that it could be misconstrued that the Virgin organisation was supporting unpleasant right-wing beliefs. He asked to be given the opportunity to be able to place in writing his own thoughts on the matter. Here is Branson's reply:

Dear Neil [Spencer, *NME* editor],
It was ironic that, in your streeter-than thou dismissal of *Sid Sings* last week, you should initiate your attack with as totalitarian a broadside as "If rock'n'roll has any backbone, it would close Virgin Records down". Just because I don't stroll down Club Row in East London on Sundays – nor, for that matter, inhabit "the fabulous world of Kings Road thinking" which Danny Baker is so keen to attribute to me – doesn't completely exclude me from understanding the meaning of the swastika.

Jamie Reid, the Sex Pistols' sleeve designer, provided us with two logos of swastikas to use in the presentation of their records. One was covered with marijuana leaves; the other – which we used on Sid's album – was in the form of four guitar necks. Both were intended to convey his opinion about the repressiveness of record companies in general and Virgin in particular. Being liberals to the point of oafishness, we have always made a point of printing all the artwork given to us by the Pistols' camp, including full-page attacks on ourselves.

We also presumed – wrongly as it turns out – that by demystifying and trivialising the swastika, much as Sid himself did by wearing it on his increasingly grubby T-shirts, it would be seen as an object of ridicule. Certainly no offence was intended, as I share *NME*'s distaste for the National Front, similar organisations and all their grisly supporters.

So, much as I initially disliked the superior, bossy, moralistic tone of Baker's review, on further reflection I totally accept that if even one Jew or immigrant was offended, he would have been justified in his attitude. The use of real swastikas over Blair Peach's face, around Brick Lane and on Asian shops – brazen intimidation if I even saw it – is completely sickening.

Finally on this point – so that you can be absolutely certain that Tyndall, Webster and I would not have an enjoyable time in bed together – I enclose one of the posters Virgin put out to ridicule the National Front at the time of the last election.

No apologies for the album itself – no more so than for, say, the Elvis Presley LP, another posthumous album we released to enthusiastic reviews in the same week. If you were offered stories on either Vicious or Presley and thought they would sell papers and interest your readers, you would have no hesitation in printing them. In this respect, I take exception to your hypocritical remark about how our marketing manager – whom you approached for a misquote – "appears only able to think in terms of profit margins". What was your ad manager thinking about when he approached him for the artwork for a full-page Sid album ad? Ceasefires in Rhodesia? Cabinet leaks?

You are free to put Elvis Presley or Sid Vicious on the cover of *NME* to sell more copies. The public, in turn, are not obliged to buy the paper. We can do likewise by issuing their unreleased material. Once again, the public don't have to buy it.

Unless they want to.

Roll on *Flogging A Dead Horse*.

Yours, Richard Branson



GRAHAM HARRISON / REX

Virgin 'Not Horrid'



September 20, 1979: The Clash at the Palladium in New York City

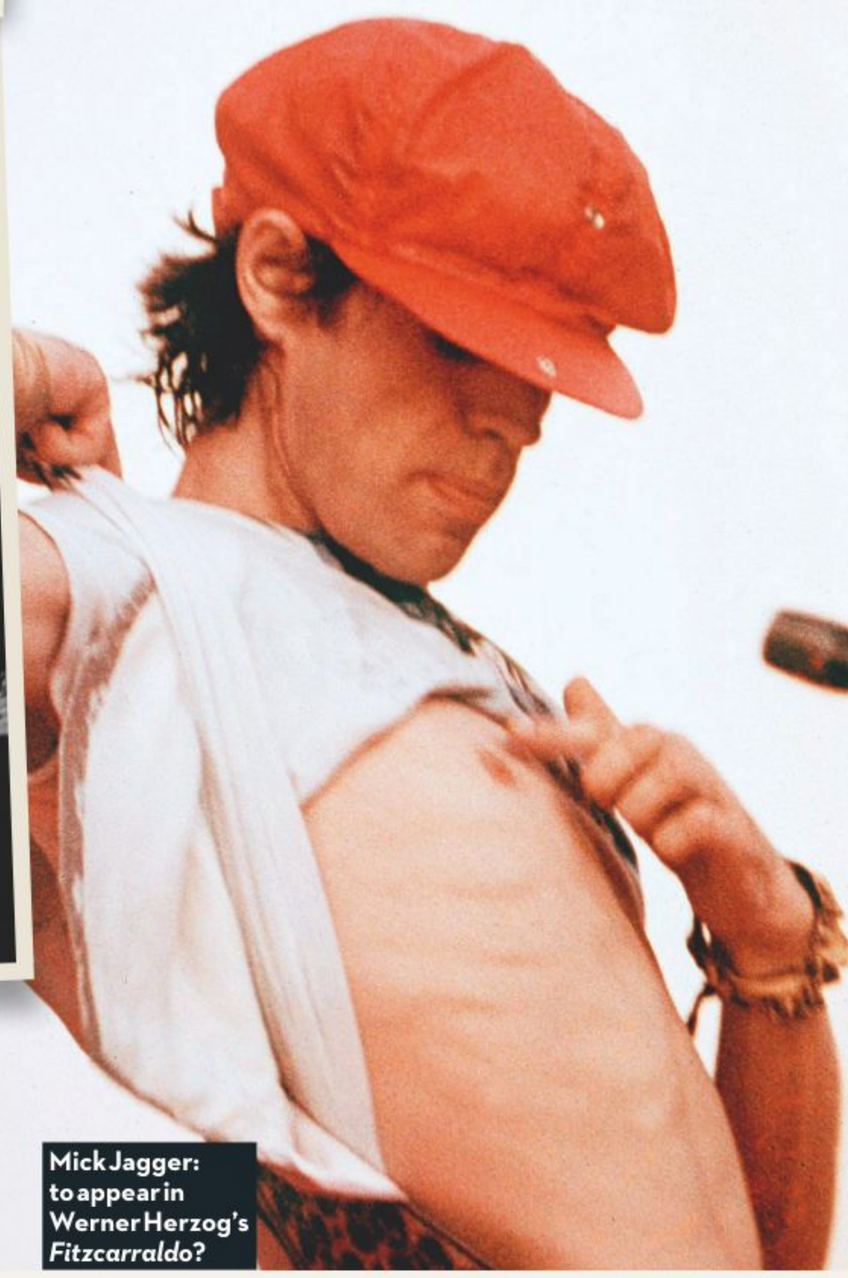
Ready for screening

MM OCT 6 Clash film *Rude Boy* out next year.

The Clash movie, *Rude Boy*, is within three weeks of final printing, but although it should be ready for screening by mid-late November, it's unlikely to be on release in Britain until the new year.

Director Jack Hazan said the soundtrack is being dubbed over the next three weeks and will be cut back from its current two-and-a-half-hour length to two hours for general release. No distribution deal has yet been worked out, but Hazan has had offers and feels that this will be no problem. Because of the state of the cinema market approaching Christmas, he reckoned that the movie – which centres on the character of Ray, a white kid in Brixton who gets involved with The Clash and their music – will be showing early in the new year.

A soundtrack album featuring about 45 minutes of Clash music will be released with the film. The new studio Clash album, which was produced by Bill Price, Guy Stevens and the band, will be released at the end of November. No title is yet available.



Mick Jagger: to appear in Werner Herzog's *Fitzcarraldo*?

A return to the style of *Exile On Main St*

NME DEC 1 Bobsleigh trials permitting, a new Rolling Stones album is nearing completion.

THE ROLLING STONES' long-awaited new album, which they spent months recording in Paris, is provisionally scheduled for mid-January release. Although still untitled, it's understood to revert to the style of *Exile On Main Street*.

And they are making initial plans for their much-delayed return to the concert platform – involving tours of Australia, Europe and Britain – which hopefully would bring them to the British Isles in the early spring.

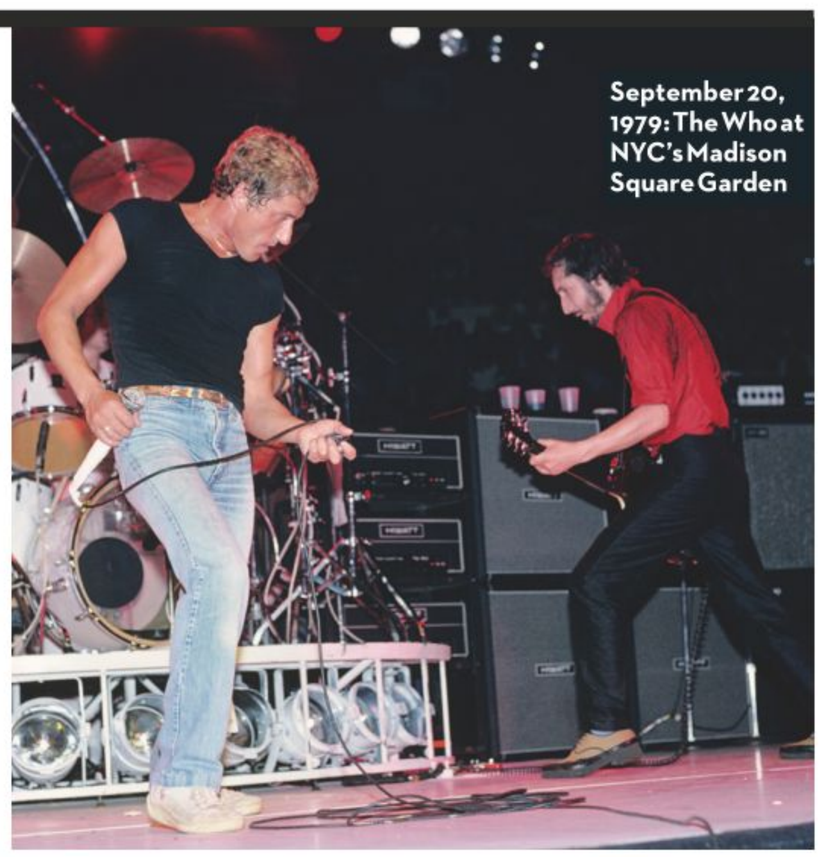
Said their London spokesman: "There's also talk of another film for Mick Jagger, which would be shot in South America. We're not yet sure if this would affect the timing of the tour – but if it did, it would only be a slight disruption."

Meanwhile, this weekend Jagger flies from New York – where he's working on the album sleeve – to West Germany to attend the Olympic bobsleigh trials in Winterberg, as he is personally financing and sponsoring the two-man London team of Alan and Arnold Dunn.

ALLAN TANNENBAUM / GETTY, BOB GRANT / REX, EBET ROBERTS / GETTY

"We'll see it through"

NME DEC 15 Tragedy notwithstanding, The Who continue their US tour.



September 20, 1979: The Who at NYC's Madison Square Garden

The Who have decided to complete their US tour schedule, despite the Cincinnati tragedy on December 3, when 11 young people died in the stampede to gain admittance to the venue the band were playing. Immediately after the disaster, they were so shattered that they considered cancelling – or at least curtailing – the remainder of the tour. But now the initial shock has subsided, they've agreed to fulfil their commitments.

Said Roger Daltrey: "We'll see it through. We talked seriously about pulling out, but we felt that cancelling the tour wouldn't undo what had happened, and would only have the effect of disappointing thousands of other people. We've also decided to go ahead with our charity concert at Hammersmith Odeon on December 28."

Daltrey explained that The Who's thinking was conditioned by the fiasco occurring outside the stadium, and therefore beyond their control and responsibility. He added: "If it had happened while we were on stage, we'd have been on the first plane home, and probably never performed live again."

Now Pete Townshend is going to great lengths to ensure that a clause is entered into the band's contracts, whereby safety measures come under their jurisdiction.

"We want to be in a position where we ourselves can legislate for this situation, and so make certain that such a tragedy never happens again," he said.





"I get freaked out"

— NME OCTOBER 20 —

Ask a post-fame KATE BUSH a straight question, you get a straight answer. What's success been like? "You go out to get cat litter and there's 40 people staring at you... I feel like an animal." Earlier in the year, her "Tour Of Life" is poorly received.

EMI: THREE LETTERS that have come to represent "the enemy" in rock'n'roll's war games. EMI House rambles like a country home with a thousand warrens of ministry-type boring pools and divisions. The guard on the reception listens to my appointment with Kate Bush with all the emotion of a weighing machine being told a hard-luck story. Like everyone else, I get told to take a seat while he talks, unheard, into one of the extension phones. About 10 minutes later I'm led down and through EMI House and up to a corridor down which the *Daily Mirror*'s Pauline McLeod is striding. She's out – I'm in.

Kate Bush is sipping Perrier water from an elegant glass. I tell her she'll get a royal old bulge if she carries on guzzling the gin like that, and she laughs naturally. She's far more attractive than I'd ever thought – not being the globe's most rabid fan of the woman, y'understand – although quite short.

NME had been after a KB interview for a while but, so I'd learned on leaving the office, her management were less than obliging. Me? Well, the truth is that I had no opinions about Kate at all. I knew the singles, but I really couldn't find it in me to go any deeper, to check out her roots (he said, nicking in this piece's most contrived gag). I still don't… such was our meeting.

Hey Kate. Do you feel obliged to sing like that these days?

"What? You mean…"

Y'know, like you could age the nation's glassblowers.

"Oh, yeah, sure. I mean, I don't feel obliged – that is me. See, like in a recording studio, when it's all dark and there's just you and a couple of guys at the desk, well, you get really so involved that to actually plan it becomes out of the question. It just flows that way. As a writer I just try to express an idea. I can't possibly think of old songs of mine, because they're past now, and quite honestly I don't like them any more."

Doing "Wuthering Heights" must've been murder then.

"Well, I was still promoting that up until 18 months after I'd had it released. Abroad I was still promoting it on TV, where I was able to do it backwards and (*she mimes it while picking her nose nonchalantly*)… just weird."

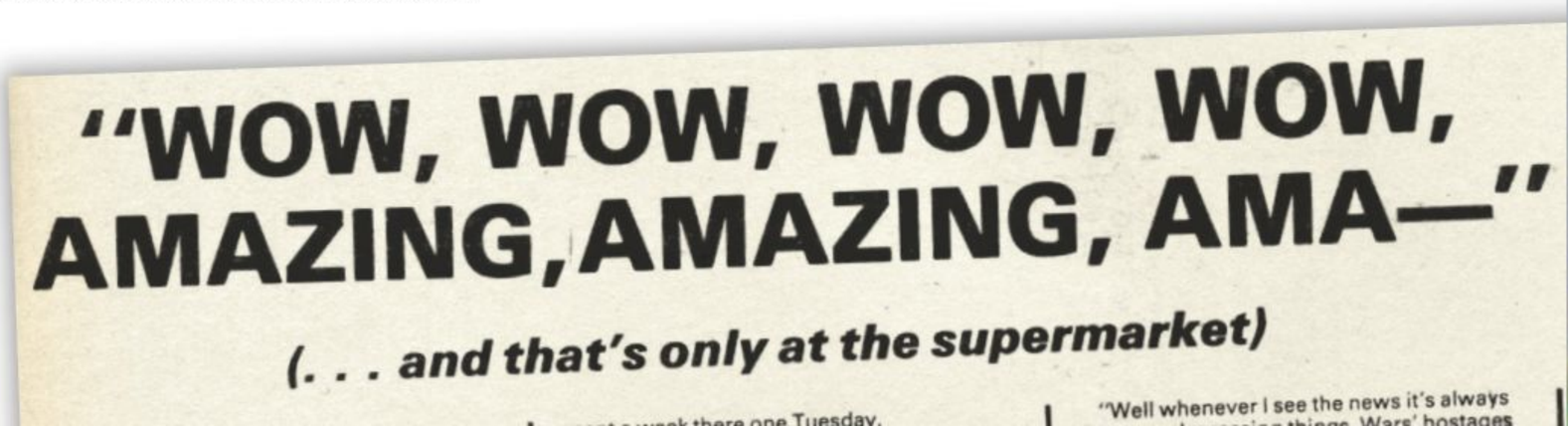
Have you still got people around you who'll tell you something's rubbish?

"My brother Jay, who's been with me since I was writing stuff that really embarrasses me – he'd let me know for sure… Yeah, there's a few I can really trust."

She smiles again and I warm to her. Mind you, she speaks my language, so I could be sympathetic because she's one of the South London rock mafia. I ask her what it's like to be paraded in *The Sun* and suchlike as the Sex Goddess of POP!

"Hmmm. You see, you do a very straight interview with these people, without ever mentioning sex, but of course that's the only angle they write it from when you read it. »

MIKE PRIOR / GETTY


"WOW, WOW, WOW, WOW, AMAZING, AMAZING, AMA—"

(. . . and that's only at the supermarket)

"Well whenever I see the news it's always

Kate Bush in 1979: "These days I feel like one of the lads"



Taunted by two suitably attired dancers, Kate Bush performs "Violin", which will appear on the following year's *Never For Ever* album

Desperate to dazzle and bemuse

NME APR 28 The theatrical Tour Of Life fails to impress one *NME* scribe.

TWO MEMORIES: RECALLED first are the days when rock'n'roll was swamped with failed classical pianists and violinists who knew that they could make it in rock'n'roll because certain strata of the rock audience have an inferiority complex about Real Culture and no standards by which to judge it.

Recalled second are all the unpleasant aspects of David Bowie in the Mainman era. Successfully shoved under the cerebral carpet by the passing of time and the ghosts of all those dynamite gigs, it only takes a whiff of Kate Bush's tour programme and the haughty condescension of the little notes from the Kate Bush Club that you find on your seat when you arrive to bring it all back. No photographers. Stay in your seats and worship, you dumb bastards!

The Kate Bush show that's been wowin' 'em (as in "Wow, wow, wow, wow, we think you're unbearable") all over the country is a tribute to hard work, lots of money and the old-style ideology that defines the relationship between artist and audience as purely that between worshipper and worshipped. Described (elsewhere, natch) as some kind of apex in the mating of rock and theatre, it is simply the most complicated and expensive extant collision between theatrics (there is a difference between "theatre" and "theatrics", but if Kate Bush is aware of it, she certainly isn't letting on) and MOR pop.

An endless stream of sets, costumes, pantomine-conjuring special effects, back projections, sound effects (ranging from wind and rain to her brother's awful crypto-poetry read in a portentous, echoing elocution-competition voice to audible sniggering from people who hadn't paid the statutory fiver for their tickets) and things that would be described as "gimmicks" if they occurred in the course of a performance with less lofty ambitions as this one. The KATE BUSH (she prefers capitals) experience is an exercise in the time-honoured art of battering an audience to death and making them like it.

Ms Bush herself is the evident product of an awful lot of strenuous self-improvement. One can only imagine all those years of ballet training, mime classes, piano lessons... she is Supergirl: the range of her skills aspires to be breathtaking and the end result is that she is capable of doing enough things passably to convince large numbers of people (only a few of whom are equipped to know better) that she is doing them brilliantly.

Her piano playing is competent but characterless: unlike Laura Nyro and Joni Mitchell – whose work she evidently admires – the style is neither distinctive nor expressive. Her songwriting hints that it means more than it says and in fact means less: she hints at mystery and uses it as a cloak, whereas true mysteries always stand naked. Her singing is at least unusual: her shrill, self-satisfied whine is unmistakable. Altogether, a lightweight talent with one good song ("Wuthering Heights") to her credit.

Her dancing is more perspiration than inspiration: completely lacking in sensuality or funk, it relies instead on a supple, well-exercised frame and enough ballet moves to impress people who know nothing about ballet, just as the Emersons and Wakepersons of yesteryear were able to bullshit people who knew nothing about classical music.

Her mime is elegant sham: great mime expresses everything, good mime expresses something and bad mime expresses nothing other than somebody's been to mime classes.

She twirled and trilled her way through a series of tableaux vivants



Backed by a cast of a dozen (seven musicians, two dancers, two singers and the real star of the show, illusionist Simon Gray), Bush twirled and skittered and trilled her way through a series of tableaux vivants which almost disguised that if it had actually been performed and staged as a straight concert it would have been tedious in the extreme.

For the climax – centred around "James And The Cold Gun" – she dressed up in cowboy togs and methodically

PETER STILL / GETTY (2)



Performing the show's penultimate song, "Kite", from *The Kick Inside*

PALLADIUM LONDON
LIVE!
APRIL 18

shot Gray and the two dancers, complete with fake blood, rimshots and dry ice, before retreating to the stylised womb at the back of the stage from which she had originally emerged, shooting at the audience. It was the first time that she played direct to the crowd and the only emotion expressed was hatred.

It has been pointed out that she's terribly young and oh-so talented. She certainly works hard: the show runs over two hours and except for when she's seated at the white piano, she's in constant motion, using a radio mic on a kind of telephonist's headset so that she can move freely the whole time.

The trouble is that she's completely entranced with the idea of her own stardom and the concept of presenting an almost superhuman facade.

Tony DeFries would've loved you seven years ago, Kate, and seven years ago maybe I would've too. But these days I'm past the stage of admiring people desperate to dazzle and bemuse, and I wish you were past the stage of trying those tricks yourself.

Sure, what you do takes talent, but it ain't the kind of talent I respect. Enjoy your success.

Charles Shaar Murray

That kind of freaks me out, because the public tend to believe it…"

Asking a few more questions, I begin to realise that this isn't the kind of stuff that weekloads of Gasbags [the *NME* letters page] are made of. I'm searching for a key probe, but with Kate Bush – well, there's not likely to be anything that will cause the 12-inch banner-headline stuff, is there now? I recall Charlie Murray's less than enthusiastic review of her Palladium shows, which were apparently crammed with lame attempts to "widen" the audience's artistic horizons – y'know, lots of people dressed as violins and carrots an' that. CSM reckons it was one of the most condescending gigs in the history of music. Kate had read the review, but she didn't break down.

"Just tell me one thing," she said in normal tones. "I mean, was he actually at the show that night?"

Yeah, sure. I remember he told me he'd spent a week there one Tuesday.

"Oh, well, in that case that's just his opinion and he's entitled to it."

We all smiled again, and Kate asked me if I'd seen *Alien*. I wondered if she got out much herself.

"Well, I don't get out to parties often. I have this thing about wasting time…"

Oh really? Which thing is that?

"You know, I nag at myself all the time for being a waster. I think, 'Gosh, you could be creating the world or something.'"

Well, that certainly seems a worthwhile thing to do, all right, although it has in fact been done before. Y'see, occasionally Kate allows the poet and all-round Tyrannosaurus Rex dreamer to slip out, a sucker for *Lord Of The Rings*. For a start, I have cut about a hundred "wows" and "amazings" from her speech. She talks at length about how important she feels it is to be "creating" all the time, and when I asked her if she looked to the news for any song inspiration I got this curious answer:

"Well, whenever I see the news, it's always the same depressing things. Wars, hostages and people's arms hanging off with all the tendons hanging out, you know. So I tend not to watch it much. I prefer to go and see a movie or something, where it's all put much more poetically. People getting their heads blown off in slow motion, very beautifully."

She grins broadly again. Kate is an artist through and through, seeing the world as a crazy canvas on which to skip. Her outrageous charm covers the fact that we are in the midst of a hippy uprising of the most devious sorts. I approach her on the question of being a woman in pop music once more. How do her workmates treat her?

"Well, when I started, I felt really conscious of being female among all these fellows. But these days I feel like one of the lads."

That doesn't sound very healthy.

"Oh, yeah, it is. When I'm working, it's really important for me to get on with it in that way. But at the same time, I sense that they're very respectful, because they make me aware of being a woman, and will lay off the dirty jokes and that…"

Incredible. Do you find men in awe of you?

"Socially? Well, I find that – with people that I haven't seen for a couple of years, because they won't treat me as a human being. And people in the street will ask for autographs and also won't treat you as human, but… ah… sometimes I get really scared. Sometimes when I'm going to the supermarket to get the coffee and cat litter, I get freaked out and see all these people staring, and you turn around and there's like 40 people all looking at you… and when you go around the corner, they're all following you! You start freaking out like a trapped animal.

"However, I don't notice guys doing it on a personal level. Maybe some will keep their distance, but that may be because they don't get off on me.

"You see, when I first got started, I thought that I'd better watch out for these rip-off artists and stick with old friends. But it's amazing that since I've been in the business, I've made many more real friends, especially on a working basis. I find that I can get so involved with a guy working with me – and usually on a platonic level, which is great! That's so special, like these two minds linked on this one project. And that is a very beautiful thing that I'd never have experienced if I had not been in this business.

"And what's more, I'll keep these friends for life, because not only do they care for you, but they give me information and their teachings. What more could I ask for?"

Do you think there's a danger of becoming detached inside music?

"Probably. I don't read newspapers, and I've said I don't watch the news. I love books, but I don't read much. What I do is I get people to read to me, and I put the stories in my head."

A bit like a hat, I suppose.

"And films. I watch an awful lot of TV films."

Do you think you might be avoiding real life?

"Well, no, because I think that all these heavy issues – equality among blacks and whites, etc – have all been done before, and if you do it now, it has to be very cleverly handled. It all gets too negative and cliched. So I find that, working with fantasy, I can handle the same issues, perhaps, but in a more positive way."

Don't you think that albums can make you feel and think sometimes without er… pussyfooting? I remember the first time I heard The Clash, and…

"Oh, yeah, some of these new bands are amazing. They're just springing up. The Police are just amazing…"

Here, listen, I think you've got the picture. Kate Bush, to meet, is a happy, charming woman that can totally win your heart. But afterwards on tape, when she's not there and you actually listen to all this, well… golly gosh. Don't lose sleep, old mates, it's just pop music-folk and the games they spin. Wow.

This was Chicken Licken, Cosmic News, Atlantis, goodnight, man…

Danny Baker •

"I get people to read to me and I put the stories in my head"





November 10, 1979: Pete Townshend (right) rips his trousers during The Who's Brighton show

BRIGHTON CENTRE
LIVE!
NOVEMBER 10

Aimlessly frenetic

MM NOV 17 Mod is resurgent, but The Who go from stately to stumbling.

THE WHO HAVE always been acutely aware of their own legend – just look at *The Kids Are Alright*. Each landmark is carefully stage-managed and duly recorded, which rather diminishes the supposed spontaneity and secrecy of their return to Brighton.

Naturally, fans heard about it early enough to form long queues days before tickets went on sale. The media were there, the legend thus fuelled. Brighton, a sentimental journey for the band and fans alike: a veterans' run rejuvenated by an influx of new mods. *Quadrophenia* was showing further on up the road, supplying the script to this particular movie.

The Who in Brighton sounds better in retrospect than it did on the night. But it didn't have to be that way, and for half of the concert it was more than that. The return of mod means that The Who no longer have to strain to justify their presence, like they did with the less-easily-pleased punks who preceded them. The first half was relaxed and stately and fine by me. The Who gently caressed the strings marked "audience response", rather than tugging at them as they were to do later on.

"Substitute" and "I Can't Explain" are great pop songs by any standards, and the band played them with lively respect. "Baba O'Reilly", possibly the best of all Who numbers, with easily the most recognisable intro, was astonishingly moving, fusing Townshend's joyful gigs with his own plaintively sung chorus.

The first newish song, "Sister Disco", was solid, lightened by John "Rabbit" Bundrick's airy synthesizer; "Who Are You" had all the classic Who hallmarks: stuttering intro, reticent Townshend chorus and impassioned Daltrey voice. "Music Must Change" sensibly introduced a three-man horn section, leanly used to bolster the song's chorus. Like the Stones, The Who are adept at assimilating newer songs into their set, so with each subsequent hearing they seem more and more like they belong.

The Who were happy together, joking between themselves without forcing the friendship on the audience. Once, Daltrey and Townshend began a chorus of "*We were the mods, we were the mods*", and later Townshend qualified his relationship to the movement thus: "Naturally we don't have much to do with the mods today, and we didn't have much to do with them 15 years ago." The irony was probably lost on the audience, but they both seemed pretty pleased with each other's presence.

Quadrophenia was represented by a forceful "Punk And The Godfather" and – perhaps the set's highlight – "Drowned", beginning with rumbling piano and hefty drum rolls. Their other opera representation, "Pinball Wizard"/"See Me Feel Me", combined with heavy floodlighting to prompt the biggest reaction of the night.

Daltrey and Townshend began a chorus of "*We were the mods, we were the mods*"

But then everything went downhill. The disguised intro of "My Generation" was swiftly recognised, the song turning into a seeming endless rock'n'roll-style medley. "Won't Get Fooled Again" was similarly spoilt. Townshend is just incapable of jamming interestingly, so that Who jams stumble over a crashing, falling rhythm and their leader's aimlessly frenetic riffing, based more on a boredom and relief gamble than tension and release.

The end and the encores: the band's lasers have been replaced with a lighting rig that spells out their name, to much applause. They returned with "Young Man Blues" – an unfortunate choice, as the father figure of the chorus now resembles Townshend too closely: "*How did you learn how to fight/spit/shit*", etc. Later there's a half-hearted attempt to smash a guitar, and it's all over.

Whether they like it or not, The Who have become an institution – one that would benefit from nationalising and rationalising if it wants to function efficiently in the '80s.

Chris Bohn

ROSS HALFIN

Veterans' run

The Criminal



Randy Newman guests on an edition of US late-night TV show *Saturday Night Live* that airs on December 8, 1979

Trekking through the past darkly

NME DEC 8 Randy Newman brings his mix of satire and self-deprecation to London.

DOMINION THEATRE LONDON
LIVE!
NOVEMBER 25

Randy Newman was wandering around backstage at the Dominion gazing disconsolately down. "Why doesn't anyone like my ELO song?" he kept asking no one in particular, and no in particular answered.

Randy Newman in concert was fraught with that kind of question; the space between the man's acute irony and his inability to convey the appropriate emotion grew wider as the night progressed. At first, with Newman alone at the piano, everything was dandy, the atmosphere and acoustics were right and the singer-songwriter picked his work-shirted way across a division of material that only hits you when you wake up in some other room.

Newman's emotional spooking became an intricate device for trekking through the past darkly; the casual nonsense of "Simon Smith", a song for imaginative children, was pursued by a murder unfolded – "In Germany Before The War" – a terrifying but still peaceful account of a psychopath after the event; maybe it's just a crime of passion.

The mind responsible wasn't giving that one away. Instead his feather touch on the keys filled in the gaps; a melody was floating up some stairs and across a meadow.

The satires, "Sigmund Freud's Impersonation Of Albert Einstein In America" and Randy Newman's version of "Take It Easy" – "The Girls In My Life (Part One)" – turned perspectives inside out, railing against the state and baring the soul too much.

As a writer Newman thrives on self-deprecation and human unkindness. "Marie" is a chilling account of justified rejection, while "Rider In The Rain", accompanied by the Randy Newman army ("You shoulda heard the Germans sing this one"), did it for the romantic image of the settler. Newman knows his man and so does his audience.

During this solo section it was possible to appreciate the songs and the execution. With Newman's left foot flailing erratically, he set about divulging the notions of the vindictive God, original sin and America's primitive religions. The faults he sees in a country are levelled at individuals too, and all the time his fragmented melodies exist in counterpoint to the nastiness. Brecht and Weill chords slap up against bar-room rolls, giving the impression of a practised amateur with a timely message.

Newman ended this phase with "Political Science", the band trouped on and the atmosphere slipped off. Sometimes it seemed that the band and their leader had only just been introduced – arrangements were untidily comfortable, disappointingly rock'n'roll. The rhythm section was collapsible; the guitarist and the synthesizer player evoked few of Newman's best characteristics.

"Birmingham" survived partially intact, but a song like "They Just Got Married" begs for the arrangement that only time and a band like Steely Dan could have afforded it. The madder Randy got, the more sane the band became, and for a number as acutely sad as "Louisiana 1927" the formula never even left the shelf.

"Kingfish" and an uptempo, toe-tappin' "Short People" are two facets of Newman's style – the one a historically illuminating affront to nostalgia with the songwriter as storyteller for a fascinating past, the other a mildly amusing parody of bigotry, an insubstantial piece in his pattern book of similar songs. Schumacher would have approved.

Sometimes it seemed that the band and their leader had only just been introduced

Being no expert on Randy Newman, I'm not sure whether his newer material really is as duff as some folks make out. I do know that his understanding of America's social problems and diseases (viz "Rednecks") are far more powerful than the tepid parodies of the '70s traits he seeks to lampoon.

"The Story Of A Rock And Roll Band" is a fine spoof and "It's Money That I Love" comes straight from the wallet ("*They say that money can't buy love in this world/ But it'll get you a half-pound of cocaine and a 16-year-old girl*") but "Pants" just isn't funny, in the same way that Frank Zappa is a monumental pain in the arse.

But when the band treat a song like limp heavy metal, you wonder where parody ends and reality begins.

It was nice to welcome some metaphysical relief in the encores when Newman returned alone. Then you could hear the ghosts of some New York vaudeville stage and watch the curtain rise on the early part of the century, which is Newman's most suitable case for treatment.

There was melodrama in "Lonely At The Top" and music-hall sentiment for "Davey The Fat Boy". Newman put his big money on the last number, "I Think It's Going To Rain Today", but by then it was too late.

A curiously unsatisfactory evening of entertainment – Eugene Debs wouldn't have stuck around for the electrical storm – it really never broke. *Max Bell*

ALAN SINGER / NBC / GETTY

"The nuttiest sound around"

October 20, 1979: members of The Specials, Madness and The Selecter on Hove beach after the first night of the 2 Tone Tour at Brighton's Top Rank and before that evening's show at the Oasis Leisure Centre in Swindon

MADNESS, THE SELECTER and headliners THE SPECIALS embark on a 40-date UK tour. Along the way they meet wild crowds, loyal skinheads and outraged feminists. "If we'd wanted to talk about politics," says Suggsy from Madness, "we'd have formed a debating society, not a fucking band."

CHALKIE DAVIES / GETTY





November 14, 1979: to mark Madness' last night on the 2-Tone Tour before leaving for US dates, the band join The Specials on stage at Ayr Pavilion, Scotland

— MELODY MAKER OCTOBER 27 —

THERE ARE 43 alarm calls booked for this morning and – oh hell! – one of them is coming this way. You can hear the damned bells ringing through the rooms of Swindon's Crest Motel, shrieking life into slumbering bodies.

Outside the motel, a drab handkerchief of mist hangs wet and cold over Swindon. The rabid yelp of the alarm jerks warm bodies out of bed and into the shivering arms of the day.

The cast congregates in the lobby, pale-faced and hungover. The motel staff are crisp and morning-bright with toothpaste smiles and efficient manners. The tour party looks like death's leftovers, pushed to the side of the plate. Terry Hall, who sings with The Specials, kisses goodbye to his girlfriend, and sees her to the taxi. She's going home to Coventry.

"I think I'm going to cry," he whines. Jerry Dammers, another Special, lumbers through the lobby, an awkward shambling figure in a shabby mac. He manages a smile, his tongue a flash of pink through an absence of teeth. Young Woodsy, Madness' drummer, punishes his lungs, doubling up in a violent paroxysm of coughing.

"My body's had enough of me," he gasps, his sharp face drained of colour.

Three days into the 2-Tone Tour, and we're already looking for the stretchers. Ah, but it wasn't always like this.

IT WAS A gloriously sunny autumn afternoon when we gathered at the Roundhouse. The three bands had been rehearsing there the week before the tour, licking themselves into shape for an epic 40-date trek around the island.

The atmosphere was buoyant, full of optimism; the energy of the musicians cut voluptuous shapes in the air. The Roundhouse was bristling with enthusiasm. The coach was late, and the tour was already behind schedule. By this time we should have been well on the way to opening night in Brighton. No one seemed mildly concerned.

The three bands were strung out across the Roundhouse bar. The Selecter and The Specials mingled, wandered and joked. Madness were quaffing light and bitters, being noisy. With their skinhead haircuts, Fred Perry sports shirts and bright-blue Levi's originals (worn low around the waist, with baggy arses ballooning around their knees and the bottoms rolled up over their DMs), they looked like a gang of roughneck schoolkids waiting to be taken for a day at the seaside.

Kellogs was standing at the bar watching them. Kellogs was the tour manager on last year's Be Stiff extravaganza. When Stiff signed Madness, they were put in his charge. He's just finished a fortnight on the road with the rascals, and he's feeling a little weak at the knees.

"They make me feel so old," he said wearily. "They just don't stop. Up till four in the morning boozing. Look at them…" We looked at them. Down the hatch went another seven pints… "They're loving it. They're on top of the fucking world. A hit single on the telly, on the road away from mum, drinking, smoking – all yobbos together. They're having the time of their lives.

"Annuver 300 pints of light 'n' bitter," cried Madness in unison as the coach pulled up outside the Roundhouse, their North London accents cracking like finger joints.

THERE ARE 40 of us on the bus and Madness, inevitably, are making the most noise; shouting, swearing, drinking, pulling ridiculous faces at the crowds in Oxford Street. The older musicians in The Selecter and The Specials smile indulgently; they've been there before and they recognise Madness' behaviour.

Woodsy was sitting opposite one of the Specials, who had brought along his girlfriend.

"This your saddle up for tonight, issit?" he asked with a wicked leer. The Special had a television/cassette contraption.

"That's a nice little number," Woodsy nodded approvingly. "Expensive?"

"Sixty quid," said the Special.

"Fell off the back of a lorry, did it?" Woodsy asked.

To let everyone know that he's in a band, Woodsy carries a half-bottle of Scotch in the pocket of his army-surplus windcheater. Musicians are notorious drinkers; Woodsy knows this from reading about bands in the rock mags. He takes a hefty slug. He winces visibly as the Scotch burns a hole down through his stomach. He coughs and gags, lights another Embassy.

Steve English was sitting across the aisle from him. Steve English is the minder on the tour; he's looking after the security. He's built like a Sherman tank, looks a little like a bruised John Belushi. He's worked as a bodyguard for Marvin Gaye, the Sex Pistols, The Clash and John Conteh. He looks at the paltry figure of Woodsy grappling with the effects of Scotch.

"Silly little fucker," English laughs.

"If he carries on like that for the next six weeks we'll carry him off this tour in a basket…"

VIRGINIA TURBETT / GETTY



THEY ARE OUTSIDE the Top Rank, a dozen skinheads, waiting for Madness. They are led by Prince Nutty. They are all wearing porkpie hats, tilted back on their heads, Crombie overcoats, braces, Levi's or Sta Press trousers, and the obligatory DMs.

You'll recognise Prince Nutty immediately. It's his contorted mug staring out of the centre of the inner sleeve of Madness' album *One Step Beyond*. Nutty tops the tape measure at just under six feet and has shoulders as broad as the bonnet of a Cortina. He's surrounded by a gang of his cronies. They're a fearsome-looking bunch. And there are more of them inside the Top Rank, milling around sending out intimidating vibes.

"Remember me?" asks one of Suggsy, Madness' singer. "I danced on stage wiv yer at the Rock Garden, remember?"

"Yeah, 'course I remember you," Suggsy replies unconvincingly. The skinhead stumbles off, tripping over on the stairs.

Madness had played in Brighton, at the Polytechnic, during their brief warm-up tour earlier this month. A mob of British Movement supporters had turned up at the gig, threatening trouble.

"They didn't do nuffink, though," Woodsy says. "They just stood about in the bar talking very loudly about Adolf Hitler. I think it put a few punters off, mind you…"

Kellogs had mentioned earlier that there had been some elements at Madness gigs in the North who had turned up looking for trouble. In Oldham, a security check on the audience as they arrived at the gig resulted in a number of weapons – knives, even a home-made mace – being confiscated. When the band played in Huddersfield, a coachload of fans from Middlesbrough arrived. The gig was already sold out. When they couldn't get in they started a small riot, smashing the group's van and trashing the truck of a film crew who were following Madness.

The band are sensitive about their following. They don't want to alienate the skins, but they don't want to be seen to be tolerating some of their more violent outrages. And they certainly don't want to become any kind of focus for the British Movement, or any other political group.

"There's no way that we're political," Suggsy says at one point. "We're certainly not fascists. If we were fascists, what would we be doing playing ska and bluebeat?

"If we'd wanted to talk about politics, we'd have formed a debating society, not a fucking band."

Prince Nutty and the large contingent of skins at Brighton seemed to respect Madness' concern that their gigs don't turn into a violent shambles. The theme of peaceful coexistence and mutual compatibility that is constantly stressed by The Selecter and The Specials communicates itself to the heaving crowd at the Top Rank.

The aggressive atmosphere that had prevailed earlier in the evening as the skins, punks, mods, students and weekend groovers in platform heels and flared bedspread trousers all stampeded through the doors and into the ballroom is quickly dispelled. The skins storm to the front of the stage, and they don't budge. No one invades their territory, and they are content with that, prepared to leave everyone else in peace to enjoy the music.

THIS FIRST GIG of the 2-Tone Tour see-saws unpredictably from chaos to celebration. The late arrival in Brighton has prevented the groups having full soundchecks. The Specials, as headliners and architects of the tour, claim priority. Madness and The Selecter come off badly as a result.

The audience groove outrageously; having forked out their two-and-a-half quid, they're not about to be denied a good time. But the frontline vocals of Pauline [Black] and Gappa [Arthur Hendrickson] are woefully distorted by a capricious sound balance. The twin guitar foundation organised by Neol Davies and the spritely Compton Amanor lifts the music, gives it a powerful direction; Desmond Brown's keyboards create great swelling gashes in the sound; but their impact is sadly undermined by the mix.

"Carry Go Bring Come" lashes through almost intact, and "On My Radio" is powerfully arranged, reaching a frantic climax that leaves the dancing hordes utterly breathless. But from here to the encore their performance, bitterly affected by the wayward sound, tends to degenerate into a myopic blur. It flashes by with plenty of activity, but leaves no impression.

CHAS SMASH MONKEY-CRAWLS to the microphone to introduce Madness. "Hey you!" he bellows, his voice echoing around the sweltering ballroom. "Don't watch that. Watch this! This is the heavy, heavy monster sound… The nuttiest sound around!"

The skins at the front of the stage erupt, a conflagration of spinning limbs and jerking heads. Lee Thompson's bronchitic saxophone rattles and wheezes, fidgets and flirts, scurrying over the beat. Mike Barson's carousel organ pitches and whines, filling the songs with jokey little swirls. Suggsy's vocal is pitched at the level of a fairground barker, full of Duryesque accents and coarse asides.

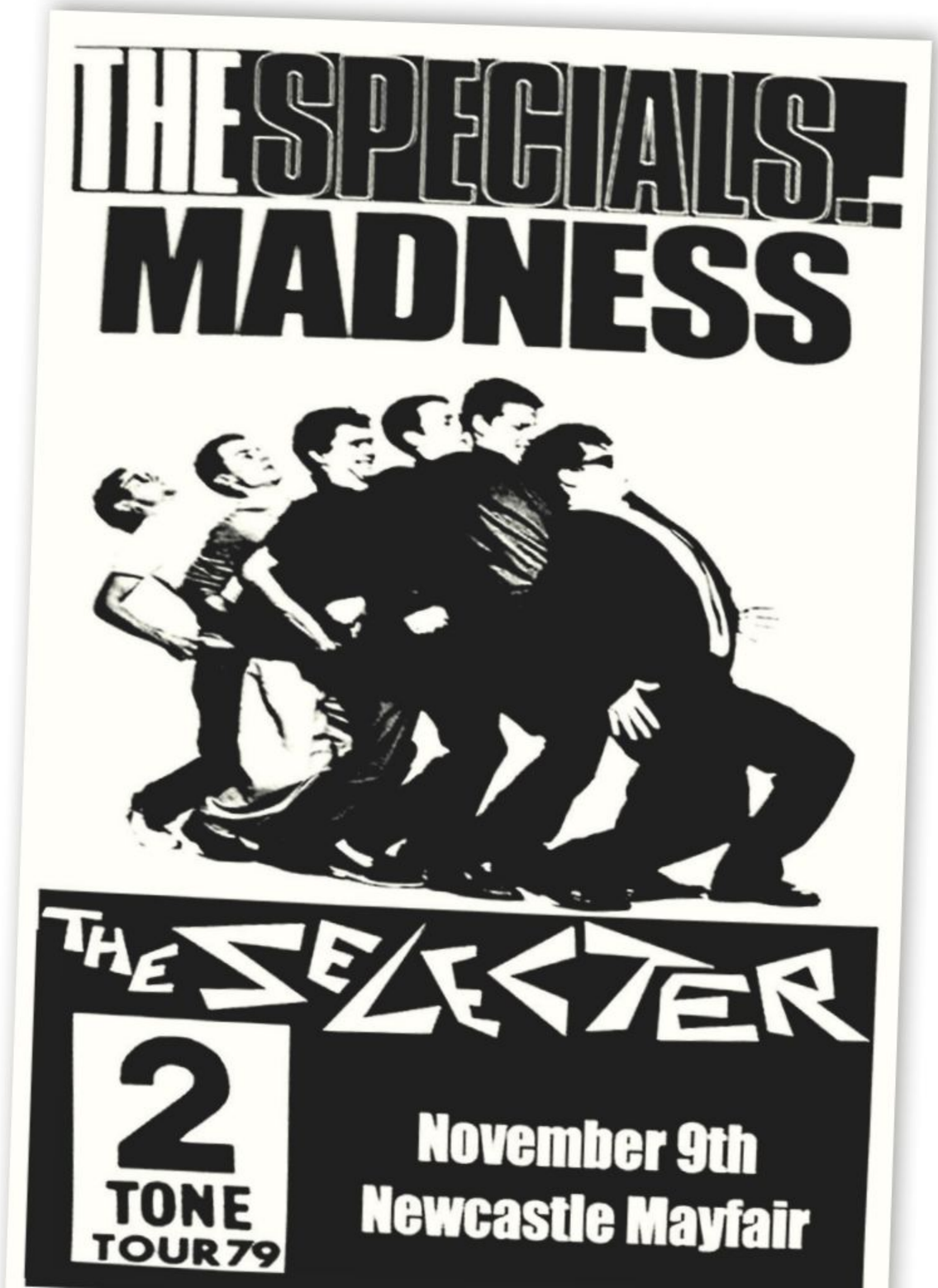
The sound of Madness is the sound of Kilburn & The High Roads spread over a ska-bluebeat background with the odd dash of vintage rock'n'roll and a sprinkling of the Small Faces' cockney humour.

It's all quite splendid fun. Entertaining, in a very laddish sort of way, it's the sound of drunken Saturday-night parties and heavy petting in the back of a Cortina and being sick on too much cider. It has a loutish swagger that can be endearing when it's not irritating. The humour is brittle, and a little bullying. It almost forces you to have a good time.

The audience allows its arm to be twisted without protest. The stage is assaulted. A few intrepid skins dance around the group. One attempts to snatch Thompson's sax. In the audience the skins are clambering upon each other's shoulders. On stage, Madness are playing "Swan Lake".

Blink! Now they're playing "Razor Alley", which goes straight into "Land Of Hope And Glory". "Madness" is an inevitable anthem. They close with "The Prince", which is really their "Sweet Gene Vincent", and come back for an ill-considered version of "Shop Around", which is really rather dreadful.

"Thanks. You're fuckin' wunnerful," shouts Suggs at the end, retreating before another berserk wave of delirious skins.



A PAIR OF LIME-GREEN socks vividly illuminated by the ultraviolet stage lights lets us know that The Specials are at last among us.

The socks belong to Jerry Dammers, and they are pumping up and down to a thrilling beat. The lights flare up and suddenly The Specials are coming at Brighton from all directions.

The front line is a frenetic blur of rushing bodies. Roddy Radiation, black leather porkpie nestling on blond spikes, guitar slung low, powers across the stage from one direction. And hello! Here comes Lynval Golding from the other direction. Squeezing himself »



Madness in 1979: (l–r) Mark Bedford, Dan Woodgate, Lee Thompson, Chris Foreman, Graham "Suggs" McPherson, Chas Smash and Mike Barson



between this hurricane rush, Neville Staples darts and hurries, his voice lost in his own slipstream. Terry Hall, meanwhile, stands at the microphone, intimidatingly gormless, as infuriatingly static as Rotten with the Pistols.

On their record, Elvis Costello has given The Specials a thin, urgent sound, mellowed occasionally by sparse brass arrangements. It was said by Specials aficionados to be untypical of the group's live sound. Whether the group has shifted its musical emphasis or not I can't say (this being the first time I'd seen them), but their performance is presently characterised by an unexpected harshness and bony aggression that reflects the album's spiked venom.

I'd expected a more mellifluous mood to dominate; a carefree rhythm that would seduce the feet and ease the heart. There was little of that at Brighton. The Specials were fierce and unsettling. The songs were nervous and intense; compelling and threatening rather than reassuring, a disquieting mixture of conflicting and contradictory emotions. If "It's Up To You" was compassionate and caring, "Rat Race" – a new song – was its antithesis; a spiteful, angry tirade.

For all its apparent chaos, The Specials' show is as choreographed and deliberately contrived as any rock act. Terry Hall baits the crowd, Neville Staples encourages them to reach out and invade the stage. He provides most of the spectacle, too; clambering up on the PA stacks, dangerously perching there as the speakers sway beneath him.

He becomes almost frighteningly possessed on stage, smacking over microphone stands, lunging at Hall and Golding, dancing into the crowd waving a pistol during "Gangsters". During "Little Bitch" – which was dedicated to one of the critics of their album – Staples sent his mic stand bouncing over the heads of the audience, who were surging back and forth like the Kop.

The group appeared to have been stung by the reviews of their album (though bassist Horace Panter and Dammers will claim that they think critics unimportant). Terry Hall, at least, was not prepared to let the evening pass without criticism of this paper.

"We didn't get "Elvis Costello to produce 'cos he's special or anything"

"The next song," he announced, introducing "Too Much Too Young" "is dedicated to the stupid cow who reviewed it in the *Melody Maker*..."

This remark rather incensed a platoon of ardent feminists who happened to be in the audience.

"What about the women's movement?" someone cried.

"They're all a lot of stupid slags, if you ask me," Mr Hall replied emphatically.

By now the audience was wound tighter than a corkscrew by The Specials' relentless attack. The vicious thrust of "Concrete Jungle" – during which Dammers vaulted over his organ, which was placed beside the drums on a second stage level above the rest of the band, and attacked Staples – provoked a brief outburst of fighting in the audience.

To escape the scrum, the audience began to clamber up onto the stage, and onto the speakers. Rico [Rodriguez] and Dick Cuthell, who'd come on for "Guns Of Navarone", were virtually swallowed by the mass of bodies.

The rest of the set was consumed by chaos.

By the time the band got around to playing "A Message To You, Rudy" (the first hint of real warmth in their performance), most of the audience appeared to be on stage with them. And those that weren't were dragging those that were off so that they could get on. Rico looked totally bemused, and hid under his woolly hat. (Suggs, who was at the side of the stage, later reported that Rico at one point turned despairingly to the wings and complained. "I can't play me trombone with these people bouncing up an' down," he cried.

As the group fought their way off stage through this thoroughly demented rabble, microphones were wrestled from the hands of roadies. Skins shouted slogans, punks replied. There was the most awful racket, and through the hysterical cacophony there bellowed the strident voice of an indignant feminist.

"Come back and explain yourselves!" she demanded of The Specials. "Don't applaud these fascists!" she roared at the audience.

The Specials were having none of it. They were off.

Our intrepid suffragettes were not to be put off so easily, however. They waited for Terry Hall to emerge from hiding and proceeded to give him

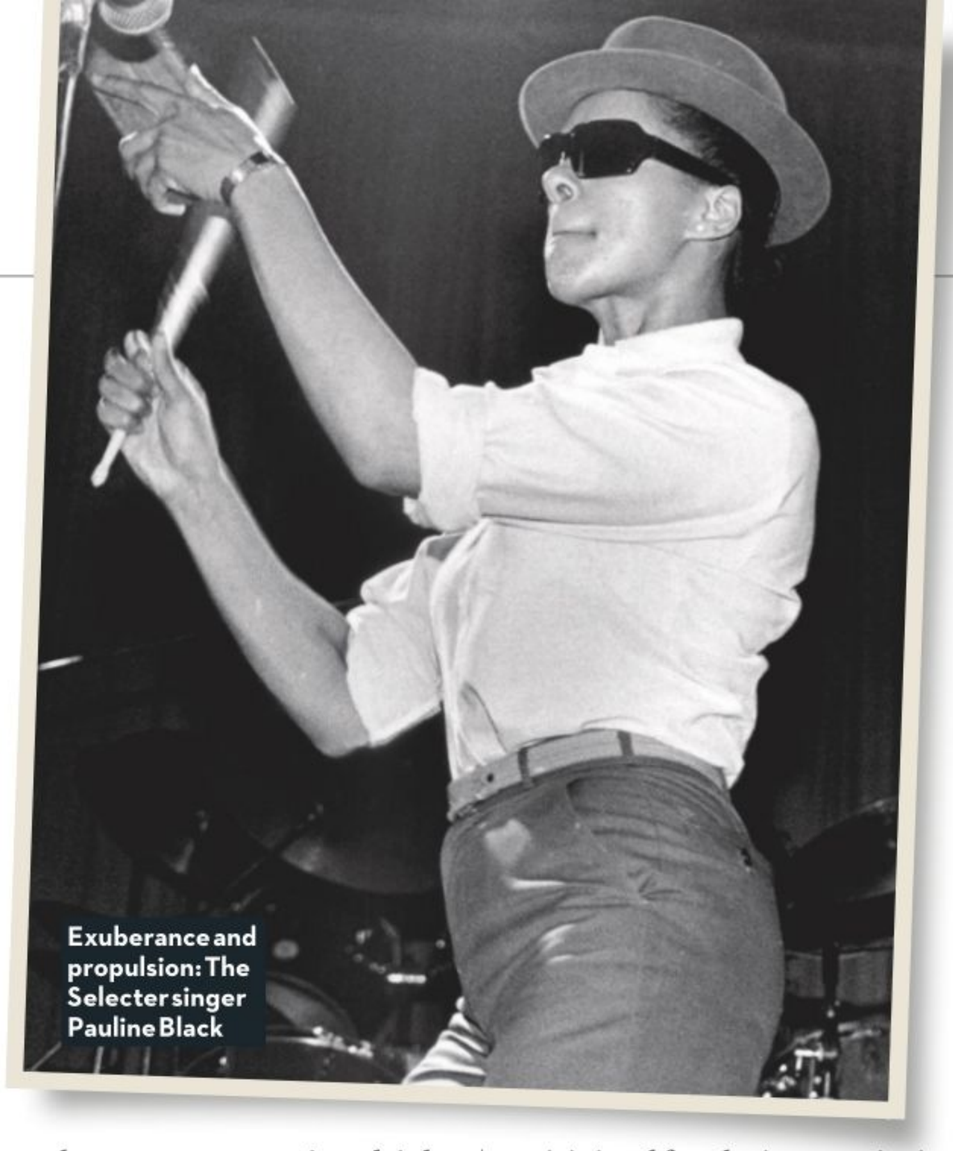
VIRGINIA TURBETT / GETTY (2)

a royal ear bashing, reproving him for his utterly sexist attitude. They stood there in their frocks and hiking boots, lecturing him on his reactionary views and lack of insight into the feminine psyche.

Jerry Dammers was standing behind the unfortunate Hall. He looked spellbound by the feminists.

The ringleader stared at him. "And what have you got to say for yourself?" she demanded. Dammers looked at her, grinning gummily.

"Would you like to come to a party with me?" he asked.



Exuberance and propulsion: The Selecter singer Pauline Black

THE SECOND GIG of the 2-Tone Tour was at the Oasis Leisure Centre in Swindon. The Oasis reeked of chlorine, from the swimming pool which is housed in the same complex as the sports arena in which the bands played.

The arena was cold, dispiriting and depressing. The evening was an uncomfortable success, the audience reacting with a curiously spineless enthusiasm. The Selecter benefitted from a better mix, but Madness were afflicted by a hollow balance that seemed to flatten all their attempts to carry the audience away with them. The Specials, after the exhilaration and tension of Brighton, seemed muted. The hysteria seemed to have gone out of their performance. It was probably a better show musically, but it lacked the wild drama of the opening night.

To dampen the spirits even more, we were confronted at the Brest Motel by a manager who refused to serve us drinks.

"Come back, Sandy Richardson, all is forgiven," moaned Steve English.

JERRY DAMMERS MAKES his point quickly and succinctly. "I don't like doing interviews," he says, as we lounge amid the lurid decor of a bar in the Stateside Centre in Bournemouth.

Dammers is a curious figure. He is clearly the principal inspiration of The Specials: his songs constitute most of the album, and it was his ambition that first brought them to national attention on The Clash On Parole tour, having talked Bernie Rhodes into allowing them on the bill.

"What Jerry wants, Jerry usually gets," says Horace Panter, attesting to Dammers' determination. For all this, however, Dammers is a distant figure. He doesn't relax easily in front of the tape recorder, although he becomes more voluble later when it's packed away. His conversation is fragmented and meandering.

What concerns him most is The Specials. He defends them fiercely against most criticisms. He replies with bitterness to some of the reviews of their first album, particularly those that accused the group of resting too complacently on the praise that swung their way after the success of "Gangsters". With similar zeal he dismisses those who consider The Specials to have sold out by signing 2-Tone to Chrysalis.

The group has retained its autonomy, he insists. Chrysalis is working for The Specials; The Specials aren't working for Chrysalis. (Nevertheless, Chrysalis are underwriting the current tour at a cost of £53,000.) Their deal with Chrysalis allows them to record 15 singles a year by any bands they might sign to 2-Tone. Of that 15, Chrysalis are obliged to release 10 records.

He is as equally determined to defend Costello's production of The Specials' album, which has come in for a bashing from some quarters. He finds it difficult to understand why the group should be criticised for their association with him.

"He was just someone who liked us and wanted to do the album. It's not as if we chased him 'cos he's famous or anything. We never thought of it like that… He just came to all our bookings. No one else did. He said he liked the band and asked if he could produce us. We all got on with him, and he got on with the job.

"It's amazing, you know… people come up to you and say, 'Well – what's he like as a bloke?' And he's just a normal bloke, that's all. Elvis Costello is no one special. We didn't get him to produce the album because he's special or anything. He just wanted to do it and we thought why not? It could have been anybody."

The conversation continues for a while, but gets nowhere specific. Dammers begins to fidget and looks as if he wants to get away.

"I don't think I have anything to say, really," he says at one point. "I just think that people should hear the music on the radio or on record – or they should come to see us… and then they can make up their own minds about what we're doing…"

He points in the general direction of the stage.

"Up there," he says. "That's where it really happens."

WHAT'S HAPPENING UP there now is The Selecter. And tonight they've got it right.

Pauline's voice is more clearly defined (though it still gets lost at times in the general assault). Gappa is more controlled and decisive and the band plays with a genuine explosiveness, reaching a peak of galvanising power on "The Selecter", with Neol Davies' spindly, metallic guitar lines forcing a passage through the thick layers of rhythm and percussion, and the final number, "Street Feeling".

The exuberance and propulsion of The Selecter's set virtually overwhelms the rest of the evening. Neither Madness nor The Specials are particularly helped by the sauna-like conditions of the Stateside Centre. The audience is packed in a dancing mass in front of the stage, trapped beneath a low ceiling. There's virtually no oxygen left in the building by the time the entire cast (with the exception of Pauline, who's jiving behind the mixing desk) joins The Specials for a riotous "Skinhead Moonstomp".

Backstage, the Specials flake out in their dressing room, their energy utterly spent. Horace has collapsed against a wall in the corridor. His face is as pale as a winter moon; his cheeks are hollow, his eyes glazed. His shirt has been ripped open, and lies across his stomach like a damp rag. His trousers are rolled up to the knees.

He pushes back his straw trilby and groans. "Oh, well," he says. "Three down. Only another 37 to go." *Allan Jones* •



The Specials' keyboards player and main songwriter Jerry Dammers on stage in London, 1979

CLARE MULLER / GETTY



John Lydon: still coming to terms with his recent legend and distant past

ALBUMS REVIEW 1979

ALBUMS

Public Image Ltd Metal Box VIRGIN

Like most ex-Catholics, John Lydon betrays a contemptuous rejection of childhood religion which is about equal to the guilt he feels in purging himself of it. Because the church's teachings are so deeply instilled at an early age, breaking away is hard to do – and, once done, it's never clean and often bitter. The struggle to stay free of Catholicism's pernicious influence is tough, and it's one that's affecting Lydon still, judging by the underlying themes of *Metal Box*.

Even in the Sex Pistols, an innate moralism showed through, particularly in "Bodies", while the cutting of ties with demigod McLaren and all the Pistols represented later gave birth to the rigorously anti-commercial, almost puritanical adventurousness of *Public Image*. The first single, clean and tuneful, struck the first blow against Pistolian expectations; then, just as they were warming to it, the debut album threw them off the trail again, with its harsh, jarring noises and rambling, uneven structures. Purging his Pistol past went hand in hand with the blunt but blistering attacks on the church in "Religion" and, more obliquely, "Annalisa", themes continued in the recent single, "Memories" – which is included in *Metal Box*.

Despite its novel and costly packaging, nothing about the album/collection is surprising; everything here has a precedent. But then, Lydon has always planted clues. This time, it's more straightforward – *Metal Box* is simply a progression from and a perfection of *Public Image*.

The basic thrust comes from a driving, single-minded drumbeat and Wobble's wanderings to and from the forefront of the mix. Keith Levene alternately attacks and tacks on raggedly spiky guitar, which occasionally spirals excitedly around the sound, other times dropping in and out. Ditto Lydon, whose voice and words have you straining to catch what he's saying.

His voice is almost unrecognisable when it first appears with a drawled "*sloooww moottioon*" at the start of track one, "Albatross". Sounding like an ill Jim Morrison, he expands at length on the *Ancient Mariner* metaphor, "*getting rid off the albatross*" from around his neck, which is his past: "*Sowing the seeds of discontent*"; and "*Kill the spirit of '68*" and running away from it – "*will not forgive/I know you very well/Run away, run away/Should I run away*" (I think). An amazing entrance, finishing after 10 minutes with a mocking but relevant "*only the lonely*" warble.

The other side of the first 45 is taken up by the two singles, "Memories" and "Swan Lake" – better known as "Death Disco" – the second being a slightly different mix. As "Death Disco"'s seven-inch flip, "No Birds" is included later, *Metal Box* comes more expensive than you might have thought.

Nevertheless, they still sound quite magnificent. "Memories" is noteworthy in this context, Lydon's sharp and sad recollections questioning the infallibility of his guardians: "*You make me feel ashamed.*" And, later, "*What's in the past/Can never last.*"

"Poptones", opening the second record, builds on a jangling guitar feature, which Levene might have lifted from an old Byrds' middle-eight, kicked along from beneath by Wobble's skittering, spidery runs. The song undermines conventional pop subject matter by revealing the skull beneath its cosmetised skin: "*Can't forget the impression you made/You made a hole in the back of my head.*"

"Careering" and "The Suit" observe – less interestingly but more plainly – conventional ambition, the first asking "*Is this living?*", while the second could be a Ray Davies song.

The third 45's "Bad Baby" has Lydon warning people to stay clear of external influences in a song riddled with childhood's fear of the bogeyman – in this case I'd guess he means the holy mysteries: "*Someone is calling/Don't you listen/Ignore it and it'll go away.*" The use of synthesizers is not unlike Hawkwind's.

The final side is 12 minutes devoted to the extraordinary murk of "Socialist/Chant/Radio 4". Wobble surpasses himself with menacing rumbles that accompany train-time drumming and a scratchy, bleeping guitar. Lydon strays in with some offhand lines which seem humorous in light of the title: "*I don't know why I bother/There's nothing in it for me/The more I see the less I get/The likes of you and me can embarrass facts,*" all whined out in his best Albert Steptoe voice against an obscured staccato chant of "*Love/War/Kill/Hate*" (that's another guess), replaced later by the simpler "*Chant*" chant. The latter is taken up by an organ for the closing instrumental passage, pinned down by Wobble's earthy playing. Hushed and reverential, it fleetingly hits an almost Wagnerian splendour in a rough sort of way, making for an eccentric finish.

Yet the album as a whole isn't particularly eccentric when related to PiL's own history. They've doggedly followed an independent line, but that doesn't necessarily mean they're going to surprise us every time. It'd be nice if they did, but, for the present, *Metal Box* gives us time to catch up with their continuing obsessions and Lydon's revealing passions: the flirtation with his own legend, and his need to come to terms with both that and his more distant past. And if that prospect doesn't excite you, then I don't know what will.

Chris Bohn, MM Nov 24

Gang Of Four Entertainment! EMI

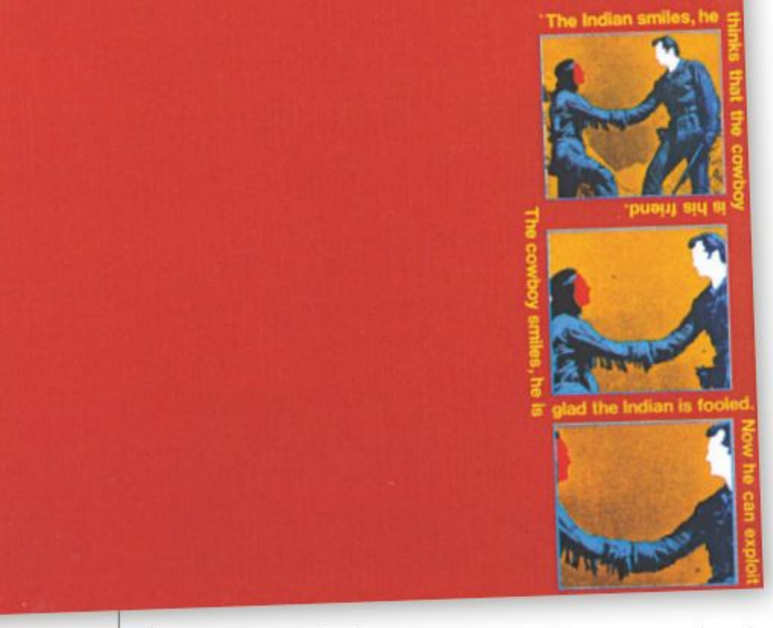
Enveloped as we seem to be by such backward times, Gang Of Four could hardly have picked a more awkward moment to foist their collectivist approach on the not-so-open market. Rock's recent cultural revolution has bred new legions of consumers; it has also never seemed further away.

Gang Of Four were born in the thick of it, a cross-breed of the possibilities suggested by Wilko Johnson's furious, coarse noise and the cry for fresh expression. They rose to this call, and met the challenge with primitive zeal. Mix up this metaphor by stirring in some earnest, but hardly serious, convictions about the nature of society (not "politics", please... they're artists) and that, give or take the exact dates, is Gang Of Four.

Nowadays I leave my objectivity at the door when they're in town. Such critical baggage is a distraction from the most



PHOTOSHOT



heavyweight live attraction on the planet. Yet it was difficult, alas, not to notice Gang Of Four underestimating the intelligence of their audience last time around, trying to impress them with strobe lights (the poor man's laser beam) and unnecessarily under-selling their already powerful and individual character.

If Gang Of Four want to reduce themselves to the standard rock level it's well within their power to be, one day, as big and irrelevant as Led Zeppelin. They're that good, if you like – and they know it. The exclamation mark after their album's title is there to emphasise the irony.

The sleeve has trouble reconciling itself to this. On the front, a little koan illustrated in situationist style. Koans are a type of Oriental epigram. Gang Of Four's songs are a bit like koans: flat, brief truths with a sting in their tale. They're not always pearls, but I feel we are meant to nod wisely.

Anyhow, the cover reads: "The Indian smiles, he thinks the cowboy is his friend. The cowboy smiles, he is glad the Indian thinks he is his friend. Now he can exploit him." Substitute Gang Of Four for Indian and EMI for cowboy and you have Gang Of Four getting coy and self-conscious about their position.

Progress to the inner sleeve and you find it splattered with the blood that the media desensitises us to. Down in the corner is a number: EMC 3313. Entertainment by Gang Of Four. Questions about the value of information transmitted by communication systems, and the corrupting nature of those systems, are raised, and raised again in "5.45", and left hanging...

They don't want to be too didactic, but they want to stir our consciousness; to provoke rather than politicise. This is agit-pop soft sell – sometimes it works and at other times it doesn't. The Pop Group made the mistake of thinking people would persevere with their cyphers because they thought they were important. Gang Of Four are skating around the same ice. Their lack of lyrical directness sometimes fuddles the issues of the songs. Paradoxically they can cut across with tremendous emotional clarity, but then you're left with the issue unresolved, which is what they seem to want. As far as it goes it's great, but it goes so far and then doesn't get there. If they were less self-conscious they just might.

In the light of which, there's little point in taking issue with the opening cut's ambiguous flirting with images of Britain's use of habeas corpus in Northern Ireland. "Ether" barely arouses the ire of their bipartisan plea for sanity in that vestige of empire on the Fast Product EP *Armalite Rifle*. But its stuttering pulse and machine-gun rhythm guitar preface what follows: an album-long burst of hard, compulsive rock action, which, though less accomplished than Joy Division's *Unknown Pleasures*, stacks up alongside in terms of potential.

There are six cuts a side, held in place by a production, by Gang Of Four and associates, that drips cold sweat; clear, raw and underdone to a turn. Six of the stones they throw won't shatter the windows in anybody's house, but the other six could. They are:

"Natural's Not In it", running on tracks laid down by the Magic Band on *Clear Spot* that allow Jon King to work up a head of steam about the devaluation of human relationships; "Not Great Men", running on the same tracks, with King's deliberately drab voice burying his words in Gang Of Four's naked arrangements; "Damaged Goods", which you really ought to know by now; "Guns Before Butter", which shows how good they can be at baring a common emotion; "Essence Rare" with a stanza about the Bikini atoll H-bomb tests that lent its name to the two-piece swimsuit invented the same year and an otherwise obscure lyric redeemed by the Gang's beguiling way with a bracing tune; and finally "Glass", ditto as for "Essence Rare".

Without dwelling on the details, Gang Of Four better watch their pretensions, or they will end up in the same place as Wire, communicating with only their egos. That's part of the reason why I'm being so churlish. Like Wire's first album, in more ways than one, *Entertainment!* is a landmark for post-punk horizons. It's rock revision. Take a fresh look. *Paul Rambali, NME Oct 6*

SINGLES REVIEW 1979


The Slits: (l-r) Palmolive, Viv Albertine, Tessa Pollitt and Ari Up

SINGLES

Pink Floyd Another Brick In The Wall Part 2 HARVEST

A decade's rolled by without Pink Floyd releasing a single in Britain for reasons beyond me (probably something to do with the old myth linking selling out with chart success). So it's nice to know they're aware of the switch in emphasis and further that they've been listening to the radio. Because "Another Brick In The Wall" is a great modern single, described aptly by Ian Birch as "an elegant Sham 69 record". Floyd characteristics are there – ominous guitar/keyboards themes, this time fired by a scratchy guitar figure, sardonic "people's voice" singing and a smooth, homogenised production – all effectively streamlined in keeping with the times. The song is an anti-educational rant, the lyrics are playfully illiterate and the killer punch comes when the children's choir is brought in to sneer its way through the chorus, upending the seasonal tradition of cutesy kiddy novelty records. Kids haven't been used so effectively since Lou Reed's *Berlin*. The flip's an oddity called "One Of My Turns", where a taped conversation leads the song into a metallic romp. *MM Nov 24*

Cockney Rejects I'm Not A Fool EMI

I'm not convinced, but I'm not about to argue with the rollicking wall of noise established by the band and produced by Jimmy Pursey. Strangely, the shouted staccato vocals are reminiscent of Poly Styrene. Brash and exciting. *MM Nov 24*

The Slits Typical Girls ISLAND

The Slits come third only to Viv "Spend, Spend, Spend" Nicholson and Britt Ekland in the "I Do Absolutely Nothing But I Do It In The Newspapers" championship stakes. Their single on Island rolls along without causing a fuss, earning them the accursed "alright" verdict once again. It does have a fetching piano in it, though. Erm, er, ah... that's about it really, just another album track bunged out for a single. The other side of "Typical Girls" is a version of "Heard It Through The Grapevine" done in a reggae sauce, or rather overdone, and is one of the most ham-fisted cover-versions of any song anywhere. Just the thing for those waiting to hear Joyce Grenfell fronting The Flying Lizards and produced by Denis Bovell. *NME Oct 6*

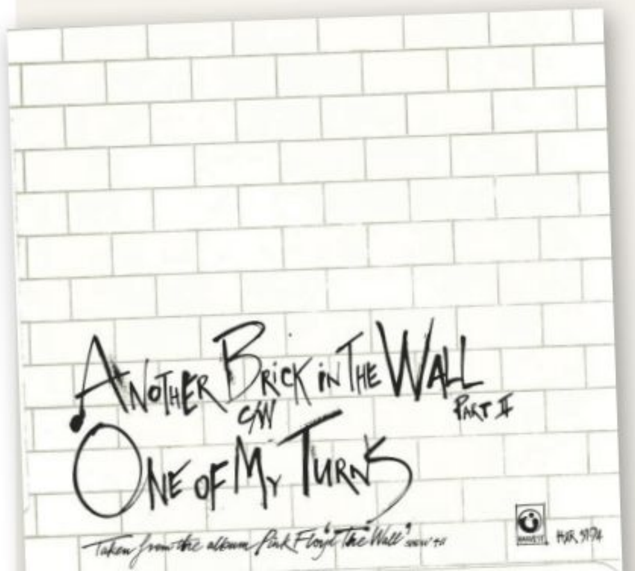


The Police Walking On The Moon A&M

Perversely, this is actually the one Sting vocal performance I actually like, though this peculiarly empty song, based around a stalking bass figure, probably wasn't a smart choice as a single. *MM Nov 24*

Sex Pistols Rock Around The Clock VIRGIN

A messy, half-baked heavy-rock anthem that – surprise – never takes off. Cool for prats. *NME Oct 6*



RAY STEVENSON / REX

1979

OCTOBER–DECEMBER



February 17, 1979: on stage at the New York Palladium during their first US tour, and following a support set from Bo Diddley, The Clash open with "I'm So Bored With The USA"

“Desperation – I recommend it”

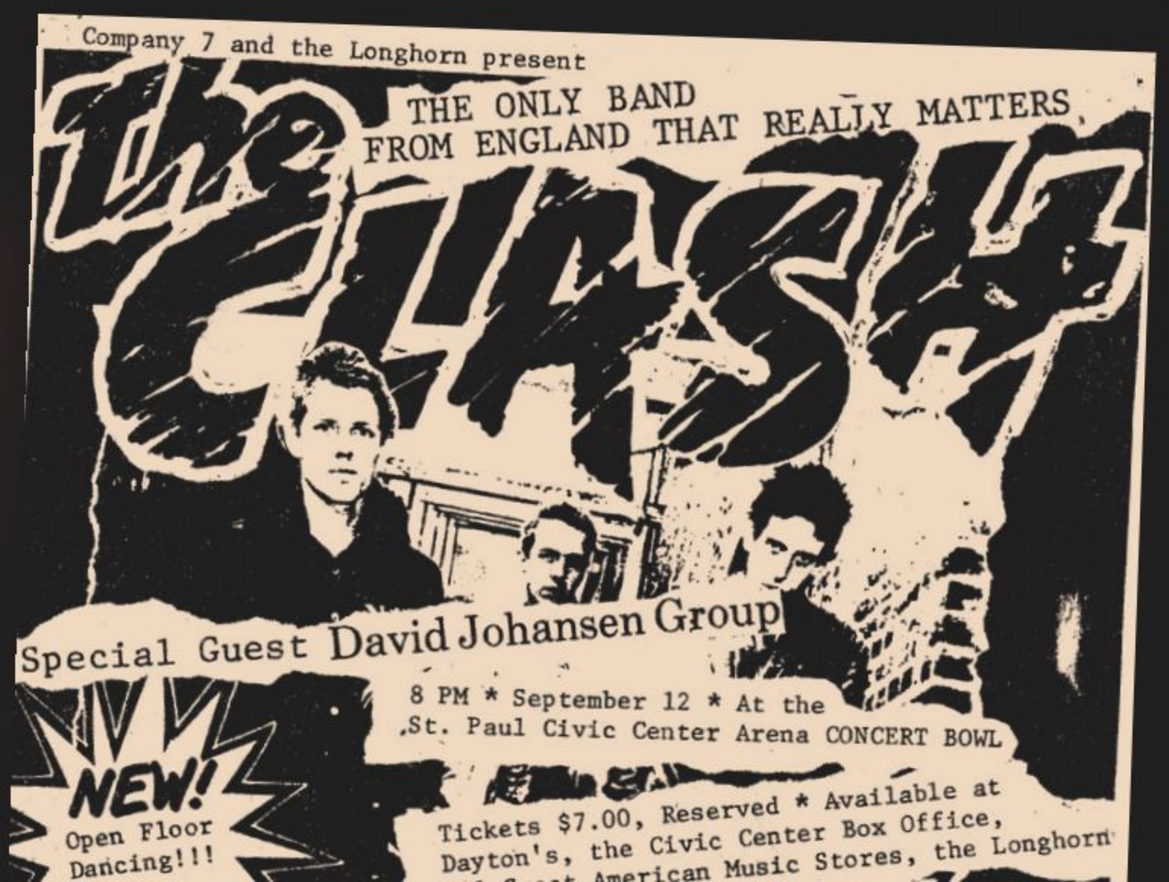
With their backs to the wall, THE CLASH rise to the challenge – and deliver *London Calling*. Discussions now include: “pokey” lyrics, bat piss, and why in the war against the “grey *neu* musik” a band must have swing and soul.

— MELODY MAKER DECEMBER 29 —

INSIDE THE CLASH’S new rehearsal studio, under a railway bridge somewhere in South London, Joe Strummer is singing a slow country blues about rolling boxcars, twisting his head way down under to reach a low mic, perched next to an electric piano. To his right, Mick Jones, dressed in black shirt, vest and trousers, looking like a maverick from a Western B-movie, messes around with a bottleneck; while to his left Paul Simonon slouches on a bar stool, as if posing for the silhouette logo on *Top Of The Pops*. Behind them, Topper Headon drops an occasional beat to throw drumsticks for his dog.

This is the new Clash, relaxed and unfettered by the chains – or “bullshit”, as Joe would have it – with which some would bind them to their past. They will later worry about the lack of work they’re getting done, but undoubtedly the music will be as tough and as tight as it ever was by the time they reach the stage in January. By then, their attack will be strengthened by an influx of new songs from their third album, *London Calling*, which showcases an ardent, much younger-sounding band, for the first time allowing itself the expression of a full range of emotions, rather than just those sentiments we all wanted to hear. The sound is exhilarating, jumping from the loping, lightweight “Jimmy Jazz” to the swinging political punch of “Clampdown”, the “white trash” reggae of “Lover’s Rock” and the upstart rocking “I’m Not Down” or “Hateful”.

The songs’ source-material is rock’n’roll, old movies, Raymond Chandler, anything – not just personal experiences or responses, which limited the scope of *The Clash* and *Give ’Em Enough Rope*. Those albums were necessarily narrow, pushing forward the punk message. But life goes on, things change, people grow, and in doing so The Clash »



ROBERTA BAYLEY / GETTY



February 1979: (l–r) Mick Jones, Paul Simonon, Topper Headon and Joe Strummer in Monterey, California, during the six-date Pearl Harbour '79 Tour

GEORGE ROSE / GETTY

have broken out gloriously from their own confines. They've learnt from their mistakes, which were many, and today they're far more cautious in what they say off the record, friendly and helpful, without volunteering the "good copy" they used to deliver, and which they've been forced to live down ever since.

"The trouble is, the newspaper men have forgotten why humans like music," says Strummer. "It's like the fairy tale, when people forget the basic thing because they're too involved with the bullshit. And that's the moral of this fairy tale – they can't see the wood for the trees any more.

"We're just a group and we release records, and that's the face of the situation, but people think they've got to swallow all the bullshit with it. That's why I thought 'Blind Date', which you used to have in your paper (*MM* used to carry single reviews by a guest musician who wasn't allowed to see the label or the artist's name before passing comment) was so good, because the reviewer had to judge it on the tune and the beat – what it should be judged on, you know, not what kind of trousers he's got on."

Easy to say that now, but The Clash – with or without Bernie Rhodes, whom they've acknowledged as being important in establishing the political character of the band at the beginning – formed the blueprint for the whole movement of socio-political punk bands, and thrived on confrontation at all levels: with authority, with their record company (CBS), and with their public – the last category perhaps still to come.

The Clash coming clean will shock those harbouring illusions about them being frontline troops, though the band began the whole mobile-guerilla-unit thing themselves. Even on the new album, on "Spanish Bombs", Strummer glamorises the "artists at war" image.

"I got that from reading – Orwell and people like that," he says. "It's been pretty well covered. But me, I've gone through my *Starsky And Hutch* stage. If there was another one, I don't think I'd rush out there and get in the front line. Who lives by the gun dies by the gun – never was a truer word said."

The emphasis has shifted. The Clash still shoulder responsibilities, like making sure the songs are right and the band are fit to play them and to give their all on stage: "It ain't like sitting on a stool; it's about 300 times more physical than that. I'm now 27 and it's something you gotta learn by the time you're 25, that before then your body doesn't keep a record of what you do to it. After that you get real sick, sort of burning the candle at both ends – especially doing the stuff we do. All this junkie he's-so-out-of-it rock'n'roll stuff doesn't appeal to me at all. That's the easy way out, you know?"

He adds: "I wrote 'Rudie Can't Fail' about some mates who were drinking [Carlsberg Special] Brew for breakfast. They think nothing of it. Me, I'm past the stage where I can. I can drink Brew for breakfast, but not every day, and that's what made me notice them. I thought it was a hell of a way to start a day."

> "Our ability has widened slightly. You gotta learn..."

Their commitment comes in the positive exuberance of the songs, concentration on getting the basics right and helping people in the most direct way they know – cutting the price of the album to the minimum. Eighteen tracks for £5, as the ad goes. Most of them worth having, too.

Ironically, bearing in mind the music's healthy vitality, The Clash were at their lowest when they began planning *London Calling*. Reeling from expensive court hearings, extricating themselves from former manager Bernie Rhodes, then leaving his successor, Caroline Coon, The Clash were going through a radical reappraisal of their whole approach.

First, they took control of their management, only recently relinquishing it to Blackhill Enterprises when they had the album in the can, because "we didn't wanna spend all day on the phone". But they were at rock bottom, and desperately needed to find a way out. Says Strummer: "Economically, we were really tight at the time. This album woulda been our last shot, never mind if we didn't have the spirit for it, which we did.

"I don't know why, but the problem seemed to relax us, the feeling that nothing really mattered any more, that it was make-or-break time.

"Desperation. I'd recommend it. We thought of this idea to create the £2 wall of sound, by recording it on two Teac recorders to keep the costs low, so we could release it cheap. Then the music would have to be fucking good to cover this fucking insanity. We just said to ourselves that we'd never put out a Clash album for six quid.

"But to do that, we knew we'd have to pay for the recording costs ourselves, otherwise CBS woulda told us to fuck off and sent us another list of debts when we asked them to put it out cheap."

They got CBS to agree to the lowest price category, which would also cover a free 12-inch single; they played a festival in Finland – "It was good

dough and would pay for the recording costs at Wessex Studios," says Strummer – and recorded between May and August.

"We gave CBS 20 tracks and told them to put eight on the 12-inch single. They freaked out, so we said, 'Look, make it a fiver', and against my expectations they agreed to put it out as a double album. I'd say it was our first real victory over CBS."

MORE IMPORTANT, THE double-album format allowed them to keep lighter, nonsensical tracks, like the free-ranging "Jimmy Jazz" or the misunderstood "Lover's Rock", alongside more conventional Clash songs like "Clampdown", "Hateful" and "Death Or Glory". "Jimmy Jazz" is The Clash at their most relaxed, working out on a bluesy tune, with Strummer scatting along, taking more care with his voice than the words:

"What started me thinking is that it's not only the message, but the way it's said. So a piece of nonsense can have a powerful meaning to me. Like, you know, '*Well, they all call me Speedo / But my real name is Mr Earl.*' But in this post-Dylan age, if you unleashed that on the political critics, they'd go 'tedious nonsense', whereas in fact it's the greatest thing that ever walked the earth along with all the other things."

Mick Jones begins miming Gene Vincent doing "Be-Bop-A-Lula" and Strummer continues: "Like, I saw that TV programme when they were taking the piss on a panel show, by reading out the lyrics of '*Be-bop-a-lula, she's my baby / Be-bop-a-lula, I don't mean maybe.*' They didn't understand that it's Gene Vincent and that's it – the meaning of life is revealed immediately (*laughs*).

"But I put a lot of thought into the whole process of writing lyrics. Some days, I just can't see the point, and then I get worried because it's the only thing I've been solely preoccupied with for I-don't-know-how-many years."

Strummer's at his most passionate these days talking about method rather than content, except in a rather extraordinary defence of "Lover's Rock". It's a song I'd considered lightweight before he volunteered, out of the blue, his reasons for writing it, opening up a whole new area previously left uncovered by The Clash. He says that the song's based on *The Tao Of Love And Sex*, which is about "the Chinese way of fucking. A lot of people in the Western Hemisphere have problems. No one really wants to talk about this kind of thing, but it's very common, especially with boys turning into men – you get some great bird and fuck it up, right? This song mainly tries to tell you how to do it properly. It goes: '*You western man, you're free with your seed / When you make lovers rock / But whoops there goes the strength you need – to make real cool lovers rock.*'

"Another thing" he adds. "It's about how you can have a good time without her either having to take the pill or have a baby. The pill leads to dreadful depressions with some girls. Taking the pill every day, sometimes getting fat and they don't know why, and that makes them feel worse.

"I mean, I was a dwarf when I was younger, grew to my normal size later on, but before then I had to fight my way through school. Anyway, that's why I wrote the song, even though it's a bit of a touchy subject. I don't agree with the pill at all. Then you got the Pope saying Catholics can't take it…"

Strange: The Clash, musically closer than ever to the rock'n'roll mainstream, moving further away in their concerns. Strummer does deflate his explanation somewhat, though, saying, "The song is, kind of, having a laugh, too."

In retrospect, *Give 'Em Enough Rope* was more of a mistake of execution, Sandy Pearlman succeeding only in diminishing The Clash's passion, without playing up their force. It just doesn't compare with Guy Stevens' more sympathetic, less obtrusive job on *London's Calling*.

Strummer remarks on the difference: "Guy is that private thing called an X-factor. He comes in and grabs me by the throat and says, 'I deal with emotions', and that's it. He doesn't deal with knobs or whatever else producers deal with. He's very off-the-wall, and he understands the spontaneity of the moment – priceless. If you can get that moment when you play a song just so in front of a tape machine, you got a million dollars. He understands that.

"Sandy's just a knob-twiddler. Well, not even that – he oversees others twiddling knobs. But Guy Stevens no longer knows what a machine is, only that it's a means to an end, while Pearlman half-knows that, but he's not sure. He's too obsessed with the machinery of it. He's kinda forgotten that it's only there to give us some soul."

The myth-making of "Guns On The Roof", "All The Young Punks" and "Last Gang In Town" indicated that the band were taking themselves and their history a bit too seriously in those days. Strummer counters: "Yeah, that was another stream of bat piss, you know? But I think sometimes you need to do that. We like to gee ourselves up a bit, but it's not strictly serious, like 'Last Gang' wasn't anything to do with us at all. I never for one minute imagined that we were the last gang in town, but the fact it was one of our song titles became a handy headline for newspaper editors.

"In fact, I was taking the piss out of violence by inventing a mythical gang. Every day I was hearing about a new gang: first the Teds, then the punks – then they were fighting – then the rockabilly Teds and the zydeco kids, who were rumoured to wear straw cowboy hats and Doc Martens covered in cement. All this was at the height of the violence, an' I came across it lots of times. I just wanted to take the piss, you know? So we invented this mythical gang, like: 'Boy, you better come running, because here's the last gang in town.'"

Less interesting were the continually publicised clashes with CBS, the remote-control/complete-control games that still go on, but now they don't talk about them so much: "Hmm. I must agree it's not the point at all, fighting record companies. It's a waste of time, but with 'Complete Control' I thought strongly about it, and the phrase kept cropping up everywhere after we seized on it, so I think, looking back, it was worth latching on to."

Strummer today is more pragmatic, less prone to lash out at easy targets. Mick Jones is the same. In casual conversation he's friendly and open. When he drifts in on the interview, he contents himself with a few quips or corrections. He'd rather continue the rehearsal that the meeting has interrupted. With both, some subjects are taboo. The Clash film, for instance, which they're adamant won't be released. No further comment. On the band's past political involvement, Strummer tends to sidestep questions by talking about the medium rather than the message.

He says: "I personally like a pokey lyric, because unless there's something really good about it, it bores me to hear about jealousy and straight heterosexual complaining songs. Unless, say, it's Chrissie Hynde – I wouldn't care what she's singing. Her voice is the sweetening to the pill. But unless it's someone like that, I prefer a pokey lyric – by which I mean a lyric covered in barbed wire.

"Look, we're just trying to do the best we know how. Our ability has widened slightly. Ya gotta learn, ain't ya? You wake up the next day and know there's more to be done, and carry on hoping that you won't make the same mistakes. You gotta keep your eyes open.

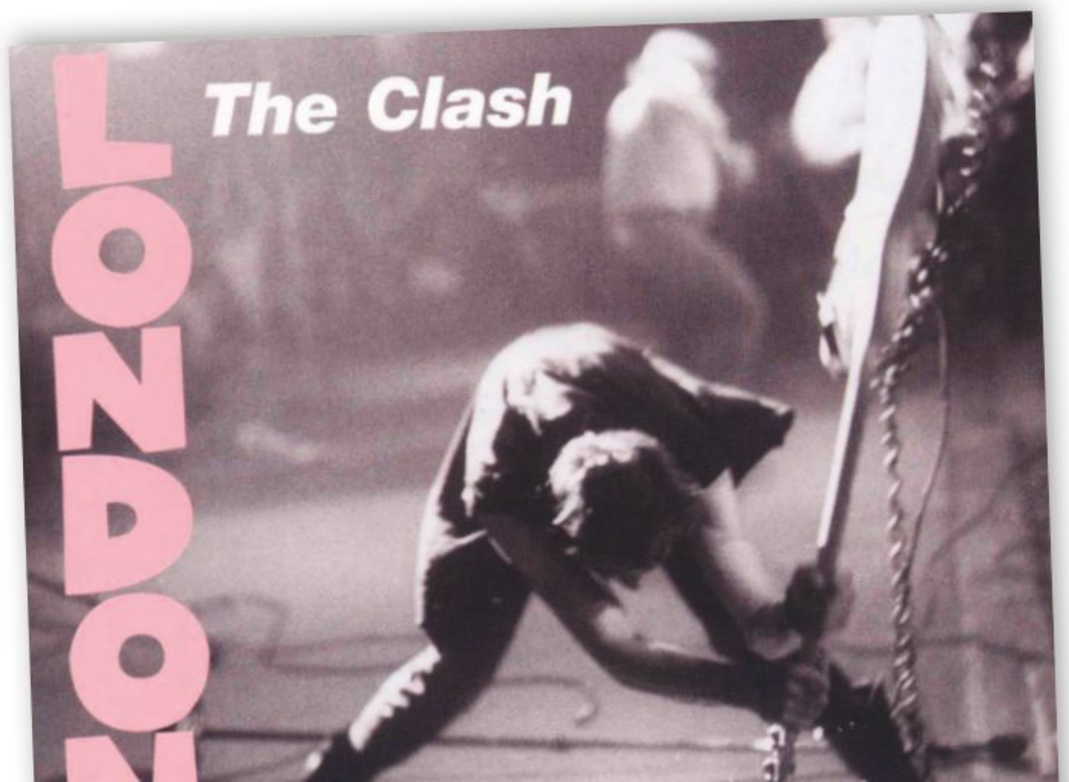
"Another thing I'm fed up with," Strummer adds, getting more animated, "if you don't mind me saying so, and that's calling the kettle black – (*singing low, deadpan*): '*It's a shitty situation / A lot of mess today / It's a shitty situation.*' What I'm trying to say is one step beyond. I hope we've gone through that stage.

"Listening to all this cold, grey brave-new-world musik – with a K – you know, I wouldn't play it to a cage of hamsters. It wouldn't do them any good. It doesn't do me any good. What we're trying to do is make some music. It's just, you know, the sound of finger-clicking. You know what I mean? This is out of place in the modern world. It's bullshit, the new kind of bullshit, and it's just as well to spot it when you can, otherwise you follow it like sheep.

"Like, there we were in '71 following Emerson, Lake & Palmer to the brink of disaster, but luckily everybody snapped out of it. I don't like this *neu* pop musik, because it just ain't got swing, or soul.

"Dogma?" he continues. "We kind of need that stuff, but we ain't gonna set it to lifeless, cold, grey music, because we realise there's no point in trying to get a message across unless it's somehow sweet – so that your unconscious will reach out to it.

"Anyway, we always tried to play just as good as we could. What we play now is what we can do. It wouldn't be fair to do ranting music, because we've mastered a time-change. We can play in another rhythm. So there's just no point. We do a bit of ranting, just to keep it up, but we don't do it all the time. We do something now which we couldn't do before." *Chris Bohn* •



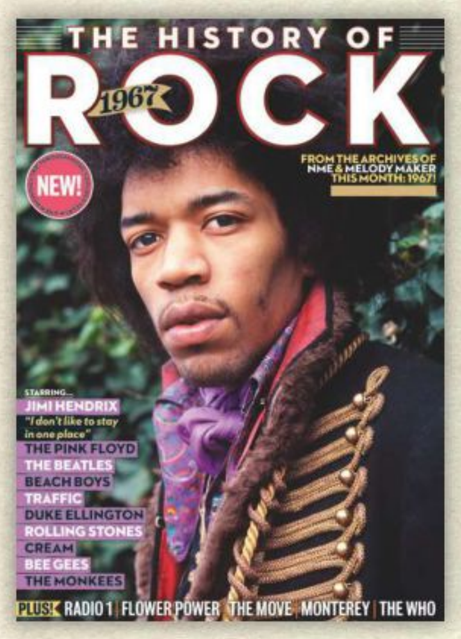
THE HISTORY OF ROCK

Missed any of our previous issues?

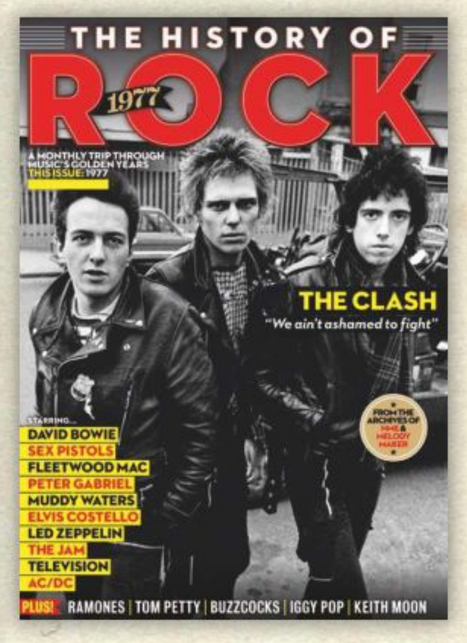
Get them at www.uncut.co.uk/store

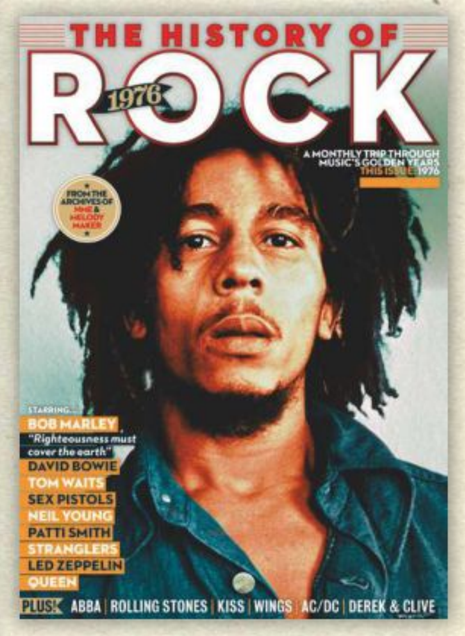












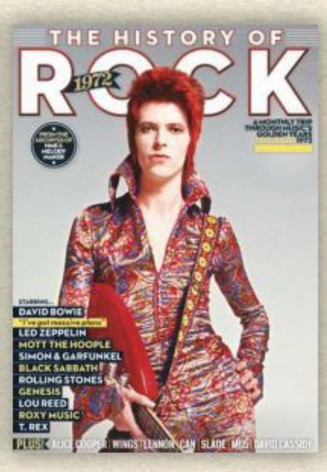


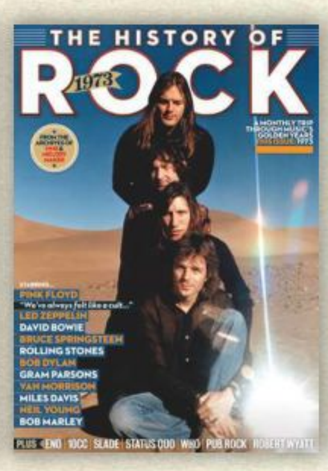


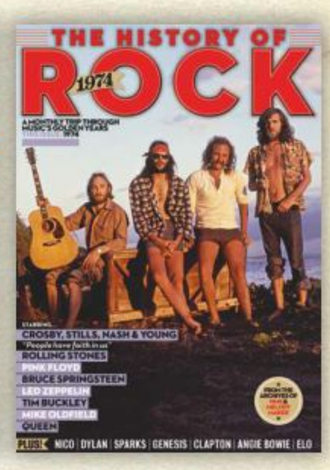












ORDER ONLINE AT WWW.UNCUT.CO.UK/STORE

Readers' letters

MM JUL–DEC View from the Chic seats, fickle critics, the cassette con and more...



Sit, sit, sit (yowsah, yowsah, yowsah)

LP WINNER!

I recently purchased, for a substantial amount of money, a front-row seat to see Chic at their concert in Brighton. Lucky, you may think. Not at all; I could neither see the band nor hear them properly. The sound was impaired, and the view obliterated, by a heaving mass of "dancers" from the audience. An appeal was made by the management for the crowd to be seated, but in actuality the band continued to play.

Life was made sufficiently unpleasant for several members of the audience, who had planned to see and hear Chic, to complain to the promoter. The promoter, reluctant to empathise, made weak excuses – one of which was (I quote): "You didn't seriously come to a Chic concerts to sit down, did you?"

May I draw you (and their) attention to page 10 of Chic's programmes, which reads: "Chic's live show counters the belief that disco music will not wash with a sit-down audience." Pity we were unable to do just that.

I hope the promoter, who assured me that he would refund the ticket money of a disabled man sitting directly behind me, did so at the end of the concert. Meanwhile, I appeal to musicians to remember those in the audience who wish to watch and hear them at work. If dancing is part of the package, this should be made plain prior to the concert, and tickets should be all of one price.

And to dancers: why don't you find a disco and do your own thing there, so that the majority of the audience can watch and listen to the band in a more pleasant environment?

BILL LADBERY, St James' Court, St James' Road, West Croydon (*MM* Oct 27)

MIKE PRIOR / GETTY

Borders on the ridiculous

At about the start of '78, some kids in my town started to discover punk. It was quite hard to get Led Zeppelin and co to take their somnolence elsewhere, but some of them finally made it. The record shops actually stocked Pistols' records.

Then things started to get a bit nasty. "Punk is dead," cried the discophiles (yes, they were late, too). Now we feel a bit lost.

Most hardened punks keep going by replaying their old Pistols and Clash albums again and again.

However, we have heard of, the...er... mod revival. What's it all about? Where can you buy parkas? Do you really need a scooter? Should I sell my John Cooper Clarke album?

Oh well, I expect we'll find out soon. It's only 50 miles to the nearest gig, and someone plays there nearly once every week!

KAY HOLMES, Riverside Drive, Egremont, Cumbria (*MM* Jul 3)

Quality not quantity

It is tiresome to read people's persistent claims that popularity in terms of units shifted, and cash grossed, equate with the quality of the music. But there are two sides to the phenomenon.

The Popularity Equals Quality Syndrome is opposed by the music critics who pick up on an obscure artist and push him or her as far as they can with ecstatic reviews; then, when their playthings achieve some recognition, proceed to push them over the cliff. Once fame approaches, they lace their articles with contemptuous vitriol. Recent reviews of Ian Dury and Dire Straits bear me out.

RN OWEN, Chesham, Bucks (*MM* Jul 3)

All mod con

On August 20 I went to Barnsley Civic Hall to see the March Of The Mods tour. The gig started with Back To Zero and there was a lengthy interval before a good set by the Purple Hearts. Until then everything seemed to be going according to plan.

About three-quarters of an hour after the Hearts' set, a gent came on stage and announced that Secret Affair had been recording a session for *Top Of The Pops*, and would hopefully arrive later to perform. He then stated that this was not the promoter's fault.

Secret Affair didn't arrive, and at about 12.30 it was announced that they wouldn't play. I paid £1.75 for an advance ticket, and many paid £2 on the night. I got the impression that most were there for Secret Affair.

The two bands I did see I could have seen in London for 75p, so I feel that I've been ripped off. In addition to this, I'm incensed by the statement that the promoters are not responsible.

In my opinion, it shows that the band are more concerned with making money than honouring their commitment to an audience.

PETER AFNEW, Westwood Court, Huddersfield Road, Barnsley, Yorks (*MM* Sept 22)

Got it taped

It's ridiculous for the British Phonographic Industry to suggest, as you report (*MM* October 6), that albums sales are being hit by home recording rather than as a result of high prices, when the two are closely related.

Home recording is a direct result of both high prices and the music industry's failure to provide an adequate cassette equivalent to long-playing records. LPs' glossy covers, often including song sheets, are things of beauty. Cassettes not only cost more than records (and why on earth should they?), they also look like what they are – little plastic boxes with tiny reproductions of pictures designed for album covers. No attempt has been made to treat cassette packaging as an art form.

So the cassette buyer feels cheated, he is expected to pay more money for an inferior product, so he borrows a record and tapes it himself. Another example of McLuhan's assertion that we "impose the form of the old on the content of the new". Old methods and ideas are employed when new ones are needed.

But there are a couple of hopeful signs – you could send away for the booklet with Dylan's last album, and, a flash of inspiration at last, Blondie's *Eat To The Beat* album contains a bonus track on cassette only.

BERNARD EMBLEM, Birchen Bower Walk, Tottington, Bury (*MM* Oct 20)

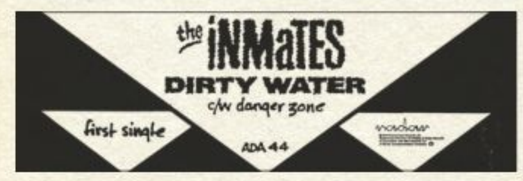


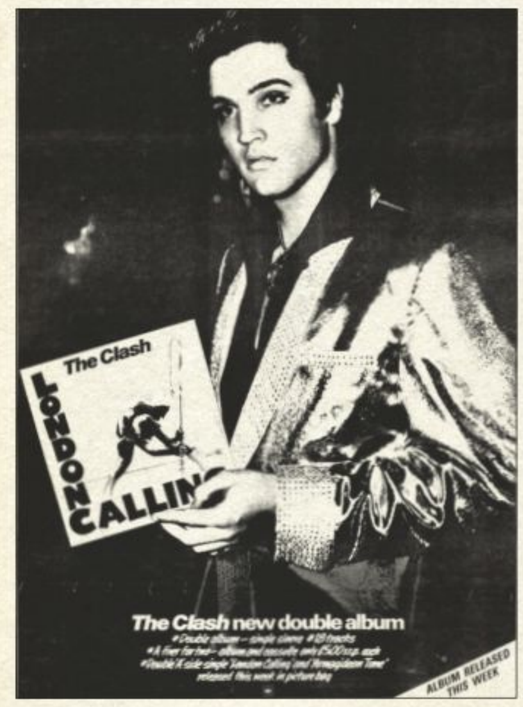












1979

MONTH BY MONTH



Coming next... in 1980!

SO THAT WAS 1979. Hope you dug the "grey *neu* musik".

But that's far from 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. Coming next, in 1980…

JOY DIVISION

THE BAND'S PROMISING career is arrested by the tragic death of their singer, Ian Curtis. Their second album, *Closer*, stands as the band's epitaph, while the music press attempts to uncover meaning from what has happened – meaning always present in their music. "Ian Curtis decided to leave us," *NME* writes, "yet he leaves behind words which urge us to fight, seek and reconcile…"

CAPTAIN BEEFHEART

A NEW GROUP. A new album. Still very much the same unique brand of strangeness. Beefheart grants an audience at his desert home and relates tales of his childhood artistic genius, and his early employments. "I once sold a vacuum cleaner to Aldous Huxley…"

ECHO & THE BUNNYMEN

THE LIVERPOOL FOUR-PIECE bring the camouflage netting and the dry ice, all ingredients in a possible psychedelic revival. "I'd say I'm more interested in atmosphere," says the band's singer, Ian McCulloch. "The spaces between the obvious, you know…"

PLUS...

PAUL WELLER MEETS PETE TOWNSHEND!

MADNESS!

SPANDAU BALLET!

FROM THE MAKERS OF **UNCUT**

THE HISTORY OF ROCK 1979

Every month, we revisit long-lost *NME* and *Melody Maker* interviews and piece together *The History Of Rock*. This month: 1979.

"You can't be weird in a strange town / You'll be betrayed by your accent and manners..."



Relive the year...

THE JAM MOUNTED A NEW BRITISH INVASION OF THE USA

KEITH RICHARDS DODGED PRISON TIME IN CANADA

THE SPECIALS AND MADNESS TOURED A NEW SOUND AROUND BRITAIN

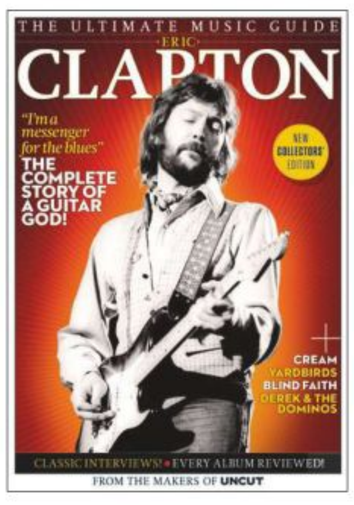
...and **TOM WAITS, JOY DIVISION, THE DAMNED, THE CURE, BLONDIE, KATE BUSH** and many more shared everything with *NME* and *MELODY MAKER*

More from **UNCUT**...











WWW.UNCUT.CO.UK