

THE HISTORY OF ROCK

1983

A MONTHLY TRIP
THROUGH MUSIC'S
GOLDEN YEARS
THIS ISSUE: 1983

★
FROM THE
ARCHIVES OF
NME &
MELODY
MAKER
★

BOWIE

"I feel in touch"

STARRING...

THE CURE

PAUL WELLER

THE BIRTHDAY PARTY

OZZY OSBOURNE

THE SMITHS

NEW ORDER

JOHN LYDON

FELA KUTI

U2

PLUS! ROBERT WYATT | POGUES | SUN RA | MADONNA | BLACK FLAG

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1983

MONTH BY MONTH



Welcome to 1983

DAVID BOWIE HAS decided to stop experimenting. After a dozen years of unpredictable musical strategy, his every move giving rise to – as he has himself put it – “whole schools of pretension”, he has returned, effectively, to Earth. Perhaps even gone back in time a little.

That’s the impression this month’s cover star gives when he convenes a press conference to announce his forthcoming live dates. Fatherhood, listening to jazz, new experiences in Australia... it’s all left him with an urge to have his music connect with people in a less intellectual fashion, to speak more from the heart. His new music now nods to soul and R&B.

It’s a noble plan, and one in which Bowie, even if he is ahead of the curve, is not alone. This year, the likes of Paul Weller, U2, Black Flag, Fela Kuti, REM and The Smiths – strange bedfellows otherwise – are all united by a sense of mission, even manifesto, in their music. Or as Henry Rollins from Black Flag puts it: “putting your ass on the line for a bunch of people you don’t even know”.

Their talk is of revelation, personal truth and winning converts, and both Bowie and the enduring Curtis Mayfield, a star for the past 25 years, imply how it all might be achieved with a certain grace. Not that life skating on the surface is all bad. In their different ways, New Order, Duran Duran, Eurythmics and Frankie Goes To Hollywood all show how it might be done while having fun.

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 19th edition, dedicated to 1983, you will find verbatim articles from frontline staffers, filed from the thick of the action, wherever that may be.

It might mean visiting Nick Cave’s sickbed. It may involve talking gangs with Afrika Bambaataa, or drink with Shane MacGowan. Even sharing a stately, old-world joke with David Bowie.

“You’re part Swiss?” he enquires of an *NME* writer. “Which part?”

1983

MONTH BY MONTH

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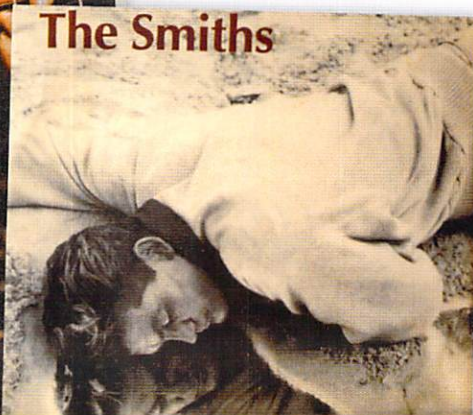
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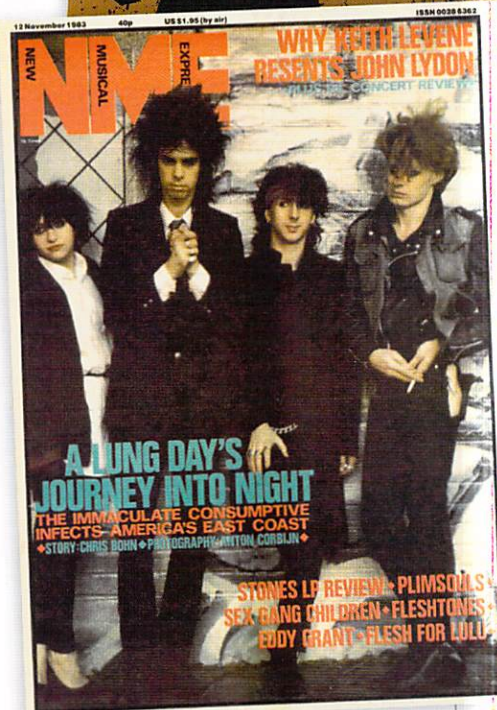
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1983

JANUARY — MARCH

THE CLASH, COCTEAU
TWINS, HAIRCUT 100,
PAUL WELLER AND MORE



January 27, 1983: Bowie
at a press conference at
the Carlyle hotel in New
York City, where he will
sign a \$17m deal with EMI

"A 36-year-old man in a 23-year-old mentality"

MM MARCH 26 A tanned, blond-rinsed and besuited David Bowie returns to recording and live performance.

AFTER WEEKS OF speculation, the details of David Bowie's first international tour since 1978 were revealed at a press conference held at London's prestigious Claridge's hotel. In a sedate Georgian lounge where muzak will never usurp Vivaldi, a gaggle of 70-odd assorted hacks sipped nervously at champagne and brandy cocktails and waited to pay court to the world's most famous Renaissance man.

Some 10 minutes behind schedule, Bowie stepped jauntily into the room – blond, sun-tanned and obscenely well-preserved – perched himself on a table in order to reach the microphones, rumpled his elegant wide-lapelled beige suit, flashed us a sneak of ankle-sock suspiciously reminiscent of Marks & Sparks, coolly declared he'd be playing dates in Germany, France, Belgium, Holland, Scandinavia, Britain, America, Australia and Japan – 90 cities in all – and then invited us to fire away.

The room fell hush in anticipation. Why, asked a newshound anxious to get in the first question fielded to Bowie in recent memory, wasn't he playing Scotland?

Bowie looked stunned. Had he flown 25 hours from Australia to have his intellect so severely tested? He mumbled some platitude, recovered composure and grinned.

Why, enquired a swarthy-looking chap at his feet, wasn't he playing Spain? A groan rippled round the room. One minute down, 29 or so to go and hardly off to a flying start. But rather than rush straight back into retirement, Bowie encouraged us with a generous intimacy that encouraged us to address him as "David". He was proud, David said, to announce that his touring band would comprise his old sidekick Carlos Alomar on guitar, Stevie Ray

Vaughan on lead guitar ("He thinks Jimmy Page is a modernist – I mean, he stops at about Albert King"), Chic's Tony Thompson on drums, Fred Mandel on keyboards, Carmine Rojas on bass, plus a horn section, and he even let slip that the stage show would be "elaborately simple, tasteful yet trashy", that it would cover something from every period he'd worked in since *The Man Who Sold The World* and that we shouldn't expect too much in terms of a character show.

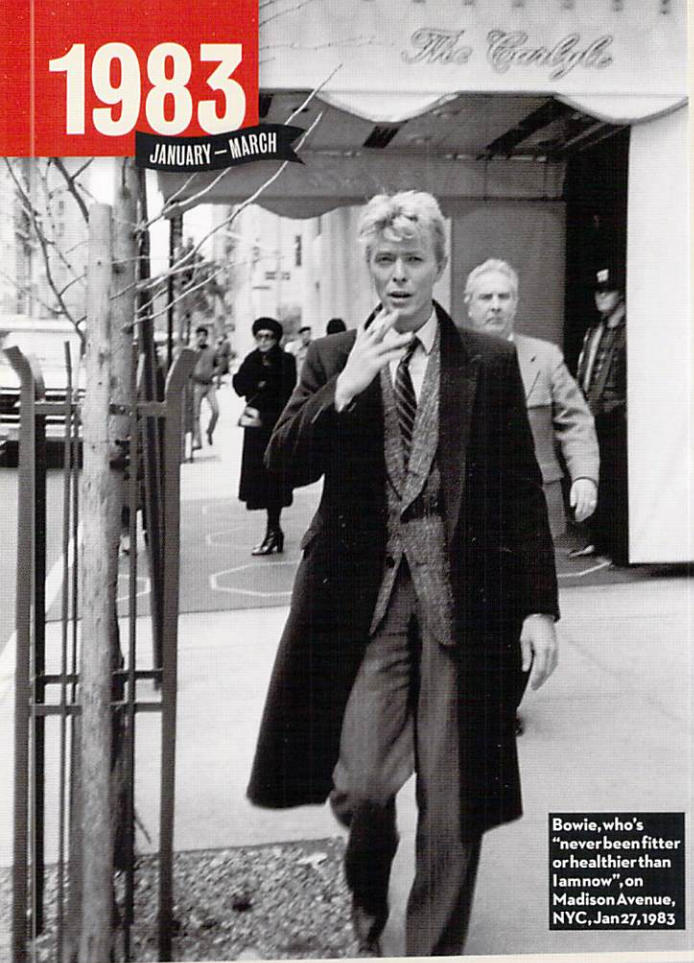
"This, by the way," he announced, somewhat abashed, "is the first concert tour I've done in five or six years, so for me it's more than exciting, it's kind of terrifying at the same time and that, possibly, can help the performance."

The assembled hacks grew animated at this, eager to learn why he'd quit and why he'd returned. David said something about lost enthusiasm regained and assured us the results of his newly rediscovered musical zeal were evident in his new single "Let's Dance" ("a sort of desperate love song") and an album of the same name to be released on April 11. Both are co-produced by Chic's Nile Rodgers, who David informed us, he'd met in a New York Club about a year ago and struck up a friendship with based on their mutual affinity for rhythm & blues.

Revisiting "Cat People (Putting Out Fire)", which he co-wrote with Giorgio Moroder for Paul Schrader's film, and "China Girl", co-written with Iggy Pop for the latter's album *The Idiot*, David claims *Let's Dance* is "not so icily spacious, it's a lot more immediate contact. It deals with things, hopefully, on a more humanist level than I've dealt with stuff before. It's not as detached or as falsely objective as my stuff seems to have been." »

1983

JANUARY – MARCH



Bowie, who's "never been fitter or healthier than I am now", on Madison Avenue, NYC, Jan 27, 1983

When our man on the spot questioned the validity of returning to the white soul style of his *Young Americans* period, David said that over the last couple of years he'd found himself listening to the Alan Freed Big Band, Elmore James and Albert King and that he'd wanted to try and recapture the enthusiasm of their music. "I hope it's not exactly a return," he hedged diplomatically, "but I think it's just a re-establishment of what I was doing in terms of an easier, more accessible brand of music."

Some wag challenged him over his inference that he equates electronic music with lack of emotion.

"No, it's not so," he countered, admirably unflustered. "It's a displaced kind of emotionalism in synthetic music, but it doesn't work in linear fashion – it touches recesses that are unusual and I didn't want to, again, touch the unusual, because it's too obvious to do that."

"At the moment, the unusual's being touched so prolifically that I wanted to get back into something that was more grass-roots, down-to-earth. I'd like to do something positive with what I'm writing, if I'm gonna continue writing, and if it's not working after two or three albums, I'll stop."

Some suave fellow from Fleet Street duly remarked that David seemed more relaxed with his music these days.

"Yes, I am," he replied, "because I know what I want to do with it. I want to make it worthwhile and something that helps people, to use a cliché."

A ripple of shock ran through the mob. Surely his old music had been worthwhile?

"I think it's been helpful in terms of examining what one can do with popular music," grinned the blond one dismissively. "But I tried to vacillate backwards and forwards between exercise and emotional content and, at the moment, the emotional content's coming out on top."

This was obviously too much for one Scandinavian chappy who'd been scratching his beard in bemusement for several minutes. "Er, do you recognise yourself in Angie Bowie's book *Free Spirit*?" he enquired with admirable tenacity.

"Uh... Anti-Whatti?" asked David.

"*Free Spirit* – yer ex-wife's book – do you recognise yourself in that one?"

"Oh... I see..." David sighed, agitatedly. "Well, listen, I got divorced seven years ago. Let's not go into that!"

Brief placatory enquiries were bounced around concerning his opinions of his imitators ("I used to imitate Anthony Newley and Syd Barrett – one does, doesn't one?") – his label change from RCA to EMI ("I didn't like RCA because they didn't like me. I think I released several very

interesting, intelligent and important albums on RCA which they didn't seem to give much time for") and the usual nonsense about his most embarrassing work ("Laughing Gnome" – except that my son likes it so much that I'm totally ambivalent about it now") before the press gang settled back into a semblance of inquisitive rhythm. What was David's favourite aspect of his work?

"Oh, conferences like this!" he beamed. "It's really gear! Uh... I dunno – changing, I suppose. Now arriving at a state where I've given myself that much freedom that I can easily move into any kind of music that I want to be involved in without feeling as though I'm letting anybody down."

His present challenge, he explained, was to counter "a strange, nihilistic, albeit romantic quality to music that seems to be overshadowing everything at the moment – style over content – and I think it's being accepted as the value of music at the moment; more so in Europe than America. But I want to get more into the guts of the lyrics."

At this point an American helpfully asked if David would be playing Superbowls in the States. Patiently placid, our hero endured a couple more minutes of mundane nonsense explaining that he was based in Switzerland now, not New York, that he's "never been fitter or healthier than I am now", that he skis to keep fit, that he's lost his fascination for Japan, that he gets up at 6.30 every morning and goes to bed at 10, that he

considers he leads "a traveller's life, but not with the baggage of rock 'n' roll", and that he felt no nationalistic draw to return to Britain.

When some persistent inquisitor cornered him with a nine-year-old quote to the effect that the people of this country should prepare for civil war and did he think Thatcher had brought that closer, David squirmed good-naturedly.

"Uh... working with Oshima was really quite an experience..." He blatantly avoided the issue "...next question."

Noticeably more comfortable discussing his acting career, David made light of his role in *The Elephant Man* ("He was kind of an easy role; I mean, there was so much emotional attachment to that man, John Merrick, that it was very hard to screw up on that one unless you were just a complete idiot"), dismissed his part in the forthcoming vampire movie *The Hunger*, co-starring Catherine Deneuve and Susan Sarandon, as "sexy and bloody", but expressed his pride over his part in Nagisa Oshima's POW film *Merry Christmas Mr Lawrence*, in which he co-stars with Tom Conti.

"I've never been offered a role as in *Merry Christmas*... where I had the chance to take advantage of my interest in interpreting the character as much," he beamed. "I had a lot of freedom in that, and hopefully, I feel that's the best piece of work I've done yet."

He denied being offered a role as Frank Sinatra, confirmed his part as Abraham Lincoln in a piece created by Robert Wilson and scored by David Byrne and Philip Glass for the opening of the Olympic Games, admitted he, like everyone else, was up for working with Scorsese, only he thought his Italian was probably too ropey, and expressed an active interest in Robert Altman's *The Easter Egg Hunt*, should the director ever raise the production money.

More interested in directing than acting – he was responsible for the Aboriginal video for "Let's Dance" – David said he had plans to work on a half-hour TV video early next year starring Iggy Pop and is currently painting a portrait of William Burroughs and exhibiting a collection of woodcuts in Europe alongside Guillermo Deisler. What gave him the most pleasure in life, we wanted to know?

"Being with my son and waking up and feeling as though I've got a future as a person rather than just a commodity," he replied.

Our man on the spot gently scoffed at David's implication that he'd somehow recovered from rock 'n' roll and discovered his true self.

"Eh... maybe" came the reply.

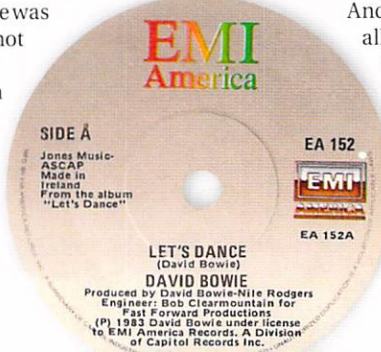
"I feel a 36-year-old man hiding in a 23-year-old mentality... possibly."

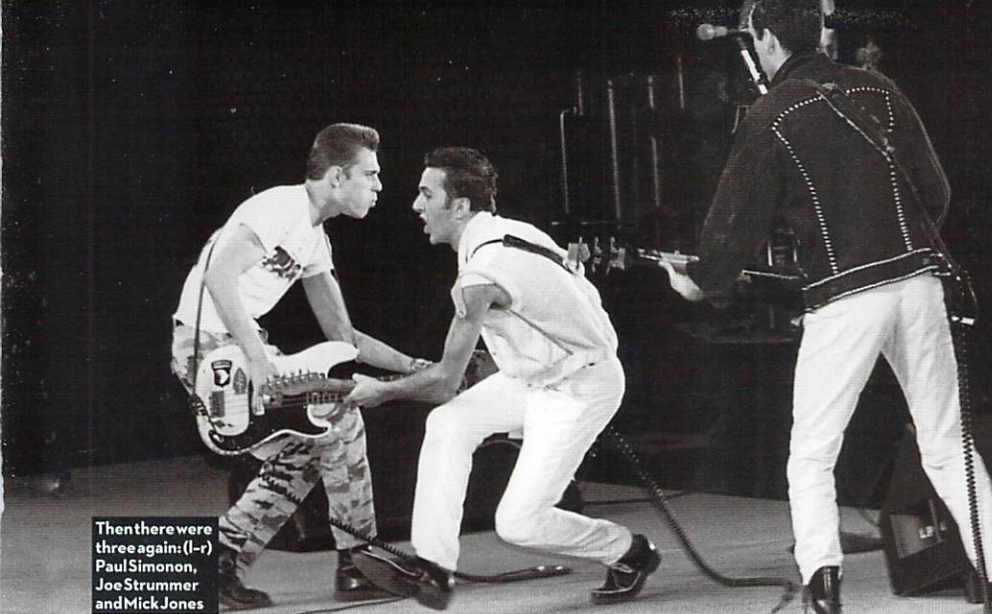
And now the question you've all been waiting for: He's been called an innovator, a plagiarist and just born lucky – which is it, our hack demanded to know?

"Um... no... um... yes um... not really," he answered...

Steve Sutherland

"I wanted to get back into something that was more grass-roots, down-to-earth"





Then there were three again: (l-r) Paul Simonon, Joe Strummer and Mick Jones

“I thought they were mad”

NME FEB 19 The Clash back to a trio following drummer Chimes' departure.

The Clash issued a statement at the weekend – in response to rumours circulating in London, they said – confirming that they are to remain a three-piece unit, following the departure of Terry Chimes, who has been their guest drummer since last May. Chimes himself said: “I thought they were mad when they phoned me up five days before an American tour, but it worked out really well – we all had a great time. Now it’s

time to get back to my own plans, which have been neglected for the last nine months.”

Joe Strummer added: “Terry put up with a lot of pressure on the British and American tours, but I only saw him throw a tantrum once – which is truly remarkable.”

The band say they don’t yet know who their next drummer will be, but intend to press ahead with their plans to record a new single in London in the near future.

Star of the late '50s

NME FEB 5 RIP... Billy Fury.

BILLY FURY, ONE of Britain’s foremost rock stars of the late '50s and early '60s, died last Friday after a long history of heart trouble. He had undergone three major heart operations, including open heart surgery, but he collapsed at his London flat and was found to be dead on arrival at hospital. He was 41.

Although he had 19 Top 20 hits during the period 1959–65, he never quite made the No 1 spot, his most successful single being “Halfway To Paradise” (No 2 in 1961). He undertook many top-of-the-bill tours, and was a regular on the top TV shows of the era – including *Oh Boy!*, *Six-Five Special* and *Ready Steady Go!*.

Ill-health caused his premature retirement, and he bought a sheep farm in Wales. He had been making a comeback over the last two years – partly to pay off debts, but also because he felt the urge to return – and recently completed an album, which is scheduled for April release.



14-year battle

MM FEB 26 Paul McCartney will not get additional royalties.

PAUL MCCARTNEY HAS lost his 14-year legal battle with music publishers Northern Songs for additional royalties on such classic Beatles songs as “Let It Be” and “Yesterday”.

McCartney and John Lennon started their action in 1969 and it was brought to an end in the High Court last week when Northern Songs succeeded in their attempt to get the action quashed. Northern Songs was sold to Lew Grade’s Associated Communications Corporation in 1969 and McCartney recently failed to buy it back for £20 million.



“Burning passion”

NME MAR 5 After trouncing all-comers in the NME Readers’ Poll, Paul Weller casts his own votes.

Group

Culture Club and Fun Boy Three

Best new group

Wham!

Male singer

Boy George and Terry Hall

Female singer

Tracey Thorn

Creep of the year

Too many to mention

Most wonderful human being

Stuart Adamson (for burning passion)

Songwriter

Paul Barry/
John Robinson
(The Questions),
Fun Boy Three

Single

“Do You Really
Want To Hurt Me”/
Culture Club

Long-player

Friends/Shalamar

Live act

Shalamar

Dancefloor

“Let It Whip”/
Dazz Band
“In And Out”/
Willie Hutch

Best sleeve

“Beat Surrender”/
The Jam

Event of the year

Never happens

Best-dressed male

Vaughn Toulouse
and the Boy Wonder

Best-dressed female

Miss Price

Haircut

Frenchmen (over 30)

Electronics

Me

Bass

I Level’s bassist

Drums

Zeke Manyika and
Jon Moss

Miscellaneous

Mick Talbot

Radio show

Gary Crowley’s
Tuesday Club

Video

“Friend Or Foe”/
Adam Ant

TV show

Only Fools And
Horses

Film

E.T.
The Plague Dogs

1983

JANUARY - MARCH

"In Holland, we're superstars"

MM MAR 19 Introducing, with help from The Birthday Party... the Cocteau Twins.

"We pinched the name from an early Simple Minds song": Robin Guthrie and Elizabeth Fraser of Falkirk band the Cocteau Twins

about the London record companies. They told him to contact 4AD, and bingo, the unbelievable happened: they not only liked the material, but offered to release it as well!

Now, six months after *Garlands*, they're poised to launch their third single "Peppermint Pig" (available on seven- and 12-inch), which shows a growing maturity, a stronger confidence in their material and, curiously, Alan Rankine at the production controls. How did that strange partnership happen?

"He was cheap," snorts Will, rolling his eyes to the heavens, in a contemptuous gesture of disgust. "And that's about all he had going for him - he was about as much use to us as a sandpit in a desert."

"He was totally apathetic," choruses Rob. "It was really obvious from the start that he didn't care for our music, and essentially we had to produce it ourselves. Oh, he did help with arrangements and

LAST SEPTEMBER A very strange thing happened. Three unknown scruffy Scottish urchins took the indie charts by storm with a debut album called *Garlands*, an unbelievably fluid chunk of sultry passion and a spiralling frieze of images with a lyrical, haunting emotion that boldly and defiantly insinuated its way into the mind and heart.

But who on earth were these Cocteau Twins and where had they come from? Were they the willing puppets of yet another conniving industry hype? And how else could they have sprung from nowhere to the forefront of our attention?

The curious enigma that enveloped them was further heightened and propagated by an appalling lack of media coverage, initiating even more rumours, speculation and distortion.

The three individuals at the centre of this maelstrom were, in fact, even more bemused than the rest of us! Thoroughly taken aback by their success and the sudden spotlight of interest, and totally naive about the machinations of the music biz, they shrank gratefully into the wise and gently cocooning arms of their record company, 4AD, where, as Liz jokingly comments, "We hid our head in the sand and hoped the hullabaloo would disappear!"

From Falkirk - a nowhere town between Glasgow and Edinburgh - our three reluctant heroes, Liz Fraser, Will Heggie and Robin Guthrie, are endearingly bumbling characters, who in no way could be pigeonholed with the new "hip" Scottish scene - awkward, self-conscious and shy,

their impetus is forged from a far deeper source than mere style.

Their curiously structured music, woven magically from intricate guitar/bass/rhythm-box interaction, is injected with the stamp of something extra special by the rich, twisting empathy of Liz's rising and ebbing vocals, creating a flawless mirage of colour, and proving that the ungainly nervousness they display with strangers belies a stronger, more decisive core.

"We tried to break into the Glasgow/Edinburgh gig circuits when we started off"

Their story began when schoolchums Rob and Will spotted Liz at a local hotel bar "hop", and singled her out as the only girl in the room who could dance!

"We sort of assumed that if she could dance she'd be able to sing as well," recalls Robin, "so she got roped into it! She was really shy at first, and

would only sing if we left the room!"

"We wanted something radically different from the dreary cabaret acts that played the local pubs," adds Will. "We pinched the name from an early Simple Minds song we thought would be long forgotten - we're a bit cheesed off with it now, but I guess it's too late to change."

"Another reason we formed the band," volunteers Liz, "is that we just didn't fit in with the people of our age group. We used to take off all round the country to see The Birthday Party and blag our way into every gig!"

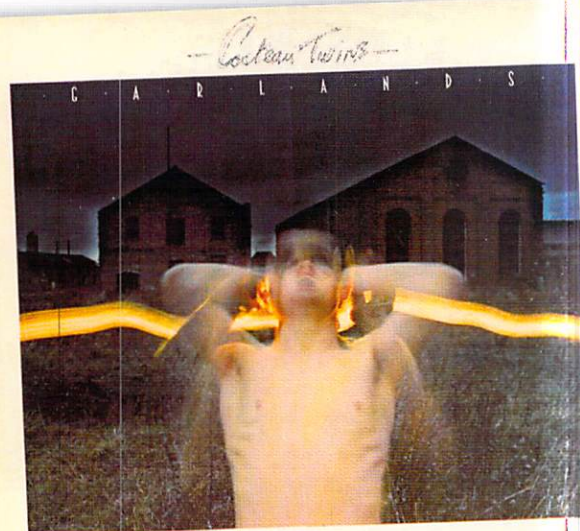
It was at one of these gigs that Rob asked the 'Party for advice

things," he concedes. "But it was good that he was there," reasons ragamuffin Liz, the peacemaker, "even if he didn't do very much."

"But what we really needed was someone authoritative," persists Will, not to be appeased. "Someone who'd at least give us their opinions on things - Alan was so vague and disinterested."

Strong stuff from a still fledgling band, but added proof that they're not content to be fobbed off with anything less than wholehearted enthusiasm - an attitude that's helped to spread their almost underground popularity.

With little press and purposely muted promotion (apart from John Peel, who in a rare moment of animation pronounced them to be "probably my favourite band in the world"), they've rapidly gained the respect and admiration of their musical colleagues - OMD have just invited them onto their nine-week European tour, but the Cocteau



Twins, with unfeigned coyness, are still bewildered by it all.

"They just rang us out of the blue," explains Will, arching his bushy eyebrows in surprise. "I mean, we've never met them or anything, and there were dozens of bands after that slot, and we didn't have to buy onto it or anything."

They're stunned by the implication. Entertainingly self-deprecating, they genuinely believe their success has been precipitated by some inexplicable quirk of fate and will be snatched back from them any moment. Trying to persuade them to talk about themselves simply induces embarrassed blushes and nervous hilarity.

"We're dead lazy," Rob volunteers.

"Lazy and fat. We just sit around all day and play with the Atari."

Do you associate with any other Scottish bands or play much locally?

"Oh nooooo," winces Will. "You see, we're not sussed enough for all that." He says it with a strong hint of sarcasm.

"We tried to break into the Glasgow/Edinburgh gig circuits when we started off," says Liz, "but we weren't a part of any clique, so they just wouldn't let us in."

So what have you been doing since "Lullabies" [the EP follow-up to *Garlands*]?

"Well, we did our second Peel session recently," enthuses Liz. "We're really pleased with it, and the new songs came up better than they do on the EP - I shouldn't really say that, should I?" she chuckles. "But Gordon Sharp, a friend of ours who used to be in The Freeze, came along and added some vocals, and it came up really well. It's not that we're unhappy with the record, it's just that we're quite apprehensive of the reaction to it."

"I mean, it's a lot more beaty than anything else we've done, an' we've used piano, an' vibes and things," she explains, waving her arms about in illustration. "People will probably hate it," she adds somewhat despondently, but I reckon it's a misplaced pessimism.

The Cocteau Twins have, to their total disbelief, made it big in Holland - the January issue of Amsterdam's *Vinyl* magazine even attributes them with "cult" status, while harping on what they term "Liz Frazer's romantic death obsession!", which she finds a bit perturbing.

"Yeah, apparently in Holland we're superstars," Will shakes his head in amazement. "We played there to packed houses, and despite a series of hilarious mistakes (he grins pointedly at Liz), we went down really well."

It's a pity that accolades like this haven't rubbed off on this side of the Channel, but the Twins aren't too disgruntled about it. They've just signed to 4AD on a five-year contract, so their future seems a lot brighter than it did earlier in the year; and they are, by their own admission, quite happy to gradually pervade and enfold public consciousness, rather than be herded into a category, picked up on some passing whim, and then discarded.

See, these people are wise as well as clever. *Helen Fitzgerald*



Anorexia nervosa

NME FEB 12 RIP, Karen Carpenter, aged 32.

The living-room-love lyrics that sold over 60 million LPs for '70s songstress

Karen Carpenter take on a

bitterly ironic twist in view of her death last week at 32.

Last Friday night saw Karen's name added to the growing list of deaths-by-heart-attack suffered by age-30-ish members of the music biz, after her parents discovered her "barely breathing" on the floor of her bedroom in the family's Downey, California, home.

Karen had recently moved to her own apartment in Los Angeles, following the dissolution of her 1980 marriage to 42-year-old businessman Tom Burris, but was staying with her folks. The reason given by Mrs Carpenter was her daughter's inability to shed the spectre of anorexia nervosa, the "slimmer's disease". It had accounted for the cancellation of a British tour by Karen and her brother/partner Richard as far back as 1975. After that cancellation, Karen was bedridden with the disease for almost two months. The heart attack which killed her was described as "massive".

➤ Wilson Pickett has blown out his projected UK tour, which was due to open on Tuesday this week. All of Pickett's previous UK tour plans have ended in similar fashion. Dingwalls chiefs Harvey Goldsmith and Peter Gross say they are taking legal action against him. *NME Jan 29*

➤ Dollar vocalist David Van Day was all out of breath when he was asked to inflate a breathalyser bag. After failing to do so he was found guilty on a drink-drive charge and fined £100 by a London Magistrates Court. He was also banned from driving for a year. *NME Jan 22*

➤ Paul Weller will share an unusual supporting role with Hazel O'Connor when they help CND chairwoman Joan Ruddock launch the appeal for funds that should make possible a "youth music festival for peace". The festival, scheduled for May 7 in London's Brockwell Park, is expected to draw thousands of young people. Weller has committed himself to playing, saying that "until we achieve nuclear disarmament, we are living on borrowed time". *NME Jan 22*

➤ March 13 sees the first night of a club called A Revolving Paint Dream. It's being held in London's Manor House at The Other Club and first band on will be TV Personalities. Anyone wishing to perform should contact Creation Cowboy, 98 Beaconsfield Road, Tottenham, London N15, enclosing a tape. *MMM Mar 5*

"Suspended animation"

MM MAR 19 Legal woes curtail Haircut 100.

HAIRCUT ONE HUNDRED have been put into "suspended animation" by a High Court judge as a result of a rift between former lead singer Nick Heyward and the other five members of the band.

Mr Justice Warner said that as they could not agree what should be done pending the hearing of their contract dispute, he would impose temporary injunctions to stop either side entering into fresh recording contract.

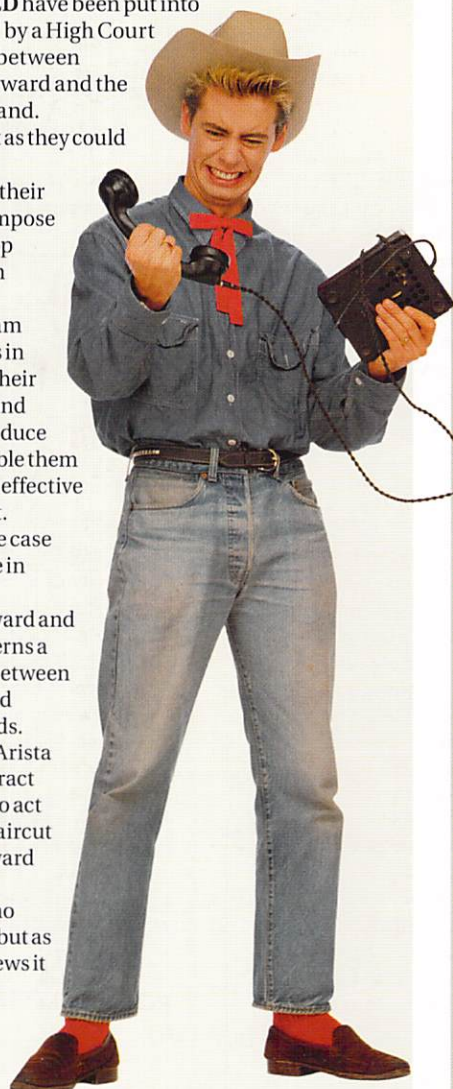
The judge said that if Graham Jones and his four colleagues in Haircut One Hundred, plus their companies Griddleside Ltd and Essex-Brooks Ltd, could "produce a package" which would enable them to continue working until an effective hearing, he would consider it.

The judge said that until the case was heard the band would be in "suspended animation".

The dispute between Heyward and the rest of the Haircuts concerns a recording contract last July between the two Haircut One Hundred companies and Arista Records.

Graham Jones alleges that Arista Records repudiated the contract and induced Nick Heyward to act in breach of his duty to the Haircut companies. Arista and Heyward deny the allegations.

At press time there'd been no development in the dispute, but as soon as there's any further news it will be reported in the *MM*.





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“We went to the brink”

U2 have just made a strong third album, *War*, and meet to talk about their convictions. “I want U2 to be a band that takes risks,” says The Edge. “We don’t do drugs or smash up hotels or get our willies out on stage. The rock rebel thing is very phoney.”

— NME FEBRUARY 26 —

SOME WILL PROBABLY claim it was an epitaph for the New Pop. Some will even herald the start of a rock revival, although the rockers' revenge seems more appropriate. But whatever it signalled, something strange happened to the nation's singles chart last month.

First came Wah's "The Story of The Blues"; next it was Echo & The Bunnymen's "The Cutter"; then the haunting hues of "New Year's Day" took their place in the Top Ten, and suddenly the singles charts was beginning to resemble an *NME* Readers' Poll. The Class Of '79 were suddenly coming good commercially.

Bono Vox, the lyrical lead voice of U2, wisely refuses to be drawn into any sweeping generalisations, but permits himself a wry smile at this slightly unlikely turn of the tide.

"It would be stupid to start drawing up battle lines, but I think the fact that 'New Year's Day' made the Top Ten indicated a disillusionment among record buyers. I don't »

In Shinjuku Central Park, Tokyo, before the final dates of the year-long War Tour at the Nakano Sun Plaza, November 1983

KOHASEBE/GETTY

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tougher with maturity rather than blanding out as most of their contemporaries have done. *War* is the group at their most rhythmic. Their sound is rooted in drummer Larry Mullen's shuddering tub-thumping and bassist Adam Clayton's bewildering percussive patterns. Guitarist The Edge is less dominant than before, the traditional solos of the axe hero superseded by intuitive excursions in tonality and harmonics that put an eerie veneer over the rock solid foundations.

The new material is not always successful, the band occasionally tripping over their own blustery intensity, but one or two songs are quite devastating in their ferocity. The bittersweet "Like A Song", for example, is probably the finest realisation of the thrash

think 'New Year's Day' was a pop single, certainly not in the way that Mickie Most might define a pop single as something that lasts three minutes and three weeks in the chart. I don't think we could have written that kind of song.

"People are growing disillusioned with pap, with the wall paper music and the gloss. It's as if someone has eaten too many Smarties over the last couple of years, and they're beginning to feel ill as they look at all the wrapping paper strewn around the room."

Distanced from the bustle of British pop by the Irish Sea and by their own purity of purpose, U2 have just released their third album, *War*. Produced, like the last two, by Steve Lillywhite and recorded in the isolation of Windmill Lane studios in their native Dublin, the LP is a vital watershed in their growth. Bono describes it as "a slap in the face", and regards it as the most important move they have ever made. The songs on their two previous albums, *Boy* and *October*, showed a young band coming to terms with themselves—with the journey from adolescence to a fragile manhood.

The new LP is different in that U2 are now facing out rather than inwards; they are now coming to terms with the outside world, and that means coming to terms with the horror of the Falklands, Beirut, Central America, the nuclear threat and the strife of their own battle-torn backyard in Ulster—coming to terms with war.

Not all the songs are directly about war, but those that are rank among the most powerful the band have yet recorded. There is a plaintive scream for compassion in Ulster ("Sunday Bloody Sunday"), an acknowledgement of the struggle of Solidarity ("New Year's Day") and the black humour of a song about the bomb ("Seconds"), which features fragmented excerpts from last year's chilling television documentary *Soldier Girls*. Even the love songs on *War* are fierce and direct, largely shunning the more delicately lyricism of the earlier albums.

Just as the words have become more incisive, so the music is now much more robust. U2 are a rock rarity—a band who have actually become

"Calling the album *War*, we're giving people a slap in the face"

ethic since Wah!'s epic "Seven Minutes to Midnight" single.

Another significant trait on *War* is the manner in which U2 have extended their musical base to include some outside assistance in the shape of electric violinist Steve Wickham, Coconut's Cheryl Poirier, Adriana Kaegi and Taryn Hagey, and Kid Creole trumpet player Kenny Fradley on a couple of tracks. There are plans, too, to have the entire album remixed by New York studio whiz Francois Kevorkian, the man behind the console on the D Train singles and the successful American remix of Yazoo's "Situation".

Further proof of U2's emergence from their cocoon will come later in the year when they

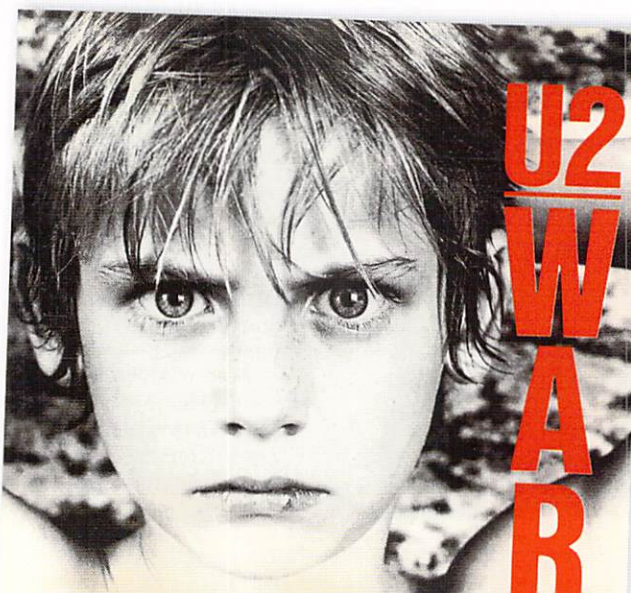
begin work on a ballet score for a Dublin theatre. For now, though, the spotlight is on U2 as one of the country's top live bands—they start a UK tour shortly—and on the near-vocational passion of their new LP.

U2 have always been romantics. They are one of the few bands to retain the idealism of 1976, looking on rock music as a great quest rather than a career. Bono's punk-inspired ideals might appear quaint in the colder musical climate of 1983, but they remain essential to any understanding of U2.

"People see us as four guys who are uprooted from their city of Dublin and thrown across the world," he says. "And we are winning. We are beating the businessmen at their own game by conquering the USA on our own terms.

We might not be this week's thing, but that will never bother us."

The following interview took place at various locations one Sunday afternoon in Dublin. Bono—the aggressive pacifist—practically jumps out of his skin when he talks, his spirit and fire a sharp contrast with the softer approach of The Edge, the suave assurance of Adam and the watchful demeanour of Larry. Bono will talk of "credibility" and "commitment" and make it ring true, his confidence never crossing over into conceit—his belief in the U2 way is total, but it doesn't deny the value of some of the other options. Being among the last of the rock idealists sometimes seems a good place to be.





Why War?

Bono: War seemed to be the motif for 1982. Everywhere you looked, from the Falklands to the Middle East and South Africa, there was war. By calling the album *War* we're giving people a slap in the face and at the same time getting away from the cosy image a lot of people have of U2.

Edge: It's a heavy title. It's blunt. It's not something that's safe, so it could backfire. It's the sort of subject matter that people can really take a dislike to. But we wanted to take a more dangerous course, fly a bit closer to the wind, so I think the title is appropriate. *October* and *Boy* both had a key to the songs in the title and this one is no different. Not all the songs are about war, but it's a good general heading.

The images conjured up by the songs are a far cry from what people might expect from U2. On *Boy* and *October*, the imagery possessed an almost spiritual purity, whereas the songs on *War* seem far more gruesome and horrific.

Bono: A lot of the songs on our last album were quite abstract, but *War* is intentionally more direct, more specific. But you can still take the title on a lot of different levels. We're not only interested in the physical aspects of war. The emotional effects are just as important – “*the trenches dug within our hearts*.”

People have become numb to violence. Watching the television, it's hard to tell the difference between fact and fiction. One minute you see someone being shot on *The Professionals*, and the next you see someone falling through a window after being shot on the news. One is fiction and one is real life, but we're becoming so used to the fiction that we become numb to the real thing. War could be the story of a broken home, a family at war. Instead of putting tanks and guns on the cover, we've put a child's face. War can also be a mental thing, an emotional thing between loves. It doesn't have to be a physical thing.

The most obvious context at the moment is the nuclear threat. You deal with that on “Seconds”, but you'd also touched on it before on last year's “A Celebration” single: “*I believe in the Third World War/I believe in the atomic bomb*.” Was that a pointer of sorts to some of the songs on the LP?

Bono: All I was saying was that the realities of the bomb must be faced: “*I believe in the powers that be/But they won't overpower me*.”

Edge: People are starting to ask more questions about the bomb. In the past, people have been more apathetic. They have become so caught up with their own lives that they haven't looked outside. Now they are asking what the hell is going on.

Adam: I think people are ready to take a more militant stance to protect their future, as the rise of the CND movement shows.

Bono: Before we can overcome these things we have to face them. There is a line in “Seconds” about a fanatic assembling a nuclear device in an apartment in Times Square, New York, but it could be anywhere. We are now entering the age of nuclear terrorism where a group of fanatics could have the capabilities of bringing a bomb into a city and holding millions of people to ransom.

“Sunday Bloody Sunday” – the obvious assumption is that it is about the Troubles in Ulster.

Adam: It isn't so much about the Troubles in the physical sense, but about the human carnage of families being wrecked.

Edge: We all had a hand in that song, because it's probably the heaviest thing we've ever done, lyrically. It's hard for us to justify a title like “Sunday Bloody Sunday”, and we are aware of that. We realise the potential for division in a song like that, so all we can say is that we're trying to confront the subject rather than sweep it under the carpet.

We thought a lot about the song before we played it in Belfast and Bono told the audience that if they didn't like it then we'd never play it again. Out of the 3,000 people in the hall about three walked out. I think that says a lot about the audience's trust in us.

Adam: It's not a comment on the situation, but we've been questioned about it a lot, being based in Dublin, and we decided that it was morally wrong that we weren't coming to terms with it ourselves. Before “Sunday

“It is my belief
in God that
enables me to
get up in the
morning”

Bloody Sunday” it was something that we ourselves had been sweeping under the carpet.

It's the same dilemma that The Undertones had to face before they wrote songs like “Crisis Of Mind” and “It's Gonna Happen” – coming to terms with something on your own doorstep.

But what about “New Year's Day”, which is about Poland? What qualified U2 to make pronouncements about something like that?

Adam: It's not a comment on the situation, more an acknowledgement of Solidarity. At the time we wrote the song, we didn't know that martial law was going to be lifted on New Year's Day. We were just saying that no matter how much people try to change the situation, things are always more or less the same at the start of every new year.

A lot of people have grown tired of rock bands wearing their social conscience on their

sleeve. Isn't it all a bit self-righteous?

Edge: The position of any band talking about the topics of their day is always a very delicate one. The only justification I can give is that we are expressing our convictions. I can see how it can appear patronising, but it depends on one's motivations. There are a lot of things we could get pulled up on. If people don't like it, then that is understandable, but we will be standing by what we've done.

A lot of the songs on *War* are inter-related. Are we witnessing the return of the dreaded concept album?

Edge: No, definitely not. That would imply that every song on the album is part of a jigsaw, which isn't the case. The title is a key to some of the songs, but not all of them are about war: “Surrender” is inspired by New York; “Two Hearts” is a love song; and “Drowning Man” is a very restful, peaceful song.

Considering the seriousness of some of its subject matter, *War* could have been a very grim and pessimistic LP, but you also hold out a certain amount of hope.

Bono: You have to have hope. Rock music can be a very powerful medium and if you use that to offer something positive then it can be very uplifting. If you use your songs to convey bitterness and hate, a blackness seems to descend over everything. I don't like music unless it has a healing effect. I don't like it when people leave concerts still feeling edgy. I want people to leave our concerts feeling positive, a bit more free.

Things might look very gloomy, but there is always hope. I think there is a need to develop a new political language to get over what is happening. Unemployment will not decrease. The new computer technology will eventually wipe out the clerical classes, and office workers will be a thing of the past. Millions of people are already on the dole with a lot of leisure time. They are going to have to be re-educated in order to make better use of that time. A lot of people can't handle these times and they are turning to things like heavy drug use. In the area of Dublin where I live there are 15-year-old kids using heroin. They can buy little 10-packs for £10. A lot of people just can't handle this age.

Are you afraid?

Bono: I'm frightened, yes, but I'm not cynical or pessimistic about the future and a lot of that must come down to my beliefs. It is my belief in God that enables me to get up in the morning and face the world. I believe that there is a reason and a logic to everything. If I didn't believe that and thought that everything was simply down to chance, then I'd be really afraid. I wouldn't cross the road for fear of being run over.

You say you are sustained by your Christian beliefs. What about human nature? Do you have any faith in that?

Bono: I don't know. It's fine to think that everyone is nice, man, and people are really swell, but there is still this capacity in man for terrible violence. I see that aggression in myself sometimes, and I see it in other people. The secret is to come to terms with it. The century that we are living in is the most barbaric ever. In the past men committed atrocities without being fully aware of what they were doing. Now man has been »

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educated, but the atrocities are still going on. But I still have my beliefs, not so much in people, but in what lies behind people. That comes across in the music.

"*War* is not a negative LP. I mean, I'm in love and there is a lot of love on the album. A song like "New Year's Day" might be about war and struggle, but it is also about love. It is about having the faith to break through and survive against all odds. Love is a very powerful thing. There's nothing more radical than two people loving each other.

When I talk about love I'm thinking of an unselfish love. Emotions can be bought and sold just like anything else, but I think real love is about giving and not expecting anything in return.

So the album could just as easily have been called *Love*—love as a weapon against repression. You seem to be saying that one can't appreciate the true value of love until it is set against the hatred and lunacy of the outside world.

Bono: I think that love stands out when set against struggle. That's probably the power of the record in a nutshell. The album is about the struggle for love, not about war in the negative sense. I would be failing in this interview if I made *War* sound like a gloomy album, because it's not. I hope it's an uplifting record. Some love songs devalue the meaning of the word. Disco bands turn it into a cliché by tearing it down until it means nothing. The power of love is always more striking when set against realism than when set against escapism.

There are those who will seize on the fact that U2, Wah! and the Bunnymen were all in the Top 10 a few weeks ago as a signal that "rock" is back; worthy old rock as 1983's alternative to the disposable pop trash that dominated the singles chart in '82. Do you see U2 as a "rock" group?

Adam: If you were to file us under anything in a record shop, I suppose it would have to be under "Rock". But I think it is a very false divide. "Rock" and "pop" cross over in so many places that I don't think you can start putting bands in neat little boxes like that. Look at a group like the Doors in the '60s: they were very much a rock group, but they were also having pop hits like "Light My Fire".

U2 exist within a traditional rock format in that your sound is basically guitar, bass and drums. How would you counter the currently fashionable claims that the format is redundant after 25 years or so? There was a letter in *Gasbag* a fortnight ago alleging that U2 were no more than a "chugging" progressive rock band with their hearts in the early '70s.

Edge: I think that anyone who can react in such a superficial, instinctive way would miss the point of what we're doing anyway, even if they liked it. They're the sort of people who base their taste on fashion and whim. I don't think the people who go to our concerts are particularly interested in what is trendy. They appreciate us on a far more gut level. They're not bothered that we're just playing guitar, bass and drums."

Bono: "We've chosen to work within that format, even though a lot of people threw it out the window a couple of years ago. It suits what we want to do. We want a joust. The guitar, bass and drum setup is good for giving people a good slap in the face.

Your instruments are only lumps of wood anyway. They're hardly the best criteria to judge the worth of a band.

Bono: We believe that passion is more important than technique. 1975 was all about style and technique. Herbie Hancock and jazz-rock, and 1982 was pretty much the same with groups like Level 42. I believe we need that slap

in the face once more. The sort of thing that we got in 1976. The elitist thing has got to be smashed down again. It's like Orwell's *Animal Farm*: the pigs have all become farmers! The bands that were our contemporaries, the garage bands of 1976, are back on the big star trip. They're playing the part of the people that they pulled down. It's either intellectual crap or patronising gloss.

Adam: To be candid, I would have liked to have been part of the fashion scene that was going on in London two years ago. It would have been nice to dress up and go to Club For Heroes. Being the weakest member of the band emotionally, I wanted to do that, but I couldn't. It was the forbidden fruit. In retrospect, there's a strength through having turned it all down. If I'd gone to London, it would have trivialised what I was doing in U2. At the time, though, there was a certain conflict because what was happening in London did look exciting.

But it was exciting. There was excitement in the way that London clubs were confronting the drabness of rock. What they offered as an alternative might have lacked substance, but that conflict in itself did produce a certain tension.

Adam: There was nothing in it in retrospect, but at the time it did seem exciting. Watching from the sidelines, I felt that I wanted to be a part of it, but somehow I just couldn't.

Bono: We see London as outsiders and probably have more objectivity through that. It's good to be able to go to London and then escape from it, never letting it become a trap.

Come on, it's not that bad! You can't write off a city like that.

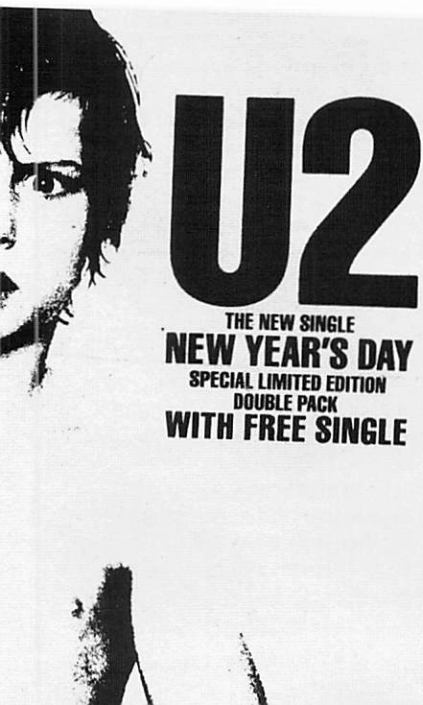
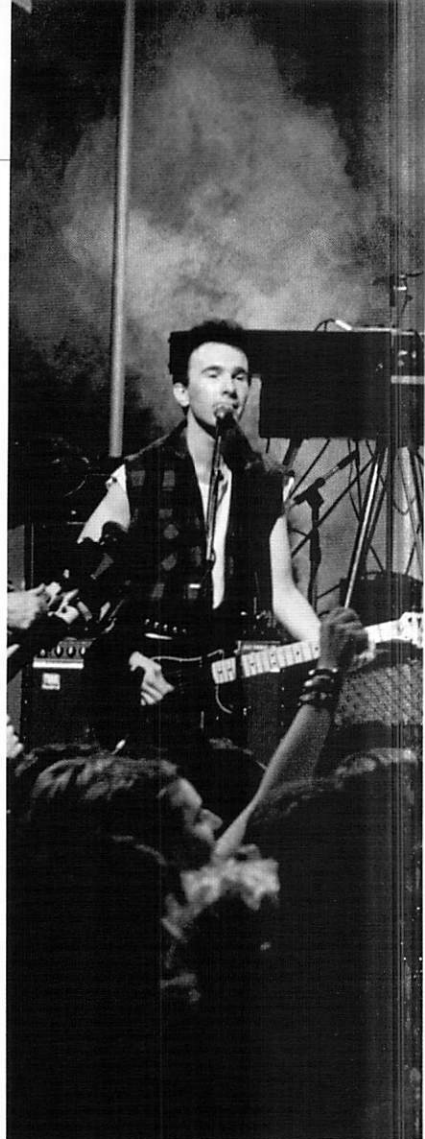
Bono: No, I'm not saying that. I love London, but that fact that we are based in Dublin, away from all the activity, does give us our own perspective.

Prior to *War*, U2 grew up in almost total isolation, oblivious to outside trends and influences. Now you seem to be broadening your scope, enlisting the likes of the Coconuts, Kenny Fradley and Francois Kevorkian to embellish your sound. There's even a 12-inch dance mix of "Two Hearts" due for single release!

Edge: Up to now, we've defined our own terms, and if we're branching out into new areas it's because we need to. We're not pandering to any outside demands. We are always aware of what is happening musically, but we're not prepared to let it dictate our style.

Is being on Island an advantage? They seem to be a label who will always allow a band to develop rather than expect some immediate commercial return.

Edge: The criterion with Island is quality, whereas with other labels it is purely sales. They always hang onto a good act, even if that act is not selling records. Sometimes they have shied away from signing an act that would have made them money simply because Chris Blackwell wants a label that he can be proud of, perhaps more than he wants the money. Island is more or less an extension of his own musical taste, so he is always keen to prolong the longevity of all his acts. Perhaps he would have liked us to have a hit earlier on, but he must be happy now that we're having hits without losing our dignity.





March 16, 1983:
U2 performing
on *The Tube* TV
show, Newcastle

How did the liaison with Kevorkian come about?

Bono: It came about through Chris Blackwell. Kevorkian's biggest ambition is to remix Jimi Hendrix, so Chris Blackwell gave him what he considered the next best thing—The Edge! The good thing about Kevorkian is that he won't just do the usual dance mix cliché. He just takes the master tapes and plays around with the sounds already on them. Kevorkian is Martin Hannett part two. He's got the same *Dr Who* features and he leads you into his garden of weeds in the same way that Hannett does.

Another direction in which you are extending your interests is the forthcoming ballet soundtrack. What inspired that?

Edge: It originally came from the proprietor of the Royal Dublin Ballet. He had this idea of using contemporary music with his company. He got in touch with us and also with Arlene Phillips, who is the kind of choreographer who has an understanding of working with rock music.

Things are at an early stage at the moment, but we have done some stuff for it, using synths and drum machines. We're not scared to broaden our musical base. Maybe at one stage we'll get sick of guitars, but at the moment they are the best vehicle for what we want to say with U2. They convey our emotions best.

Do you ever worry about appearing too earnest? Sometimes, particularly onstage, you almost fall over your own two feet in the rush to project your own passion.

Bono: Sometimes we fail and I'll be the first to admit that. Sometimes we go over the top and miss the point altogether, but I know that our music means a hell of a lot to our audience from the letters that we receive; not the fan letters, but letters that actually go into the music and take it seriously. I think part of the fun of being a U2 fan is seeing us fall flat on our feet and then get back up again.

“Love is more striking when set against realism than escapism”

Have you ever got to the stage of not wanting to go on?

Bono: Yeah, about once a week! When we were making *War* we went practically to the brink of breaking the band. When we go into the studio we draw totally on our deepest resources and stretch them to the limit. If the band is going to be honest they've got to bring out everything, even the things that might frighten them.

Edge: I want U2 to be a band that takes risks. I hate this idea of U2 as a nice safe band. Maybe it's because we don't play the rock'n'roll game. We don't do drugs or get arrested in America or smash up hotels or

get our willies out on stage. All that is just conforming to rock tradition. The rock rebel thing is very phoney.

Adam: I don't think it's very likely that we'll give in now. The longer we go on, the more interesting things become. I can see us going through an awful lot of changes that I would never have imagined when we first got going. At first it was just a simple case of playing for fun. Now it's very different. Perhaps it's maturity, perhaps it's down to Bono getting married last year and The Edge getting married this year, but as we mature, the frantic teenage issues that we were concerned with early on are changing into something else, something more complex.

So, the quest goes on...

Bono: Yeah, and I feel that we're winning at the moment. In some ways, U2 are only really being born now. Right now, it feels good. I think there is a certain insight in this group, a certain ability to see human emotions and expose them honestly. There are a lot of clichéd songs around in the chart. The fiction factory loves churning out superficial songs about the same old subjects. That's just something we refuse to do. This might sound egotistical, but I think we'll always retain our honesty.

Adam: Basically, I think we're all nutters, but somehow it works. It always comes out in the wash. *Adrian Thrills* •

“Quite disconcerting”

Interviewed in their London dosses, **THE BIRTHDAY PARTY** discuss prison, highbrow reading and their itinerant lifestyle. “It’s really just Nick who’s in love with feeling alienated,” says Rowland S Howard. “It just makes me feel rotten.”

— NME MARCH 26 —

VOICEOVER: “In conclusion, *The Birthday Party* in essence a slug, nomadic, and their journey is slow and painful and always forward and their trail of slime is their art and so on and they are barely conscious of its issue...” Nick Cave, writing in the NME Xmas issue

INDECENT, YET IRIDESCENT in its ugliness, The Birthday Party’s slime marks the one rewarding trail through the muck that is rock.

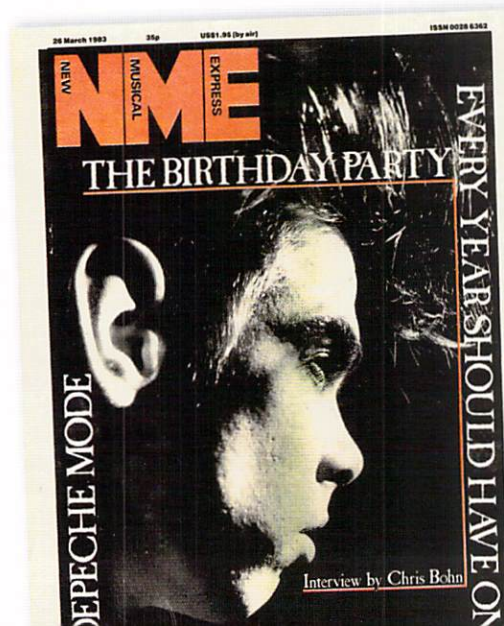
Post-punk’s token standard bearers U2 and Echo (more pallbearers in their solemnity) have converted the same muck into brassy clean liturgies, pseudo-literary dirges dredged up from high holy masses and Boy Scout manuals; but The Birthday Party have continued to churn emotions with sickeningly obsessive love notes and fabulously detailed travel tales allied to a music at once brilliant and luminously flawed.

The violence of a Birthday Party song springs not so much from the urge to hurt, as a boldness, a hankering after danger, which leads them up dark alleys and sets them up in conflict with the night. Unsurprisingly, their combat reports come back spotted with shreds of that self-same night.

If these lurid purples and deep reds disturb you, it’s because your senses have been dulled by Pop Art, whose flat canvasses of car smashes masquerade as accurate reportage while putting you at one remove from the subject. But when The Birthday Party report “Dead Joe”’s fatal accident on *Junkyard*, they convey something of the crunching reality of death, the shock of its suddenness and the guilty excitement, the terrible curiosity its appearance brings.

It’s not all gloom and despondency, because the events they describe are extraordinary – meaning that, despite their occasionally grisly nature, there’s something of the carnival about them. They buzz with gossip, sneers and asides, brim over with speculation, sly jokes and sick one-liners – “*Tonight we sleep in separate ditches!*” – as would a crowd gathered round a fresh corpse.

Their new songs, as featured on “The Bad Seed” 12-inch and in their current live set, make the brave leap into the fantastic and the surreal. What with the accusations of self-parody made against »





"We remain apart from the audience":
Nick Cave,
February 1983

Junkyard, lesser souls would have retreated into something more ordered and conventional.

Instead, The Birthday Party heaped more garish make-up onto the grotesque mask they displayed to the world until, top-heavy, the make-up started falling off in lumps, leaving behind a correspondingly lighter, fascinating, misshapen form.

Tracy Pew's bass is the one constant around which ex-multi-instrumentalist Mick J Harvey (taking over from Phill Calvert, who was forcibly ejected from the drumset last June) places his bizarre drum figures and at which Rowland S Howard's guitar nags or, alternatively, teases with deliciously romantic come-ons...

Far be it from me, however, to rescue The Birthday Party from a philosophy of dirt and unhappiness—or even propose one on their behalf—by explaining them away; for the longer they remain untouchable, the more potent and unassailable their position. Besides, the Birthday Party never entered this game to be figured as the good guys.

IPICKUP THE trail of The Birthday Party slime in a Soho café, follow it down to Brighton and eventually back to their homes—or at least the places they hang their hats. So what's in a home? What can be read into the books on their shelves or the messes scattered across the floor?

"See? You're right in the home, there's nothing to hide!" despairs Mick J Harvey with a trace of mockery as I eye the French, German and Spanish dictionaries he's using in his spare-time study of languages, acting as if I'd chanced upon some guilty secret. Such is Mick's modesty. Such is Mick's application.

In contrast with the tidiness of Mick's flat, the room Rowland S Howard occupies with his girlfriend Genevieve is strewn with the few possessions allowed in an itinerant couple, arranged so as to make a home of sorts out of a desperately impoverished situation.

This trip, Tracy has walked into the tidy South London house of fellow Australians, The Go Betweens, only to have to walk out again a few days later when the Go Betweens give it up to go on tour. I meet Tracy and his girlfriend a week later, carrying three heavy suitcases into the room on loan to Nick Cave in the household of You've Got Foetus On Your Breath.

The first time I visit, I find Nick sick in bed, fully clothed beneath coarse blankets, the sheets—if any—ridden up somewhere deep beneath the covers. A bottle of mellow brown liquor buoys up his spirit, ashes are strewn across the pillow and the floor. He has reduced his necessities to the bare necessities that will now fit into a solitary plastic bag. Materially,

this is as far as The Birthday Party have come since leaving Melbourne for Britain three years ago.

Nick has been allocated the TV room in someone else's house. "They'll probably pressure me to leave when they get a video," he quips.

Aw, come on, Nick, surely you're the better entertainment value.

Rowland's lament

"I'm really not terribly fond of this nomadic existence because I find it's very hard to do things like writing songs when I haven't got somewhere I feel is my home, where I feel fairly secure.

"For the last three years our lives have had a limited amount of security, which Nick really thrives upon. I find it quite disconcerting. I find it really hard to write on the road or on the move. But Nick can write anywhere. He carries pieces of paper everywhere—in people's houses, on the tube, in people's rooms. He's quite lucky.

"I'd like to live somewhere, but then again I can't think of anywhere I'd like to live too long. I'd like to go home, but then I think, 'where's home?' I think Tracy and Mick both like to have somewhere fairly solid. It's really just Nick who's in love with going to new places all the time, continually feeling alienated. It just makes me feel rotten."

Tracy's wish

"It's been a bit of a pain in the ass sometimes, all this moving about, but when I think of the last three years and how it would have been if I was still in Australia now I would be bloody miserable too. All my mates who are still there want to come over here because we make it sound so great in our letters. And it's certainly been great seeing all of these different places. It's not something I want to do for the rest of my life, but for the moment it's fine.

"We're touring a lot this year, which I'm looking forward to. As far as I'm concerned, I want to stay on the road almost solidly this year so I don't have to worry about getting a flat."

Mick's front room

"I quite like being settled to some degree, but that's a very hard one because Nick is obviously very different in that respect. There's a lot of desperation about his creation, which manifests itself in a lot of fairly obvious ways. He really pushes himself to the limits, if you like. Me, I don't really care if I create anything or not. I'm quite happy to be comfortable and relaxed for a few months. It's not a big thing if I haven't written anything for a while."



Nick Cave with The Birthday Party at Ace, Brixton, London

Nick's wanderlust

"I personally don't think that any external things – whether it's the environment or whether it's my situation – affect my writing in particular. I have the same sort of ideas if I'm in London, Berlin or Australia. All it tends to do is make my life more miserable, if I'm thrown into a Dickensian situation, which seemed to be what happened when we got to London.

"After a few short months here I started feeling I was becoming part of the city, that London was sucking up my personality and it was then I knew I had to move out. It wasn't until I got to Berlin that I realised it's the moving that is the important part of the stimulus, not living in any particular place.

"I'm always really conscious of forming habits, and when I find them forming I try to break them, no matter what they are, whether they're routine or lifestyle or whatever. People who order their lives into a complete routine seem to be making a claim for security. Unless they're really in control, they're not secure.

"For that reason, I prefer my life to be totally insecure. I like not living anywhere, not having a home, moving around, just putting myself into states of confusion on a day to day basis."

Rowland reminisces

"When we first came to London, Nick was living in a squat in Maida Vale. I can't really speak accurately for him but at the time he was reading things like Samuel Beckett – *Watt*, things like that, depressed, sort of dirty and that, I think, influenced him into writing about this whole sort of squalor thing."

Nick's aside

"Rowland told you that? Judas! Well, he was reading... Mervyn Peake!"

Rowland's recall

"Mostly we were influenced against what all the English groups were doing. We've said this often enough before, but anyway we went to see some big thing at the Lyceum with Teardrop Explodes, Echo, A Certain Ratio and The Psychedelic Furs – the cream of British rock. But it was just so bad, so unpowerful, so uninvolved that we instinctively reacted against it. For a while we became more Americanised in a parodic sort of way."

Fade...

THE SOUND OF careening guitars and derailed rhythms swells up from the distance. Party songs are collaged, the voice of a deranged evangelist preacher folds in a death litany... "*Pilgrim gets on hacked daughter / All we get is 40 hack reporters... sweet hatchet swing low son / I'm feeling pretty lonesome...*" The noise degenerates into the curdling screams of the lynch mob. The ugly accent of bigots suited only to articulating jealousy and suspicion, the horror of miscegenation and fear of strangers is expertly seized with perilous glee... "**HANDS UP WHO WANTS TO DIE!!! Have you heard how Sonny's burning? / Like some exotic star / He lights up proceedings / Raise the temp... Some day I'll cut him down!**" The wagon rolls south, the mockery doesn't relent... "*American heads will roll in Texas!*"

Offscreen voice

The realm of The Birthday Party imagination isn't confined within geographical or political borders. It is populated with freaks and frightening dimwits, heroic and broken-backed lovers, all subjected to hot sticky climates or – their exact negative – damp cold climates, either of which reduce people to a state of inertia.

Subjected to the humid heat of Faulkner's deep South, the steamy golden showers of Genet's southern European ports or Greene's miserable, drizzling Brighton, BP characters react to the stifling atmospheric pressures with violence or extreme acts of love, often resulting in death sealed with hilarious kiss-off lines.

BP songs are pages torn from a thief's journal written in flight from Australia across Europe and America. They are – to put it in Tracy's colourful vernacular – "a real hell's broth of all these quite diverse influences, things that have just gotten into our mind, assimilated and eventually spewed forth."

"I like not having a home, putting myself in a state of confusion"

Nick's southern discomfort

"A mythical deep South? I know exactly what you mean, though I don't want it to be that particular. I just find that area, that style of intelligence and so forth, which maybe Faulkner would have his characters steeped in, really fascinating. The way in which they would talk, which is dumb, but is a really descriptively dumb language. It's just that a lot of things about the deep South interest me.

"The fanaticism, the blind belief in all sorts of totally ridiculous sorts of things, their really quaint, mystical way of justifying the beliefs they dedicate their lives to, these superstitious people of the South. Living each day, through

every hardship possible, with their hands, not their minds. Their lives are lived entirely in terms of punishment and reward.

"And that type of thing is equally prevalent in our *sophisticated* society. It is just simplified and magnified with these hillbilly type people. The same concepts of people denying the things they want still apply, denying their basic desires because they're afraid of what might happen if they express what they want.

"You can sit around for hours and make analogies of various aspects of that kind of society and this one. The lynch mob, the crazed mob that has no personality whatsoever, they lose their entire personalities for the sake of one crazed idea, is exactly the same as going to a concert by Adam And The Ants, where the focusing of attention is so much on one particular figure that they're just trading in their personalities to become a polyheaded blob...

"What makes us so different? I really do have quite a strong opinion of the way people behave when they're with other people. With us, I consider we're making an example of some kind of bid for individuality and at our best, which we were the other night at the Lyceum, we remain apart from the audience, we remained individuals with our own visions and we weren't sucked into the mob.

"Sometimes I get scared into feeling I should entertain these people, so I force myself to fling my body round everywhere, because I know it's entertaining, so eventually I lose and they win. Then I might as well be down there with them, basically..."

Rowland's reasoning

"When we went back to Australia last year, we were greeted with such acclaim and adulation it made what we were doing pointless, because the whole life of the group had been based on reacting against what was around us and turning it into some kind of positive force. So once everything was positive toward us it defeated the purpose. We loathed it, for the main part.

"For a start, most of it seemed unwarranted; people applauding wildly when you come onstage, when you announce a song they've never heard before; it was apparent they weren't thinking very much about what was going on and that we were well and truly absorbed into the whole rock'n'roll schtick.

"We never had any illusions that we were a law unto ourselves, but we've always operated fairly well outside the normal rock'n'roll context. I mean, we've never mixed with those sort of people socially. So it was frightening and disappointing to see how people were reacting. After two and a half months in Australia, Nick, Mick Harvey, Tracy and me, we were determined to break up the band because there didn't seem to be any point to continuing."

Tracy's dogs

"Nobody would like to think the audience is relating on such an arbitrary level. We like to get to our audiences a bit more of what we're trying to communicate rather than react to us on a purely mindless level. The comparison with Pavlov's dogs dribbling when they hear a bell ring... sometimes I think they're not listening at all. It's pretty bad when things get to that.

"The split-up last June... well, we set ourselves these goals in the past, 'cos it's really easy for us to lose our patience when you can't see immediate achievements. It's been our way to say, fuck it, if we can't do such and such by such a time. But by the time that date comes it's usually forgotten. We've been saying it as early as 1980, so I don't think there'll be too much of that mutinous talk in the future." »

Mick's best-laid plans

"Like last June I was looking more and more forward to being completely free, but when the designated break-up point came, there had been a lot of odd things happening in the meantime, like Tracy being put in jail. And we realised we hadn't done a lot of the things we wanted to do. But we knew something had to happen. We didn't want Phill (old BP drummer) around, so what we did was kick Phill out (Mick now plays drums full-time, switching from his role as a multi-instrumentalist) and moved to Berlin and decided to carry on as a group.

"I found it very difficult at first to be positive about it, because by that time I was looking forward to doing something else. But I couldn't keep on being negative about it, otherwise I would drag everything else down, so I went to the other extreme and became very positive. Sometimes, though, I don't know how much more the group can achieve, or what the group has achieved—I don't know why the group should achieve anything. Why should we put ourselves through this much agony?

"But what is quite different for our group is that it is a great thing for us to play an inspiring gig."

Nick's shock

"Breakup? We were going to break up? Nobody told me!"

Tracy's bad break

"Basically I got nicked for my third drunk driving offence, at least the third one where I was actually caught doing it, which was silly of me. I also had warrants out for two minor theft cases. One was for shoplifting a few sausages when I was broke and hungry. The other time was when I nicked something from a party when I was drunk. I was as incompetent a thief as I was a shoplifter. The cops finally caught up to me when I went out and did it again. I didn't go into court with a very good lawyer, just one from legal aid, so I left the court with a four-month sentence, of which I served three. The jails in Victoria aren't that bad. They're worse, I should imagine, in New South Wales. I got sent to a nice little prison farm.

"The band was due to leave for America about a week after I was locked up, which was a little awkward. I often seem to be doing things like this to inconvenience the rest of them. So they got Barry Adamson in for the tour...

"It's difficult for jail to have a positive effect on your mind, because the only thing on it is getting out. Your friends are on the outside. My girlfriend came hundreds of miles to see me every Sunday, but even then I couldn't see enough of her. I missed her like hell. I was also thinking about what I was missing with the band. That's the bad part.

"I don't know that it did that much for my mind at all. I think you would have to spend a lot longer in jail for that to happen, but it certainly cleansed my body. I was off the piss for three months, exercised a lot, worked everyday pruning pine trees, did weightlifting; that way you could sleep really well so time went a lot quicker."

Nick's way

"That art has to benefit society in some practical way? Anything but that! Art is what anybody wants it to be. I will not be pressured into harbouring a social conscience to write about issues that will be forgotten in a year's time, giving my opinion on something when it's not worth more than anyone else's basically.

"My sense of aesthetic, my style of aesthetic, now that's something worth making concrete for the world! My basic creativeness is exceptional, but I don't think my particular social or political opinions are worth a pinch of shit. So why should artistic sensibilities go to waste because I'm not opinionated?"

Rowland's wrath

"I really find it amazing that people who review us have sometimes come to the grand conclusion that we're doing the exact same thing as Bauhaus! It's incredibly frustrating when people conclude we're the same as them and their ilk. Even if they may think the music is mindless, I think it's fairly clear the lyrics are a hell of a lot better than 99 per cent of people writing at the moment."

Nick's nightmare

"It often worries me that our group could be accused of deliberately dwelling on the horrible things in life: death, murder and the like; that we're totally skin-deep and nothing else. We did this interview in Copenhagen and the interviewer read us this daily newspaper article that said our music could best be described as the sort of thing that would go with a cheap B-grade horror movie, which I find really insulting."

Mick's father

"Moral responsibility? That's a tough one, the eternal question. We would make what we would construe as a very irresponsible joke, meant in a particular way, maybe not seriously, and that leaves the question of us knowing what we mean and the possibility of 99 per cent of the people taking it the wrong way. So do we say, fuck the people, they don't understand, they're stupid? Or do we just do it, because it's the way we think about it, so why shouldn't we?

"On the whole I'd say it's too bad if they're misinterpreted, if the cover of *The Bad Seed* is taken the wrong way. Why the swastika? Well, I dunno, hahaha. I suppose if people went, Oh, how disgusting, that would be a very blinkered view. People would misunderstand the way we use it... That is, it's almost a bit naughty. The joke almost becomes that people are going to go 'Argh!' at something that was used that innocently.

"It's not to shock them. People who would get upset are very far removed from the group so most of them would never see it. That is what is so funny about *Drunk On The Pope's Blood*. Most of the people who would have been offended by the title would never come across it.

"You can't say we set out to be deliberately shocking, because if we are it doesn't work. We do those things... they're done to be ridiculous. They're meant for ourselves, not as a public offence. I find it really silly when people accuse us of trying to be sensational, because if we are, we're terrible at it."



"I left court with a four-month sentence, of which I served three"



"Except in Australia, they made a big thing out of *Drunk On The Pope's Blood*, which was so stupid, because it made the people who would have been offended by it aware of it. And I don't think we ever wanted to do that. Once that happened I was really upset about it. Well, my parents heard about it, and as my father's a priest (C Of E) I got a bit of flak about it."

Nick unrepentant

"Mick always used to say, 'I know why you write all this blasphemous stuff – it's to get back at me because of my father, isn't it?' But after three years he realised the joke had been going on too long, so there must be some serious intent behind it."

Mick's measured tone

"Me too reasonable for The Birthday Party? No, I think I'm an element the others require. For one we haven't got a manager, so it usually falls on me to get things organised, as I start worrying about them first. I think I really create a balance that is needed, otherwise I wouldn't be here. They've never complained about my being too reasonable or level-headed."

"Anyway, I can be irresponsible, too. It was me who got drunk at the first gig in New York and started yelling obscenities at the audience, which was really out of character..."

"I think Birthday Party represent elements of the individuals involved that otherwise wouldn't come to the fore. There are elements about me that come out in something so totally wild and untamed as The Birthday Party, which otherwise would stay hidden."

"I completely approve of it, though sometimes I think it would be good if people didn't get completely drunk out of their brains before going on stage. Then I realise that if they didn't, things wouldn't be the same. Their attitude would be different if they were responsible."

A Nick caricature denied

"I mean, I'm not the sort of person who sits around in bars crying into my beer, trying to dwell on physical pain... I would probably consider myself to be a destructive person, at least destructive to myself, but I enjoy it... I just don't write songs when I'm happy. That's partly because when I've got some spirit I'm usually out some place destroying it."

"Not that I'm saying that when I find myself depressed I crawl over to the desk, slide into the seat, dip the quill in the pot and start scratching this really painful prose. Even when I was a happy-go-lucky lad in Australia I wrote about depressing things."

Rowland's friends

"How I met Lydia Lunch, we were playing in New York and I met her at the Chaise Lounge. I'd been wanting to record 'Some Velvet Morning' for a while, and it struck me as a good idea to do it with her. Not the least because she would be good for selling the project to companies with! And they jumped at the chance."

"After that, the German company asked Lydia to record an album, so she got me, Mick, Genevieve (Rowland's girlfriend) and Tracy over to Berlin to help her do it... In the end the Germans couldn't pay the studio bill, so the tapes are gathering dust."

"Because 'Some Velvet Morning' sounded good – it had this dreamlike quality and some depth – I formed this group These Immortal Souls with Barry Adamson and Genevieve. There were plans to release a series of 12"s, each with a different theme, but no company was terribly interested..."

Rowland's sorrow...

"A lot of my favourite songwriters are people who write when they're obviously close to the edge and the songs betray this quality of weakness and fragility... I guess I'm primarily interested in people rather than expressing an idea. I'm interested in affecting people on an emotional level, hit them really hard, so they feel the same emotions you were feeling when you wrote the song. Anyone who can achieve that I think is very great."

"If I can make a record as good as the things I was listening to at 17 thinking they were the best, then I'd be satisfied. I think *The Bad Seed* is really a work of art, strong, powerful and capable."

...And his frustration

"The songs I used to write were really personal songs, and Nick said he couldn't sing them because it was too embarrassing, like reading someone else's diary. So for a long time I was writing impersonal songs,

and it's taken me a year to rediscover how to write self-expressive songs. Now I have to decide which ones are for The Birthday Party and the other ones I keep for me, Genevieve and Barry Adamson."

Nick's rejoinder

"To his disfavour, Rowland gives me lyrics that obviously mean a lot to him, and he has to release his emotions by proxy, kind of, and at the same time

I can't release my own. It's like driving someone else's car: you have to be more careful. And that's the way it is with lyrics."

Nick and Lydia

"We wrote *50 One Page Plays* together, 50 plays made up from five categories of things like the speedway and filth. Lydia suggested that one. 'Well, we had to start somewhere, so why not at the bottom?'"

Deutsch Australian freundschaft

"*Crawling in misery/nothing is here/sluggish crippled cells/your spells speak/hoer auf ruhr/thirsty animal/set unquenchable fire/demise after the fire/the cellcores burst out/lava burst out/new islands/thirsty animal*" ("Durstiges Tier" Words: Blixa Bargeld. Music: Einstürzende Neubauten)

Rowland: "Me and Nick are really interested in working with as many people as possible. It can only improve what you're doing. It's fairly limited working by yourself or with only one other person. I've written songs with about 10 other people in the past two and a half years. It teaches you something, inspires you a lot more."

Nick: "We're not misanthropic towards other artists in whatever field – I'm not so narrow-minded to reduce it to rock – who have ideas which I think are great."

"We don't have an attitude in which we don't want to have anything to do with anybody else, that we think we're the fucking greatest, though I do admit it might sometimes come across like that. We look to other people to play with, express ourselves with, exchange ideas with."

"It only happens very rarely, but it did in Berlin with Einstürzende Neubauten, and also with Lydia Lunch. Even so, our group is generally totally alienated from the scheme of things."

A bedtime story to close: Nick's swampland narrative

"What actually happens in this story is the death of this one central figure who is sinking into quicksand, listening to the sound of a lynch mob hot on his trail. All the time he is reminiscing, falling into fits of vision, having unearthly visitations, while he's gradually sinking deeper and deeper. Finally, his executioners burst into the clearing; they surround him but they can't get him, because he's too far away. Only his head is visible above the quicksand."

"He's beset by more visions and eventually he's visited by an angel of some sort, who he thinks forgives him for the murder of some orphan girl, which is the final hoax of his life. Just before he dies he believes he is forgiven and that nothing further or worse could happen to him. And somehow it's brought into the vision that the mob have poured gasoline onto his head, so his head is now this little flame in the middle of the middle of the mob..."

"That's putting it into a logical format, which it won't be when it's finished. The way this would be written, the way I want it to be read is like someone... waking up with a hangover, your mind totally blank but in pain and then one by one these grizzly memories come staggering back from the night before. Just half-conscious, totally vague, conflicting sorts of images drifting back..."

"For example, this character has murdered the county's tiny orphan girl who the community has taken into their hearts, and each time he relates it to the reader it's slightly different, because he can't really remember how he did it."

"To draw this to the music... 'She's Hit' is done in the same sort of style. Lines hint at a catastrophe of sorts, but not enough evidence is given to allow a clear picture of what exactly has happened. But the person who hears it is given to understand that some violent catastrophe has happened..."

Nick's longing

"I often feel nostalgic for Australia, but then I think there's nothing there for me any more except for a few friends and my family... but I really would like to go and live with my mother for a while, to tell you the truth."

Chris Bohm •

1983

JANUARY-MARCH

“We’re trying to reach people”

LA punk band **BLACK FLAG** bring their full-contact live show to Britain. “I like to see a band that puts their asses on the line for a bunch of people they didn’t even know,” says singer Henry Rollins.

THE FLAGSHIP

IT WAS embarrassing. I’d never met them before. And they didn’t like me.

less than enthusiastic about drinking. They did stay in the

dementedly at the number 13 orange-striped pool hall.

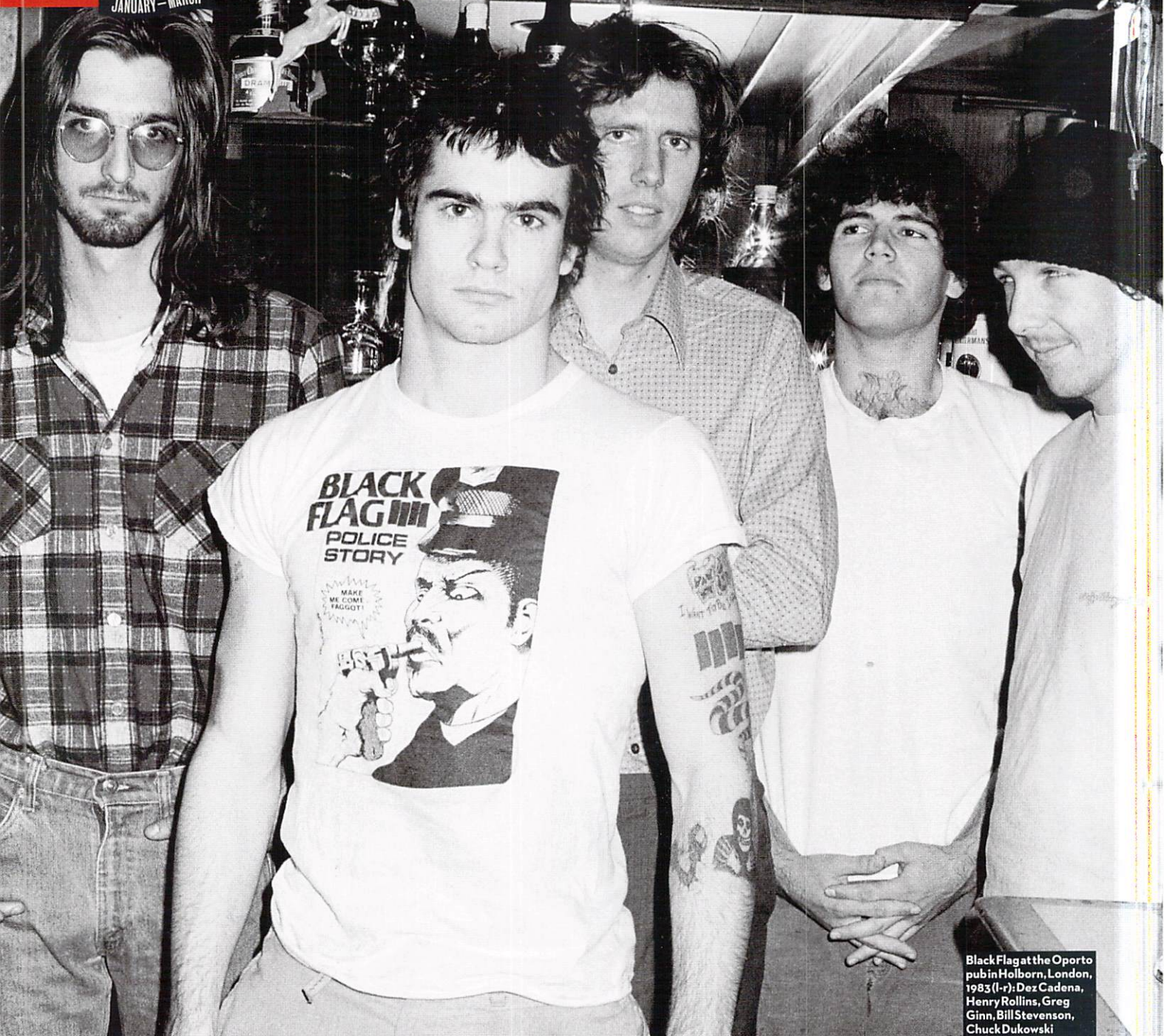


January 16, 1983:
Henry Rollins joins
the crowd at a show in
Torrance, California

BOB CHAMBERLIN / GETTY

1983

JANUARY—MARCH



Black Flag at the Oporto pub in Holborn, London, 1983 (l-r): Dez Cadena, Henry Rollins, Greg Ginn, Bill Stevenson, Chuck Dukowski

— MELODY MAKER FEBRUARY 19 —

IT WAS EMBARRASSING. I'd never met them before. And they didn't know London that well. So I reckoned that the most welcoming, most comforting place for an interview would be the pub (well... any excuse).

What I didn't reckon on was that LA band Black Flag might be less than enthusiastic about drinking. They did stay in the round, mind you. But for every bottle of Guinness that passed my lips, they were sending out for fresh supplies of coffee! By the end of the interview I was feeling like Edna the Inebriate Woman.

Black Flag certainly aren't predictable. I knew it the minute I walked in and found singer Henry Rollins sitting huddled by himself at the opposite end of the pub to the others, staring dementedly at the number 13 orange-striped pool ball he was rolling around in his hand.

"I did that because I'm Henry and I was doing the Henry trip," he explained later. This probably made perfect sense to himself and the rest of the group, but it certainly did worry the guv'nor of the pub, who thought he had an imminent hospital case on his hands.

I never did discover the significance of the orange stripe. Meanwhile, the Black Flag majority were maintaining an ominous silence at their

table, looking little like the over-the-top punk rockers of their musical reputation. Dez (Cadena, rhythm guitarist) could've taken on the role of Neil, *The Young Ones*' hippy, quite successfully. Equally mild-mannered, Chuck (Dukowski, bass), Greg (Ginn, guitar) and Bill (Stevenson, drums) showed no immediate visible signs of the maniacs they become when they walk on stage.

I had a sinking feeling that this conversation wasn't going to be as easy as I'd imagined. For the price of a bottle I'd have joined Harrigan and his cronies at the bar. And then Black Flag got talkative. Unpredictable. I told you so.

Previously, I'd seen Black Flag twice, towards the end of 1981. They remained in my memory for two reasons.

One was their overwhelming heaviness—like the weight of AC/DC multiplied by 100. The other was that they had a skinhead singer. A skinhead from Los Angeles! Now what's that all about?

"In my world, hair isn't such a big deal," responded Henry, now apparently happy to sit with the rest of the group but still squeezing the pool ball, "Over here, it's like you join a certain army if you have your hair a certain way. I didn't have my hair cropped for any reason, like 'I'm a skinhead'. I had it that way for the reason I have it this way now... because I felt like it."

He brushed his free hand through the dark tufts to signify the end of that particular topic, and talk turned to Black Flag and their mission in life. Which is planting seeds, apparently?

"Our ideas are emotional and each one is a seed," explained Chuck, obligingly. "The degree to which we're successful is the degree to which we plant a fertile seed in somebody's mind."

"What we're trying to do with our music and our approach is to reach people," continued Henry. "We're five people going 'I am I am' and we want to touch every emotion that a human being could possibly feel, from joy to hate or sadness or real disgust."

"I want to put myself, my mind, my heart and my body on the line for that. I'm driven to do it. It's my form of self-expression. I like to see a band that puts their asses on the line for a bunch of people they didn't even know. I know how hard I try, and if people don't like it, there's a door. They can go out and join the mass of other people who don't like Black Flag, and that's all."

"For me, a lot of the songs we play I need to play. That's what we write them for."

This sounds a bit obsessive to me.

"Well," said Henry, enjoying the drama of his own language, "It's as much an obsession as breathing is. Do you want to live tomorrow? I need to live, and there's a song in my heart."

We return to the subject of emotion.

"Most people have everything they need inside them, and Black Flag jars the emotions around and jiggles them out of people," said Bill, the newest member of the band. "We can make you see what's inside yourself."

"We just went to a big museum," said Chuck mysteriously. "Every topic in there dealt with

several real simple things; the themes were people's insecurity and how they fit into the cosmos, religion and how they relate to life and death... their insecurity about death and feeling about life. Then there's love and all the ramifications of that."

"There's a lot of violent imagery carried with the pictures. There's one picture, which was a knight and he's got a shield and the woman's there. It was like 'The woman of death'. You can see that all intellectual ideas such as we saw in the museum are derived from more simple ideas: people's emotions."

I venture that while a Black Flag gig could certainly be described as an experience, I never

felt any entire range of inner feelings tested as a result of being there. Do the band maybe obscure their intentions by crushing people into submission, or—to be blunt about it—don't they feel that instead of regarding them as a unique emotional stimulant, people might dismiss them as a lot of noise?

"It might be a lot of noise," said Chuck testily. "But then you could say that if you have a dog and it comes up and barks because it's happy to see you, that's a lot of noise too. Or if he whimpers because he's just got hit by a car you could say that's a lot of noise. There may be noise, but the dog is still being communicative. That's the point."

"It doesn't matter if people like us or not," said Des. "Any kind of reaction is a reaction, whether it's good or bad."

"There's a whole lot of things that a person can't face," said Henry, giving the impression that it was everyone's duty to face Black Flag at some time in their life.

What about the people who don't want to face them? What about the people who don't feel the emotional message? What about the people who don't particularly want to have these so-called seeds planted in their heads? Are they deficient in some way?

"Maybe there's a deficiency in us," said Des wisely, eliciting a mutter of "You can say that again" from Harrigan at the bar, a chuckling from his mates and a general ordering up of pints for their guilt-free drinking company.

Personally, I'd agree that Black Flag do seem

slightly on the eccentric side. Maybe that's what enables them to perform with the intensity, the strength and the full commitment of their gig at the 100 Club two days later... and equally can inspire them to pull out the horrifyingly overbearing tactics of their last British visit in the bigger halls.

"I keep a journal,"

said Henry brightly as the topic of Britain presented itself. "I was writing in it last night that I never feel American until I'm over here. That's because the people around me make it painfully clear that I am American. I would like people to relate to me as a person and a human being."

He squeezed the number 13 ball even tighter.

"And while we're here, we'd like to mention Troublefunk from Washington, the Descendants, Saint Vitus, the Meat Puppets from Arizona, the Dicks from Austin, the Big Boys and Red Kross."

With that, Black Flag had to leave for rehearsals. It was time for a proper drink. And when I looked up, Harrigan's mob had all gone. Carol Clerk •

The edge of insanity

MM FEB 19 Black Flag put their all into a London show.

THERE ARE TIMES when you realise that the music business really does protect its artists. Take Black Flag. Now if these five weren't in a band, they'd have been certified years ago, wrapped up in straitjackets and committed to the nearest asylum to rant into the empty air for evermore.

In daily life, they're peculiar enough. On stage, they're right on the edge of insanity, teetering dangerously while a soundtrack of screaming hell shrieks and swoops round them.

Henry, the singer. He's the psycho to end them all. His eyes are the weapons of a possessed epileptic. His muscles strain constantly, pushing the convulsing body out to its shuddering physical limit. His forehead bulges so forcefully I thought his brains were about to come bursting out over the pogoing punksters in front of him.

And the rest of the band... an orgy of flailing limbs and psychiatric disorder, physical chaos and mental havoc.

You can't say Black Flag don't put everything they've got into their shows. This is punk rock gone mad.

Musically, the Flag go more for atmosphere than actual song content. I couldn't tell you what they played; couldn't even make out the lyrics. I can tell you that they created an outrageously powerful, compulsively unsettling cacophony that aimed as much for gut reaction in the slower songs as in the more familiar, ferocious punk numbers. Black Flag seized control and kept it. They deserved the response they got.

To be honest, I wasn't much looking forward to this gig. I'd seen Black Flag before at the Lyceum and the Leeds Queens Hall, and thought them possibly the worst band I'd ever encountered. Their crushing volume, on those occasions, seemed their only means of attack.

Maybe the band have improved since then. Or maybe the smaller, more intimate, grounds of the 100 Club allowed the personal assault of the music to assert itself properly while also permitting the crowd to see the band at close range.

Whatever the reasons, and despite a less-than-packed-out attendance (due partly to a boycott by some punters after the appalling scenes of violence at Infar-Riot's recent gig there), it turned out to be an evening well spent. I reckon I was due for a nice surprise anyway... Carol Clerk



"Black Flag jars the emotions and jiggles them out of people"



1983

JANUARY—MARCH



Randy Newman
athome in Los
Angeles, 1983

“I try and not be mean”

RANDY NEWMAN

hits town to tell the press nothing (and everything) about himself. Los Angeles, talking woodblocks with Springsteen, rewriting *Faust*... all come into his witty remit. “I don’t even have to write the songs any more,” he jests. “Have the maid do it.”

— MELODY MAKER FEBRUARY 12 —

WEIGHING WORDS FOR a living, Randy Newman at some time in his life made the decision to speak in penny-plain. Judging by his work, he is probably also a moralist and an intellectual, but, like the subject of himself in his songs, he would prefer all that good stuff to lie tacit. Back in 1978 when I was the rapacious sort of interviewer who couldn’t wait to crowd Hitchcock into a corner and make him spill about *Notorious* and the Sacraments, I gave Randy a hard time on these characteristics. He took the Fifth Amendment. Quite right too.

This time around, we stuck with the text, and, as with *The Shroud* at Turin, got some idea of the absent figure. After all, this is his own method in his songs, which impersonate viewpoints that he either despises, pities or merely records. I used to think that his personal nightmare was loss of identity – “*You said, ‘Honey, can you tell me what your name is?’ / I said, ‘You know what my name is’*” (“*Last Night I Had A Dream*”) – but I now think it’s none of my damn business.

His latest album, *Trouble In Paradise*, is a marvellous piece of writing, and deserves a conducted tour by the writer. “Just as long as I don’t look as if I’m carried away by the depth of it all,” says Randy, worriedly tearing my ticket as I board his Greyhound, MIAMI – LA – CAPE TOWN – THE CHURCH OF BAD FAITH. Earlier buses at the depot have left already for Louisiana, Dayton Ohio, Birmingham, Baltimore and Cleveland.

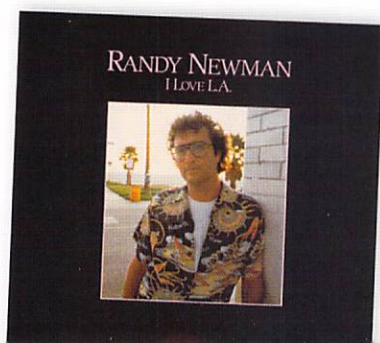
“Some of the best songs I’ve written about cities were about places I’d never been. It’s like when Brecht or Kafka wrote about America before coming; it was silly stuff, inaccurate but there was something imaginative and good about it.”

Like the queue of blacks in “*Christmas In Cape Town*” all carrying lunch pails with pictures of *Star Wars* on the side?”

“Yeah, I know it’s not true, but I like mixing it all up with California. I could see that so well, all of them like children going to school with their lunch pails, the guy seeing it that way. He sees them like children. I like the idea of the ghetto listening to ABBA. I know it can’t be so, but I like the idea of getting things a little wrong. It sheds more light.”

The English girl in the song who criticises apartheid while just passing through represents Randy’s resentment of British sanctimony. »

RICHARD E. AARON / GETTY



"They've been very unfair over a number of years. Things I saw on TV here in the '60s criticising the United States for racism. This country hasn't handled it any better. Now you've got riots. Now you've gotta recognise your own problems, publicly. Hmm—I guess I shouldn't say this..."

"There's more racism among surprising people in the States right now than there's been for a bit. In California you hear it from people who don't like the fact that the state will be 50 per cent Mexican soon, Chicano. It's similar to what you heard here about the Pakistanis, you know, the population increases so fast, all that. That's new.

"I'm not sympathetic to the guy in the song's position, but I am sympathetic to his reaction to someone coming from somewhere else and telling him how terrible it is. If they're upset about my criticism in South Africa, they've got a good case. I've never been there. But I did let the guy make a case, the best case he can. Well, he can't make one for apartheid, but he can make a case for how truly difficult it will be for the people down there to adjust should it ever change.

"It's too easy to say racism is horrible. There are songs that've done it, but it's not my way. I think it's more interesting for me to let the guy try and make his case. I can't keep doing it or it becomes a device—but this guy is very different from the guy in 'Rednecks' or the guy in 'Yellow Man'. It must be a strange, charged atmosphere there in South Africa. Well, that's what you get when you read Nadine Gordimer."

RANDY NEWMAN and PAUL SIMON THE BLUES



From the new Randy Newman album, TROUBLE IN PARADISE

THE GUY in the bar in "Cape Town" is different from the guy at Mikey's too, though there are superficial similarities. Both blame the blacks for their own loss of youth, but the focus is very different. The guy at the bar in Mikey's centres on the hostility of the jukebox.

"It isn't like the old songs he'd like to hear in his friend's bar, but his friend's gotta play what the patrons want to hear. The music's very threatening to a guy in his forties who grew up in North Beach ("Mickey, whatever happened to the fucking Duke of Earl?"). See, I like the music. The guy in there I disagree with about the new stuff. The coldness of synthesizers and techno-pop, no humanity, no warmth—he's not quite wrong about synthesizers being essentially cold. I use them and like them for what I have to do, but I don't have a deep affection for them. I love an orchestra, but I can't use it very much on what I do."

Both the sad ballads about girls are distorted by the lens of the narrator. "Same Girl" is sung by a junkie, responsible for the wreck of his subject, and trying to pretend she's still the same: a denial of his responsibility. "Real Emotional Girl" sung with treacherous indiscretion by her latest disaster, has been a worry to the songwriter. He's painstaking about spaces and the reverse, putting too much in, and he also has a moral and

aesthetic contempt for textual ugliness. Sometimes, in consequence, the casual reader will miss the monitored drip-feed of character poisoning.

"He's a bad guy! You're absolutely right. Yes! But no-one got it! There you go, see. I'm glad. That's what I meant; he shouldn't be giving these confidences away, you bet. In my opinion, he shouldn't say any of it. Most people thought, real smart ones that know my work very well, that he was just trying to figure the girl out, and that it was a straight love song."

He fiddled with the lines, refining "Every little lie you tell her" to "Every little thing", and "She comes real quick" to "She turns on easy"—both distancing the villainy of the narrator. "Yeah, I altered things, I got scared. It'd read nice; make it absolutely clear, but too horrible. You're right. It's happened to her again. Oh good."

He worried a lot too about vulgarity in "There's A Party At My House". The song crouches into a heavy breather after the halfway point, following a couplet about nipples with the injunction, "Bobby, get the rope."

"I didn't mean anything malignant about the rope there. I tried to get rid of it. I took it out because I thought I had a way to fix it. I was gonna say, 'Hey Bobby, get the goat', but that was so much worse. Awful bestiality!"

MAYBE IF YOU are gifted with Randy Newman's eye, which will see through all lead obstacles, pink panties and self-delusions, you do need to make a conscious effort to think positive. The sneering circle of the very smart would not sustain the solitary haul of the songwriter.

"I used to say, 'Oh great—so what, so what, so what? I've learned as I've got older to try and enjoy the good things that happen to me because it's tough. I get criticised for being cruel, and I watch it. I mean, I'm careful about a mean streak, not showing it in a work. Sometimes you see it in people's work and it makes you think bad people did it."

"I didn't watch it in 'The Blues', and it's a little rough. It's just about the suffering songwriter thing, that sorta stereotype. It's interesting that Paul Simon would do it, sorta make fun of himself, though he's way beyond that. His songs are genuinely personal. As dippy as it sounds and as much as I've always hated the sensitive kind of poet-songwriter stereotype—that kid in *Fame* you know?—I shouldn't make fun of it because there are some people legitimately that way."

It's not so much unkind as startling that Paul Simon would agree to Randy's fit-up. He can hardly, in fact, get more than a handful of poignant lines on the track for the composer's mock-enthusiastic recommendations: "He's got the blues, this boy / He's got the blues." What it is is very funny, and just below the stern moral resolve, it was obvious that Randy thought so too...

February 26, 1983:
performing on
Saturday Night Live





Newman in his
backyard, 1983

Every time you use vocal unisons to endorse a line, I mistrust you double, I confide.

"Well, you can't believe my narrators either," he replies, amused. "They're untrustworthy in almost every case. Maybe when I seek to reinforce something, it's a bigger lie."

I confess that I hadn't known what his attitude was on "I Love LA". He lives there, and he had told me in the past that he couldn't write about it because it was too close, too familiar.

"I do love it. It's ignorant, sorta a simplistic paean because the attacks I've heard on LA are so simplistic. The streets I chose ("*Century Boulevard, we love it/Victory Boulevard, we love it/Santa Monica Boulevard, we love it/Sixth Street, we love it, we love it*") are undistinguished, to put it kindly. An LA joke in a way, but in a sense it's a bit of a defence."

And Miami?

"Very strange atmosphere. I've only been there once. The wind blows from a different place, and it feels like any kind of nastiness is possible. Lounge town. The character is just a sponger and it's a real good town for spongers."

I wondered aloud whether this sponger would have a word like 'impure' ("*And the women down here/Are so impure*") in his vocabulary. Randy shot across the desk to peruse my lyric sheet. "I don't like to make mistakes like that, but I do. Maybe. It's close, I agree. I think about that kinda thing, whether the guy in 'Rednecks' would've known all those ghettos. Hmm... he's not that dumb, this guy. Hard to say."

The song reminded me of Nathanael West's *A Cool Million* in its reversal of the Horatio Alger myth. The composer looked far from pleased at that.

"Yeah, they want to make a musical of that and they called me to do it. It's too mean for me. Too nasty. So is *Day Of The Locust*. Boy, that's some mean-spirited stuff, I'll tell ya. I try and not be mean, I don't want to be. I turned it down for that reason."

Randy Newman's sad, small characters have at least self-justification going for them. West's had none. Pessimism, emptiness, without compensation of the possibility of redemption is the overall message of West's masterpiece, *Miss Lonelyhearts*. More to our subject's taste at the moment is Goethe.

"Goethe was smart. I just read *Faust* recently and I loved it. I love those

"The narrator in 'My Life Is Good' is a horrible version of me"

movies about Heaven, you know, where they have angels and the Devil in it, that sorta anthropomorphising Heaven.

"*Green Pastures* – did you ever see that? It's a black kid's version and God smokes five-cent cigars. This stuff can be a disaster! The idea of doing *Faust* is almost a cliché and a joke, but I think I can do it. I wrote first draft and I have maybe three songs. I sorta wrote 'I'm Different' for that. I'm gonna have Faust be this kid who goes to Notre Dame, and that's what he'd be like."

So what would the Devil offer him?

"That's the thing, see. He's a kid. His wishes are so totally juvenile he'd want to see

somebody naked or something. His teacher. He's as tiresome to the Devil as Goethe's Faust. The Devil asks him, well what do you want? And the kid says, ah... I dunno. Tough to corrupt. I got a 14-year-old boy, and they can be pretty fuckin' infuriating, you know. Don't seem to want anything. My musical will be a total trashing of the story, but I'm afraid to look at it again."

WEREACH "MY Life Is Good" without me coming on incisive about his personal life.

Married, kids, Hollywood antecedents (those Newmans), works in an office with a piano, bench and table in a bad industrial ("I'm the only sissy in the neighbourhood") area of LA. He volunteers a little more.

"The narrator in that is a horrible version of me. This guy is just trying to browbeat this poor little teacher with how magnificent he is. Offend her; impress her, everything, Me and Bruce Springsteen 'talking about some kind of woodblock or something?' It's to impress her. Me and The Boss talk shop. That's what we talk about. Nothing you would even comprehend. Oh, he's loathsome! I like all that stuff the Mexican maid does for him.

"She cleans the hallway, she cleans the stairs – she does everything. I don't even have to write the songs anymore. Have the maid do it. Very privileged existence. It's like the old legend that Irving Berlin didn't write his own songs. He had a little black kid tied up to his piano who was doing all the stuff."

Hey, Juanita! Keep 'em comin'. (*Unison*) Brian Case •

1983

JANUARY - MARCH

Mini-dramas:
Fish of Marillion

— ALBUMS —
REVIEW
— 1983 —

ALBUMS

Marillion
Script For A Jester's Tear EMI

How easy it would be to wax perverse over Marillion; to take up their cause just because they get up so many hacks' noses. But such a strategy would be incestuous, not to say pointless so I'll simply state my case: the idea of Marillion is a fantasy I've long entertained, the idea of a band brave enough not to tell the plebs what they should want but to steam right in there where Cabaret Voltaire fear to tread, give them what they want and then do something.

To a certain extent, the reality of Marillion does just that.

Despite singer Fish's grease paint and mime, they're less of a novelty than most other new bands I can think of, pandering less to the fickle one-upmanship of the fashion-conscious than playing with the rules of the faceless mass of music lovers that the media generally either ignores or insults.

Marillion could be more ideal, could warp more, subvert more, could try harder to bring some sense, some reason, some reality to an audience all too willing to escape into hero-worship. But my perception is patronising - I say they should be revolutionaries first and foremost and musicians by consequence, and *Script For A Jester's Tear* works the other way round.

To judge it musically then, *Script* does no more, nor less than has been done before. Within

their world, orchestrated crescendos easily assimilate symbolic passion, and pseudo-classical passages act as conveniently accepted substitutes for introversion.

The scope of any one number - "Garden Party" for example - should be applauded for its attempts to accommodate so many emotions, but unfortunately the overall scope within which the album works hasn't progressed - or regressed - much since 1974. Pomp rock sure... but with pompous intentions?

Here we have it - *Script For A Jester's Tear* is almost the wolf in sheep's clothing I'd hoped. Wearing its influence, literally, on its sleeve, every song is a mini-drama scripted in the florid language expected by its audience, but refusing to say cosmic nothings.

They're dirt dressed up as angel dust, and Fish is an accomplished actor, almost as precocious as the young Gabriel but also almost as vicious as vintage Alex Harvey. Without him, *Script* would be the bollocks you probably think it is, but with him it's probably as sharp as a form so often wrongly assumed to be archaic can be.

"He Knows Your Know" deals with drugs, "Forgotten Sons" with war, "Garden Party" with class... uh... the rest, I'll admit, are anyone's guess.

So *Script* will do nothing to convince pop's worthy theorists that "progressive" rock isn't dead-but-not-gone, though it may well affect thousands of faithful fans in a way they might not otherwise have been affected. It doesn't need my excuses; it will sell not for what it says but for the way it sounds. One can but hope that some, at least, will wake up and listen. Steve Sutherland, MM Mar 19

Pink Floyd *The Final Cut* EMI

If there's anything more undignified than a drunkard pestering the pub's customers for another gin, it's the grim spectacle of a name that has known fame in youth refusing to grow old with good grace. Like the withering, decrepit former glamour queen played by Gloria Swanson in Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard*, Roger Waters is a sad example of one of those people who cannot bring themselves to admit that their days of glory have gone forever, who just can't resist the temptation to prop up their public personas and personal sense of pride with ill-conceived and myopic acts of vanity.

The Final Cut is Waters feeble attempt to come to terms with *The State Of The World*, a hand-wringing address to the nation that arrogantly and laughably tries to comment "meaningfully" on the troubles and foibles of the entire human race in the latter stages of the 20th Century in the space of a mere 40 minutes without the aid of anything remotely resembling an analytical, poetic or probing imagination. And oh boy, is that some disadvantage!

Even taking into account the witless torpor that Pink Floyd fell into more than a decade ago, even remembering the pointless indolence and brain-numbing complacency of the likes of "Welcome To The Machine", the scale of this record's failure is quite stupefying, its sense of pretension and self-satisfaction wholly nauseating. Compared to this monstrous endeavour, "Another Brick In The Wall" is an undiluted masterpiece.

So, Roger Waters, you have poked your head outside of your residence and decided you don't

uh, dig Earth 1982-83. Funnily enough, the rest of us didn't realise things weren't rosy in the English country garden and should gain enlightenment from this rock operetta. I mean, this one sounds heavy: "Brezhnev took



pink
floyd
the
final
cut

Afghanistan, *Begin* took *Beirut*, *Galtieri* took the *Union Jack*, and *Maggie* over lunch one day took a *cruiser* to make him give it back." Like, words of genius.

Waters' views never rise above this level, a series of vacuous and simplistic conceits, delivered as if he's doing us all one great big favour. "Oh *Maggie*, what have we done?" he asks to cringe-inducing effect on the LP's first track, as if to set the tone, oblivious of the fact that anybody who really despises the woman calls her "Thatcher", "Maggie" of course being the phrase beloved of the fawning press.

No-one's denying that it's possible for artists to tackle "big" issues, but it takes both political literacy and artistic sensibility to be able to comment on such vital issues as the Falklands and the decline of Britain.

Waters possesses neither. Robert Wyatt's delivery of Costello's line "We could be diving for pearls" or just one minute of Alan Bleasdale's TV drama *Boys From The Blackstuff* say more about our current predicament than any of the soft-headed, intelligence-insulting doggerel on show here.

And it's not as if it's possible to ignore the lyrical content. Waters' colourless voice is fixed permanently at a level that leaps out of the mix, his enunciation and emphasis on certain words indicating the presence of "significance". The adjective that most accurately describes his mood throughout is concern – not the genuine article, but the kind of exaggerated bleeding-heart concern you will hear from SDP politicians.

"Wasters of life and limb," he barks, in a false, accusing manner. "The final cut", he spits, so unconvincingly that it has me in fits!

Musically, you know what to expect, only it's worse. The "important" – or should that be impotent, ho ho! – parts sound suspiciously like outtakes from an Alan Price album, these being broken up by crashing thunderstorms of quasi-orchestral melodrama at this type of guitar playing that is usually accompanied by contorted facial gestures. Truly, a milestone in the history of awfulness. Expect the usual sycophantic review in the pages of *Rolling Stone*. *Lynden Barber*, *MM Mar 19*

Dexys Midnight Runners *Geno* EMI
Or, EMI's revenge. This is a

collection of singles (A and B sides) which Kevin Rowland and his original Dexys boys released through the Manchester Square monolith before the band disintegrated and Kevin legged it to Phonogram, looking for new musicians and a new sound.

A cash-in job? Maybe, but *Geno* is also a fine guided tour of the raging soulful power which the surly Rowland used to exude consistently back then.

"*Geno*" itself is well enough known, of course, but there's a satisfying assortment of other gems here too. For example, there's "Dance Stance", which later reappeared as the epic "Burn It Down". It's a little slower than the later edition, with the lads belting out the list of Irish authors behind the leader's remarkably vocal aerobatics.

It's clear, listening to "Plan B" again, that the tune was severely underrated when it came out – it's a fierce, driving assertion of the will to move on up, and deserves another hearing.

This collection also makes it clear what the present-day Dexys lack. The first incarnation of the band somehow felt much more like a group, not just a carefully-drilled context in which Kevin could throw any shapes he felt like.

Check the barely repressed fury of "I'm Just Looking", or the tingling rush of "There There My Dear". This was a band with a great deal to prove, and in doing so they comprehensively trashed any accusations of rip-off, cash-in or recycle with brutal exercises in controlled power.

Which isn't to say that instrumentals like "Soul Finger" or "The Horse" were any more than token gestures. For some reason they've been plonked at the ends of sides one and two, and bring the album back to earth with a dull thud on each occasion.

But their version of "Breakin' Down The Walls Of Heartache" demonstrates that they understood enough about their sources to invest them with greatly increased strike capability without losing sight of what made them worthwhile in the first place. In all, a useful collection even if you already have a copy of *Searching For The Young Soul Rebels*. It contains some great songs and showcases one of the best horn sections in recent memory at full tilt. Most of all, it shows you what Kevin Rowland was capable of when he had a band which pushed him to his limits. *Adam Sweeting*, *MM Mar 19*



SINGLES

...reviewed by MARC ALMOND

David Bowie *Let's Dance* EMI

After being up all night watching *Batman* videos, I was hoping to be wildly excited and livened up, and everyone pricks up their ears – if you'll excuse the expression – at the thought of a new Bowie record. But this reminds me of one of the many faceless funk records that come out and go nowhere. He did this on *Young Americans* and again on *Station To Station* much better, so why do it again?

I think Bowie, like all good legends, should either disappear or die or, at least, become a recluse, give up and be remembered for what he was good at. It's been a long time since I've been enamoured of anything he's done – I think he's slowly slipped away into tedium and now he's ruined his chances of becoming a good legend or an enigma. *MM Mar 19*

New Order *Blue Monday*

FACTORY

If it had *Divine* bellowing over the top, you might be able to look at it in a different light, but this is a boring old standard electro-disco riff with a few standard

electronic effects thrown in, put over a wet, weary, soulless vocal totally devoid of any passion whatsoever and wrapped in a suitably annoying Factory package.

They're doing something new for them but it's very, very dated. It would be preferable to have your head run over by a steamroller – both give you a headache but at least the steamroller ends it quickly. This just seems to go on and on and on. *MM Mar 19*

Duran Duran *Is There Something I Should Know?* EMI

The thing about Duran Duran is that they always put out really infectious pop records and, whether you love 'em or hate 'em, you end up going round singing them all the time. You just can't stop, they stick in your mind – I think they're very clever at the crafted pop record and I really liked *Rio*, but this is them at their most unmemorable. Whether you like or hate a Duran Duran record, you can always recognise it as being them, but this could have been anybody – it reminds me of the Beatles' harmonies in the '60s.

If people are gonna make a deliberate effort to get away from the sound they had before – and I don't actually know if Duran are – they should go and do something extremely different as opposed to something like this where people will say, "Well, maybe they're trying to do something but maybe they aren't." This has ended up being a bit nowhere. *MM Mar 19*



1983

JANUARY—MARCH

“It’s a very,
very dry
joke”

From Leeds, and
disliking Bauhaus,
come THE SISTERS OF
MERCY. “We like a loud
noise, we like a good
tune,” says ironic
linguist ANDREW
ELDRITCH. “We like
the relentlessness of
classic rock music
— heavy metal.”

— MELODY MAKER JANUARY 15 —

“O UR PROBLEM IS that talking usually ends up as a very serious affair, which isn’t a true reflection of the band as a phenomenon,” said

Andy, singer with The Sisters of Mercy. “It’s very hard to convey the non-intellectual aspects of any band through talking.”

What the hell, we talked anyway. We talked in Andy’s front room in Leeds, all four Sisters and me. Then I talked to Andy and guitarist Gary Marx in a Chinese restaurant. Then back to the front room. I vetoed the full all-nighter around 3.30am. Andy probably spent the rest of the night talking to himself, because he’d finally got warmed up, the night creature pacing in his lair.

Before he found himself in the spotlight with The Sisters Of Mercy. Andy studied languages. Where, I queried? »

KEVIN CUMMINS / GETTY

Page 20 — MELODY MAKER, January 15, 1983

THE DEVIL'S
FLOORSHOW



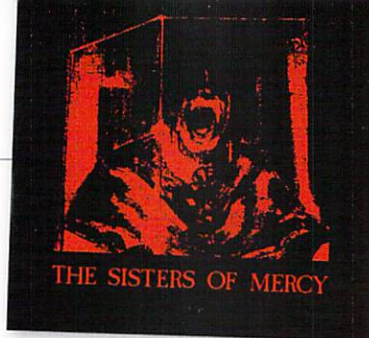
The first four-piece Sisters Of Mercy lineup: (l-r) Gary Marx, Craig Adams, Andrew Eldritch and Ben Gunn in 1982

"Oh, all over the place," he said guardedly. "I never finished a course because I kept finding more exciting things to do, like petty vandalism."

"I've done French and German and Italian and Latin and Chinese and a smattering of Russian and a smattering of Dutch in my time. Chinese was the best. Latin helped me no end—I don't know whether it helped my brain any, but as a linguist it was certainly vital. And I can do crosswords in a zillionth of the time it takes anybody else. I can't do ordinary ones, but the cryptic ones are a doddle."

The day of our meeting found The Sisters Of Mercy unaccountably quiet, possibly the result of a sordid and thinly attended gig in Bradford the night before. Consider these men: guitarist Gary Marx is tall, lanky, thick white socks of the sort favoured by mountaineers pulled up over the bottom of his jeans. He watches the proceedings with apparent indifference, occasionally throwing in an oblique comment. On stage, he wreaks violence on his guitar.

Bassman Craig Adams crimps himself into the corner of the sofa and reads an old Batman annual from cover to cover, pausing only to light another cigarette. He only uses three strings on his bass because one of the machine heads is broken. His cheerful exterior seems quite at odds with the grinding, warlike attack of his playing. Craig is the



"You can
frighten
people and
amuse them at
the same time"

"It's vital. The personal chemistry is very important. Craig's response is just to play the bass like he does, the sort of awesome noise, and that says a lot to me."

"Sometimes at soundchecks, maybe after we've been in the van all day, he just plugs in and wham! It just knocks me out."

Mark provides the more lunatic side of things. And Ben's got a much more open mind on things. The balance of all these four is what makes it work.

"Even minor decisions are ludicrously democratic. That's one of the reasons why we never got a drummer, because drummers just don't fit into anybody's personal chemistry."

You talk a lot about the humour in your music, but does it communicate to the audience?

"Well, basically it involves the dialectics of cynicism, which is something that takes a long time to explain," says Andy. "It's a very, very, very dry joke."

Gary: "I think the gigs are pure slapstick."

Because you make them that way or because of the places you have to play in?

Andy: "It starts off OK but by the end of the gig Gary's just not in control any more, he's just destroying things. And it is very slapstick."

"But every band's got that anyway. It's just that most of them don't realise it. And of course the fact that you're being serious about it only makes it more ironic, and the whole thing about irony is that it compounds itself at every stage."

Of course, a joke's no longer a joke once you've picked

it apart and explained it. I can only say that the first time I saw them something clicked at once. Perhaps it's a little like that horrific thrill of driving fast on a motorway in the rain and the car suddenly starts to aquaplane, or realising that you've gone over the line this time but wasn't it worth it for the rush? Gamesmanship par excellence. Check, for

Hideous raw power and black humour

MM MAR 12 London feels the Sisters' "keen blade of irony".

THE EVENING BEGAN with the ghastly wailings of Ritual, a graceless quintet who took huge pride in their sheer unrelenting awfulness. Next, something called Baba Luma, who seem to think they're The Doors. The Doors were usually awful, but Baba Luma were worse.

Luckily The Sisters Of Mercy came next, and I cannot speak too highly of this excellent group. I have already spoken highly of them several times, and will continue to do so until you bastards (*Steady on there Wah-Ed*) start paying attention.

The Sisters' macabre fusion of hideous raw power with black and twisted humour may well be unmatched in the annals of rock. Certainly, they tread this wicked razor's edge with malicious deadpan glee, and I find the keen blade of their irony a splendid thing.

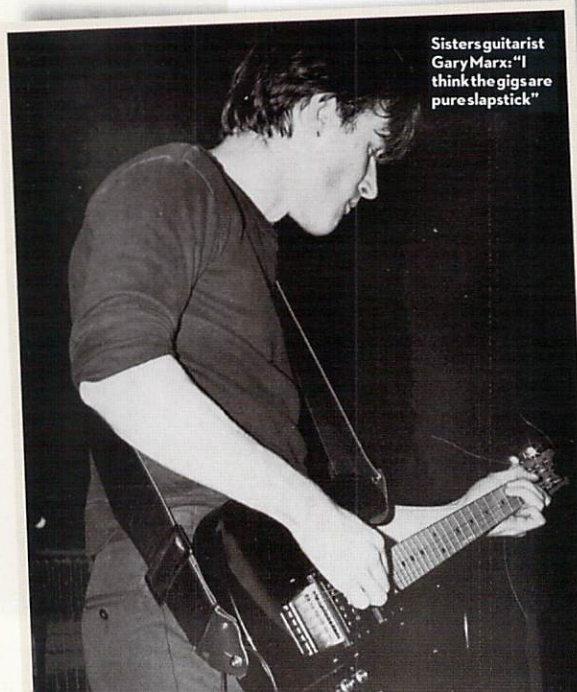
Tonight, the only clues they offered to a rather witless audience were guitarist Gary Marx's irrepressible smirks. How the entire band managed to keep a straight face while Andy negotiated the higher registers of their preposterous cover of "Jolene" will probably have to go unexplained.

More easily assimilable for the bozo in the street were such masterpieces as

"Floorshow" and of course the rib-crushing "Body Electric". Already, the Sisters have coined some of the most malevolent riffs known to man, galvanic lacerations of noise driven firmly into the stomach by merciless drum machines. The appropriate physical response to The Sisters Of Mercy isn't a dance exactly, more a sort of horrible writhing motion. Dig it!

We were treated to an airing of the next single, "Anaconda", not perhaps vintage Sisters but serviceable enough, plus the slow, gruesome slitherings of "Valentine", a nasty piece of work.

The Sisters Of Mercy command a shrewd grasp of their objectives plus the ability to project it. This is a rare gift, so treasure it. Adam Sweeting



Sisters guitarist Gary Marx: "I think the gigs are pure slapstick"

verification, available Sisters vinyl on their own Merciful Release label: the fierce, teeth-clenching bobsleigh runs of "Adrenochrome" and "Body Electric", the relentless "Alice".

At the moment I'm fixated by the suspended torment of "Floorshow", a roaring electric tarantella, the kill-or-cure dance of death. It's hard rock without the pomp (though Andy can and will pose like a good 'un), heavy metal with keen critical faculties.

What do you love about rock?

Andy: "We like a loud noise, we like a good tune. We like the relentlessness of classic rock music—heavy metal."

What do the Sisters do that's any more than a loud physical noise?

"Well, our attitude towards parody is designed to show people how this loud noise is ideally to be taken. You can frighten people and amuse them at the same time, and excite them and inspire them. Because that's what it does to us, it does all those things."

Are you offering your audience some kind of faith?

"Yeah, I mean to us cynicism is very close linked to faith or belief or holding something dear. It's the sort of cynicism that comes out of disappointment with one's environment rather than despair of it, and that's a very precious thing, it's the only thing which separates us from bozos."

Do you advocate self-destruction?

Andy: "Under certain circumstances, yes. Nietzsche once said that a man's greatest power is the power to decide the time of his own death, and that seems perfectly reasonable. I wouldn't hold that suicide is necessarily a symptom of unsoundness of mind, or being not in possession of all one's faculties."

Gary: "...which is one of the connotations of the name of the group. It was picked because it had several strong images, not just one."

"The name's nice and ironic," said Andy with a thin grin, "very corporate. A nice 50-50 balance between nuns and prostitution, which seems like a very suitable metaphor for a rock band. All this pseudo-faith business and high ritual, and yet—prostitution."

And Merciful Release?

"Suitably pompous," chortled Gary.

"Vincent Price delivered the line very well once," said Andy. "And it's a nicely self-deprecating way of releasing stuff. When you make a Merciful Release it's like, 'Well, that's out of the way, the agony is now over.'"

BY ANDY'S OWN admission, the Sisters are still embryonic, but plans have been laid for 1983. Depending on trivial little factors like money, they should have a single called "Anaconda" out in February, and an EP is also high on the agenda. An LP is not envisaged before 1984. They're currently entering a "slower and heavier" phase, which Andy feels he has to work out of his system forthwith.

Reading some of his lyrics on paper, I was surprised by the formal attention to detail which has gone into them. Generally the voice is used as a strand in the groups's overall sound.

"Our sound says a lot about me," Andy explained. "People say things like, 'What's your attitude to nuclear war?' and I say, 'Just listen to the sound—what the fuck do you think our attitude to nuclear war is?'"

"The voice is much more personal than the instruments, so it's better to mix it down, because you're very vulnerable. I think with 'Anaconda' we might include a lyric sheet. We'd never print the lyrics on the sleeve, 'cos that would spoil my artwork.'"

Andy does the Sisters' artwork himself, and typically it's cold and neat, iced with sharp detail, using vivid monochrome to index the stark polarities contained inside.

"Anaconda" is about the hip games people play with

heroin addiction, now worryingly back in vogue at prices too many people can afford.

"There's far too many smack songs which are a bit too callously irresponsible. Junkie chic is not where it's at. We do 'Sister Ray' because it is just an orgy of self-destruction every time we do it. That's what it all about."

"All the lyrics are designed to be taken away and used. It's not just purging myself. I couldn't go and perform it or make record of it if I didn't think it was generally useful. Besides, the band

wouldn't let me, and why should they?"

Is there anything you'd die for?

(Long pause) "I might die for someone. Not for my cause. Dying when you don't intend to is not my idea of an intelligent act."

What would you be doing if you weren't in The Sisters Of Mercy?

"I'd like to do all sorts of things—whether anybody'd give me the chance is another thing. I wouldn't mind being your regular Renaissance Man, but who's gonna employ me to do that? Not many vacancies for them in the Exchange & Mart."

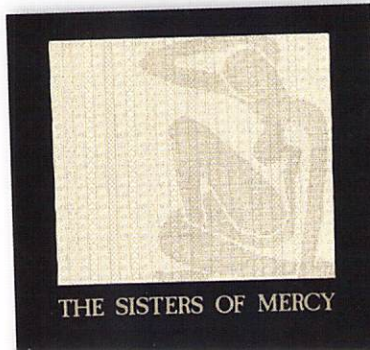
How about you, Gary?

"Working Class Hero. It's true, that's what my name is, it's just sending it up. I'm just a born Working Class Hero—deprived background, almost a footballer."

Andy: "You could say, 'Well look, four million people can't be wrong and that's how many we've sold,' and it wouldn't justify it. You could say, 'Well, it stopped one person jumping off a bridge,' and that wouldn't justify it. Whatever justification you had wouldn't prove the point; you can only offer an opinion."

"That question not only asks 'What do you do?' but also 'Do you regard it as worthwhile?', and obviously one does or one wouldn't do it." Adam Sweeting •

"All the lyrics are designed to be taken away and used"



1983

JANUARY-MARCH

Eurythmics' Dave Stewart and Annie Lennox flaunt their "dumb nerve" in London, 1983


 LYCEUM
LONDON
LIVE!
MARCH 13

Pedantic normality

MM MAR 19 The imperial polish of Eurythmics fails to impress.

SWEET SUCCESS IS made of this: Grace Jones' style, Ziggy's makeup, an Ultravoxian name, Pink Floyd guitar, The Specials' brass, a Lou Reed cover, Hazel O'Connor's mime, some Shakin' Stevens clap-along and a popular anthem nicked lock, stock and lyric from The Human League's "The Things That Dreams Are Made Of".

More by accident than design - they don't seem sharp enough to have deliberately contrived the whole con - the painstakingly proficient but exasperatingly likeable old musos who work as Eurythmics have connected with the public beyond thought and fashion. They've plagiarised with such an honest ignorance of hip etiquette that they're immune from accusations of deceit, and one doesn't know quite what to marvel at most - the band's dumb nerve, or public gullibility.

Everyone loves an underdog and Eurythmics are a synthesis so gauche, so unsubtle that it makes you wonder what took them so long. Actually, it was probably us who did some catching up - first we fell into buying past hits rehashed, then videos which pulled

the past up alongside the present and confused any sense of visual contemporaneity, and now we allow Eurythmics to manufacture our future for us from all our most obvious inherited images.

There's a cliché somewhere that says classic pop records all sound alike you've heard them before; Eurythmics take the point to the precipice - you have heard all their stuff before. It's no idle coincidence that Lennox and Stewart bowdlerised Dusty Springfield in The Tourists (something every other outfit had more taste than to do) before growing up and pretending to go underground.

They obviously learned one valuable lesson - that novelty has nothing to do with being new, but rather involves a comforting semblance of freshness presented with practised verve and based firmly in collective

nostalgia. It makes me sick - Eurythmics haven't one original idea between them, they never take risks and they fit in so neatly. They're heroes for reasons hitherto unimagined; not because they do great things that it wouldn't even cross our minds to do.

They work on a low denominator, or a frigid joy, and their appeal is their pedantic normality. How else would they pack the Lyceum more full than I've ever seen it

before other than by stealing so much they now know means something to everyone?

I mean, what more proof do you need that pop is growing thin on top and contented to pander to the moneyed, middle-aged "original" teenagers than a Top 10 touring band in 1983 comprising two

ex-Tourists, a Blockhead (Mickey Gallagher) and a Blondie (Clem Burke) digitally dissecting "Satellite Of Love"? They may be showered in lights, but they offer no illumination - Eurythmics are a pressing case for compulsory career euthanasia. Sweet FA is made of this. *Steve Sutherland* •

Eurythmics haven't one original idea between them, never take risks and fit in so neatly

Calcified kookdom

NME FEB 12 Rickie Lee Jones has gained brass, but lost lustre.

IT'S ALREADY WELL known how the great Casting Director in the sky limited women to a few suffocating roles in American popular culture: the mother and the whore, the hard-hearted and the hurt, the soft-boiled and the soiled, the confessor and the kook.

Given such a limited choice, the kook has invariably served as the best disguise for the most intelligent and fiery because, under the beaten brim of a tugged-down hat and inside shapeless raggedy clothes, they could shelter all or none of these types.

But how quickly does kookdom calcify into concrete personae under klieg lighting. List all those lovable kooks who started off so strong and unclassifiable only to end up so dismally and dismissively stereotyped: Laura Nyro, Laurie Anderson, Patti Smith, Joplin and... Rickie Lee Jones?

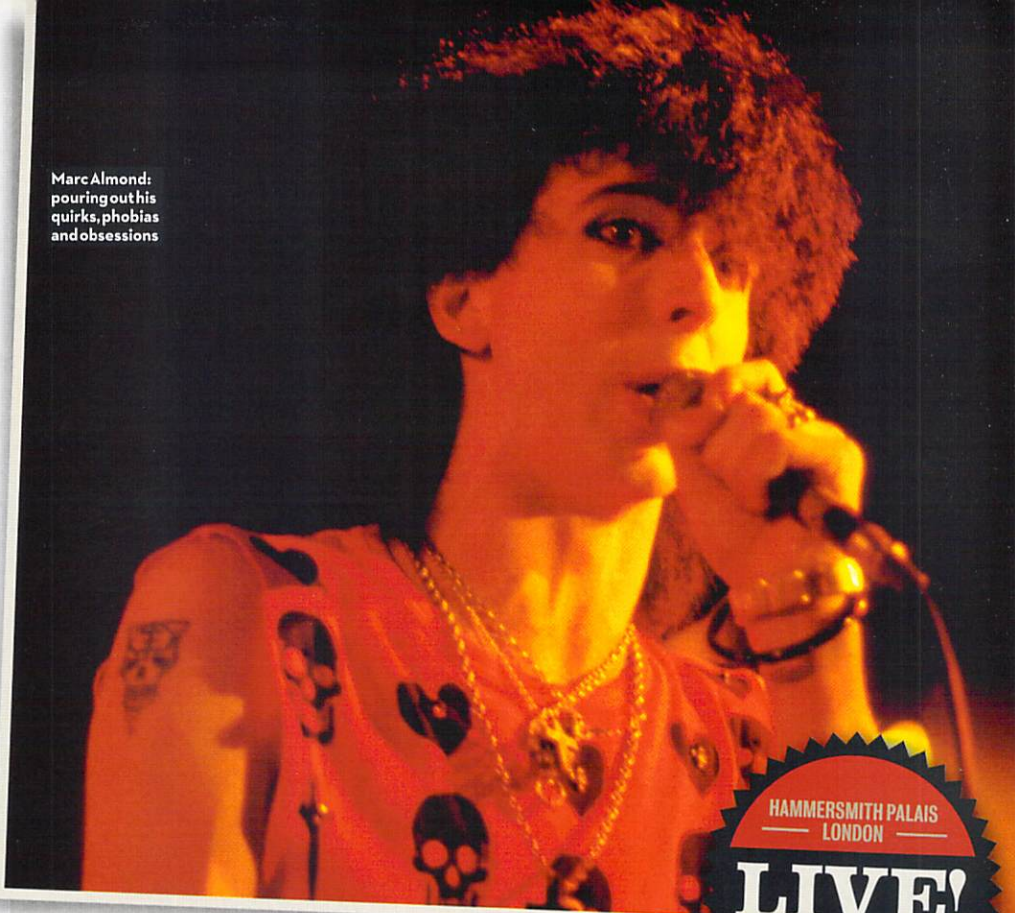
Rickie Lee's entrance into kookdom konkret is the saddest, partly because it's not her own fault. That melting voice of her two LPs is still intact, puzzling and negotiating its way through the maze of hurts and hold-me's of tenement roof affairs, which, if this movie were any cornier, would end with a bullet in the back. Her group, blowing blowsy soundtracks in place of the blues – that is, a white, beery-eyed uptown bar version of the same – are what destroys her live. Though they still sound like they're auditioning for that part in Altman's *The Long Goodbye*, they look and behave like they want the support spot to the Rolling Stones at Madison Square Garden. No use closing your eyes either – you can feel the ugly exertion. Where they ought to suggest and nudge you towards Rickie Lee, they bludgeon you rudely, shoving you right up against her.

Rickie Lee, correspondingly, has developed a brassier front to cope. That same hat is tugged down over her eyes, the dress is classier than expected, though not particularly suited, and the voice... The voice has melted into a milk 'n' cookies yelp, an entirely inappropriate *Peanuts* caricature of the "I only wanted to be loved" confessor, which is totally at odds with her scenarios.

There are few transcendently quiet moments, when an audience conditioned to shit itself at the leap of an octave, restrains its enthusiasm long enough for Rickie Lee to project your imagination back into the private sphere where she has the space to move.

In other words, Rickie Lee Jones is best heard and seen in the comfort of your own dream. *Chris Bohn*

Marc Almond:
pouring out his
quirks, phobias
and obsessions



HAMMERSMITH PALAIS
LONDON
LIVE!
MARCH 8

Resonant emotion

MM MAR 19 Soft Cell enjoy the limelight. Now with added Foetus!

TONIGHT SOFT CELL are the finely honed technicians of barely suppressed hysteria, artful masters of split-second suspense, the objects of a million anguished, unrequited dreams.

Flagrantly revelling in the waves of long-pent-up adulation that hits them in a deafening chorus as they descend the dimly lit stairs to the stage, they briefly acknowledge the massed throngs of front-row doe eyes who strain and scream for one brief glance from their heroes. (I recall the feeling well – the lump in the throat, the absolute conviction that this was love! Those were the days!)

And doesn't Marc thrive on it – giggling, mincing and preening like a mutant Shirley Bassey on heat. No, that's cruel, Marc's everyone's darling, loved because he's so accessible, so chummy, so dear, sharing his secrets and excitement, pouring out his quirks, phobias and obsessions for us to sympathise with and share. Over the top in the grand tradition of Bible Belt evangelical mass hypnosis, Marc's the half-touched preacher man bearing his tortured soul to the *Hallelujah Chorus*, needing the rising hysteria to justify his off-beat flirtations and self-flagellation.

A quartet of gyrating backing singers and a raunchy sax wail lift the spotlight from Dave Ball, who's desperately trying to maintain his customary be-leathered aloofness, but even old stone-face breaks into involuntary grins to the rapturous

applause for the celebratory anthem of "Youth" which marks the end of the first "act", and gives me time to wobble off to the bar.

By now well stocked with Bacardis, the second stage adopts the distant features of a wild surreal movie, and gives me the courage to wade through the hordes of pimply adolescents, to the front.

Screaming and waving with the best of them, I press into the speakers to let the haunting strains of "Torch" fold comfortably around me and get deep inside the resonant emotion that instils Marc's voice with a power and depth too frightening for one small man.

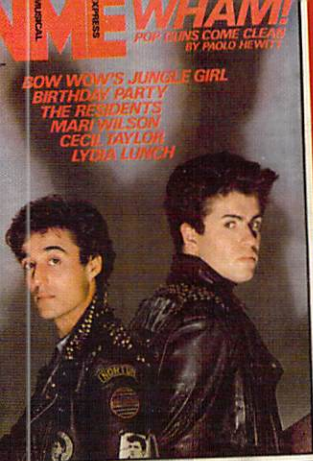
And there he is, touching, letting himself be fondled and cherished by the writhing phantom hands – not teasing any more, but almost bashfully recognising the welter of heartfelt concern for this strangely vulnerable figure.

Loath to leave us, reluctant to end the joint expurgation of passion, he calls old friend Foetus to the stage. Foetus, a cohort in worlds of jaundiced angles and things not being quite what they seem, makes my night with a grazing, throaty cover of Suicide's "Ghost Rider". The amassed teen element wouldn't know Suicide from Bucks Fizz, but they appreciate the superb interplay of voices – Marc loud and mellow, Foetus rasping, gravelly and harsh – and it fills me with a bursting optimism for them.

There's hope yet! *Helen Fitzgerald*

Marc Almond lets himself be fondled and cherished by the writhing phantom hands

HAMMERSMITH ODEON
LONDON
LIVE!
JANUARY 31



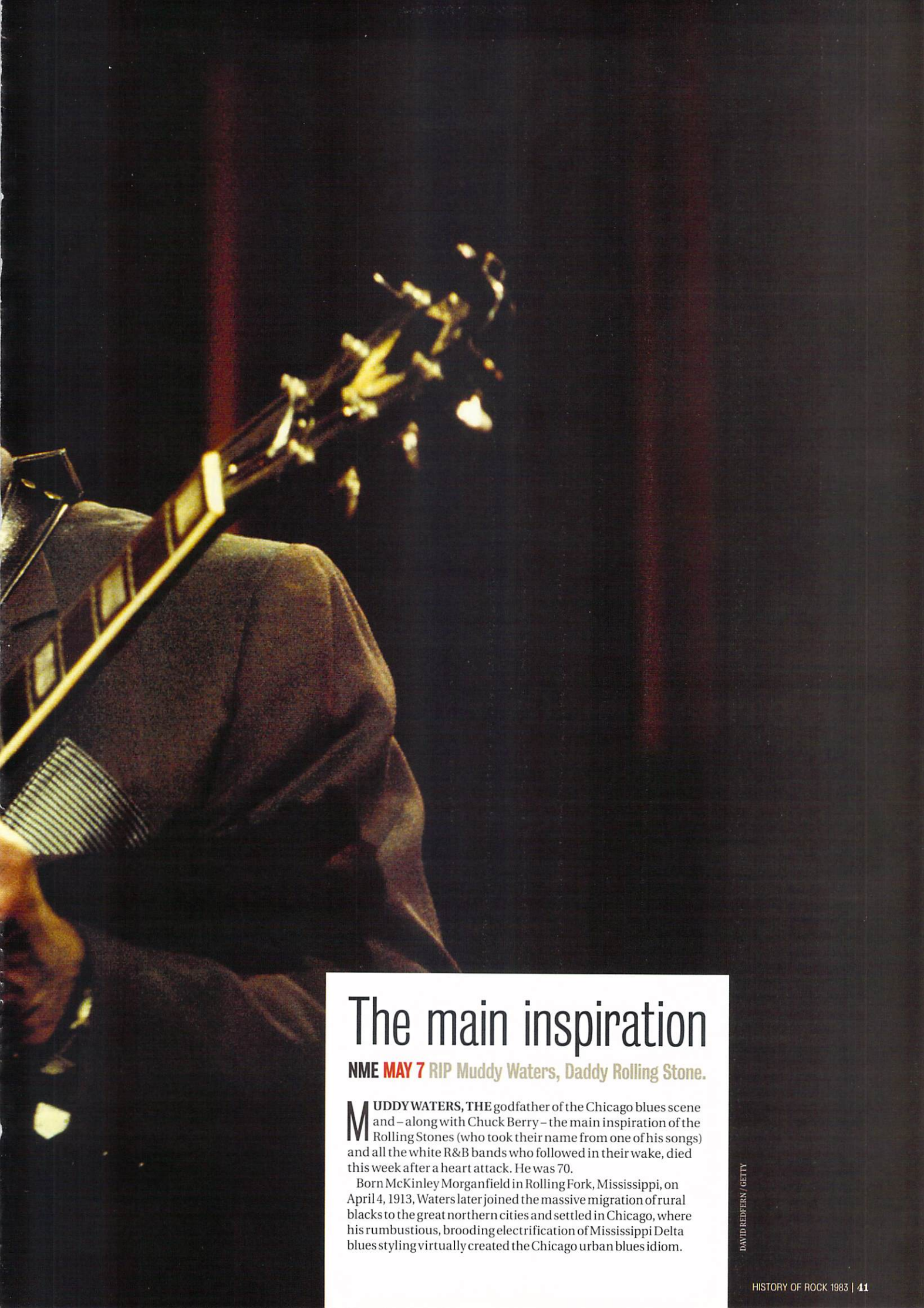
1983

APRIL — JUNE

MOTÖRHEAD, ROBERT
WYATT, DAVID BOWIE,
JULIAN COPE AND MORE



Muddy Waters on stage
for Jazz At The Maltings
during the Aldeburgh
Festival, Suffolk,
October 24, 1968



The main inspiration

NME **MAY 7** RIP Muddy Waters, Daddy Rolling Stone.

MUDDY WATERS, THE godfather of the Chicago blues scene and – along with Chuck Berry – the main inspiration of the Rolling Stones (who took their name from one of his songs) and all the white R&B bands who followed in their wake, died this week after a heart attack. He was 70.

Born McKinley Morganfield in Rolling Fork, Mississippi, on April 4, 1913, Waters later joined the massive migration of rural blacks to the great northern cities and settled in Chicago, where his rumbustious, brooding electrification of Mississippi Delta blues styling virtually created the Chicago urban blues idiom.

DAVID REDFERN / GETTY

1983

APRIL - JUNE



Pete Farndon:
bassplayer's
wife found him
dead in bath

"We're all really upset"

MM APR 23 RIP... Pete Farndon, the second member of The Pretenders to die.

THE PRETENDERS SUFFERED a second tragedy within a year when their former bass player Pete Farndon was found dead from a suspected heroin overdose at his London home last Thursday.

Less than a year ago, Farndon was sacked by the group on the same day their lead guitarist, James Honeyman-Scott, died from drug-related causes.

Police from Notting Hill station rushed to Farndon's home in Oxford Gardens, West London, after an alert from Farndon's wife. The couple had left home separately that morning and when she returned at around 8pm, she found his body in the bath.

At the time of his death, Farndon, a founder member of The Pretenders, was said to be happy and optimistic about the band he was in the process of forming with ex-Clash drummer Topper Headon.

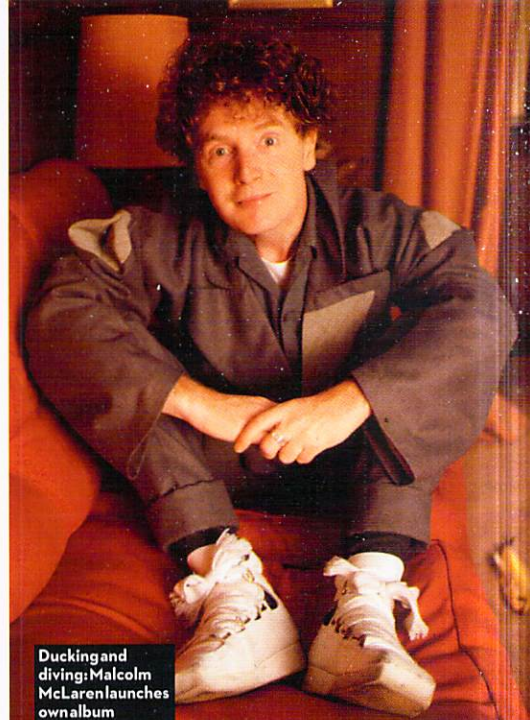
Recently, they had been rehearsing at Hammersmith Studios with guitarist Henri Padovani, former Blockheads keyboards player Mickey Gallagher and former Original Mirrors and Hot Club singer Steve Allen.

A spokesman for Notting Hill police said this week: "Peter Farndon was found in the bath, believed to have taken an overdose of heroin. There will be an inquest, although we don't have a date yet. We certified death by calling our own doctor because the musician's local doctor wasn't available. We believe no one had seen Peter Farndon all day."

Neither Chrissie Hynde, who formed The Pretenders with Farndon, nor drummer Martin Chambers, now the only surviving members of the original lineup, was available for comment at the time of going to press, but **MM** did speak to the group's manager, Dave Hill.

"We're all really upset," he said. "He hadn't been with us for 10 months, and I'd only seen him two or three times since then, but we'd heard he was very excited about his new band."

Nick Pedgrift, solicitor for Farndon's new group, said: "I can only confirm that Peter was found dead on Thursday. A full statement will be issued in due course."



Ducking and
diving: Malcolm
McLaren launches
own album

"Magical instincts"

NME MAY 21 Manager Malcolm McLaren turns artiste...

MALCOLM MCLAREN HAS his debut album *Duck Rock* released by Charisma on May 27, featuring 12 tracks inspired by musical cultures from around the world – places as diverse as Botswana, the Peruvian Andes, Cuba, Tennessee and the South Bronx.

Charisma say the LP is distinctly not a conventional collection of songs, but an attempt to get closer to the pop sensibility by taking the listeners on an adventure to other cultures. And to complement this aim, the album package contains dance routines to follow, according to the appropriate track. All the material was written by McLaren and Trevor Horn, with the latter also producing.

As for the LP's title, McLaren issued a statement explaining (and the lack of punctuation is his): "A Duck Rocker is what might be applied to someone who takes their dancing seriously to the point of reviving their magical instincts customising their lifestyles that show tradition never dies only the business does" – if you see what he means.



"It's going to be great"

MM APR 16 Ian Gillan joins "old mates" Black Sabbath.

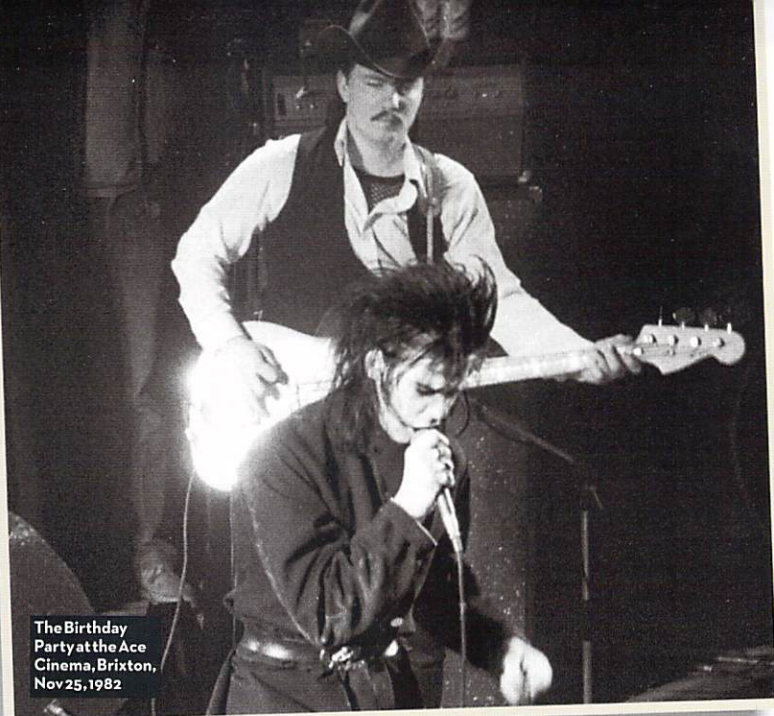
IAN GILLAN HAS joined Black Sabbath as their new lead singer. The news was revealed last week at a press conference at Le Beat Route Club in Soho, thus ending months of speculation about the future of both band and singer.

It was also revealed that original drummer Bill Ward is rejoining the band, having spent the last two-and-a-half years in semi-retirement following musical and personal problems.

Gillan's move will no doubt be welcomed in heavy metal circles, but it's bound to cause repercussions with his ex-colleagues from the now-defunct band Gillan. That was split up a few months ago, ostensibly because the singer was reported to be suffering serious problems with his voice. It was said then that he would have to spend around a year off the road and out of the recording studio.

However, at the press conference he told *MM*: "I'm feeling a lot better now than I have for some time. The only thing I'm concerned about is getting back into action with Sabbath. We've got an album to get down and we're finalising plans for a long American tour."

"It's going to be great working with Geezer and Tony—they're old mates and so when they first suggested that I join the band, after Ronnie Dio had left, I didn't have any second thoughts at all. It was just a question of sorting out various contractual things before being able to announce that I was going to join the band."



The Birthday Party at the Ace Cinema, Brixton, Nov 25, 1982

"It has been decided to end"

NME JUN 4 The Birthday Party break up.

THE BIRTHDAY PARTY have announced that they will definitely be breaking up in the near future. They are currently in Australia, and will be returning to the UK very shortly to finish recording an EP for Mute Records, after which the group will split to pursue individual projects.

The group have issued their own statement which, in somewhat obscure terms, explains their decision: "In view of events this year, it has become obvious that new challenges are needed to sustain our creative vitality. Rather than continue regardless of our better judgement (ie, for money or through lack of daring) and diminishing the impact of our work to date, it has been decided to end The Birthday Party. Individual plans are not definite at this time, but we hope this decision will prove as productive as is its intent."

At odds

MM JUN 4 Keith Levene leaves PiL.

KEITH LEVENE, ONE of the founder members of Public Image Limited, has quit, reducing the group to two, John Lydon and drummer Martin Atkins. PiL will remain a working unit, however. They're nearing completion of their first album since *Flowers Of Romance*, released two years ago.

The group have been playing concerts in America recently and they're due to travel to Japan to fulfil live commitments there. It now seems certain, however, that Levene will not be on these dates. Levene, Lydon and Atkins all

live in New York and sources close to the group say that Levene was increasingly at odds, musically and "corporately", with the others and decided to leave before the next series of dates.



Man with power drill

NME JUN 25 Gig ditched as German "avowed non-musician" Andrew UN Ruh is seriously ill.

EINSTÜRZENDE NEUBAUTEN—THE leaders of Teutonic noise—suffered a setback last Sunday eve when punters pulled up to London's Brixton Ace anticipating a bill of So Alone and The March Violets topped by the Bohn-endorsed steel-bashers. They found the venue locked and anxious spokesfolk hovering about to assure them that "money would be refunded come Monday".

The reason for this abrupt cancellation occurred on Friday when Andrew UN Ruh (the band's most avowed non-musician) was rushed to hospital just before leaving Berlin. Andy—memorable to London audiences as the man with moustache and power drill—underwent emergency surgery for a particularly unpleasant condition which blocked his upper intestines, preventing his body from dispersing its own waste.

Although UN Ruh is now recovering, the incident dealt another severe blow to the Neubauten plan for an American assault; due to depart the day after their Ace engagement, they had already fallen prey to permit hassles.

APRIL - JUNE
1983

➤ Elvis Costello & The Attractions are to play a series of UK dates next month, tied in with the release of new material by F-Beat Records. Full details are expected next week, but it's already known that their London show will be at the Hammersmith Palais on June 19. Tickets are £5, plus booking fee if purchased from an agency. *NME May 7*

➤ Bruce Foxton, clearly determined not to be overshadowed by his ex-Jam colleague Paul Weller, is about to launch a solo career of his own. *NME* understands that he is signing a solo deal with Arista. The label weren't prepared to confirm that officially this week, but it seems the plan is for Foxton's debut single to be released in the summer, followed by an album later in the year. *NME Apr 30*

➤ The Residents, the "anonymous" American band with a cult following, are coming to Britain in June as part of a European tour. Dates are expected to include a major London show at Hammersmith Odeon. Despite the novelty of their lack of identity, with the members always wearing masks, their musical ability has been widely acclaimed. Part of their mystique is that no one knows if they are well-known musicians operating under an alias—or nonentities with a gimmick. *NME May 7*

➤ Virgin Records are releasing the Sex Pistols single "Anarchy In The UK" next week to coincide with the General Election. *MM, June 4*

COLLAPSING NEW DRUMMERS

1983

APRIL - JUNE

"We have to shape our own destiny"

MM JUNE 11 Former gang member turned music pioneer Afrika Bambaataa offers a guide round the Zulu Nation.

Afrika Bambaataa performs at The Venue, London, Nov 23, 1982

If any DJ ever saved a life it was Afrika Bambaataa. The original turntable ace; founder of the self-styled Zulu Nation; the man who took you to "Planet Rock" and then went "Looking For The Perfect Beat"; Bambaataa is a cornerstone of black street culture.

A Bronx hero, his emergence in the community dates back to the '60s, and through his various roles as gang leader, disciple of roots culture, DJ and recording star, he's earned a respect that places him as a kind of elder statesman of ghetto affairs.

People don't just listen to his records and dance to his inspired cross-cut disco mixes, they go for advice. Meeting him it's not hard to see why. A giant bear of a man, he ambles into the Tommy Boy offices and quietly issues his greetings in a slow, reassuring drawl that has the winning charisma of Muhammad Ali when he's humble.

Underlining the Ali connection (both are Muslims), Bambaataa homes in on the hard electro-funk booming across the tiny basement crammed with desks and hi-fi gear, and starts moving his feet like they were walking an invisible conveyor. Treading air he really does float like a butterfly, and though it's history now, he can sting like a bee, too.

While overblown characters like the absurdly macho Prince Charles have made much mileage from their colourful reminiscences of New York street life, Bambaataa prefers to play down this part of his background.

This reluctance to be seen as the archetypal pimp-hustler is refreshing at a time when every would-be punk funkster is pushing his street cred' persona down the throats of an eager and easily awed white press. It's ironical too, because you sense that Bambaataa's

recollections have the ring of authenticity. They haven't been given the same outlandish embellishment. His world seems altogether more real, and most importantly more human, than the cartoon posturing favoured by funk's musclebound young bloods.

"I was into the street gang scene back in '69 through to '75," he says matter of factly. "But I got out of it, and I learnt from it. I still associate with some of those people now," he adds, "though things are more positive these days.

"I used to be in the Black Spades - the largest black gang in New York City. There were divisions everywhere. My patch was the south-east Bronx. It wasn't just about fighting, though. We had chants and war cries which were taken from people like James Brown and Sly Stone."

Eventually the gangs died out, but kids came together again, this time as crews. "A crew is almost like a gang," Bambaataa explains, "but it's more neat, ya know? A crew has a symbol or the same sharp clothes - it's much more creative."

As the Bronx crews turned to expressing their collective identity through pop mediums like dress style, graffiti and dancing, so Bambaataa moved further into music, developing a unique backdrop for crew "performances".

Fed on a healthy multicultural diet - everything from early funk, to Caribbean and African music - by a mother with the biggest record collection on the block, he already had a head start over most DJs.

He got his first system together in '76. Billed as Afrika Bambaataa And His Zulu Nation, he made his debut with a tribute to James Brown and Sly Stone. Since then the Zulu Nation has gone from strength to

strength, stretching right across the States. A symbol of black pride and dignity, the notion of a new Zulu tribe was suggested not by a serious piece of roots literature, but a Hollywood-style epic that made Michael Caine a star.

"I thought *Zulu* was a great movie," Bambaataa enthuses, "because for once the black man was portrayed as brave and sensitive. The Zulus fought like warriors, but they also spared the British even though they could have wiped them out."

"So I decided to use the Zulu name in the future. Once I started as a DJ, I formed a dance group, The Zulu Kings And Queens. And they became part of the whole Zulu Nation, which really grew out of a lot of different street gangs."

Then it started getting out of hand... so many people wanted to be involved. It spread from one part of the Bronx to the next, then Manhattan, Queens, Brooklyn and upstate New York. We even met some "Zulus" in Cleveland, Ohio, when we toured there!"

Bambaataa sees the Zulu Nation as a way of elevating black consciousness and links the phenomenon with the '60s radical movement.

"See, we need to know who we are, where we came from and where we are going. We have to shape our own destiny. The black Americans need this 'cos they've been blind, deaf and dumb for too long. I guess it began in the '60s. That's when we started to find our culture."

"Then the '70s seemed to put everyone to sleep. People forgot what had happened and turned their backs on the problems. Whereas in the '80s you see them reviving the '60s again. Militant groups coming back again, people marching in the streets. People

standing up and saying they don't want no more war! You have to believe in something that's gonna push you on!"

Not surprisingly Afrika Bambaataa's first single was called "Zulu Nation", but it was really "Planet Rock" that made him a steady feature in the dance charts on both sides of the Atlantic.

Released on New York's promising indie funk label, Tommy Boy (through Polydor here), it brought together the combined talents of Bambaataa, synth wizard John Robie and producer of the moment Arthur Baker.

Its eerie blend of Kraftwerk electronics and fierce, programmed funk-rock represented a change in direction for Bambaataa. Back in his old stomping grounds, the Bronx River Community Centre and the "T" Connection Discotheque, he already had a reputation for playing head-spinning mixes of all things funky, but this was altogether something else.

A reflection of his move into the whiter new wave clubs in Manhattan such as The Peppermint Lounge, The Ritz and The Mud Club, "Planet Rock" embraced the cooler tones of European futurism and, just as significantly, a hard-rock element; two strands of influence that would subsequently make even more impact on the new black music.

"I was the only DJ that would play rock with funk," Bambaataa points out. "I would play slices from the Rolling Stones, Mountain, Grand Funk Railroad and mix it up with all kind of things: rap, new wave, funk, sometimes TV jingles!"

These wildly eclectic mixes were frequently laid down on what amounted to demo discs to be played only at the clubs, so it was no big leap for Bambaataa to go into the studio and come up with a mass release. However, he's quick to praise Baker's contribution

and feels they work together well as a team - all 400 pounds of them!

They've been accused by some of simply turning out another line in boogie music, but Bambaataa feels his lyrics have a universal appeal and a genuine message to communicate.

"Like the Koran, it helps if you have a translator to understand what the Soul Sonic Force means. 'Planet Rock' is saying it's time to chase your dream - let our soul lead the way."

And "The Perfect Beat"?

"The beat could be drugs, love, peace. All the world is looking for that beat, but you could say that The Zulu Nation and Afrika Bambaataa has found it."

"The Perfect Beat" as the first metaphysical funk record? Whatever, it's preferable, he says, to the ghetto clichés that have become the currency of the contemporary rap artists. Though he's pleased to see outfits like Grandmaster Flash and The Furious Five enjoying commercial success, he points to Gil Scott-Heron and The Last Poets as examples of more intelligent black commentators.

"When people think of the ghetto, they think of burned-out buildings, dirty streets and desperate people. You know, that's such a joke. Down in my area there's a few bad places, but there's good ones too; housing development projects and stuff. I could show you places where white people are hanging out with black and together they're making all kinds of art.

"And movies like *The Bronx Warriors* [recently released in the States] don't help either. It just ain't all gangs and vigilantes. I tell you I ain't got no plans to move out of the Bronx - I don't care how much money I make."

So, looking to the future, did he think we'd all be around long enough to find our perfect beat?

"Mmmm... that's hard to say. I mean, is the Creator playing some kind of game here? The prophecies say it will end, but I don't know. Maybe in the future they'll have wars over the dimensions. Y'know I am the king of time! To me it's just one big ball of confusion. I reckon the only way the whole planet would pull together is if somebody from outer space threatened us. Then we really will see star wars!" Ian Pye

"We need to know who we are, where we came from and where we are going"



Planetrocker: Afrika Bambaataa in London, 1983



NME MAY 21
The Radio 1 DJ and presenter's top gear.

Books

A Dance To The Music Of Time by Anthony Powell
A gloomy book my mother has about medieval medicine
Anything by JB Morton (Beachcomber)
Histories rather than fictions
The Pepys Diaries
Boy's Own annuals from the '50s

Records

Changes hourly
Mainly...
Teenage Kicks The Undertones
Live At The Counter Eurovision Misty In Roots
Age Of Consent New Order
Zadok The Priest Handel

Fave places

Liverpool
Norwich
Berlin

Artists

Paul Klee

Films

Anything with Margaret Rutherford in or Alastair Sim
Brief Encounter
The Fatal Glass Of Beer
Eraserhead
Gregory's Girl

Fave quotes

"It ain't a fit night out for man or beast" WC Fields
"A friend in power is a friend lost" Henry Adams

Fave drink

Primitive red wines

Least fave drink

Fennings' Fever Cure

Actors

George C Scott
Sebastian Shaw

Actresses

Edith Massey

Fave monarch

George VI

Fave teams

The Champions
Meadowbank Thistle

THE UNDERTONES

TEENAGE KICKS



George C Scott in *The Yellow Rolls-Royce*

1983

APRIL - JUNE



LEON MORRIS / GETTY

Floored
genius: Cope
onstage, 1983



“It seems cool to sell out”

That's not JULIAN COPE, though. Post-
Teardrop Explodes, he remains an
enthusiast for great music – and a
waspish critic of his contemporaries.
“I really believe I should slag Blancmange
off,” he says, “because they have no
redeeming features.”

— NME APRIL 16 —

“I AM WHITE, AND blond and male, and that’s a very safe position. That’s why I’ve got no time for things like Tears For Fears. You watch *One Day In The Life Of Ivan Denisovich* and you realise your problems are very petty, and very few.”

He seems so much more philosophical when he’s not wearing jodhpurs. The Teardrops – to adapt one of the more perennial pop press headlines – finally Exploded for the last time towards the end of last year, after an erratic but occasionally brilliant career. They left behind two albums, *Kilimanjaro* and *Wilder*, and a brace of singles of varying quality.

And the rest was silence – apart from one exceptional blast of polemic, which Cope wrote for our Christmas issue.

Phonogram have just released the last Teardrop record, an EP of leftovers topped by “You Disappear From View”. We can safely say it was done without the active encouragement of Cope, and leave it at that.

Julian has split from his long-time associates Bill Drummond and Dave Balfe of Zoo – he’s currently sharing management with Tears For Fears, ironically enough. Balfe is looking after Scottish group Strawberry Switchblade. But Gary Dwyer, drummer and stalwart sidekick, remains with the singer, part of the line-up Cope is using as he embarks on a new solo career. A solo John Peel session has already gone out, and a debut single, “Strasbourg”, is due soon, to be followed by an LP and some live work.

Despite his well-publicised loathing for much modern pop (you might recall some unseemly stories about him defacing a Blancmange record in disgust) Julian Cope is still one of the biggest fans you’ll ever find on the far end of a microphone.

During our talk, he throws admiring name-checks in the general direction of John Cale, Television, MC5, Tim Buckley, Glenn Branca, Honeybus’ “I Can’t Let Maggie Go”, Captain Beefheart, The Doors, Laughing Clowns, The Beat, New Order (though not “Blue Monday”), Manicured Noise and D.A.F. I’ve left those bits out because what he has to say about Ian McCulloch is probably funnier.

The earliest Cope I ever knew was a diffident, rather awkward frontman with a Ken Barlow haircut. The next Cope was a fully-blown teen-scream pin-up, occasionally pilloried for his wide-eyed persona and Scott Walker fetish.

And the newest Julian Cope? Well, let’s find out...

Teardrop’s history was littered with fallings out. Are you so hard to get along with?

It must be hard to feel you’ve got a lot out of working with me. I know Balfey found that a lot. Often it was my fault because my expectations were utterly different to what the others were gonna put over. All I knew when we split up was that we really needed to split up.

Did that feeling grow on you, or were you still keen right up to the day before the last?

It grew on me. We did *Wilder* and I’d written it all, and put so much into it. But by the next album, Balfey felt that because he could write songs that he should be allowed to. And I couldn’t really argue with that, because of course it’s reasonable, and he has got that ability. But as a songwriter, I’m not very good any more at writing songs for other people’s music. They’ve become far more narrative and wordy.

I tried to make the end of the Teardrops as clean and simple as possible. It’s pretty good, we haven’t lingered around too long. And *Wilder* is the last album, which is good.

I was surprised by the note of embittered idealism you struck in your NME Xmas article – about the decay of punk and the rise of the production-line pop mentality.

What’s upset me is that people don’t feel that purity anymore, and they

don’t even see the need, either. There’s no questioning anymore. It’s all watered down. It upset me because we were very much from that ’77 thing. And clichéd as it is, I really believe in that, and that the music didn’t have to go the way that it did.

Everything’s just ‘nice’ now. I’ve really slagged people off, and people come up to me and say, “You’ve slagged so-and-so off, but he’s a really nice guy”. Ha! The average person is a “really nice guy”. I am a really nice guy – but at the same time I’m not a boring dickhead!

The Blancmange stuff – why should I slag them off? Well, I really believe I should slag Blancmange off, because they have no redeeming features. They offend me no end. I’m sure I’ve offended people, but I don’t believe I’ve ever offended them like that.

One thing that I think put people off was when you seemed so gushy in your enthusiasms.

But I find the only way for me to make a point that I want to make is to make it like an expressionist version of that point....

Did you ever feel you’d invented a character for yourself, a ‘Julian Cope’ in inverted commas?

Mmm, yes. That was another impromptu thing. I thought I’d be so natural, I wouldn’t think about anything and I’d say what was in my head. And that backfired on me. I’d do an interview and I’d miss out what I didn’t like for the next interview. Tommy Smothers, of the Smothers Brothers, had a great quote: You’re on TV every week, you watch yourself on the playback, you iron out all the things you don’t like, and in no time you’re an edited version of yourself.

There are times when I’ve been very unsure of what I’m doing, and I’ve thought, right, if I’m going to take it in any one direction, at least it’s gonna be powerful in that direction.

I mean, Bono – he’s over the top in his direction. I mean, I think it’s the crappiest thing in the world, but I wouldn’t knock the fact that it’s over the top in his own direction.

It’s the one thing I’ve got against what the Bunnymen are doing in a way. They still set great store by the fact that they’re aware of U2 being crap. And once upon a time it was enough to know that U2 are crap. But not any more. Now you’ve got to know why they’re crap.

I was disappointed with the Bunnymen’s new album, because I know that they really can write songs – unlike Orchestral Manoeuvres, who are just crap. However much Mac and I don’t get on, I really believe he knows what’s good and what isn’t. And to know, and still not do it, is really bad... Things like [“My White Devil” lyric] “*The Duchess Of Malfi*...”, I just couldn’t believe. I was gonna have a T-shirt made with “Malfia, Malfia, what for art thou Malfia?”

First time he said that, I thought, oh. And then he repeats it, so I thought, oh, so it’s not some ironic Liverpool way of saying it; he just doesn’t know. All someone needed to say was, Mac, it’s called *The Duchess Of Malfi*. It’s bad. Literature is quite special; more special than pop music.

What literature is most special to you?

I love metaphysical poetry. Andrew Marvell, John Donne. And I love T.S. Eliot. I think I love stuff that isn’t solely based in reality. There’s like a twilight zone between reality and pure strangeness.

I went through a period of being pissed off when people said my lyrics didn’t mean anything any more. My lyrics always mean something. I wouldn’t be so callous as to write a lyric that didn’t mean anything. Just because it’s pop music, doesn’t mean you shouldn’t take a little more time over it...

I never wanted to put lyrics in with our records, and Pete Dinklage said a good thing – one of the few things Pete Dinklage ever said that was good – namely, before *Kilimanjaro* came out I was asking him, “D’you think it’s pretentious putting a lyric sheet in?”

And he said, “Well, your lyrics make less sense when they’re down on paper, so maybe you should put them in.” So I did, and I quite like them now.

“I’m a really nice guy, but at the same time, not a boring dickhead!”





Pre-explosion: Cope with latter-day lineup of The Teardrop Explodes, USA, 1982

I always loved doing B-sides, as well. I like the fact that our biggest single, "Reward", had "Strange House In The Snow" on the B-side, 'cos you couldn't be prepared for that. It's a really repulsive song. Gary said how the scallies used to put it on in pubs in places like Norris Green (an un-chic Liverpool suburb) and the old men'd be freaking out cos it's so disgusting!

Do you listen to what other people are doing nowadays? I mean from the mainstream of pop music?

I make an effort. But I don't find it fascinating. ... I mean, it even seems cool to sell out nowadays, doesn't it?

Yes, if you can present it as a clever commercial strategy, saying, 'Well, I was sitting round in Rough Trade two years ago and I thought sod it, let's go infiltrate *Top Of The Pops*'—present it as a grand scheme.

The most annoying thing, I found, were those apostrophes around 'Sweetest' in "The 'Sweetest' Girl" (by Scritti Politti). That's such a clever-clever thing, that's one of the biggest cop-outs I've ever seen. I couldn't believe that.

I think he was sort of playing off one audience against the other, having his cake and eating it.

Yeah, that was too smug, wasn't it? I think things should be laid quite bare. That's why I still like "When I Dream". I'm not singing "When I dream, I dream about you" with a wry smile on my face. I'm really singing it!

Were you at all calculating about your image, visually?

No, I'll tell you the story of that. Bill [Drummond] and Dave [Balfe] said to me, "We'll have to do something about the way you look, because Mac is going to be massive". They always said this. I just had my hair a bit short, and was a bit spaz—probably still am, but I was overt spaz at the time. I used to try moving on stage, but it was really crap.

Then I was in this tiny

town in South Wales where I was born, and I was trying on these pants in the Army & Navy shop, and in the stock room where you changed they had all these old leather pants for 15 quid, so I got some. Then I got a flying jacket in Liverpool, and immediately I had this outfit that nobody had ever had! Bizarre!

And I remember walking down Princes Road, past this girl with her friend and she went, "Kecks on 'im..."—and I thought, well, this is quite weird actually. And I started growing my hair and dying it.

And it was so far out of the picture at that time, the idea of me making it as a face, that I hadn't even thought about it. I never used to get come-ons from anybody, never got girls looking at me onstage. And suddenly it all happened. And I got well into it—the total surprise of it. And Alan Gill had been in the group, so my mind was a little distorted at the time.

It was a very joyous period. And I was really pleased cos I could piss Mac off as well, cos Mac was all ready to be this massive star. And it's taken him 'til now!

So you've been through the pop idol bit now, and enjoyed it. Did you learn anything from it?

I've learned that it was OK, and it was interesting, but I didn't need it. Very soon after, "Colours Fly Away" as a single didn't really do anything. And I thought, "Oh, that's it, it's all finished." And though this sounds like bravado, there was a real sense of relief. I thought, I can start getting on with things again now. It was quite nice.

I always knew that the 14-year-old girls would move on at some point—very rapidly, as it happened—and it took the pressure off. 'Cos I'm quite a slob, really. There is that dickhead factor still there.

Paul Du Noyer •

EBET ROBERTS / GETTY

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lingered around too long. And "Wilder" is the last album, which is good. I was surprised by the note of embittered idealism you struck in your NME Xmas article—

before "Kilimanjaro" came out I was asking him, "Do you think it's pretentious putting a lyric sheet in?" And he said, "Well, your lyrics make less sense when they're down on paper, so maybe you should put them in. So I did, and I quite like them now. I always loved doing B-sides, as well. I like the fac-

1983

APRIL - JUNE

"The grandfather of new wave"

It's precisely what **DAVID BOWIE** doesn't want to be. Not presently interested in experimentation, he has made a more traditional album, *Let's Dance*. He's also – at 36 – more mindful of his status as a role model. "It's interesting to look at someone really fucked up writing music," he says, "but it's not very helpful."

— NME APRIL 16 —

I: The Missing Years

David Bowie's new film, *The Hunger*, opens not with the focus fixed firmly on the star but with a cameo sequence of Bauhaus live in Heaven.

THE SONG, ARCHLY enough, is "Bela Lugosi's Dead". The striking face is Peter Murphy's. The gestures are all David Bowie's. A decade's tics, contortions and conceits, culminating prematurely with Thomas Newton's gun-toting passage from *The Man Who Fell To Earth*, are summarised in a matter of minutes. It's quite a performance but, alas, we don't get to hear how David Bowie feels about seeing his past flash before his eyes. His attention is elsewhere.

Playing John, a 200-year-old English gentle companion to ageless vampire Catherine Deneuve, he's casing the heavenly audience, not the group, for a suitable victim, a blood sacrifice to his eternal bloom.

Though this is fiction, the opening might have been wittily composed with its star in mind. David Bowie coming face to face with a fragment of his legacy and looking right past it at someone else. Or, alternatively, the vampirical Bowie prowling the clubs in search of new talent, new ideas to play off against his own.

Bowie has always been the first to admit the blood flow has never been one way. As is only »





Electric blue: David Bowie on the globe-straddling *Serious Moonlight* Tour, 1983

MICHAEL PUTLAND / GETTY

proper in such an interdependent relationship, he has a right to take back what he has put in, even if this means withdrawing what amounts to his original deposit. But where can he look these days without seeing Ziggy's children mutated into resplendent or garish beings?

For every Bowie phase there is a movement in its wake. As he once quipped, he has launched whole schools of pretension singlehandedly. Even in his absence, then, David Bowie is somehow present.

It's been a long strange trip from *Scary Monsters* to *Let's Dance*, lasting two movies and three years, plugged by three bizarre single collaborations.

There was Bowie and Brecht on the excellent five song *Baal* EP, featuring Bowie having a ball whooping through young Brecht at his lebenslustful best. "*Baal can spot the vultures in the stormy sky/As they wait up there to see if Baal will die/Sometimes Baal pretends he's dead, the vultures swoop/Baal in silence dines on vulture soup!*"; Bowie and Moroder on "Cat People", the overblown melodrama that makes perfect sense when heard over the closing credits of the film, being both a description and sensual suggestion of *Cat People*'s barely contained sexuality; and finally, the oddest of them all. Bowie and Queen on "Under Pressure".

"Yes I found that quite odd," smiles Bowie. "I'm not quite sure how I got involved in that really. They turned up in Montreux, which is not far from where I live in Switzerland. Needless to say, when groups come to record, they find out where I live... so this is how I tend to see a lot of bands, ha ha, under the influence of Switzerland."

"So I just went down to the studio and we just started one of those inevitable jams, which lead to a skeleton of a song. I thought it was quite a nice tune, so we finished it off. It sort of half came off, but I think it could have been a lot better. It was a rush thing, one of those things that took place over 24 hours. I think it stands up better as a demo."

Once the shock of Bowie working with Queen passes, it stands up surprisingly well, and Bowie's words – "They were not a finished lyric," he insists, "it was done so quickly that some of it makes me cringe a bit, but the idea I like" – are consistent with both the sentiments of *Scary Monsters* and the positive Bowie to come – his new LP, *Let's Dance*.

DESPITE THE PERSISTENT line about Bowie's inconsistency, he has always been remarkably constant in those matters he cares most about. His concern for the young dates right back to *Ziggy Stardust*, when he was first alerted to the awesome responsibility that goes with mass popularity. His "inconsistent" taking and shedding of masks, his cultural leaps, are all ways of keeping that responsibility fresh and his audience on their toes. I mean, can't a man change his mind without being hauled over hot coals for doing so?

If rock critics have generally been loath to acknowledge his integrity, preferring instead to see only the chameleon figure intent on protecting his privacy from public scrutiny, the Japanese director Nagisa Oshima chose Bowie to play the godlike prisoner of war Jack Celliers in his upcoming film *Merry Christmas Mr Lawrence* precisely because he saw in him such a quality.

"People ask me why I cast actors from the world of rock," remarks Oshima in the film's publicity notes. "It is because they are sensitive to what people want now; they are performers; their antennas are screwed on tight and they don't mind getting right in there and having a go at the truth."

"I think I'm
just a little
tired of
experimenting
now"

"When I saw David Bowie act in *Elephant Man* in New York I knew immediately that this was the perfect actor to play Celliers. He had an immense passion, something that superseded reason. If the character Celliers had only his Western rationalism to counter Hara and Yonoi (his two Japanese protagonists) he would have been destroyed very rapidly."

"But it is Celliers' spirituality, his personal nobility, his inner peace and indestructible charisma that the Japanese captors cannot come to terms with. David Bowie has all these qualities."

After the BBC production of *Baal*, this ought to be the first acting role to really test Bowie. Unlike the alien of *The Man Who Fell To Earth*, the 200-year-old man of *The Hunger* and the hideously deformed *Elephant Man*, Celliers has no "emotional limp" for Bowie to hide behind. Maybe something of the character has rubbed off, for Bowie's new positivism, as testified by the clear-blue narrative of *Let's Dance* and his recent spate of public appearances, suggests that he has dispensed with the need for masks... "and it is necessary only for a man to ask for his seed to be chosen and to pray for the sower within to sow it through the deed and act of himself, and then the harvest will

be golden and great." (From *The Seed And The Sower*, by Laurens Van Der Post, on which *Merry Christmas Mr Lawrence* is based.)

The David Bowie sitting opposite is charming and chatty; far more relaxed than his TV self, smiling and laughing frequently to relieve the tension. Suffering terribly from nerves, however, I miss his first tension-relieving joke: "You're part Swiss? Which part? Ha ha."

Now aged 36, he has never looked healthier. His sunbleached hair is a natural straw colour, his face tanned an ochre brown by his recent working sojourns in Australia and the South Seas. He is spritely dressed in an olive-green khaki blouse that emphasises his boyishness.

Within the confines of a 50-minute interview with a complete stranger he is extraordinarily forthcoming about his work, revising opinions of his past in light of his present attitudes. Quite naturally, he only lets slip so much of himself as is relevant to what he is doing. Dare we expect more from our public figures?

II: The interview

BOWIE: I'm talking more in generalisations because I think they probably serve a better purpose than honing down to one direct point. It's easier to make a stronger statement with a generalisation, to make such a strong impression with a popular song lyric.

NME: The strongest impression left by your press conference was your concern about the worthwhile nature of popular music.

For me, personally, my business is my business and it just strikes me... er, I don't really have the urge to continue as a songwriter and a performer in terms of experimentation – at this moment. I feel that at the moment I'm of an age – and age has an awful lot to do with it – I'm just starting to enjoy growing up. I'm enjoying being my age, 36, and what comes with it in terms of the body. It actually physically changes. Mentally and emotionally there are big changes, 'specially if you have been thrust in the front of popular and mass observation.

If you've been observed, as I have for the last 12 years, well, you have to contend with that one way or another. You either care about it, or you don't any more. You think, well, as I have this platform, there's something I can do with it.

And frankly I don't think I would want to continue performing any



Bowie playing vampire John Blaylock in *The Hunger*

more if I didn't think I could do something hopeful and helpful with my music, both for myself and my audience.

How do you define music that is hopeful and helpful? What evidence we have from you at the moment is a celebratory dance record as opposed to something that points anywhere.

Yes. I think it will have a lot to do with *(adopting a mock preachy tone)* people shouldn't fight each other. People shouldn't kill each other and people should try to live together.

Isn't that a little simplistic?

Yes, it is simple.

Your positivism seems to parallel that of Jack Celliers, the character you play in Nagisa Oshima's *Merry Christmas Mr Lawrence*, leading by action and deed.

Instead of intimidating change, try and do something about it.

You identified pretty closely with the character, then?

Yeah, I think I immediately identified with him because of his own personal turmoils, his and mine stemming from different sources. With Celliers, he's ridden with guilt most of his life because of his relationship with his younger brother, which caused him to embrace that particular wartime situation, and gave him that kind of particular strength. That is pointed up a lot more in Oshima's screenplay than it probably is in the book.

And for me, personally, I guess it's the idea of through all my experimentations I have learned a lot; and there must be something I can do with it on a very simplistic level now. I don't have the urge to play around with musical ideas. At the moment. Any more.

The present loss of urge to experiment... is that an indictment of the *Low/Heroes/Lodger* period? Can't humanity and technology sit together?

It's just another way of using my songs. I think I'm just a little tired of experimentation now. But electronics are rewarding in terms of playing around with atmosphere and trying to reach different parts of the mind, funny corners of the mind...

But there is a proliferation of synthetic instruments being used in that kind of, er, "Me generation", icy-cold vein.

It's such a wide sweeping statement that at the moment I feel it's very hard to use those instruments without a kind of preconditioning already there. That if you use the synthesizer it means this particular thing; that I'm part of this angular society.

So that's why I've used a very organic, basic instrumentation on this new album. Such instrumentation doesn't say anything other than it comes from a hybrid of white and black culture. That is the only underlying subtext it has really...

As I say, experimentation can be rewarding for finding awkward stances musically. But it just isn't satisfying after a while. And it's not satisfying because it's not very useful, except—as Brian Eno would say—for setting up a new kind of vocabulary. Now I've got the vocabulary, I'm supposed to do something with it! Ha ha.

On the other hand, the subliminal aspect of electronics allows one to speak more through the music than does rock'n'roll, where the vocabulary is so well-known it has lost its efficacy.

That's the premise, surely, yeah. It does speak in those terms, but I think also to reach a large audience, they're not willing to listen to the music, or play the records, if they're couched in terms they're not really familiar with.

I mean, they're not going to sit and listen to that kind of music and accept it. It's like American television; the record-buying public of America is still very much in the television format mentally and it is impossible for them to listen to something that doesn't make its point in the first 30 or 40 seconds. And I'm starting to subscribe to that at the moment.



Bowie with Merry Christmas Mr Lawrence director Nagisa Oshima at Cannes, May 1983

Previously you've said you're not worried about your experiments losing your old audience, that you were content to pick up new audiences as you go along.

Hmm.

Are you effecting a reconciliation with your old audience?

I don't think so. I think the music I'm writing at the moment is probably going to reach a newer audience for me. But if I am going to reach a new audience, then I'm going to try and reach it with something to say, which is on a very obvious and simplistic level. I don't want to be the grandfather of new wave by any means... that's quite an easy one for me to slip into. I think I'll come on as the simple country boy, ha ha, and go completely against that.

Laurie Anderson said she wanted to balance the tendency towards horror imagery with imagery nice, humanistic and warm. But the problem is making such imagery equally as compelling as horror. Are you presently being confronted with a similar problem?

That particular balance has had not a small part in a lot of the material I've written, but I think I understand what she's saying. I don't know enough of her work, but it's certainly the case in "O Superman". That's a very delicate balance, a marvellous piece of work. Did you see her in concert? I thought she was dynamic, really was impressed.

For me, I'm writing something that I've never really touched before, which is a one-to-one situation. I mean an emotional situation between two people... Such a situation seems to take up at least five tracks on the album. The love situation, the emotional situation between two people, seems to have escaped me—or I've avoided it is probably nearer the truth—since I started writing. Usually, it's been the man in isolation and all that.

Whether I'm becoming either, one, comfortable or, two, complacent with myself—I dunno which it is—but it is something I can feel I can now get involved with as a writer.

I suppose the obvious question to that is: is it a response to your personal situation?

Very much so. Are you married? So you don't have children? I would never have thought it possible, but for me the one most enjoyable and hope-giving quality of my life over the past four or five years is my son.

When the son gets to the age of nine, 10, 11 and 12 and starts asking those really inquisitive, curious and unanswerable questions, well, my response has been to consider how important life is, and how important it is for him.

And as it became more important for him through me I found it became more important for me as well; and our future collectively started taking precedence over everything else. It's amazing what a son or a daughter does for a chap. Ha ha ha.

That's had a very positive and strong bearing on whatever I intend to do in the future. I feel I have to make a commitment to something more altruistic to that which I've been concerned with before.

If that sounds like a turnaround, then it's a turnaround, and it has to be and I would have to face that charge. But I don't think it will quell my »



natural inclination to want to experiment with music, though I think it will modify it greatly.

Insofar as you wouldn't want anything you do to upset your son?

It would make me reflect on anything that would produce the kind of nihilistic quality which was so much part of my early music. Hopefully I was falling out of that anyway. That period had a lot to do with my problems as a human being. To produce that kind of music, though it's interesting to look at someone really fucked up writing music, it's not very helpful.

Because it provides too much of a role model?

Exactly, yes, and I would like to play down all that stuff a bit and make the subject matter, give that more relevance. It's such a complicated, confused time, and my only reaction to that would be to make the subject matter very simple.

The very simple problem is that we're on a terrifying voyage and the effects that have been brought about by those causes are really quite transparent and obvious: the need to belong to small tribal units when there seems to be too many other people about; the mistrust of somebody who is not from one's own origins. Those kinds of things are so obvious that I guess maybe it's quite a good idea to write about them in a very obvious way. And I want to utilise videos to the same extent.

It's easy enough to glamorise a pop song. I've done that often enough in the past! You know, give it a surreal quality and a kind of detached... That's fine if you've got time to watch promos at that level, but these videos reach too many people and, anyway, there's too many of those kinds of videos. Video has become a part of the packaging.

So it occurs to me that it would be a very good idea to utilise those four minutes of space and try to make them say something simple and as hard-hitting and as hard-selling as a commercial, but in terms of human quality and human life as opposed to, this is the kind of outfit, this the way you wear it and this is the kind of cool you have to have to be able to carry it off. As you said before, the whole idea of the role model.

So it's a matter of playing invisible man, moving behind the camera, projecting normality?

Yes! Aside from the fact this is a marvellous chance for me to practise being a director – one can't get away from that! – it's also a chance to incorporate people other than myself as the fronts for the promos. I've had enough of that side; and it's much more fun to use actors, or even non-actors, if I'm going to deal with that kind of subject matter...

Why Australia for the "Let's Dance" promo?

Because it's such a new country, yet it's already got such a well-established, progressive and technological aspect to its society. And because the indigenous peoples of that country have well and truly been put on the outside faster than in any other nation in the world.

It's really so polarised to the extent that it can be related to South Africa quite easily. Not so much in New South Wales, but in Queensland it might as well be South Africa. Aborigines have to buy their drinks in the backs of bars – they're forced to use what is called the dog hatch in the back of the bar. Then they mustn't drink them on the same side of the street, they must go over to the other side and drink them on the grass verge.

The whole thing is ruled like that. There's absolutely no way they take part in modern society. Their education programmes are almost

July 1, 1983: the first of three huge open-air shows at Milton Keynes Bowl

Did you choose Australia because it might have been too inflammatory to film a similar situation in Britain?

No. If it was done in England it would have been too much about the English situation. The other aspect I liked about doing it in Australia was that I found it intriguing to look at. I liked the slightly surreal quality of Australia itself. I purposely left out kangaroos, wallabies and boomerangs and all that. There's nothing strictly aboriginal. The city doesn't shriek Sydney. They are just obviously some indigenous people in some modern country. So it becomes an international situation.

People are not used to seeing Australia on a general basis. In a black-and-white situation they are more used to seeing the streets of London or New York. So already it's a situation they're aware of, and then they don't take quite so much notice of it. They go, "Oh yeah, black-and-white situation, New York, fine, I know about that."

What's the next video?

But shooting the same situation in a different place, it doesn't look the same as anything you've seen before for that situation: modern black people in a modern white society. It's not quite anywhere you recognise, so it points up the situation more, so it could apply to any country – South America, South Africa, England, America – without identifying those obvious targets. It's going back to that old thing about juxtaposition.

You're willing to tackle such a difficult subject visually, so people haven't got words they can immediately turn into slogans, thereby damaging the "message"?

Exactly, yeah. That's another thing. A slogan can kill a cause far quicker than anything else, because it's so easy to package it. Once you put a box around anything it's over.

I'm trying to keep things simple without sloganising. It's easy to say "Give Peace A Chance", but once said it's wrapped up in such an insular little ball, it only applies to certain people. To keep it free of that, I guess it's down to pure statement.

It's very hard to attempt such a thing and I'm having a lot of trouble. There's only a couple of things on the album that have the right feeling, but that is definitely a direction that intrigues me more and more.

Is it easier to deal with those complexities through the medium of film than it is within a song?

That is the problem I'm having, dealing with it in song format. Sometimes you can end up sounding neo-Dylan or something, and that is already stylish and part of a particular cliquey kind of songwriting. I'm not very good at it yet. I'm still working on the one-to-one relationship, and from within that situation trying to create an overall humanist feeling.

It is hard. I think Jim – Iggy Pop's much better at it than me. If he could be manoeuvred into that kind of situation he could produce some stunning social observations. I'd like to cover more of Jim's songs, because I still have

a penchant for exposing talents that I think are valid and important. Jim's songs are so good, his lyrics so fine, he really is a wonderful American poet. He's absolutely great!

So it's great to be able to take advantage of what I can do and include some of his songs.

"China Girl" (by Pop and Bowie) is another track on the album. That's a committed piece of writing. Whereas, for instance, the subject matter of "Let's Dance" is nebulous. There is an undercurrent of commitment, but it's not quite so straightforward...

It's a one-to-one thing, yes, but the danger, the terrifying conclusion, is only intimated in the »



non-existent. Since the beginning they've been put in a ghetto situation. It's very hard for them to fight back at the moment.

Also they're very wary – and quite rightly so – of being seen as the last of the prehistoric tribes. They've done that bit, dressed up in warpaint, spear and whatever for cameramen and it's kind of backfired on them. It hasn't defined their culture as being incredibly interesting and important; in their eyes it has just made them specimens.

People want to see the aborigines only in that context (*adopting touristic tone of astonishment*): "Aah, they're great the aborigines! They still eat witchetty grubs!" That kind of thing.

And the boy and girl in "Let's Dance", Terry and Jolene, they've never seen a witchetty grub in their lives. They have no need to see one and they don't want to be portrayed like that. What I very much wanted to do was to portray them as modern people not being allowed to take part in modern society. But I found out with the promo you have to do everything in four minutes. So, obviously, you quickly get into stereotypes.

Whatever, Terry and Jolene were great, absolutely marvellous. They've had no experience in film, but they knew exactly how to respond to the situation we talked about, so they weren't at all worried when I said, "Jolene, I want you to scrub the streets of Sydney!" Ha ha. She said, "Fine, yes, yes, that's how I feel!"

"I'm trying to keep things simple without sloganising"

piece. It is not apparent what exactly the fear is that they're running from. There's an ominous quality about it, quite definitely. That was the dance song that has all the trappings of old disco music, but it's almost like the last dance.

The last dance? Aren't we in danger of coming back to the apocalypse?

We are indeed (*laughs*). That's what we are in danger of doing, indeed, yes. Well, in terms of writing I've got a background to shake off which is very hard to get out of, because I find it very easy to... (*mimes striking keyboards*) weurgh! Haha, I find it very easy to hit the right chords and bring it all about... whoa, that's great, that's really horrible! Haha. And it's difficult for me to sort of say let's turn the corner here and make it go somewhere else. It's a natural entrapment of my own that I have to be careful of in future.

How do you feel about your legacy of songs in light of your present positive attitudes? Can you still sing them?

Oh, quite easily, yes. No problem at all. I've started listening to a lot of my old stuff, gone back to find out what I was writing then and why. I guess they kind of stand up in their own place in time. Not many of them carry through; I don't think of them like "that's a great old chestnut, sounding good year after year", but they're all interesting.

It's a personal bias, but with every song I've written I identify so much with the time and place it was written in. It's hard for me to shake off the particular year or particular trauma I was going through at the time.

It's much easier for the audience to do that. There's the Duchamp thing about the point where the artist really has nothing more to do with this work. I can only see mine in terms of, yeah, November 1975, and go, "Phew" (*mimes shuddering*). Haha.

But for me to be able to carry on interpreting them, it's enough that I find them all very strong pieces of writing.

Do you ever get the urge to follow Duchamp into silence?

Frequently, yeah. It occurred to me over the past couple of years that if I was going to continue writing it has to be something I can do with conviction. I can't just play about at it, pretend that I'm enjoying it, sort of continuing a career, something like that. If I was going to continue, then why? Well, I wanted to continue, because I wanted to do something positive with it and that's the only way I'll be able to continue today.

The recurring statement through your '70s interviews was about trying to shake off that middle-class ball and chain.

I'm lumbered with that problem. I mean I'll have it for the rest of my life. Haha.

Succumbing to it?

I think so, yeah. I think I've accepted that situation. There's no way I can make myself other than what I am (*Bowie pauses and bursts out laughing*). Now that's a funny thing for me to say, isn't it? (*Laughter*) What a ludicrous thing to say, David! But it is somewhere in there, yes. One faces up to all these things. I'm armed with all these things, my problems with my own background, my own personal problems or whatever. I'm not so detached from myself anymore. I feel in touch (*mimes peace sign, laughing*). Hey, I feel in touch with myself!

I guess you can think of every cliché in the book and that's probably how I feel. Then again, a cliché probably develops life because it comes from a point of truth.

How do you think your 17-year-old self would feel if he were confronted with your present 36-year-old self?

My 17-year-old self would think, er, especially regarding the drift to where

I'm presumably going, that self would probably think, "Ah, what a waste of how to be exciting or radical," or whatever. I know my 17-year-old self would think, "Aw, what a waste, haha ha ha. It's going to be really boring!" Haha. And I'd say, "You wait till you're 36!" Haha. You won't think it's quite so exciting just working in dark areas, haha.

Last year Lou Reed said he was quite prepared to write rock'n'roll songs for adults. On *Scary Monsters* you seemed to be addressing the young still.

Did it really feel like that? That's interesting. You could probably answer that better yourself, but I would imagine it seemed like that because the instrumentation, the actual effects of the instruments and quality of production... well, they were incorporating all the sounds that are radically part of the youth-culture music. The epitome of the new-wave sound at the time, from bubbling synthesizers to erratic and unconventional guitar playing, it had all those elements that are by definition the young way of playing music.

Songs like "Because You're Young" and "Teenage Wildlife" reminded me of the Hagakure [Samurai ethics] author Jocho's dangerous advice for the young: Human life lasts but an instant. One should spend it doing what one pleases.

Well, that would apply to Oshima as well as Mishima [who popularised the code with his modern commentaries in *On Hagakure*]. The funny thing was that before Mishima died, he and Oshima did an interview on television, separately, but as representatives of the radical right and left, respectively. Oshima was furious with the thing afterwards, because they agreed on just about everything! He said he was completely floored by that and it was one of the reasons why he started to modify his own political ideas, because he felt that kind of polarity just produced the same end result.

He was very concerned about that, because he didn't like being the same as Mishima at all! There again, I qualify that by saying that the Japanese left and right are quite different from Western ideas of left and right, where it is estranged left and estranged right. In Japan both would have probably have roots in the same source, more than they might have over here. They both say, "Let's stay Japanese." And when you've got that you're almost cancelling out everything else!

Then it just becomes a matter of how you do it?

Yeah, they do have that problem, the Japanese. (*Smiles*) Oshima, of course, was very much part of that unrest in the '60s...

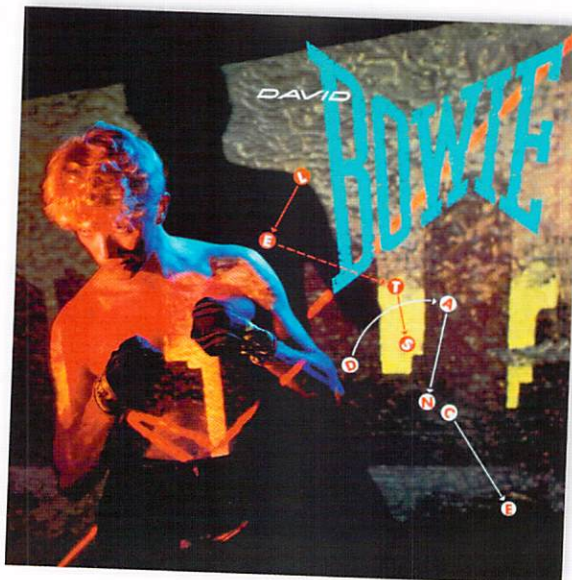
Oshima is primarily concerned with exploring Japanese morality and the way it hides itself, the real position of it. The etiquette against the real life of the Japanese is very important to him, the closest repressed thing they have about them, where there's a turmoil of emotional conflict going on hidden by this veneer of the perfect style, the perfect life, which is such a front. Which I

suppose, as an Englishman, is the perfect thing for me to write about. Haha. Actually, his process of working is more interesting to me than the subject matter.

There might have been pressure on Oshima to moderate his views because he just couldn't work any more. There were five years when he was almost completely ostracised from the film community after *In The Realm Of The Senses*. They really came down on him like a ton of bricks after that movie.

I dunno, this one's going to upset the apple cart again as far as Japan is concerned, so it might be another five years before he makes another one! (*Laughs*) But he will say these things about his own people! Haha.

"I've started listening to my old songs. Not many carry through"



But you avoid saying the like about your own people? That's interesting—jumping from culture to culture might be interpreted as another set of masks.

Yeah, you know (*thoughtfully*) I suppose it's [that] I don't think I have enough experience of England to be able to write objectively about it, which seems a pretty poor thing for an English chap to say! But I really don't. Not that I know more about anywhere else, but at least I'm there. In the other places, because I've been just about everywhere else other than England. I mean, one gets left-behind news or secondhand reports from what newspapers are worth trying to glean anything from, anyway. I pick up most of my news from the *Christian Science Monitor*. That's the only one I can find that really doesn't have a bias on it.

I think "China Girl" is the nearest thing, especially in the video I've made for it [again in Australia], well I think the interpretation of that puts a bit of that right. It's a very heavy song. I think I've dealt with imperialism in that video to a certain extent (*pauses*)... he says. Ha ha.

In a four-minute pop video?

Exactly! "Right, that's got imperialism done..." Ha ha.

It does start to get like that, but well, OK, that's alright. I work in pop songs, and that's what it will have to be...

When you purged yourself of the Victoria incident [you'll recall the time Bowie arrived back in Britain at Victoria Station in a Mercedes limo with a theatrical flourish of outsiders, salutes and loaded statements], you were saying it was some people of Berlin's far left that swayed you. How did they approach you on the incident?

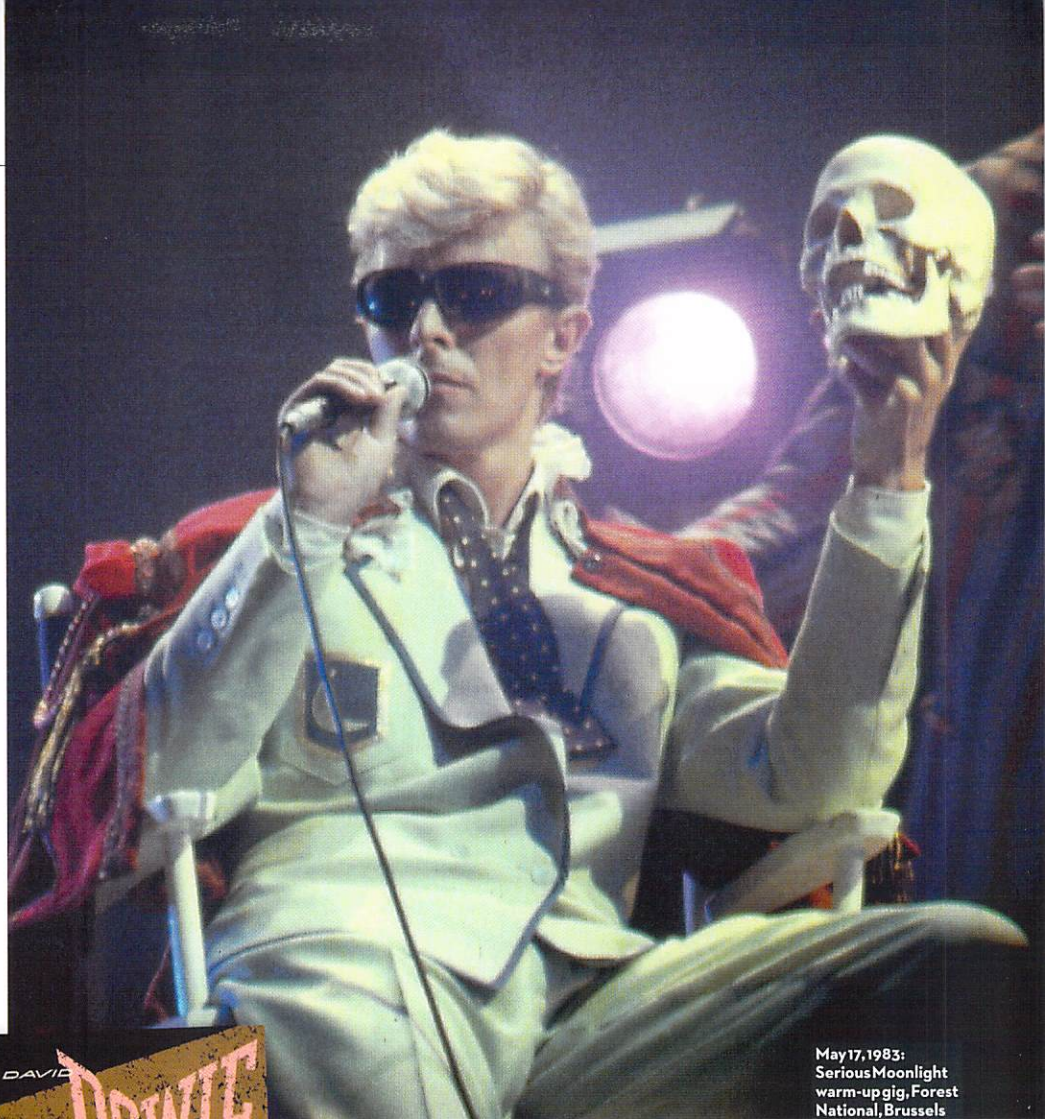
The most illuminating conversation about that was with a couple of guys who really took me to task about the things I said about fascism in 1976, and they made me very aware of how much thought one should put into what one does and says. Because what one does has a lot to do with what one says. They weren't responsible for making me finish with that whole drug period or anything, but they set me up and caught me on a very bad day, you know, ha ha. (*In a heavy teutonic tone*) "So you're still a Nazi, David?" Oh dear! Crumbs! They gave me a real ticking off and that put me straight, I think.

It really sorted that out in my mind about not being quite so flippant or fragmented or stupid or stoned out of my gourd to let myself get involved with those kinds of just hideous reflections.

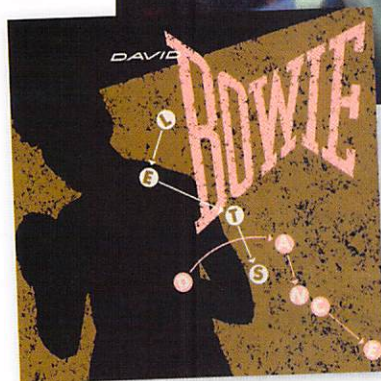
The way fascism entwines itself with aspects of nationality makes it very difficult to refer back to nationality without appearing nationalistic.

Yes, that's a very hard balancing trick, it really is. At the time that whole thing was very much in the air. I just felt it happening, and I wasn't even in England. In 1976, the time when I was spouting all that stuff, the National Front still hadn't been publicly acclaimed to any great extent, as far as I can remember, because when I came to England I got all these pamphlets and things (*loud laugh*) from Mosleyites, asking me if I was joining up! Oh fuck, ha ha.

And it was that hideous thing where, as an artist, you kind of felt that there's something in the air, I can't even put it another way, but you can just feel it, you can just sense a situation or an atmosphere and that can go into your writing. My problem is that after I've written something, or



May 17, 1983:
Serious Moonlight
warm-up gig, Forest
National, Brussels



when I've started writing something, I then try to intellectualise what I'm doing. And that's when the problems usually begin. Especially when you try and intellectualise when you've just done a gram of cocaine, ha ha, and the offcoming statement is usually something that one doesn't want to refer back to a few years later.

Are drugs completely out now?

Oh absolutely! Drugs are no part of my writing or recording or anything. It's impossible to consider your life worthwhile, or the life of those around you worthwhile, if you're just fractured like that. I mean, God knows what would have happened to my son if I was continually stoned over the last 10 years. I probably wouldn't have him. He certainly wouldn't have wanted me. Quite sure about that.

He seems quite a sober character, from what you were saying at the press conference about his love for maths.

Yeah, but he likes Madness, though. Loves them. I thought he was going to start liking Flock Of Seagulls, which worried me a lot. Ha ha. But he saw them on television on *In Concert* and fortunately decided they weren't for him. Ha ha.

Seconds to go. Panic! David Bowie is modifying his reappraisal of his legacy, rightly claiming his past work can be played as photojournalist snaps of the mood and atmosphere of the time they were written, when his publicist arrives to bring the interview to a close.

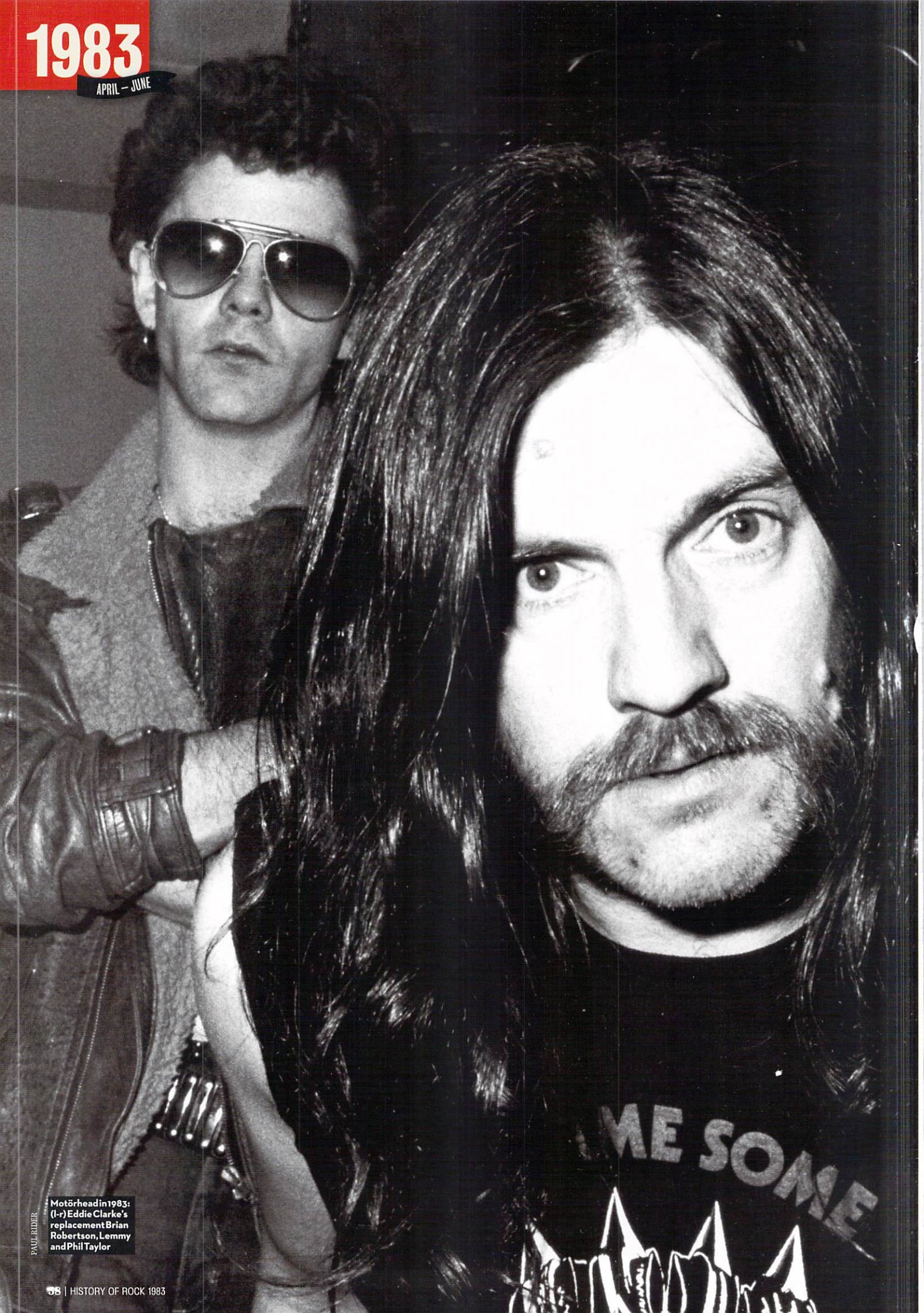
BOWIE: If you want to conjure up the atmosphere of any particular period, well, for me I can do it quite easily by putting on one of those albums. If you put on *Station to Station* it couldn't be from any other period than when it was written.

So, *Diamond Dogs* is still a vision of 1984 from 1974, not from one year off?

Exactly, oh yeah. It doesn't carry through. I don't know how the songs feel on stage, not being an audience for my own work in that way. I don't know if people take them as reflections or if they can still treat them as contemporary pieces... *Chris Bohn* •

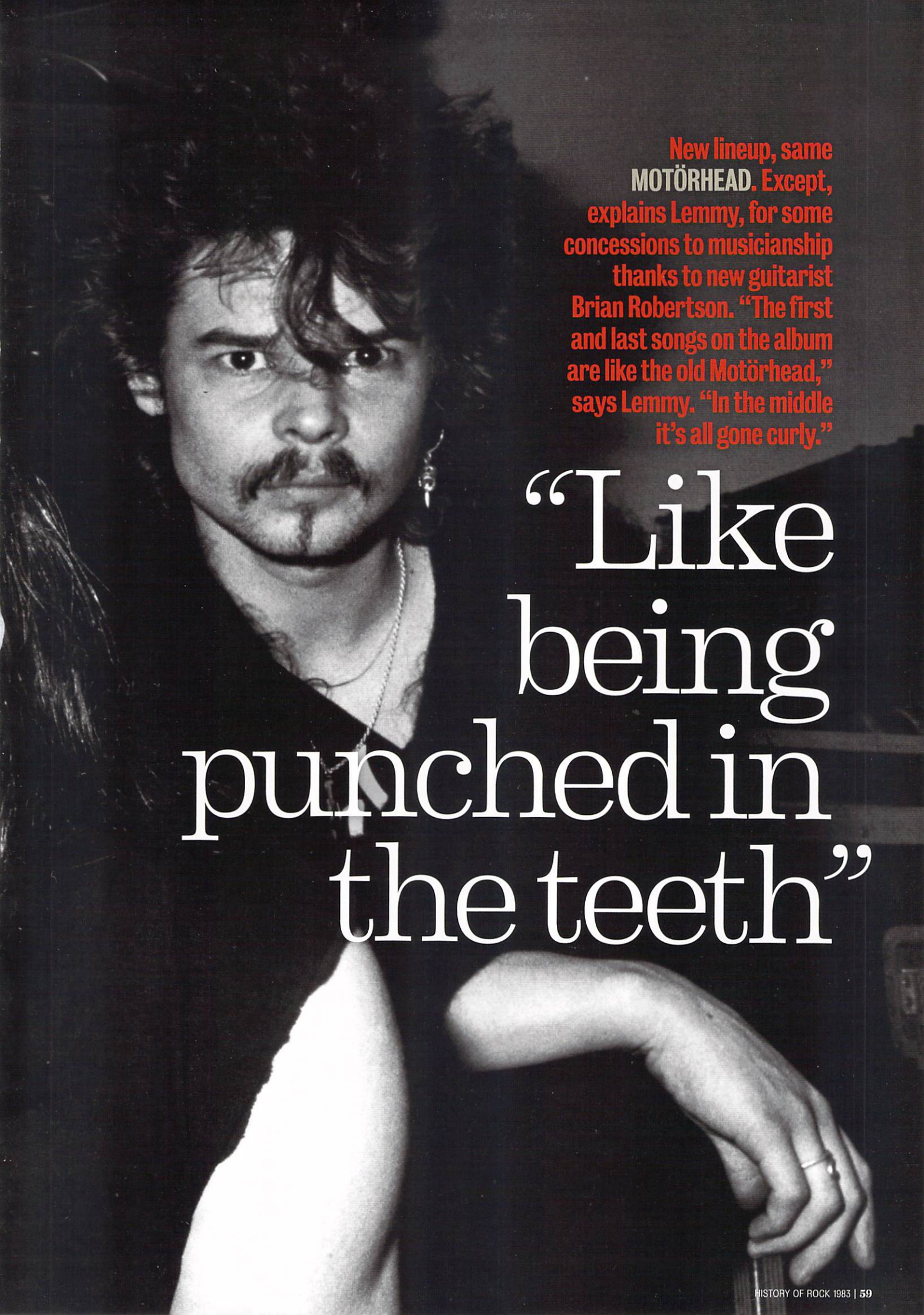
1983

APRIL - JUNE



Motörhead in 1983:
(l-r) Eddie Clarke's
replacement Brian
Robertson, Lemmy
and Phil Taylor

PAUL RIDER

A black and white portrait of Lemmy Kilmister, the lead singer of Motörhead. He has long, dark, curly hair and a mustache. He is wearing a dark shirt and a chain necklace. He is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. His right arm is resting on a surface in front of him, and he is wearing a ring on his finger.

New lineup, same
MOTÖRHEAD. Except,
explains Lemmy, for some
concessions to musicianship
thanks to new guitarist
Brian Robertson. “The first
and last songs on the album
are like the old Motörhead,”
says Lemmy. “In the middle
it’s all gone curly.”

“Like
being
punched in
the teeth”

— MELODY MAKER MAY 14 —

SHOW COME *Sounds* get the VIP treatment? I mean, an afternoon out with Motörhead at a sewage plant in Rickmansworth—luxury. The *Maker*, however had to be satisfied with the deep-pile corridors of the Nomis rehearsal complex dahn in Olympia, where the handsome threesome were supposed to be rehearsing for their forthcoming tour.

Rehearsing can mean many things to different people. To the remarkable Lemmy, the original renaissance man with a heart of pure noise, it means a stiff vodka always within easy reach, a heap of Marshall stacks and a pile of 10 pees to shovel down the greedy throat of the Nomis *Donkey Kong* machine.

Our story begins with His Lemship preoccupied with the latter pastime.

"Christ!" said Lemmy, failing once again to rescue the digital Fay Wray and watching the distressing earthward plunge of the protagonist, "can you play this bloody thing?"

Lemmy entertains you

MM 28 MAY A glowing report on the new album.

Motörhead *Another Perfect Day* BRONZE

There's been some frantic speculation that *Another Perfect Day* would mark a startling change in direction for the mighty ones. What with Fast Eddie doing his runner and Robbo (as his many chums at the *Maker* know him) reaching the climax of his wanderlust at the right hand of the great Lemperson, I was pretty agog myself.

Well, you little mallet-heads, you can rest easy in your beds—the good news is that Motörhead are just as violent, vehement, vibrant and vicious as they ever were. Yes kittens, Motörhead still make you bleed from the ears, they still beat you to the floor and leave you a quivering wreck, they still take an axe to your skull and don't hang around to mop up the blood. Life's not so bad, eh?

The recent, very excellent interview with the boys in these pages came up with the revelation that Robbo is classically trained and uses 13 guitars on this album. He seems to be playing most of them at the same time too, while Lem stomps around, drifting in and out of the action like a mad rodeo rider, launching himself from one rage to another. The finer points of his inspired rants are a little tricky to decipher, but the gist is mostly self-evident.

"Marching Off To War", for example, arrives amid a volley of machine gun guitars and drums, and talks about things like "slaughter", "hell" and "fighting for the nation". I can think of no better backdrop for the horrors of war than Motörhead at full tilt.

That, however, is for wimps compared to the full, blinding fury of "Dancing On Your Grave" and the epic, celebratory "Tales Of Glory". Climaxing the whole thing, though, is the charmingly titled "Die You Bastard!", which opens with an abrupt belch and swiftly scorches into a sort of fighting man's version of Dylan's "Positively Fourth Street". Voice like a chainsaw, Lem preaches hate and disgust from what sounds like the back of an aircraft hangar. I've often wondered why HM albums always have the vocalist at the back of the mix, but Lemmy's case it's probably done for reasons of compassion.

These tracks are all typical, vintage Motörhead at their fearsome best without any evidence of the much-vaunted new melodic edge. But "Back At The Funny Farm" does have a smattering of quirkiness and an extremely odd sound interrupts the debilitating progress of "Rock It". I'm reliably informed it's called a piano.

The single, "I Got Mine", is also relatively tuneful, while "One Track Mind" eases the pace to a mere 90mph. You can tell by the way Phil Taylor includes a token cymbal in his regular route of the skins that this is the ballad.

They duly deliver it with their customary sensitivity, building to climax after climax until you and presumably they are too exhausted to take any more. My favourite track, though, is "Shine"... blistering, exhilarating, and genuinely exciting. This is Motörhead at their very finest, playing with total command and authority, and blazing away any reservations with the sheer single-minded belief of it all. If HM was always performed as consummately as this, then I'd be queueing now for Castle Donington.

Motörhead, of course, transcend HM these days. If, as has been claimed, HM is to rock what country music is to MOR—fanatically followed in the provinces, reviled in the big city—then Lemmy is its Dolly Parton. He's now fast approaching legend, and his exploits are now moving his status from grudging respect to outright hero. The People's Champion is also becoming

Public Champion. Give it ten years and he'll be Prime Minister. This splendidly buoyant, exciting, intimidating tirade will do that march no harm at all.

Colin Irwin

"It's a difficult machine, that," I assured him, remembering with suppressed mirth the sight of suave John Barton cashing cheques over the bar to pay for another couple of hundred trial runs.

Lemmy gave up. "This way," he said tersely, motioning the *Maker* faction down the corridor with a flick of his leonine locks and a brief glimpse of teeth eroded by years of corrosive sound and, well, "hard living."

We followed.

Marillion were hard at it next door, discernible by a series of dull thuds coming through the wall. Motörhead, unwithered by age, had huddled around a pile of flight cases and unfriendly plastic chairs near the door, as far as possible from the forbidding walls of amplification at the far end of the room. They meant work.

These days, of course, Motörhead are Lemmy, the redoubtable Phil Taylor on drums, and relatively new boy Brian "Robbo" Robertson on massed guitars.

I'm not sure why, but I always had this impression of Robertson as a demented Scotsman rarely out of earshot of a bottle of Scotch and the sort of chap liable to greet one of these effete journalist types with a crisp right hook followed closely by a low-flying knee.

I had the first bit right, but in fact Robertson on this occasion turned out to be positively garrulous, ready and willing to expound on all manner of strange topics. The sorry plight of the South Moluccans who live in Holland, for example, or memoirs of a Thin Lizzy guitarist (as he was then) trying to reach an understanding with the druggie gangs of Amsterdam.

"I grabbed this guy by the lapels, right," Robbo explained in swift Scottish, "then I gave him a slap round the mouth, stuck my hand in his pocket and took all the money he had. I said 'this is mine, see?' His mates were just standing there dumbstruck."

"Then I says to this guy with me—he was there to give me support, right?—I said, 'do something.' He went to hit this other guy and the geezer just punched him and he hit the deck. I thought, 'Oh that's fucking great, this guy's supposed to be protecting me and he's just decked it...'"

As Robbo got deeper into the saga, Phil Taylor curled up on the small, uncomfortable sofa. "Ask Phil how he feels," Lemmy ordered.

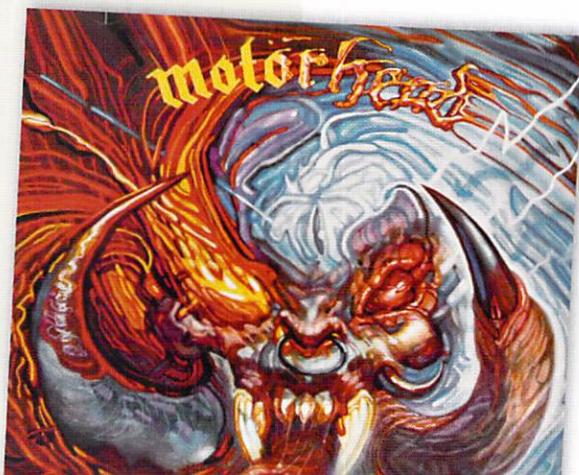
"How do you feel, Phil?" I asked.

"Full of gale force winds and gases," said Taylor, belching magnificently. Had the interview begun, I wondered? Perhaps it was already over. Better press on anyhow.

I thought I'd better ask Motörhead about their new LP *Another Perfect Day*, due for release in a couple of weeks. It's the first one they've done with Robertson tackling guitar duties; Eddie Clarke having deemed Lemmy's single with Wendy O Williams to be the last straw and walking out to form Fastway.

Another Perfect Day might come as a surprise to some. It's different—for Motörhead, anyway.

Where records like *Ace Of Spades* or *Iron Fist* were a bit like being struck by one of those things they use to knock down buildings, *Day* is sort of spacier, kind of wider-ranging. Much of this must be attributed to Robertson, a one-



man guitar army who loves nothing better than to hole up in a studio and pile on layer after layer of guitars.

"Before, our records were like being punched in the teeth," said Taylor, probably awakened by the sound of loud sniffing sounds from the direction of his fellow musicians. "Now it's like being punched in the teeth with an apology afterwards." He lit a Silk Cut and rubbed his eyes laboriously.

ROBBO ASSURED ME that there was more to constructing the Motörhead sound than met the ear. "I was classically trained to start with," he said. "Even with this album. I structured it as I would do if I was structuring a string section. That's why you use all the different guitars with the different sounds. You might use this guitar because it sounds thinner and leaves a gap, and it's down to light and shade – that's the way I like to work." He says he used 13 guitars on the album, though Lemmy reckons it was only 12.

"The first and last songs on the album are like the old Motörhead," said Lemmy with relish, "then in the middle it's all gone curly. A lot of it's more or less the same as we would have done, but the great thing with Brian is he can carry a solo or a slightly longer solo than Eddie could or did.

"He also plays rhythm a lot different than Eddie did. Eddie was a good rhythm guitarist, but he couldn't swap over at a moment's notice. Like Brian will do a couple of chords in the riff, then stick a bit of lead in and come back to it." Phil burped sympathetically.

Could this be a more commercial record for Motörhead? Of course, titles like "Die You Bastard!" or "Dancing On Your Grave" probably won't make Peter Powell's 5.45 slot, but there can be no denying that there's a sort of terrible majesty about things like "I Got Mine" or "One Track Mind".

I used to dismiss Motörhead as preposterous subhumans who'd think themselves lucky if they found sawdust dribbling out of their ears ("hey, there is something in here after all!").

These days, I have a sort of quaking admiration for their complete absence of qualms and determination to see it through to the logical limit or beyond. People who live like this and make this noise must know something I don't.

Lemmy offered his Marlboros round. "Put that thing out," he said scornfully, indicating my soggy roll-up. He flame-threwed his cigarette and pondered. "We've had all this bitching for years, right, about being Neanderthal fucking rock'n'rollers posing around with bullet belts and all this. Now that we've changed it a bit and it is more melodic, let's just see what they say now. They'll think of something."

So you expect the record to get a kicking in the papers, then?

"Oh, probably," said Lem.

"We expect to get a kicking anyway – we're used to them.

"They've lost all their fire', that's what it'll be now."

Well, you never know, I suggested – *NME* even wrote quite a sympathetic piece about Twisted Sister this week (they're Lemmy's mates). "I think they're finally seeing the signposts," he said. "I mean, the *NME* has become like a cross between *The Financial Times* and the *Whole Earth Catalog*. It's all 'Do you know what they're doing in Devon? They're poisoning sheep with chemicals!' I don't wanna read about that in a music paper!"

The best thing about us is that we're laughing all the time at it all. All these bands seem to lose their sense of humour once they get above number seven in the charts. They try to say relevant things and be cool. I'm not cool. I'm really uncool, me. I really enjoy it. We're a little slack, compared to most people."

"Life would be a lot easier if you didn't have to rehearse," groaned Taylor, lighting another Silk Cut.

Do you get sick of the *Kerrang!* approach to Motörhead, I queried – y'know: where the band always get approached from the same angle of attack?

"The *Kerrang!* boys have always been alright to us," said Lemmy loyally. "But I know what you mean, the same slant. You get bored with it. But what can you do? A lot of

bands have got the same thing but with a different sort of slant – each band has the slant in the way they're written about. I'm sure Marillion are sick of being compared to Genesis. I've only seen three articles about them and everyone talks about Genesis and the new wave of psychedelia."

There's a lot of talk about "rock" being redundant these days, I said, but I reckon there's nothing wrong with rock, it's just the rock groups.

"Yeah," said Lemmy, adding a little orange juice to a glass of vodka purely for cosmetic purposes. "There's a lot of tales about people getting bland, but that's rubbish. The kids don't say that – when they write to the papers they're always slagging off the writers for saying that. They go out and have a good time at the gigs while the writer's there getting paid for it. He goes in for the first number, goes to the bar, maybe staggers out for the encore and then writes a bad review."

Lemmy rose with difficulty to his feet. "If you'll excuse me for a moment I'm going for a shit." He picked up a biker magazine and tucked it under his arm.

"There is toilet paper in there, you know," Taylor pointed out.

"But it's not glossy, is it?" snapped Lemmy.

LEMMY WAS GONE for some time. When he came back, it seemed the time had arrived for the boys to do a little work. Huge roadies with beards and beer guts had begun to wander into the room, fiddling with leads and switching on mixers. Lemmy picked up a bass and plugged it into the nearest phalanx of Marshalls, then let rip on a terrible grinding riff.

Obviously he wasn't satisfied, since he soon put down the bass and punched his amplifier with a heavily ringed fist. "Seem to be losing a bit of top on this," he said to the nearest crewperson. "Better get it sorted out before the tour."

Meanwhile Robbo was making infinitesimal adjustments of the array of knobs on his guitar synthesizer. He scratched his copper-dyed hair, walked over to his quadruple band of amps, turned a couple of knobs and played a resounding E major.

Lemmy sidled up to me, leering. "Silly bastard's changed all the settings," he said. "That's what you get for working with musicians." He thumped a couple of violent bass chords. Meanwhile, Taylor read a magazine behind his drum kit.

Finally they were ready. Robbo lashed into the intro of "Marching Off To War", and swiftly struck the first of many guitar hero poses, eyes glazed and his mouth compressed into a bloodless grin.

As Taylor's sticks made a tour of his enormous kit, Lemmy advanced to a nearby microphone, feet planted aggressively astride the stand and his head craning up, like he was about to take a huge bite out of something warm-blooded. In this absurdly low-ceilinged room, it was impossible to hear anything except a vast crushing roar, which hammered sickeningly into your stomach like a giant piston.

Motörhead had a whole night of this ahead of them, so we decided to call it quits. Robertson, seeing us about to depart, hurried over to shake hands, much more the professional rock celebrity than the other two will ever be. To our surprise, it was still daylight outside. *Adam Sweeting •*

"Bands lose
their sense of
humour once
they get in
the charts"

ANOTHER PERFECT

DAZE

1983

APRIL - JUNE



Rip Rig + Panic: a manically executed array of ideas

ALBUMS
REVIEW
1983

ALBUMS

Rip Rig + Panic *Attitude* VIRGIN

Let's get to the point: *Attitude* is marvellous - the sound of Rip Rig + Panic kicking up a ruckus with typically mercurial wit and speed, yet never allowing their anarchic spirit to tip over into the kind of nagging self-indulgence that made "I Am So Cold" so intermittently wearisome.

Whatever their occasional failings, no matter how deep the cheek, Rip Rig stand out as a living, breathing organism among the dead sludge of modern pop, a piercing yell of idiosyncrasy in a wasteland of anonymous product.

Naturally there are those who can't stand to see this happening, but thank God for that; the moment Rip Rig fail to mortally offend a cross-section of critics from the pop and jazz spheres alike is the moment they cease to carry any weight at all.

Not only do the group not conform, they don't conform loudly, and in this sense there's a strong feeling of 'punk' about their stance. Rip Rig's 'attitude' is the love of overturning apple-carts, their refusal to approach music with the po-faced concern and premeditated restraint of so many of their mediocre peers.

More precisely, their approach is rooted in the smearing of elements from differing musical traditions - most notably pop, soul and jazz - and doing it with such pep and energetic style that the question of comparison with the original sources of inspiration rarely reaches the agenda.

In a very real sense the group are visionary - they've created their own musical category that owes little, if nothing, to the trends and tendencies going on around them. Rip Rig are a 'pop group' that stalk the popular music marketplace, yet one whose personality is bound up with styles that exist both outside and within the mainstream.

On *Attitude*, as on their debut, God, it's the saline freshness of their juxtapositions that surprises, the willingness to examine a musical idea from a wildly unusual angle, then move on to tackle the next project with equally determined vigour. We

know there'll be explosions, can be certain there'll be calm, but can never predict from which direction the splinters will be showering us, or tell when they'll stop.

One moment, Rip Rig can take us back to the noise and hellish excitement of early rock 'n' roll - "Beat The Beast" (also the current single) sounds like wild animals tearing into the flesh of "Rock Around The Clock" and spitting the blood back in our faces - and the next steam into frenzied gallop that could be one of the manic forays from Don Cherry's *Brown Rice* LP cut up by Mark Springer's tempestuously hammering piano.

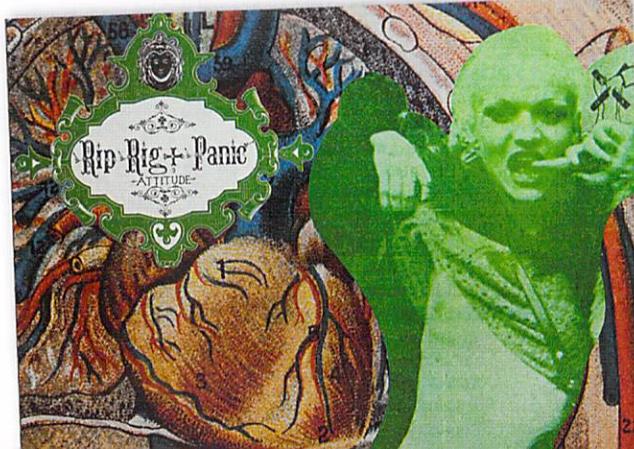
All cuts are comparatively short; the statements are dense yet succinct, a series of taut,

inspired conceptions performed with affirmative dash, spittle and verve. There's much of the accessible, colourful discipline of their singles here; Neneh Cherry has become one of the most important beasts in their bear-garden, her vocals providing a central focus to the bouts of romping and raging.

On "Do The Tightrope" and especially "Viva X Dreams" her voice sounds remarkably close to Annabella's, yet the ferocious musical surrounds - snorting sax and thundering, relentless drums - make Bow Wow Wow seem lame. Go wild in the country indeed!

Other than a couple of weaker tracks - "Sunken Love" is a little pedestrian, and "Rip Open..." too close to stolid punk-jazz -

Attitude is a record that begs exploration, a closely worked and manically executed array of ideas that proves Rip Rig + Panic not only have sublime musical taste but the ability to actually do something with it. Though not as immediately appealing as God - we have adjusted ourselves to expect the



unexpected—it possesses a multi-layered makeup that becomes more and more exciting on each successive spin. Liberating stuff.

Lynden Barber, MM Apr 9

David Bowie *Let's Dance*

EMI/AMERICA

A recent late-night session with some Bowie-loving friends yielded some unexpected conclusions about the Master's past. *Hunky Dory* sounded like a school poetry magazine hurriedly converted into makeshift MOR, while it seemed inconceivable that anybody could ever have taken the clumsy soap-operettas of *Ziggy Stardust* seriously.

But history has already decided that these were seminal records, for whatever reasons. Perhaps it was simple lack of opposition. Perhaps it was mass hysteria. There was no denying that Bowie looked the business, but when you got too close he was just another card-sharper who couldn't look you in the eye.

And so to *Let's Dance*, in which this very clever bad actor enlists the help of Nile Rodgers (a man badly in need of some Bowie-style sleight of hand) to whip up a thick, tactile funk-rock. This album is frequently persuasive, at times has every appearance of being threatening and would make a good soundtrack for some fairly expensive thrills. Don't blame me if you feel bad in the morning—it was a good time while it lasted, no?

Most of the meat is on the first side of the record. Giving no even breaks to suckers or smart-asses alike, Bowie fixes the jugular squarely in his sights with the opening "Modern Love", a rowdy portion of acrid rock-gospel. It's loaded with percussive muscle, hung with blousy brass and spearheaded by raucous massed voices.

Suddenly you're swilling around in the narcotic undertow of "China Girl", and even though it's little more than a thunderous funkoid re-tread of "Moonage Daydream" (and the song was penned in '77 by Bowie and Iggy Pop) it's hard to deny the pained (melo)drama of Bowie's voice or the rabid catcalls of Stevie Ray Vaughan's lead guitar. You'll know about "Let's Dance" itself by now, then it's onward! To the outdoors with "Without You", a seductive cat's cradle of chords, mammoth drums and a glutinous, terrain-hugging bassline.

Side Two is much less

impressive, despite the Peter Gabriel-like "Ricochet" with its snappy horn arrangement and a guitar-overkill reworking of "Cat People".

"Shake It" is a horrible, flimsy morsel of synthy-funk, while "Criminal World" is the album's solitary cover version and makes a strong plea for bulk erasure. For the record (for those of you who keep one) it's credited to Peter Godwin, Duncan Browne and Sean Lyons (may they rot in obscurity), and it's difficult to believe that the normally sure-footed master of disguise could really have been drawn to this laughable minestrone of violence and sexual ambivalence.

"You've got a very heavy reputation/But no one knows about your low-life"—you may be able to get away with this sort of thing as scriptwriter for *CHiPs*, but not here.

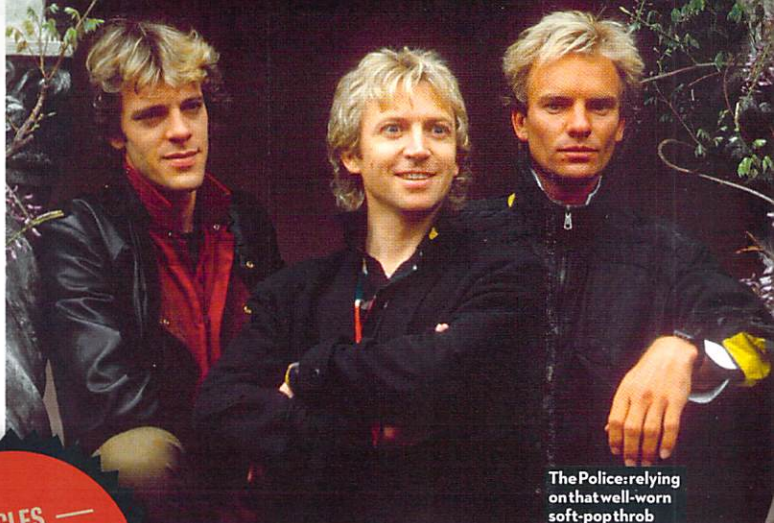
Not that any of Bowie's own songs tell you anything, but years of deception have taught him all about the potential elegance of sheer vacuousness. *Let's Dance* is a workable compromise—some inspiring moments, some cleverly devised camouflage and all papered over with a gambler's flair for the dramatic (empty) gesture.

Like most of David Bowie's records, this one says absolutely nothing while recognising precisely the time, date and circumstances of its creation. It saddens me slightly that it took me so long to appreciate the full extent of Bowie's unerring, instinctive duplicity, but that's why he gets the back page of *Smash Hits* and I just get cheek from John Barton.

The gentleman cat-burglar of pop surfaces still has a useful trick or two in hand to keep the new generation of artful dodgers at bay, and he can hardly complain if the entire music industry has stolen his notion of changing styles once a week.

And finally, even if David Bowie is only a new paint job with a heart of pure trash, nobody's been able to call his bluff. He knows only too well that the only crime is being caught.

Adam Sweeting,
MM Apr 16



The Police: relying on that well-worn soft-pop throb



SINGLES

The Police *Every Breath You Take*

A & M

Remember The Police, do you?

Absence makes the heart grow fondue, or perhaps this is how the reasoning goes. Unfortunately this is devoid of those sleights-of-hand that used to make Miles' wonder-boys so hypnotic, and instead relies on a well-worn soft-pop throb and some truly comical clichés from the almighty Sting. "Oh can't you see you belong to me?" queries the beautifully proportioned hunk, before delivering miracles of metre like "Every smile you fake/ Every claim you stake." Probably bashed out during a break in rehearsals for *King Lear*. MM May 21

Motörhead

I Got Mine BRONZE

Suicidally reckless and monumentally un-chic, the disgustingly loud Motörhead come roaring out of the traps with a mission to cauterize. Every cliché in the book, of course—Robbo's massed Marshall thunder, Lemuel's last-gasp croak and Philthy's skull-warping percussion. All of which adds up to the only single of the week which has the bottle to proclaim its independence and take on all comers. Beyond good and evil and eclipsing any tokenist 'heavy metal' shrink-wrapping, these oddly civilised savages stake it all on a single throw of the dice and achieve an

improbable nobility.
MM May 21

Jane *It's A Fine Day*
AVAILABLE FROM OWAIN BARTON, 514 CHARLES



BARRY CRESCENT, HULME, MANCHESTER

I first heard John Peel play this a couple of weeks ago, and I was very struck by it because it's very different from most records you hear on the radio. It's not a million miles from the Marine Girls and Tracey Thorn, though in this case you hear Jane's voice—"standing naked in the wind", as some Islamic prophet once said, since she sings it unaccompanied.

Sandie Shaw, Annie Nightingale and Alf from Yazoo reviewed it on *Round Table* and greeted it with great cackles of laughter. I was disappointed because I think it's a very brave attempt. It's one of those records that could turn into a totally unexpected hit if someone like Mike Read started playing it. MM May 14

David Bowie *China Girl*

EMI/AMERICA

First: "Let's Dance" was the summer single of the spring.

Second: "China Girl" isn't.

Third: The original was one of the less memorable tracks on Iggy Pop's *The Idiot*.

Fourth: It is constructed in such a way as to encourage the worst melodramatic tendencies of both singers. Bowie sinks into a distressingly overwrought routine here, and I can't help thinking of Rod Stewart on Python Lee Jackson's "In A Broken Dream".

Fifth: Conclusion—Iggy Pop's version was the more acceptable of the two.

Sixth: But what do you care since you've already bought the *Let's Dance* album and played it to death? MM Jun 4



1983

APRIL - JUNE

"I wouldn't shy from political words"

The re-release of "Shipbuilding" brings ROBERT WYATT within an inch of *Top Of The Pops*. In its place, he holds benignly forth on everything from world politics to pottery and Paul Weller. "Why a Eurovision Song Contest?" he asks.

— MELODY MAKER JUNE 4 —

STRANGE THINGS HAPPEN, and one's just happened to Robert Wyatt. He'd been living in Spain for the last six months, well away from the vertiginous roundabout of British music, British charts and British fashion, when, unknown to him, Rough Trade re-released his haunting single "Shipbuilding".

Next thing you know, the record had begun to scale the singles charts at a healthy enough rate for Wyatt to be whisked back to England to ready himself for a possible appearance on *Top Of The Pops*. The single rose to 35 on the BBC's chart last week, but with *TOTP* being shortened in favour of football, Wyatt's services were not required. So now he's staying over here to see what happens this week.

"Shipbuilding" would be an unlikely enough candidate for pop payability at any time, featuring as it does Elvis Costello's mordant slant on the Falklands cataclysm, lit by the sort of luminous ironies few other writers are capable of. Add Clive Langer's sweet-and-sour melody and Wyatt's tragically crucified vocal, and you're probably as close as you'll ever get to the

subversiveness "pop" music is supposedly capable of.

We meet at his flat in Twickenham. Wyatt is friendly and quite cheerful, but I feel »

JON BLACKMORE

DIVING FOR PEARLS



"I thought, 'Hmmm, could you do a pop song?'" : Robert Wyatt (note "Diving" badge) photographed at home in Twickenham, South-West London, May 1983

oppressed by the desperation that all his thinking and reading and listening seem to have led him to discover. Most people have too little time. I suspect Wyatt would gladly give them some of his.

Anyway, here are some edited highlights.

Shipbuilding

"Clive Langer and Elvis Costello had asked me to do the song, and it was sort of tailor-made for me really. My only worry was whether I could do it as they hoped. That was really the beginning and the end of my worry. I'm not going to go out and buy a thousand copies or anything like that.

"I was really pleased and amazed when Elvis offered me the song – I was really surprised, because the last thing I saw of him was the TV programme about him in Nashville, which was very brave of him, chucking himself in at the deep end there. What amazes me is his eclectic range of interests, because although my own is eclectic, it's very bitty. Whereas talking to Elvis, he seems to have an encyclopaedic interest in pop music itself. I was surprised he knew enough about me to ask me to do the song.

"In this particular case, Clive Langer wrote the tune and thought this was the sort of thing Robert Wyatt could do, and Elvis put some words on. They certainly realised I wouldn't shy away from singing political words. I find that things that happen like this out of the blue work better than me trying laboriously to construct projects on my own, very often. So there's no particular incentive for me to construct things of my own. I put most of my energy into the sort of passive pursuit of following the things I'm interested in, culturally and musically, and I'm never sure what's going to come out of them.

"A lot of very interesting things that have happened to me. I've found absolutely no way of expressing them or dealing with them at all, which is very frustrating. A lot of the things that happen to you just don't translate into songs, and I'm not really cut out to be a journalist as far as I can see. I've done a bit of writing occasionally, but nobody ever seems to pay you for it, so I knocked that on the head. The only people who pay you seem to be the ones on the verge of going bust."

Entertaining

"I don't believe in this idea that music's 'just entertainment' – as if there was any such thing as 'just entertainment'. I think people who are apparently just singing something that's totally self-indulgent or apparently meaningless are making a very serious statement, and that serious statement is: 'I exist; I want you all to like me.' That's a very urgent message.

"If somebody tries to dress nicely, that's what they're saying, and for all you know their survival, psychologically, depends upon a sympathetic response to that. So it's terribly serious. I think everything that people do is serious, whether it's dancing to attract somebody they like or just to have a good time, and I get very impatient with people who say you shouldn't try to be serious in escapist culture. It's all pretty desperate if you look at it.

"I think of flowers. People say, 'Oh, a lovely relaxed flower garden there' – in fact it's not. If you think about what a flower's doing, he's saying, 'If a bee doesn't notice me within about 24 hours I'm not gonna be able to carry on. Everything depends on a bee thinking I'm a really sexy flower and getting hold of my stamens,' or whatever it is they do."

Paul Weller

"He knows more than I did at his age. For the record, I'm 38. I'm very slow; it's taken me a long time to see things the way I do now. I saw an interview with Paul Weller and he was talking about the people he was conscious of who were around. Not that they've been through more, but you sort of benefit from previous generations' experience. He's watched The Who and he's seen this and that, and he's capable of avoiding the pitfalls that some of us older people may have fallen into. It's quite inspiring really.

"But on the other hand, I'm very conscious that there is an unspoken ideology, which is much stronger than conscious politics in rock'n'roll, and that's age. There is an assumption there that the young standing on the shoulders of the old is in fact a law in rock'n'roll, and it fits everything, it fits the marketing of it... so I'm very conscious that younger musicians

would be uncomfortable that older ones would like them, 'cos each generation seems to need to feel it's got a sort of autonomous culture.

"There's always going to be a gap, because the stuff I was interested in when I was a teenager was stuff that was going on before those people were born, really. I wouldn't have missed it for the world. And the stuff you get into as a teenager stays with you longer than anything, I think. So I respect people like Weller, but it's from quite a distance, because I'm just not in that world.

"But there are times when you think, 'Christ, I've got this voice, I've got this constituency if you like, an informal constituency of what I do, I must feel responsible.' I think it's perfectly reasonable that Paul Weller should think, 'I've got a responsibility here, therefore I have a choice between whether I say something useful or whether I say something

useless', so he gives himself the responsibility of saying something useful. He's not claiming to have any power, he's just saying, 'If I have, and it seems as though I may have some, I'd better use it as well as I can.' That's fair enough. Because we don't really know what influence we have, it hasn't been worked out."

Motivation

"I suppose what set me off is what keeps me going, and what set me off was not politics or pop music, but being brought up as a teenager to deal with people who called themselves avant-garde at that time, in painting and music and so on. Something very strange happens to avant-garde, which is that the moment you've said it or

done it it's not avant-garde any more. And if, for example, you call yourself a performance artist you're giving the game away, and you're no longer a performance artist. The person to watch for is somebody who's not saying who they are – things aren't just what they're called.

"I'd have to qualify that by saying that I'm very rarely happy with the results. That's because I think being brought up not just with the avant-garde in general but with the ideas of the Dada era in particular, there was this idea that manifested itself over and over again in rock music, that there was no point in doing anything properly, because when you sketch out an idea it's the idea that's interesting, so you don't hang about and fill it all in and dot all the 'i's. I'm not saying I should have tidied all my songs up, but the fact is there isn't much I've done that's quite finished in the sense that some people's work is finished."

Pop

"The reason I did some sort of conventional pop songs was partly to move outside the consensus of people I was working with at that time, which would have said that pop music is a dull and dead-end medium. And I thought, 'Hmmm, could you do a pop song?' So I thought, 'Well, let's have a look at a successful pop song, see how it works.'

"If you talk to people who deal in long and really developed music, they'll say that one of the reasons that pop is bound to be a minor form is that you can't do much in two or three minutes. I found an interesting thing, that if you're trying to write a good tune it's very hard to make it last longer than one minute, and in fact three minutes is an incredibly long time. Almost without exception it's quite long enough.

"By the time three minutes is up you've heard each idea in the record probably at least three times, and far from being restricted, I found it just as intimidating to try to create three interesting minutes as anything longer.

"I didn't try and write one myself, I was just interested in taking apart a few good or successful pop songs from the inside and then reassembling them in the light of what I could do, just to see what made them work. And I ended up with what I suspected I would have, which is a lot of respect for the craft. People say, 'Well, it's so limited', but so is making pots. Making pottery is not making Rodin's sculpture, you're looking for the wrong thing, but there is a difference between good pottery and crummy pottery."

Africa

"All this century, Africa has been supplying our culture with its revitalising juices. I don't think musicians should feel guilty about it; I think musicians are relatively innocent and so are their audiences, they're just looking for a different stimulus.

"Within this century, Picasso's revolutionising of the world of painting can be attributed in part to his discovery of African sculpture and wood-carving. He's celebrated as this innovative genius, while sculptors in Mozambique and Tanzania are still struggling away to sell their work to tourists. Picasso might have wanted to transfer the status of the world he'd inherited, of Europe, onto the Africans who'd inspired him, but artists don't have that much power.

"I think what's sad for artists... if we live in a country which has got rich by crippling the potential of some other country, then even though we ourselves are personally innocent of this economic, political and military fact, we can't help but participate in an unfair situation when we continue to use others. In England, we still inherit a situation where we can get more out of other people than they can get out of us. I don't expect anybody else to take that on if they don't want to, but personally it worries me to the point of not really being sure that anything I do is really any use to anybody whatsoever.

"But then I fall back on my old standby of saying, 'Well, I never tried to do any good anyway, I'm just an avant-garde artist.' Because after all, we're all selfish first – we're all saying, 'This is what I do, this is my act; I hope you like it, because if you don't I'm done for.' That's what we're all doing and I'm no different from anybody else in that, I'm not any more altruistic."

The Eurovision Song Contest

"When it comes down to it, I'm more interested in politics under particular situations. I don't actually start off and end up with some sort of overview. Sometimes you get the politics in a very specific situation, like the Eurovision Song Contest. Where you really think about it is where nobody's overtly talking about politics at all. I think Eurovision is just bristling with political implications, on all kinds of layers.

"First of all, why a Eurovision Song Contest? It's slightly broader than that ridiculously tiny and unrepresentative group of countries called the EEC, which excludes Austria, Scandinavia, Spain, Portugal and all the countries further east, but not much. Then why is there this tradition that everybody sends rubbish that nobody in their own country of origin knows anything about? Who are the selection committee? Who are the juries? What's going on there?

"The reason I mention the Eurovision Song Contest is that Spain did something this year that as far as I know nobody's ever done before – they sent a great singer with a great song. They sent a girl called Remedios Amaya singing 'Quien Maneja Mi Barca'. Poor old naive Spain, trying desperately to impress the Europeans and trying desperately to get into the EEC, send a good singer and good song – a bit of electronic ska backing and her gypsy vocals, and we're away. And of course it got no points at all, none whatsoever. Very unusual thing to happen.

"There's a very touching naivety in Spain and they really were hurt, they started blaming themselves, and you wouldn't believe the debates that went on in the press about 'we shouldn't have sent a gypsy, all Spaniards aren't gypsies', or 'she was barefoot, she should have worn good shoes' – oh, awful stuff. They were blaming themselves instead of saying, 'What a cloth-eared bunch of gherkins we've got here.'

"But there were all kinds of other things going on there. Countries gave spectacularly bad marking to the countries where their immigrant workers come from. This may be coincidental, but it's amazing that West Germany, who presumably 30 years ago, had the opportunity arisen, would perhaps have given Israel no points at all, would now give Turkey, Spain and anywhere with gypsies in it no points at all – because the current xenophobia in West Germany is about Spanish and Turkish immigrant workers.

"Then you think, 'Well, maybe the Israelis will appreciate this song, because it's part of the southern Mediterranean tradition that Remedios Amaya is coming from' – you could recognise Middle Eastern folk influences in what she does. But nothing from Israel, because Israel is trying to be more northern European than the northern Europeans. They don't want to know about

anything that sounds like gypsies, as far as I can see.

"And then Yugoslavia got nothing from Austria, and Yugoslavia is where Austria's guest workers come from. Not that it's all political, it's just that that's an element in it that's totally ignored, because it's just 'fun, fun, fun'. And as I say, it's not fun, fun, fun, it's Remedios Amaya crying on behalf of Spain for help. There's no such thing as light entertainment, it's all much more desperate."

Killing people for an ideology

"I don't think killing's the worst thing you can do to people. The usual slogan of liberation movements goes something like 'Better to die on your feet than to live on your knees', and really what I do is... I will support certain people who have come to that conclusion if I've read their history and I agree with them that they have no alternative.

"The second question is whether that's necessarily effective – it's a moot point. Means become ends in politics, and that's always a danger. But really what's so unfair about the image given to various liberation movements I sympathise with is that violence wasn't talked about until they reacted to it – then they're called the violent ones. It's extraordinary the amount of perhaps hopeless, perhaps hopeful violence our Empire has caused as a reaction, and it seems to me that basically we must look for the cause of that in what we were doing there in the first place.

"To take some very obvious examples, if you remember that according to some Namibian liberation fighters, when the English took over the concentration camps from the Germans they got worse, then you begin to see what we're up against. I don't think anybody would seriously say that the French Resistance were wrong to keep up the armed sabotage against the Nazi occupation of France. In fact the people who get despised tend to be the collaborators, people who said, 'Well, let's try and make it work under a Vichy government.' And I think certainly that people living in Namibia and El Salvador find themselves in that position."

The Bible or Marx?

"Most of us, whether we admit it or not, are probably brought up with the New Testament drummed into us at one stage or another. There's a lot of very clear moral advice in that, which I find very few defenders of Christianity taking any notice of, and one of those pieces of advice is taking the mote out of your own eye. And I think that our responsibility is towards the casualties and deficiencies caused by how we ourselves operate, how our countries operate.

"To me, what seem to be the most unreasonable and totally unpalatable aspects of the so-called Socialist alternative that exist, the worst thing about them is when they try to imitate Western imperialism – technically, when they imitate the British Empire's global sort of spider web, or

ideologically when you get people using Marxism as a sort of global idea... The precedent for that is Christianity – the Pope does exactly the same about what he believes. The Pope is very compassionate about all the Indians being slaughtered in South America at the moment, but the fact is that the ideas that he represents are ideologically totalitarian.

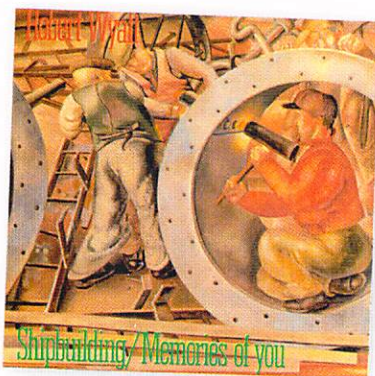
"It's the Mediterranean religions of Islam, Judaism and Christianity which first suggested this absolutely terrifyingly revolutionary idea of a single mono-God that was totally running the whole show, to whom we must all be servile. That's totalitarianism, that is. I think that having set these precedents, the Bible in one hand and the sword in the other, and becoming

so successful at it, it's incredibly hypocritical the way we sort of wag our fingers at people who, in trying to be successful, use elements of these approaches to get their place in the sun. If we really think those ideas are bad, then we must debunk them here, because then we won't inspire other people to emulate us."

Parting shot

"Somebody once said to me that I'm very easy to talk to, but very hard to interview." *Adam Sweeting* •

"I'm not really
sure anything
I do is really
any use to
anybody"





The original ranter and enemy of pop groups: The Fall's Mark E. Smith



More compelling than ever

MM APR 2 Thank God we've got them. The Fall surge ever forward...

ONE HAND SLAPPED carelessly into his pocket, the faintest trace of a sneer flickering across his face, Mark E. Smith slouches across the stage in that peculiar gangling fashion of his and gingerly approaches the microphone.

"Good evening... we're The Fall," he says in hollow, unemotional tones. It's the only time he speaks to the audience during the entire night.

A blast of double drums, an insidious menacing bass-line and Mark howls on - the original ranter - subjecting his audience to the relentless yet paradoxically exhilarating barrage that makes The Fall like no band on earth.

Is it arrogance? Masochism? Perversity? Or is there calculation in the manic rush? Is there genuine guile behind the fierce intimidation? Yes, all of them.

The Fall are the direct antithesis of the television generation. Mark clearly despises society's obsession with luxury, softness and

easy-listening; a society that brings you remote control buttons so you don't even have to shift in your armchair to organise the evening entertainment. The musical reflection of this is the current deluge of pop bands who are dominating the charts and getting all the press, and they're driving Mark E. Smith even further into his own manic world of random thoughts and snatched images.

Tonight The Fall are more intense, more compelling than ever. The recent departure of Marc Riley, generally reckoned to be Smith's chief lieutenant (if dictators have lieutenants) and the man who added nuance to madness, posed many theories and queries about the band's future direction. They haven't replaced him, they've gone headlong into a yet darker, more deranged area that opens at

full tilt and gathers momentum from there on.

It figures. When everybody else is getting drum machines, The Fall opt for two drummers. When everybody else reckons that touring is for circuses and R&B bands, The Fall hit the road with a vengeance. When

everyone knows that no band can afford to make it through a gig without playing at least something recognisable, The Fall dispense with old 'hits' like "Elastic Man" and "Hip Priest" and play almost entirely new material.

They pull it off brilliantly.

A few people walk out of course, like they always do, but brace yourself, force yourself into the ruck right in front of Mark's nose, and the pounding percussive battalion and the hellish unruliness of Mark's wild outpourings drag you in and take your head clean off. Thank God we've got them. *Colin Irwin*

They've gone headlong into a darker, more deranged area

Speed, volume and excess

MM MAY 21 Rasta-punks Bad Brains support stalwart UK Subs.

YOU WOULDN'T MAKE much sense of Rasta-punk band Bad Brains if you happened to be listening to their set through the toilet window, but watch as well and it all falls into place.

This is an audio-visual show that depends on outrageous speed, volume and excess. And while your head's spinning with the sheer intensity of the sound, you watch the figures whirling

round the stage like speedballs and you realise Bad Brains aren't playing these songs as songs at all. They're exorcising themselves of every emotion, every ounce of energy, every last strength in their bodies. Their concentration, commitment, obsessiveness, is total.

And then, just when you think that the singer, a real star, is likely to work himself into a fit, or alternatively pass out with the effort, the visible strain of his movement, the band will slow right down for a touch of reggae, flute winding carefully round the rhythms as we catch breath in time for the next onslaught.

As an experience, if nothing else, Bad Brains were excellent, leaving UK Subs with a pretty tough job on their hands.

This was not to be the Subs' greatest night. Sound problems robbed them of their customary rumbustious vigour, although more importantly, the new lineup has yet to carve out an identity of its own.

It's okay going back in time to favourites "Emotional Blackmail", "Warhead" and "CID". Everybody loves to hear those. And I suppose an Urban Dogs number here and there is acceptable if not advisable. But what's needed now is a lot more new material, a statement of intent and a sense of purpose so that we can expect something more in the future than a collection of greatest hits. *Carol Clerk*

A hopeful vision of the future

MM MAY 21 Rush glory in high technology, and deliver the goods.

IT'S COMPLETELY APPROPRIATE that Rush have secured film of the American Space Shuttle programme as the centrepiece of their massive 1983 stage show. Rush are a band who glory in high technology – they use it on stage and they celebrate it in their songs – and as the Space Shuttle Columbia shuddered skyward on the giant video screen behind the band, the music of "Countdown" echoed its epic voyage and sent the 8,000 worshippers into a similar orbit.

It's around 18 months since Rush were last here and during that time they've entirely restructured their set, ditching most of their old stuff and concentrating mainly on material from *Hemispheres* onwards.

The change in choice of material reinforces what strikes me as a rethink in the band's philosophy. Until this two-hour show on Saturday it hadn't really occurred to me just how doom-laden their message used to be. I've formerly emerged from the concert hall with the taped voices of the priests of *The Temple Of Syrinx* echoing in my head and while it was an

effective way of closing a show it wasn't exactly what you would call an upper.

But now Rush's vision of the future is a hopeful one, as illustrated by the video clip of the Shuttle. Man, they appeared to be saying,

does have a future and he can use technology to his advantage.

As a result of this new feeling, even old classics "Xanadu" and "Closer To The Heart" take on a fresh new meaning. The only odd one out in the set is "The Trees", whose anti-socialist nature still jars a little.

"The Analogue Kid" showed guitarist Alex Lifeson at his finest, demonstrating his enormous range of skill, versatility and control. Geddy Lee's vocals, particularly on "Xanadu", showed new depth and maturity, while Neil Peart is showing great restraint as a percussionist in the band.

Quite simply, I haven't enjoyed a show as much for years – Rush proved they have the ability to move and to move gracefully with the times and not get stuck in any kind of musical rut. A magnificent performance.

Brian Harrigan

Rush proved they have the ability to move with the times and not get stuck in a rut



Versatility and depth: Alex Lifeson and Geddy Lee

PETER STILL / GETTY

HIGH PRIESTS

The History Of Rock is a magazine series celebrating 50 years of the music that changed the world – starting in 1965.

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THE HISTORY OF ROCK

1983

A MONTHLY TRIP
THROUGH MUSIC'S
GOLDEN YEARS
THIS ISSUE: 1983

★
FROM THE
ARCHIVES OF
KITE &
MELODY
MAKER
★

BOWIE

"I feel in touch"

STARRING...

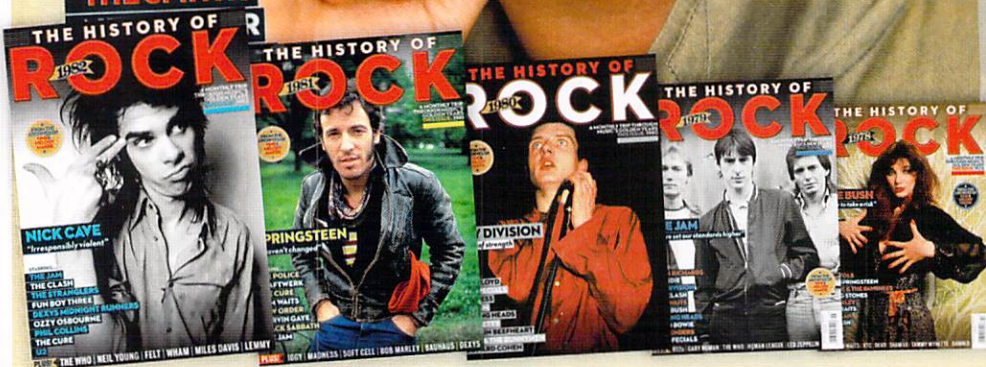
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**NEED ANY BACK ISSUES?
SEE PAGE 144**

Readers' letters

MM JAN-JUN Political unrest, New Barnet hipsters, feckless boobies and more...

Left? It's not right

Leaving music aside for a moment (let's have more Tracey Thorn!), I wonder whether you're interested in the fact that I find your left-wing bias utterly boring, too. You know that old adage 'If you're not socialist by the time you're 20 you've got no heart and if you're not Conservative by the time you're 30 then you've got no head'? It isn't true. The majority of my friends, including those on my Politics and Government degree course at Polytechnic, are not Labour supporters and many are Conservative – not because we're blind, selfish, bigoted or stupid, simply because we've arrived at certain political viewpoints through thought, experience and instinct.

Why is it that nearly all the *NME* journalists who ever express a political preference take a unilateralist and socialist stance, while any nationwide survey of 'young people' would indicate a wide range of views? I don't mind reading things which I disagree with (I buy the *Guardian* and *The Sun*) but I much prefer to read a spread of opinion, and I'm sure most people do, too.

If you're going to include party politics among your (excellent) music coverage you've got to have some spread of opinion, otherwise you lose credibility.

Your coverage of the music scene caters for a range of intelligent and interesting tastes, just as the music industry as a whole does. The political content of *NME* is concentrated in one area of the political spectrum, and it's boring. **JEREMY HYE, London E9**
Boring? A doctor writes: "You are suffering from terminal exposure to Partly Satirical Broadcasts from the CONservative Party."

Must have been on drugs...

For those of you who tried to read my London Drugs Report (in *NME*) last week and wound up with a headache, don't blame yourself – or me. The last third of the piece (starting "City Road is the only...", and ending "...A lot of them are going to need some serious help") got transported into the middle and made garbage of the totality. I suppose I should come up with a quip about "someone must have been on drugs or something" – but I'm not in the mood.

ANDREW TYLER, London

War and peace

I have been enjoined by various feckless boobies to dispatch an epistle to your organ containing remarks of a derisory nature concerning a collective of Hibernian upstarts who call themselves U2. Ever since the sad defection of Monty Smith to the *TVTimes* your organ has been unable to unearth a cinema writer of similar ilk. Were Monty still in the land of the living he would have pointed out that "New Year's Day" bears more than a faint resemblance to the theme music Carpenter wrote for *Assault On Precinct 13*. As it is that shower of 1977 reprobates have escaped unscathed from the sort of criticism that The Jam received when they released "Start". I hope this will redress the balance. **WALLY TOMPKINS, Edinburgh (NME March 5)**
I can't imagine Monty bothering to listen to U2 in the first place. But worry not feckless boobies, consider the balance redressed.



Having just listened to U2's *War* for the first time I turned to Radio One for some light relief. On tuning in I was convinced that I was hearing the polished tones of Dollar's "Mirror Mirror". However, further listening revealed it to be none other than OMD's "Genetic Engineering".

Is this important?
TREVOR, York (NME Mar 12)

Co Respond-ents course

Paul Weller and Respond Records ask you to try Tracie and decide. Half the nation's young stylists converge on Basildon. Tracie's mother is horror-stricken. Tracie is ambivalent: she welcomes the experience and attention, but wonders whether she has the stamina.

MARCUS CRASH, Stockwell (NME Apr 16)

I like The Jam, Paul Weller and, yes, even The Style Council's single. But if you print one more letter from either mod-bashing New Barnet hipsters, or even outraged and defensive members of the New Breed, then I'll... I'll stamp on my Paul Weller doll (with accessories). So there.

LOVE, TRACIE

Is this the end of a beautiful friendship? And what's this about 'New Barnet hipsters'? The only New Barnetan we know is John Connolly, and he's more gluteus maximus than hip. (NME Apr 16)

Earboxing

To the matey who was slagging off JoBoxers. For once we are on the side of Adrian Thrills. We too believe that the "Boxer Boys" deserve to make it big. If you have ever seen them live, you would realise that there is no fucking pose about them, their clothes or their music. Can't people for once stop being cynical and recognise a good thing when it happens? The JoBoxers are friggin' A!

Max, Jax, Ver and Ger, Reading (NME Mar 12)

Flirting with disaster

How come there has always been someone or another from *NME* accusing certain Factory groups of "flirting with fascism" when no one has even commented on the cover of The Birthday Party's "The Bad Seed" EP, which is designed around a bloody swastika?

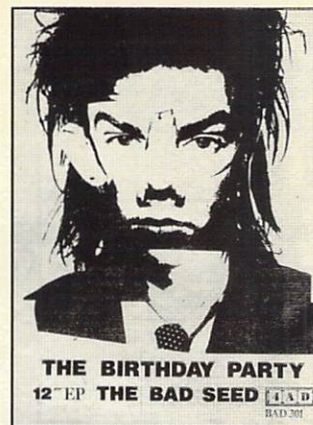
M.S. STODDART, Liverpool (NME March 12)

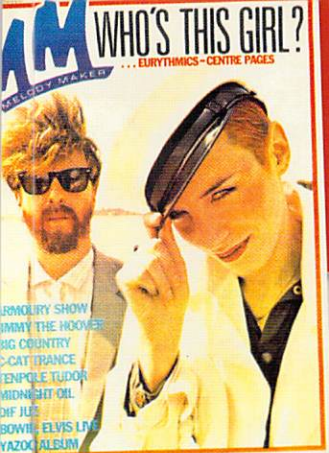
Okay, the sleeve sucks. Satisfied?

China churls

NME EXCLUSIVE! Pop star in naked sex romp. Outrageous pop star David Bowie has filmed a video which recreates the lurid sex scene from the film *From Here To Eternity*. Next week: **NME BINGO**. **R. SHELDON (NME Jun 4)**
Wrong again – BINGO is on page 69 as we've told you before.

Just thought I'd drop you a line to tell you that contrary to expectations I'm all in favour of David Bowie having it off on the beach! If he gets really adventurous he'll drown himself! **CHIP HAMER, Herne Bay, Kent**
Just the kind of sensationalist trivia we need. Feel free to write again.





1983

JULY – SEPTEMBER

THE STYLE COUNCIL,
CURTIS MAYFIELD,
NEW ORDER AND MORE

"There was no discussion"

NME SEP 10 Clash guitarist ousted.

MICK JONES HAS been sacked from The Clash. In a terse statement released by The Clash office last week, the remaining members of the band claimed: "Joe Strummer and Paul Simonon have decided that Mick Jones should leave the group. It is felt that Jones has drifted apart from the original idea of The Clash. In the future, it will allow Joe and Paul to get on with the job The Clash set out to do from the beginning."

Rumours had been circulating in recent weeks that Jones and Strummer had reached a point where they could no longer work together, though a similar dispute occurred in 1981, when Jones headed for the States with Ellen Foley, while Strummer talked about reaching the end of the line – the twosome resolving their differences on that occasion after what Strummer termed "a simple common-or-garden punch-up."

Last year, Strummer disappeared for a while, causing a UK tour to be cancelled. His reappearance signalled the moment for drummer Topper Headon to split from the ranks. Now the inevitable has happened and Jones is out, though the exact reason for his leaving is likely to remain something of a mystery.

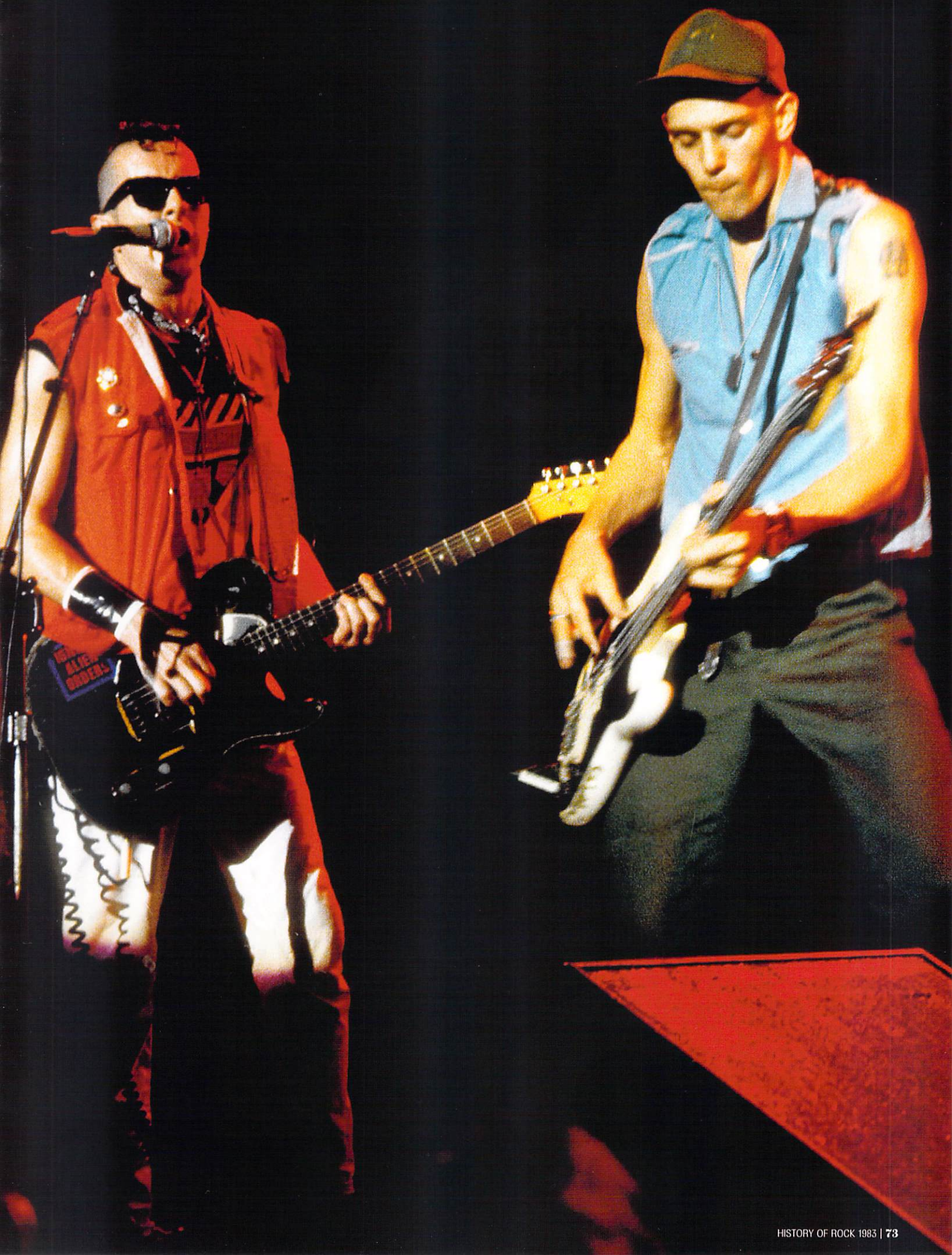
"I would like to state that the official press statement is untrue," Jones later stated. "I would like to make it clear that there was no discussion with

Strummer and Simonon prior to being sacked. I certainly do not feel that I have drifted apart from the original idea of The Clash, and in future I'll be carrying on in the same direction as in the beginning."

Meanwhile, The Clash office continues to ward off all further queries with a series of "No comment."

CLASH: MICK GETS THE BOOT

November 22, 1983:
Joe Strummer and
Paul Simonon onstage in
Sacramento, California



1983

JULY - SEPTEMBER

Herbie Hancock:
veteran jazz
is up to scratch

"Anything could happen"

NME AUG 6 Why has Herbie Hancock made a scratch record?

CLOTHES ARE SCATTERED everywhere. Wet towels lie crumpled on the bed. Scraps of paper containing phone numbers and quickly jotted down notes are littered all over the room. The phone rings constantly, breakfast was a weird mixture of orange juice and curry, and amid all the chaos Herbie Hancock has just managed to complete his daily Buddhist chant.

Suitably refreshed spiritually, he now sits on a chair rubbing his eyes and smoking Marlboros, talking about a friend of his who made him a tape of all the new records that were happening Stateside.

"I like his taste," explains Hancock, "and the thing that really caught my ear was 'Buffalo Gals' by Malcolm McLaren. I said, 'What is that??? I want to do something like that!'"

While Herbie's imagination was running overtime, inspired by The Tarcy One's excursion into scratching, Material - a flexible ensemble that revolves around Bill Laswell and Michael Beinhorn - were preparing, at the request of Hancock's associate producer and manager, a tape containing ideas and tunes for Herbie's new solo endeavour.

When they sent it over from New York, one of the songs featured a slice of scratching... Herbie flipped.

"It was exactly what I was looking for," he

enthuses. "They didn't know it at the time, but soon as I played that tape I said, 'That's it, that's the one.'"

So Herbie Hancock - a man who cut his jazz chops with Miles Davis and Donald Byrd in the '60s, penned the theme music for the classic Antonioni flick *Blow Up*, virtually invented a whole area of jazz funk in the '70s with his solo work, has recently maintained his jazz links with the much-acclaimed VSOP Quartet featuring wunderkid Wynton Marsalis - made an '80s scratch record called "Rockit", veering off again onto another musical path.

Like jazz, scratching and rapping is about a breaking down of conventional limits, turning them on their head and emerging with a form and sound that is challenging and unpredictable. Scratching, good scratching (and believe me there are some grating efforts around), thrives on brash arrangements and relies on the inventiveness of the man in charge. It's more about sound than melody, and "Rockit", while no "Buffalo Gals", is a positive contribution.

What attracted Herbie to the genre in the first

place was the music's possibilities.

"I heard a looseness and a mixture of different sounds that contributed to the rhythms. Some things only appeared maybe once or twice, things that didn't have a real obvious structure. There's structure in general, and then there are other things which are more like happenings of the moment. And I like that kind of freedom, that use of sound."

It sounds like anything could happen at any minute on "Rockit".

"Yeah! As a matter of fact, because of the dance today that's actually what's going on in the clubs: improvisation. The DJs are doing it, mixing and remixing, which is great. I saw and heard some incredible stuff at The Roxy in New York. Really exciting, great dancers, some wild stuff."

However, it seems strange that Hancock, muso tag surrounding him, should be checking out New York's club scene. A commercial move or true interest, Herbie?

"No I felt it right away," he states. "In obvious ways it's new to me because it's a new kind of music, sort of. But in ways that aren't so obvious I could relate to it. I even got a sense of the avant-garde in jazz, not in the sound of the music but the approach."

For purists who recall Hancock's jazz

playing or dig his electronic doodlings, such an eclectic approach is bad news, tantamount to a sell-out. But Mr Hancock just goes with the flow.

"I do what I want to do. I'm interested in people, I'm interested in music, I'm interested in learning about music and learning about myself. I get that criticism all the time, but primarily from publications. I don't get people walking up to

me in the streets saying, 'Oh, I think you're selling out.' It seems a little strange that the people who the records are made for seem to have more of an open mind than the people who are paid to have an open mind, the reviewers and the critics. I think being a purist is limiting myself. I may choose to be a purist on a certain occasion or in a certain setting..."

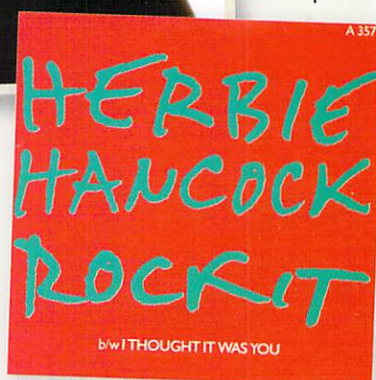
Like the VSOP work?

"Yeah, because that's what I want to do, but it doesn't mean that I myself have decided I'm going to totally limit myself to just doing that."

He rubs his eyes again - "I did the clubs last night, Palace and the Embassy" - and reaches for the coffee.

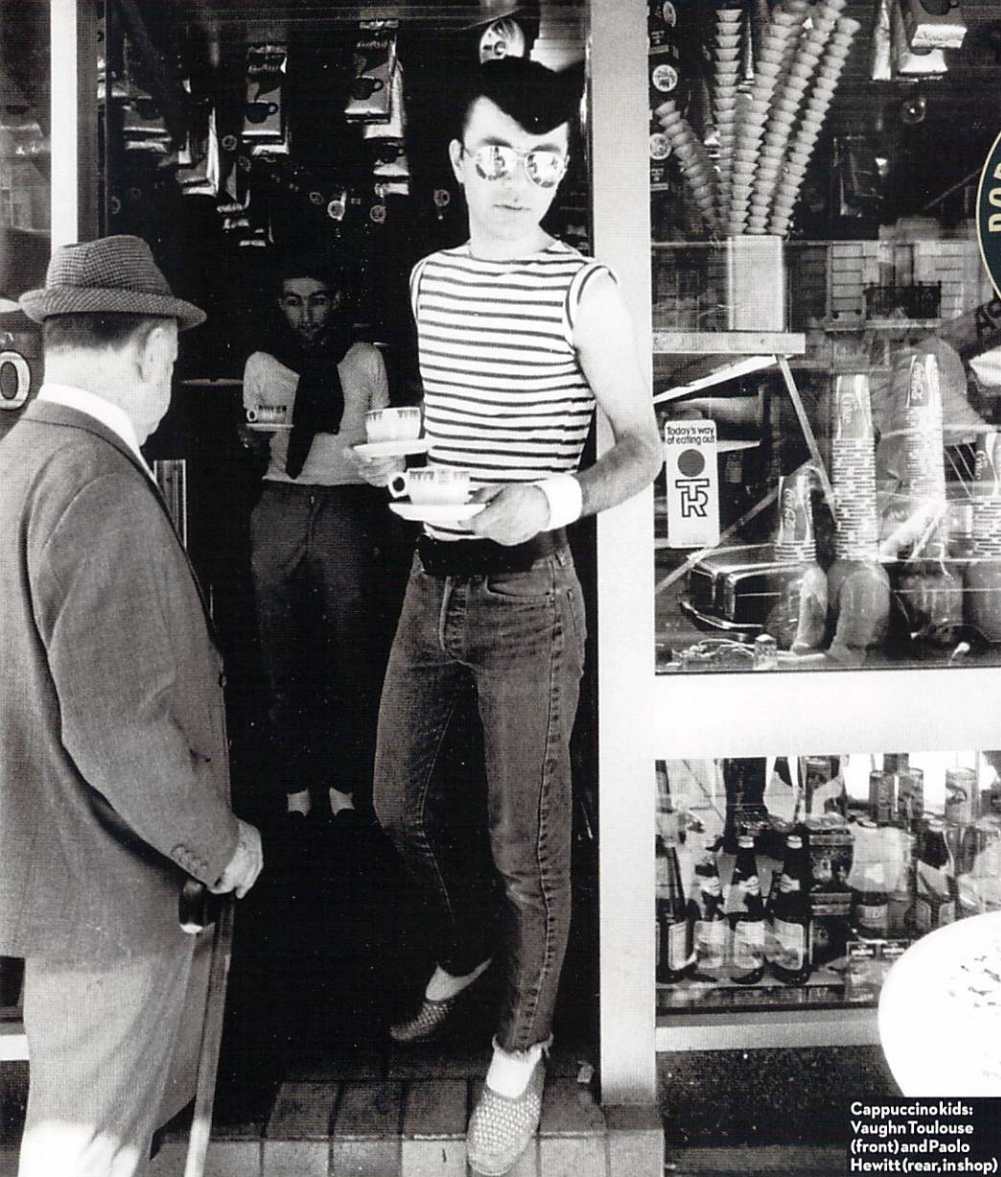
Outside, the car to whisk him off to the video set has been waiting for half an hour. There's a plane to catch for Spain and an appearance with the VSOP that evening in San Sebastian. Then it's back to London - or is it New York? - for more promotional work and the room's still in a mess and the bags aren't packed yet and did my visa come through? And the phone is ringing and, "damn, I'm in a bit of a state at the moment".

Then he laughs at the absurdity of his schedule and you just know that Herbie will ride again. Paolo Hewitt



"I don't get people walking up to me in the streets saying, 'Oh, I think you're selling out'"





Cappuccinokids:
Vaughn Toulouse
(front) and Paolo
Hewitt (rear, in shop)

"The cappuccino is up to standard"

NME JULY 9 At 50p, it should be. Blowing the froth off the new cafe society with Vaughn Toulouse, recording artist for Paul Weller's Respond label.

Barclayo Cafe, Beak Street

VAUGHN: "It's my favourite in summer 'cos it's cool, there's never anyone in here and the coffee is really nice. It's good not having a lot of people in here, because when you've only got a three-hour lunch break and you have to spend an hour waiting around for someone to finish off their spaghetti bolognese, it becomes a bit of a bind; especially when it's really hot and you want to get a cappuccino down you and get out. Those are the most important things, plus expense. As long as they're under 30 pence, that's alright. I'd come again."

The Pollo, Old Compton Street

"When I do drink cappuccino, what I tend to do is slurp around the outside of the froth, which a lot of people find disgusting. To be honest, I didn't realise that there was such an underground thing, such a religious fantasy surrounding the cafe scene until I read the book [*Absolute Beginners*] which one gets when one signs on the dotted line for Respond, along with chewing gum and a pair of white socks."

"I also like this cafe because you can sit opposite the window and watch all the dodgy

old office workers come out of the Ram bookshop with brown parcels, which is, I'm sure you'll agree, rather novel..."

Cafe Figaro, Lower Regent Street

"No chocolate on the cappuccino and it's not the sort of place to bring a crowd because it's too small."

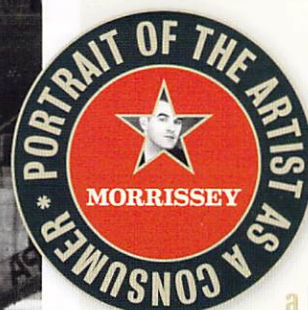
"The thing I like about it is you can sit on the pavement, which makes it a bit more European. The trouble with nearly all London cappuccino haunts is that you can't get into the sun so it would be worth making the most of it."

"That's why I like Europe, because you can sit outside at any time."

"I think the cappuccino is up to standard here. But at 50 pence a go it should be."

Bar Italia, Frith Street

"The first time I've been here. I like the 'help yourself to the chocolate' attitude they propagate here. Yes, very friendly and unusual, plus they've got a telly here, which no one seems to watch anyway. The coffee's good, it's strong, and the whole atmosphere reminds me of a betting shop. I wouldn't avoid this place at all." *Paolo Hewitt*



NME SEPT 17
The Smiths' frontman picks a hatful of stuff.

Records

Stop Before You Start Sandie Shaw
The Right One Is Left Cilla Black
Heart Rita Pavone
Insult To Injury Timi Yuro
Paper Boy The Marvellettes
How Does That Grab You, Darlin'? Nancy Sinatra
Be Young, Be Foolish, Be Happy The Tams
Johnny Remember Me John Leyton
I'll Never Quite Get Over You Billy Fury
I Want A Boy For My Birthday The Cookies



Books

Complete Works Of Oscar Wilde
Popcorn Venus Marjorie Rosen
From Reverence To Rape Molly Haskell
Beyond Belief Emlyn Williams
The Lion In Love Shelagh Delaney
Against Our Will Susan Brownmiller
The Angel Inside Went Sour Esther Rothman
Men's Liberation Jack Nichols
The Murderers Who's Who Gaute & Odell
The Handbook Of Nonsexist Writing Miller & Swift

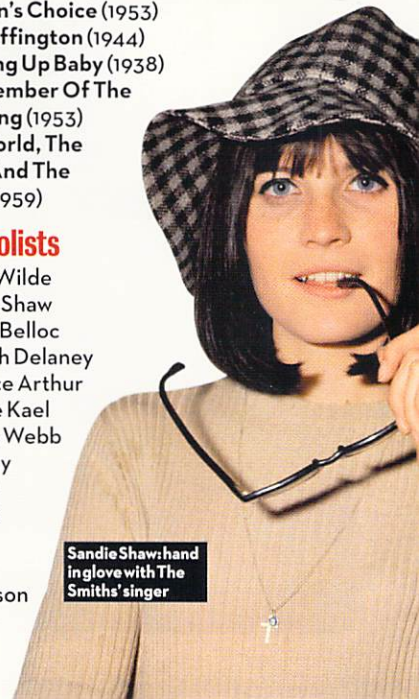
Films

The Man Who Came To Dinner (1941)
A Taste Of Honey (1961)
Christmas In Connecticut (1945)
The Killing Of Sister George (1969)
A Kind Of Loving (1962)
Hobson's Choice (1953)
Mr Skeffington (1944)
Bringing Up Baby (1938)
The Member Of The Wedding (1953)
The World, The Flesh And The Devil (1959)

Symbolists

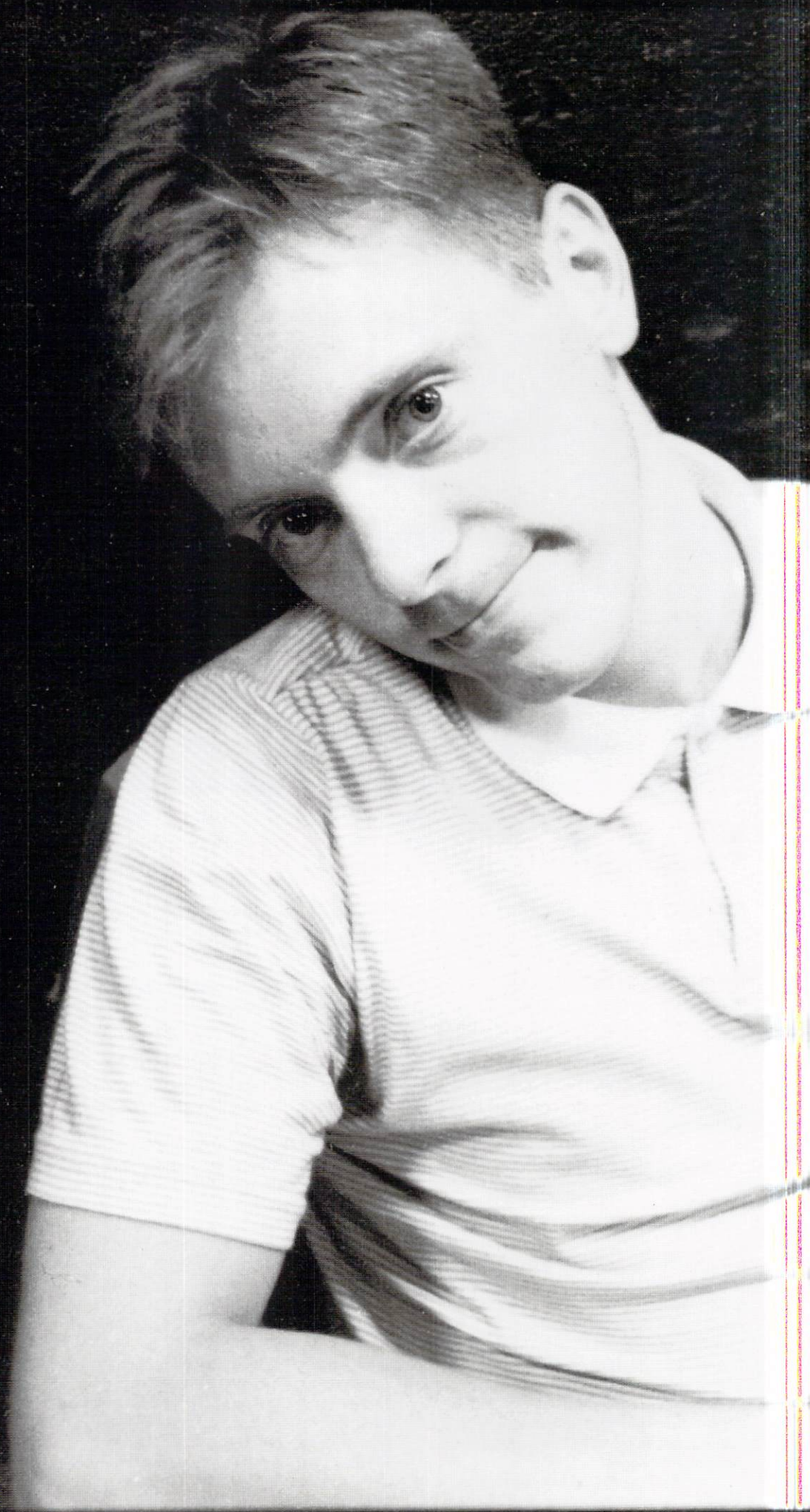
Oscar Wilde
Sandie Shaw
Hilaire Belloc
Shelagh Delaney
Beatrice Arthur
Pauline Kael
Clifton Webb
Dorothy Parker
Ronald Searle
Viv Nicholson

Sandie Shaw: hand
inglove with The
Smiths' singer



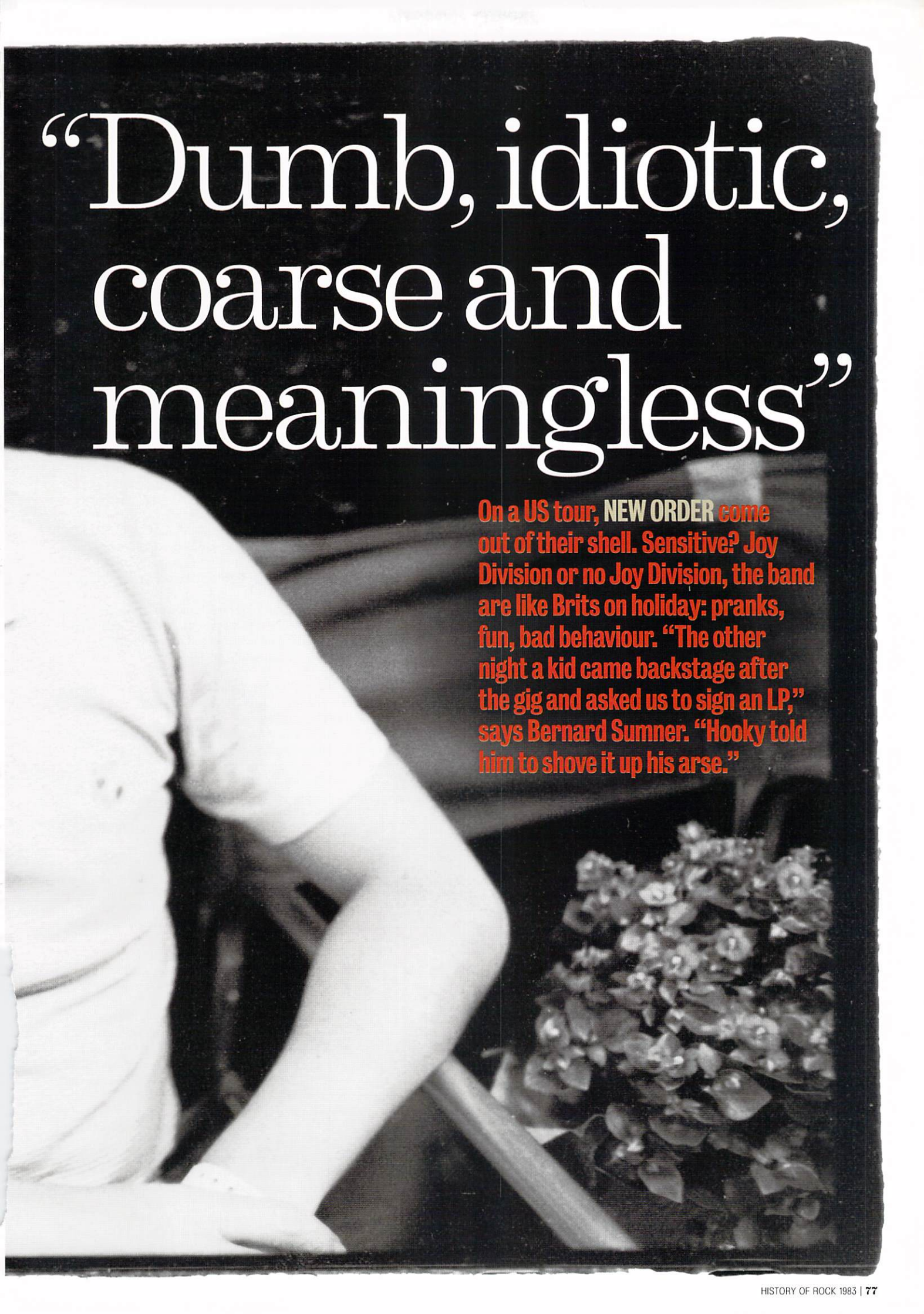
1983

JULY - SEPTEMBER



"A devilish choirboy":
Bernard Sumner, New
York, July 1983

LISA HAUN/GETTY



“Dumb, idiotic, coarse and meaningless”

On a US tour, **NEW ORDER** come out of their shell. Sensitive? Joy Division or no Joy Division, the band are like Brits on holiday: pranks, fun, bad behaviour. “The other night a kid came backstage after the gig and asked us to sign an LP,” says Bernard Sumner. “Hooky told him to shove it up his arse.”

— NME JULY 23 —

Some people try to pick up girls and get called assholes. This never happened to Pablo Picasso. Not in New York.

VISITORS TO THE Funhouse, a Puerto Rican club on 26th Street between 10 and 11, would do well to heed Jonathan Richman's advice.

Pablo's Spanish is the loving tongue here, but really it is physique that talks big with the locals.

Bohn enters through the hideously mocking grin of the giant Joker mask that forms one of its doorways, stumbles through the carry-*bric-a-brac*, feeling like the circus geek, and tries his strength on the test-your-punch ball in club's amusement arcade.

He gives it the best he's got, yet it barely registers wimp. Fortunately nobody's looking. So while his luck's holding he passes on the arm wrestling machine and slips back into the crowd. He is hardly less conspicuous among the Puerto Ricans, whose gleaming muscles bulge through T-shirts cut off directly below the chest and shorts slashed at the groin.

"If you're English you don't stand a chance," Simon Topping – ex of A Certain Ratio and presently in NYC studying timbales – has already informed his Mancunian colleagues in New Order. "ask a girl to dance, they hear your accent, look you over and laugh in your face!"

Anyway, dancing in The Funhouse is largely a solitary pleasure. The most company people ask for is their own reflection in one of the hall's many mirrors. The sound system is more than enough to keep them occupied. The DJ spins fabulously disjointed funk tracks. The nuttier the breaks the better the dancers like them, responding to each echoed *rlm*shot with delighted jerks, throwing their heads back and squealing their heels across the floor to stuttering sequencers.

It is a matter of pride to the dancers that they stay abreast of the mercurial changes. The Funhouse is where Planet Rocker Arthur Baker comes to test his latest mixes. "He reckons if he can get through to these meatheads he must be onto a winner," goes the local logic. These early hours he's onto his sixth version of New Order's "Confusion", which, when he's finally satisfied with the audience response to it, will be their next Factory US 12".

As it plays, the three boys and one girl of New Order mingle with the crowd unnoticed, checking the reaction for themselves. It is enthusiastic, as indeed it should be. "Confusion" is the result of an extraordinary collaboration bringing together the opposing temperaments represented by New Order's methodical pursuit of excellence and Baker's poltergeist spirit. Though it began as an uneasy experiment, New Order rose to the challenge of working at speeds and in conditions unknown to them.

"It's the only time we ever sat down to write," recalls bassist Peter Hook with a shudder. "And God, was it hard! Arthur Baker just stood there staring at us, sort of going, go on, go on, write something, and we were walking around in circles thinking, fucking hell, isn't it time to go home yet? We don't normally work well under pressure."

"He'd start a drum machine off and send one of us in saying, have a go on that synthesiser," expands guitarist Bernard Albrecht, *né* Dicken [*born Sumner*]. "See what you can come up with. So you're standing there thinking what the fucking hell am I doing? You'd do something and he'd go, that's alright, turn off the drum machine, start the tape rolling and say, right, play it again. And even though there'd be a minute's worth of mistakes in it, he'd just say, fuck it. It's alright."

"The one thing he doesn't like about English records, he told us, is they're too neat and clean. And I agree."

It is not out of vanity that New Order are listening to themselves in a New York club at 4.30am. Having just played the final date of a gruelling American tour in Trenton, New Jersey a few hours earlier, they would rather be back at their hotel celebrating the fact with some sleep.

But even at this hour, duty calls. They must film the video for "Confusion" before returning to Britain, particularly as Charles Sturridge, whose previous credits include *Brideshead Revisited*, has been flown out to make it. Don't let it be said that Factory don't do things in style. (Sturridge was brought in, incidentally, on the instigation of Factory's Tony Wilson. They met at Granada TV, where Tony holds down a

day job and for whom Sturridge completed *Brideshead*.)

At the point of filming, the group still weren't sure of the storyline outside the fact that a Puerto Rican dancer fitted into it somewhere. Echoes of Fame? Not unless it's at New Order's price...

THE ROCK OF America is riddled with bores. It has become such a commonplace activity that talking music here is about as exciting as discussing the weather.

Bohn would be the last person to bring it up, but at every stopping point on his odyssey down Broadway to the Paradise Garage, where New Order are playing their NY concert, he is earholed by a weevil wiv'an anecdote.

The hotel bellhop recalls every blow struck at a Talking Heads concert; a soda jerk gets frothy about all the new English bubblegum groups he's had the pleasure of serving; a cab driver hands him a thesis on how Ritchie Blackmore revolutionised America.

If in Britain forming a group is – as Julien Temple has said – about as rebellious as joining the army, in America being into rock is on a par with being in the civil service. Being into rock is being part of a non-productive, non-reactive glorified fan club there to service the needs of an idol elite.

Anyone tenuously linked with rock – and that can mean as little as having the right haircut and an English accent – has the sort of credit rating that will earn him a free cup of coffee at Bleecker Bob's Greenwich Village record store, so long as he's prepared to put with the world's loudest and oldest juvenile shooting off his latest *Weltanschauung*.

The clubs provide some sort of refuge from all this mundanity, partly because the music is too loud to talk over, but mostly because the clubs themselves are so gaudy and great, and the music they play so expertly functional and supremely anonymous that people gratefully use them – the clubs and the music – and move on. Unlike those people who've immersed themselves in the rockpool, they're not overcome with the need to talk about it all the time.

Tonight, however, is not a typical one for the Paradise Garage. Normally a gay black disco, it has been leased at great expense to New Order for the concert. Few of the regulars are evident in the audience, even though the same group is responsible for a stateside – indeed worldwide – club hit in "Blue Monday".

The slyest, most perfect, driest and most sexual of dance records, "Blue Monday" is a model of anonymous functionalism, the work of a group who assert quality above novel identity.

And you can't believe how refreshing that is until you've heard any one of a stream of British hits screaming, "love me, love me, love me!" from every Anglophile store, radio station or club.

Nevertheless, despite themselves, New Order's concert draws an audience in awe of the group's name and reputation, based on the impressions they got from reading the British music press. They are at once given a lot to live up to and even more to live down...

"What people write about us is usually five miles wrong!" mutters Bernard ruefully.

"All these Americans know all the stuff, but all they do is stare," says Peter Hook, at once flattered, frustrated and flabbergasted by their American experience.

"It's really weird. The first half-dozen gigs before we got to New York, we went down pretty well – a bit too well. It was like they were just waiting for us, we didn't have to win them over or anything. We'd already won. All we had to do was play. They were all shouting 'Dreams Never End!' 'Ceremony!' – just like they do in Britain."

At least we've had some lively, over-the-top audiences there, but here the only lively audience we've had was in Austin, Texas. Otherwise we haven't had to struggle, meaning there's no point to doing it really.

"Preaching to the converted isn't any fun is it?"

That's as may be, but it doesn't take long before American audiences become slightly unsettled by what they're seeing.

Brought up on the New Order mystique as fostered by the British music press, their reverence is duly shattered by the group's offhand and nonchalant stage manner, the long pauses between songs and maybe even the summery sight of Bernard Albrecht in grey shorts, looking like nothing if not a devilish choirboy. Once the music starts sinking in, it is obvious, too, that this isn't the same group that made the heavy emotional demands of their first LP *Movement* and their early singles.

"I wanted the lyrics I wrote to be good, but they were not wonderful"

It is as if they've digested the darkness and rigour that informed those great, albeit gloomy records and no longer feel the need to bludgeon people with their seriousness. That period still informs the present New Order, but in the interim they've become lighter, freer and extraordinarily playful; which isn't to say they're any the less affecting, just that they now touch a broader spectrum of feeling and experience.

New Order have become a truly fearless group, one that refuses to be intimidated either by their peers' trends or the desires of the audience. They will take you – if you're prepared to let yourself go – from the swollen heartbleed of "In A Lonely Place", through the impishly turbulent "Temptation" and slamdance of "Confusion", and onto the entirely different joyous plane of most of *Power, Corruption And Lies*.

Within the framework of one song – such as "Your Silent Face" – they'll couple the banal and comic with moments of true beauty. The song is hooked into a stunningly simple and subliminal sequencer pattern that serves as both rhythm and melody; it is topped with a ridiculously insipid OMD-type synth tune, which would have spoiled it, had it not been rescued by Bernard's gently spiralling ocarina. The words follow a similar trajectory – one moment reflective, the next hilarious. Could you imagine the old New Order so carefully drawing the listener into a tissue-thin web of sensitivity only to abruptly eject him with the kiss off lines: "*The sign that leads the way/The path you cannot take/You caught me at a bad time... So why don't you piss off!*"?

If any song marks the lucid New Order, it is that one. Where the early records were written under the shadow of Joy Division the songs from "Temptation" onwards feel looser, more natural.

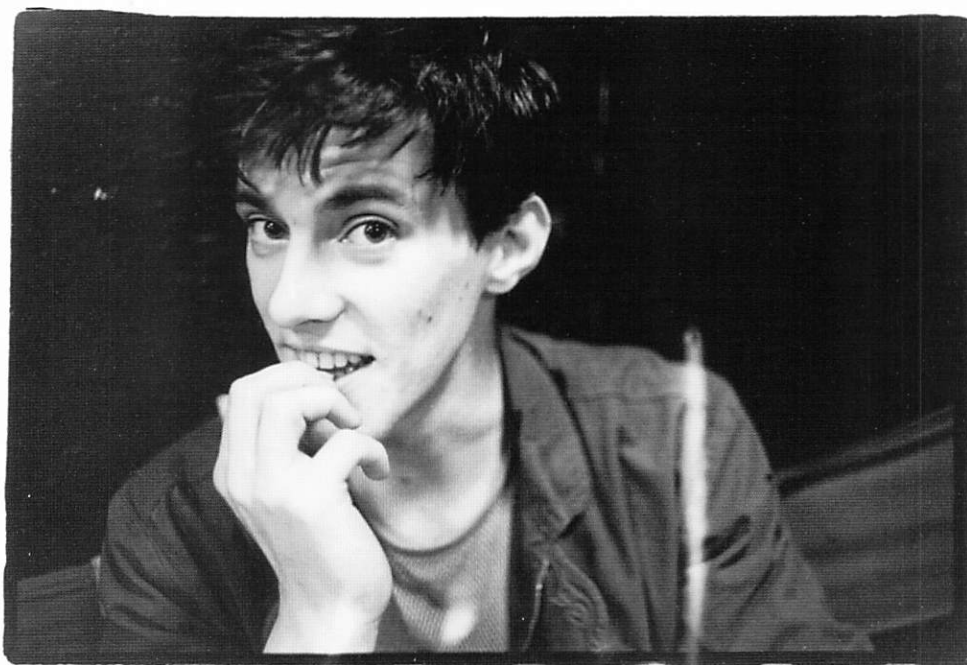
"Well when we first started, I tried writing serious lyrics and I was just shit at it," remarks Bernard candidly. "So for the second LP I just wrote down whatever I felt like. I didn't really care whether the lyrics were good or bad on the second one so I was more relaxed.

"On the first one I felt so self-conscious because I was coming after Ian, who was such a great writer. I wanted the lyrics I wrote to be good. They were alright, but they were not wonderful. After I'd said fuck it, I started to enjoy writing a lot more. Ironically, the songs on the second LP mean a lot more to me. And because they're less self-conscious, they're more truthful to myself.

"With 'Your Silent Face', well, we wrote that one in the studio. Because we wrote this very beautiful emotional music, we thought to put a beautiful very emotional vocal line over the top was a bit obvious. So we put down a quite nice vocal line and some nice lyrics, but by the end we got stuck for a couple of lines.

"Everyone was thinking of really beautiful, poetic, meaningless lyrics. Then I thought, instead of having something beautiful, poetic and meaningless, we might as well have something dumb, idiotic, coarse and meaningless. An absolute contrast to the rest. Even roses have thorns..." »

Crucial three:
Peter Hook, Gillian
Gilbert, Stephen
Morris, New York,
July 1983



The foundations of America's Rock, based on a fake bonhomie, Boy Howdy beer and cheesy McDonald's grins, are easily undermined.

The New Order way of doing things makes them quake a little, not because it's calculated to, but because their genuinely casual approach, often at odds with the highly disciplined music they're playing, constantly disrupts the mood of the night. Some interpret their laconic, incommunicative stage demeanour as arrogance. Others think it's funny. A worldwide complaint seems to be that their sets – at around 45 minutes – are too short.

"Usually we're not contracted to play a specific time, so we come over here and play a set which we think is long enough, but not so long that we get bored," explains Peter Hook. "But everybody seems to think it is too short – I don't know whether that's a compliment or not!"

"We play 45-50 minutes because it feels right to us. We almost caused a riot in Rotterdam once. The promoter gave out notices warning that this band only plays 45 minutes, so if you don't like it don't come in!"

"That we don't play encores is another big beef with people. Once, just as an experiment, we played seven numbers, went off, came back on and played three more. We played our usual ten numbers, but because everyone thought we'd done an encore they weren't bothered!"

Not everybody's so easily pleased, as Bernard recalls with a smile.

"One kid in Sheffield a couple of years back said, you didn't play such and such a song tonight and you only played for 45 minutes. You've shattered all my dreams. Give me my money back! Fucking hell, I almost bottled the bastard! And he said, me three other mates would like their money back as well!"

"I dunno," he expands, "we shouldn't really categorise people I suppose, but I know the type. We have the studious type with glasses and a fringe and we have the nasty-little-men-with-chips-on-their-shoulder type who do that sort of thing. And the kind of people who have just read about you and expect you to be exactly what they've read."

"There's a lot of nutcases who buy our records, I can tell ya," says drummer Stephen Morris, "who come backstage after a gig. You know: why didn't you play any Joy Division songs? Why did Ian Curtis kill himself? Some get really worked up about it."

"Or they come in and tell you, you're a load of rubbish, you are," chips in synth operator and second guitarist Gillian Gilbert. "Imagine! It's like if you were in a pub and somebody said, you're a load of rubbish you! You'd flippin' hit them round the ear 'ole. But you're supposed to just sit there..."

"Or go, oh yeah, you're right," mocks Steve. "Soddin' hell. Fucking hell, I should give it up now."

Later Bernard tells Bohn the biggest mistake people make about them: "Thinking we're serious. Because we're serious about the music they think we take everything seriously. Like, the other night a kid came backstage after the gig and asked us to sign an LP. Hooky told him to shove it up his arse. We were only joking, but because it's us he took it serious and went away hurt."

"I dunno," he sighs. "They take everything you say so seriously, as if you mean everything..."

BERNARD BREEZES IN to the breakfast room of the Holiday Inn, tired yet affable as always. He takes a long sigh, "fookinell!" by way of a morning greeting, and proceeds in his quiet-spoken Lancashire burr of a voice and with a gleam in his soft eyes to relate various anecdotes and pranks that have occurred during the tour.

The most unlikely concerned a 65-year-old stringer for a German teen magazine based in LA. He wanted the group pictured in Mickey Mouse ears! Surprisingly, only Bernard refused.

"Then I made the mistake of sitting in the pram we use to push around the video equipment," he laughs, "and

while I was jammed there he rammed the ears on me head and took the photograph!"

Another night the group's highly unconventional manager Rob Gretton tempted the lighting man with 100 dollars to join New Order onstage and sing for one number.

"He stood there with the lyrics to 'Cries And Whispers', shivering like crazy. You could hardly hear him!"

The best and cruellest prank, however, took place at London Brixton and involved Joy Division biographer Mark Johnson, an American who dogs New Order's every move. At their recent Ace concert, they got the number of his 'bike announced over the PA, saying it was blocking an entry. When he rushed out to move it, he saw New Order's roadie van hurtling up the road with his 'bike lashed to the top.

And there you were thinking that The Stranglers were the bad boys of British pop.

"There's a lot of nutcases who buy our records, I can tell ya"

PERHAPS BEFORE NEW Order depart NYC for Washington DC, we should brief the President about the group. New Order are the phoenix who rose from the ashes of Joy Division, from Manchester, who were the last popular group from Britain to probe heart and soul with stark candour. They never attempted anything so conceited or deceitful as writing anthems for doomed youth, but the rigorous explorations of self, as personified by vocalist Ian Curtis's words, were uncannily right for the moment.

After Ian killed himself and Joy Division as such no longer existed, popular music took fright and for the large part regressed into its

present state of mercantile infantilism, as if nobody wanted to take the risk of running so deep again. Thus pun became the dictate of the day, a pervasive cynicism gnawed away at any ideals that survived punk – to an extent a necessary stage in pop's sweet growth – and business acumen became the ruling aesthetic.

The greyly unimaginative post-punk indie boom wasn't particularly encouraging to the independent cause; and because the media is only capable of operating in terms of epic sweeps, they swept out the imaginative and inspired along with the rest.

The three surviving members of Joy Division, meanwhile, auditioned a new singer but, finding no one suitable, brought in untutored musician Gillian Gilbert – Steve Morris' friend – and renamed themselves New Order.

How about an introduction to yourself, Gillian? She is, incidentally, an attractively down-to-earth and funny Mancunian who has the sort of accent that explains John Cooper Clarke's popularity.

"I vaguely knew Joy Division," she whispers. "I used to rehearse next door to them in Manchester when I was in a punk group, just before their hit. I used to go and see them and then I got to know Stephen – I sat next to his sister in geography, which is a coincidence really. Haha. I think it was one night at Liverpool Eric's and Ian had hurt his hand on a bottle or

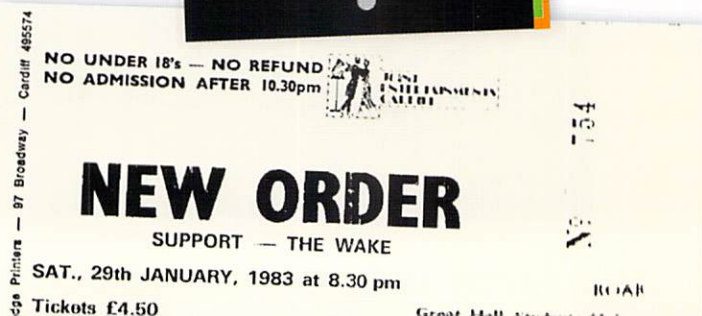
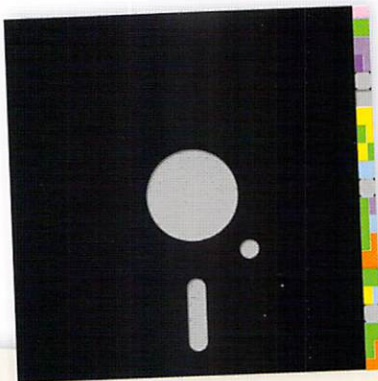
something, so he couldn't play the guitar for one number. It wasn't a very big bit, so as I could play guitar a bit, I played that one number.

"Then, some months later the others called me. I think they wanted someone without any knowledge of guitar whatsoever to remind them of when they started and couldn't play. I think they were also looking for somebody who didn't have any particular style, so they could work them better into the band."

"We didn't really want anybody who could play," Stephen concurs. "If we got someone who could, he might not fit in with the way we write songs and stuff, so we decided the best thing to do was get someone in

fresh. Gillian was the only person we knew who couldn't play. We'd seen her play before and she definitely couldn't!"

They spent a year writing and rehearsing a completely new set, retaining only two unrecorded Joy Division songs – "Ceremony" and "In A Lonely Place" – which they



released as their first single.

Anticipating the intense media interest focused on their return, they sensibly avoided its glare. With admirable perseverance they stuck to their own way. Being a sensitive collective beast, the media took New Order's unwillingness to cooperate personally and thus had them and Factory – the Mancunian independent they'd allied themselves to – figured as hostile, sullen and incommunicative.

The lack of exposure hasn't harmed them any. Through a series of infrequent international tours and the odd date at home, they've become the best-selling independent group in the world, racking up club and radio hits in Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Europe and America.

That they've done it their way – that is, with a minimum of fuss and the emphasis on quality, not personality – is something they quietly cherish. Even if it has meant odd interpretations of the New Order silence.

"I just don't think the group should be at the forefront," asserts Peter with some authority. "I don't think we're that important. If we've got something to say, we say it. If we haven't got anything to say it doesn't mean we're dumb. It just means we don't fancy shouting our mouths off, or something like that. But I consider the music very important because it affects me, so I don't see why it shouldn't affect other people as well. I find it exhilarating, depressing, happy, sad or whatever. I just don't think our personalities need to be pushed."

The seeds of their mistrust of the media were sown when they were still Joy Division.

"In the very early days before *Unknown Pleasures*, the music press detested us and that was a kind of driving force to go on," says Bernard. "When *Unknown Pleasures* came out we were suddenly wonderful. We went from being the most unpopular group in the world to the most popular. Fucking ridiculous!"

"I remember reading one live review of a gig at the Moonlight Club. We played three nights there and got wonderful reviews from all of them, even though one night we were shit, really bad. And the review from that night said, this group was so good they made me want to piss in the face of God! And we were fucking appalling! When I read that I just thought the whole press thing with Joy Division had gone completely over the top."

Shy and conscious of their own privacy, they stopped doing interviews three years ago. Most importantly they didn't want to get sucked into the music industry mainstream.

Says Bernard: "We were worried in case once you started you would begin to do things the way everybody else does and that would have been boring. So to keep our noses clean... It's been pretty enjoyable the way we got where we are today. It's been really good the way we've done it because we've not gone through the system and I, for one, feel better for it. I don't mean because I've done things honestly. I mean, each to his own."

From the distance they've so admirably maintained from the pop maelstrom, its absurd manifestations must appear ridiculous. From the other side, the constancy of New Order and its Factory allies might be mistaken as old-fashioned or slow-witted.

"I think this idea of being hip or not being hip is a fucking load of shit," Bernard forcefully states. "It's a trap that music has got into. If you see the progress of music as a maze, well now it has arrived at a dead end. The idea of hip has stopped people expressing themselves as much as they should do, because they're afraid of not being hip. Like, you can only be hip if you've got this rhythm or these instruments, otherwise people will stop listening to you!"

"I think it's terrible because it's stopped people producing music unselfconsciously. They're too conscious of whether what they're doing



will fit into the mould or not. Hip is making a lot of people very narrow minded. Hip is like a chain reaction. A music paper gets very narrow minded in its approach, the people who read it get that way and eventually it works its way into music. Then everything starts going in one direction. The music scene in England now doesn't allow for any kind of fringe to be successful."

THE ONTARIO CINEMA, located in one of Washington's black districts, specialises in lurid Spanish pictures. But tonight they're featuring New Order. That is, if they arrive.

Bohn and the photographer travelled down from New York in the relative splendour of an Amtrak train, passing through the Baltimore of *Diner*, Philadelphia and across the Delaware. Shortly before Wilmington the train pulls up outside a plant called Destruction Of Confidential Records. Bohn ponders whether he should throw in his notebook, but decides that no guilty secrets are contained therein.

So much of what New Order says is good sense, and the way they've ploughed their money back into Manchester by way of The Hacienda club is exemplary. Their attitude ought to serve as a strong example in these times when popstars would sell their soul for a line – preferably on a mirror but otherwise in a teenzine. Not to mention the nobility of their art; he is pleased to publish it.

The group travel down by air shuttle, arriving at Dulles ("s Dullesfuck!") sneers Simon Topping, who is guesting with the opening act Quando Quango) Airport. Half an hour before the show is due to begin, Steve Morris, Peter Hook and manager Rob Gretton are still missing. Quando

Quango, also a Factory act, are sent out to appease the restless audience with their stylishly aloof and bemused funk.

It works fine, but the four songs they've brought with them don't last long. In the meantime the three have arrived "ratarsed pissed" on melon ball cocktails. Hooky immediately falls asleep under a dressing room table and later melts into the night.

He's still playing hookey when the group, already hours late, must go on. They start without him and try to pass off Rob Gretton as the Third Man, but even from the back it is obvious that this figure in drooping tracksuit vest and shorts flailing away at the cymbals, often as not missing them, is not the right man.

Midway through the second song, Hooky shows. "Ah, the black sheep returns," mutters Bernard, while shooting Hooky a rueful glance. Hooky straps on his bass, looks out into the audience and apologises: "Hi shitheads!"

A new order: being pissed means never having to say you're sorry.

TO COMPENSATE, A new, healthy Hooky arrives first in Trenton, New Jersey. Hardly a prestigious finale to the tour, it is a godforsaken, rundown place, the equivalent of a northern milltown after the mills have closed down. The venue is once again in the black quarter.

Next door, parents are holding a carnival to raise money for the baseball Little League. It is here New Order go for a photo session, gathering in front of something called The Hellhole.

What's on the other side?

"A vision of what's to come for them's that misbehave," pronounces the ticket collector.

Duly warned, New Order stop squabbling over who should wear the funny glasses and line up for their portraits. Bergmanesque visions of the grim reaper no longer hover behind the music of New Order. Cries and whispers have transmuted into smiles on a summer night. New Order have struggled with the Meaning of Life and come out winning. *Chris Bohn* •

"We've not gone through the system and I feel better for it"

1983

JULY - SEPTEMBER

"Always too drunk"

POGUE MAHONE
(trans: "kiss my hole"),
featuring former Nip
SHANE MACGOWAN, are
rewiring Irish music for
the post-punk era. The
songs are timeless,
says Shane. "They're
to do with things that
happen to everyone
whether they're
young or old."

— NME AUGUST 13 —

DURING THE '76- '77 era of Pistols punk, young Shane MacGowan was quite a well-known face about town, immortalised by the gossip columns when he had the lobe wrenched from his sizeable ear by Kate Modette.

He was also, as lead singer with a wayward crew called The Nips, one of the most charming singers washed up on the punky wave. Best remembered for the cute "Gabrielle" single, The Nips fell apart, partly trampled by the great recording contract goldrush and mostly by personal disillusionment.

"Up to a certain age I had the mistaken belief that rock music was worth the time of day and that there was money to be made in it, though there certainly wasn't in The Nips. So I thought, fuck it! Let's do something completely different, something at least vaguely based on Irish music, because I knew a lot of the songs from my mum and dad and the parties they used to have.

"Before, I'd never thought of playing it onstage, but it became obvious that everything that could be done with a standard rock format had been done, usually quite badly. We just wanted to shove music that had roots and is just generally stronger and has more real anger and emotion down the throats of a completely pap-orientated pop audience."

On the opening nights of Richard Strange's Cabaret Futura the plan »

FREDERIC REGAIN / GETTY

Mahone Ranger's Handbook

GAVIN MARTIN meets the punks who turned to Irish folk music and became the Pogues with the brogue



Three chords and
the tooth: Shane
MacGowan

was put into action, though not too successfully.

"It ground to a halt because we were always too drunk to get anything together," he candidly admits.

It was also around then that the new group got its name – Pogue Mahone, which is Gaelic for "kiss my hole", a last minute handle coined when they were typically inebriated before their second gig – and one that stuck.

"I think it's a pretty stupid name," says Shane.

Now, following an influx of more "responsible members" – Maestro Jimmy Fearnley (accordion, himself a former Nip), Andrew Ranken (drums), Caitlin O'Riordan (bass), and Country Jem Finer (banjo) – the wayward drive and spirit of Shane and Spider Stacey (tin whistle and additional singing) has been anchored to a stable and exciting musical base. Although largely still unsung, they are one of the best unrecorded groups on the London circuit.

Where a lot of groups are starting to incorporate the odd fiddle or accordion into their rocky format, Pogue Mahone have torn the music up by the roots and replanted it in a hothouse of twanging bluegrass banjo, the storming throb of pagan 'billy beat', impressive harmonies and an accordion that can go from wild jigs to lustrous melodies.

While benefitting from the obvious strengths and qualities of a forgotten musical heritage the Pogues also bring a refreshing attack by approaching it from their own standpoint and intuition. As Jem points out, they weren't brought up in the traditional Irish environment and it would be stupid to try and sound that 'authentic'.

Shane: "I can't stand The Chieftains and people like that who are completely technically brilliant, the sort of stuff that is respected in this country that makes all the real money out of Irish music."

Spider: "They neuter it; they take all the feeling out of it."

Precisely because of the staleness and uniformity that surrounds Irish folk music I'd never listened to much of it. But it's obvious listening to the Pogues, and their judicious choice of traditional music, that those old songs actually grow in poignancy and relevance as time passes, as well as having tunes that are guaranteed to brand themselves on your brain plate.

Shane: "They're timeless. They're to do with things that happen to everyone whether they're young or old. You don't have to be part of the youth subculture to relate to it, it doesn't have to be angst or anything so fuckin' stupid. It's based on strong melodies, which to me is what a song is. It isn't some pathetic attempt at a tune dressed up and synthesised by Trevor Horn and all the rest of it. You ought to be able to just sit there and

sing it. I think most of our stuff has that quality."

One of their traditional numbers, "The Band Played Waltzing Matilda", not only has one of the most moving vocals I've heard all year – a voice truly sickened by the sorrowful waste of war – but it's also a telling indictment of a tragedy that exists today.

Shane: "People are still coming back from wars in bits to a country

that offers them nothing. Like The Falklands – another example of young lives being thrown down the drain because of some stupid fuckin' government's idea of territorial rights."

But it would be wrong to give the impression that the Pogues are simply living off the past. At least half their set comprises originals. Was it hard to write songs that could stand up against the traditional material?

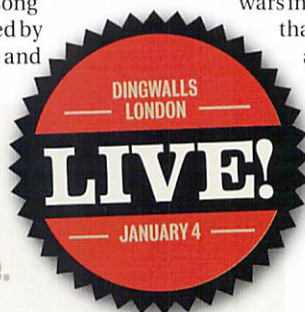
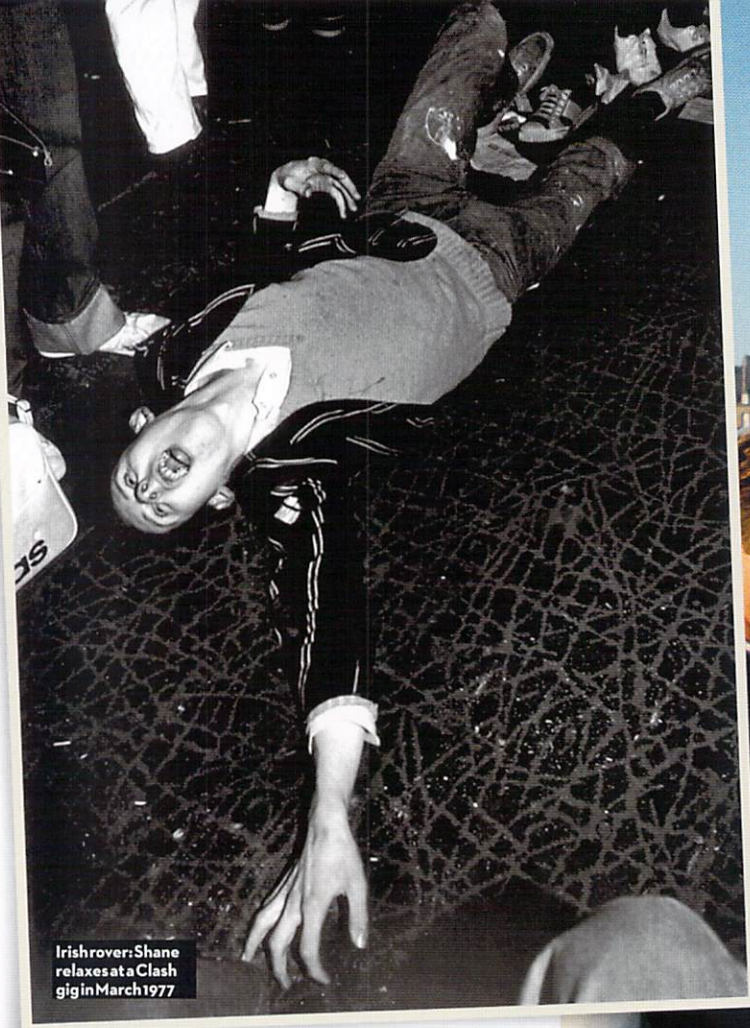
Shane: "I haven't a clue how our own songs stand up. Obviously they are not as good as Irish folk songs, but we're not an Irish folk band as such. Most of our songs are about London."

They are also a mix of life, humour and lyrical intrigue.

There's "Streams Of Whiskey", a song I thought was actually traditional.

Shane: "It's a totally irresponsible and blatant defence of heavy drinking – there's no other way to describe it. I like to think it is at least poetically written. It's about meeting Brendan Behan in a dream and having him expound his philosophy on life, which is basically – fuck it!"

The demon drink also features in the instrumental "Repeal The Licensing Laws" which, played with a gusto that suggests a topic very close to their hearts, proves that you may be able to take an Irishman off his native



Bar-room brawl

NME JAN 15 An early gig shows shambolic promise.

SHANE WAS THE lead singer with The Nips, the bloke who had his earlobe cut by Kate of The Modettes at a Clash gig, a punk mini-legend. Pogue Mahone is the band he's been hatching over the past 18 months, using accordion, acoustic guitar, tin whistle, bass and (sometimes) drums, a style pre-empted by phase three Dexys but Pogue Mahone's approach is different – more bar room b(r)awl than showband revue.

They suffer from disorganisation, scrappiness and long periods of tuning up between songs.

Ironically the lifestyle that fuels the songs is also holding them back. A shame because were they to tighten up they could be an abrasive, honest and strong sideswipe at customary ways and expectations.

Pluses – Shane has a fine singing voice, one of the few people this side of 40 who can actually use his voice expressively and draw you into the places and feeling sketched out in the songs. The songs themselves are barbed and naked, painting a blunt, sometimes squalid picture but never forgetting the effectiveness of a good tune or a merry jug. Folk music? All depends what sort of folk we're talking about I suppose.

For instance, one song takes the life of a navy building the railroads in the 1800s, another deals with his descendants in post-punk boom London giving Arabs hand-jobs and dropping mandies. But they are taking themselves seriously enough to make a real go of it? Pogue Mahone is Irish Gaelic for "kiss my hole". Gavin Martin, NME Jan 15, 1983



Seashanties:
The Pogues in
St Malo, France,
November 6, 1983

beat, but you can't take the native beat off an Irishman.

"Connemara Let's Go" is a ghost story about a guy out roaming the fields, who comes across one of the mass graves where plague victims were buried.

Shane: "It's also about the way tourists—krauts and Americans—go over to Ireland and think of it as a nice little place full of donkeys and carts, and they don't understand the tragedy of its history, or that they belong to a culture that has systematically destroyed it. It's not something that I'm particularly bitter about, but I'm just saying it's happened."

While it should be clear to anyone with half a brain that what the Pogues are doing in their punchy, wholly revitalised pub folk format is worlds apart from the lavish showband revue of Dexys Midnight Fiddlers, there will be a few dullards who'll see a picture and think that they are treading familiar ground.

Shane was waiting for that suggestion.

"The difference between us and them is as big as you could imagine. I used to really like Dexys when they were doing the soul stuff. They were brilliant, absolutely great; one of the best groups I'd ever heard. But this pathetic attempt they've made to incorporate some kind of Celtic bit—with the fake wearing of dungarees and berets and growing stubble and walking round without any shoes and straw hanging out of their hair and all the rest of it—is such a fuckin' insult to the whole thing.

"And they go and put a song from Tom Moore—who wrote songs that were accepted in Victorian England for Christ's sake—on the back of the album. It's rubbish, what they've done is made a bland type of soul

"As many
people as
possible have
to be subjected
to this"

music with a few fiddles thrown in and they don't even play them like fiddles, they play them like orchestral instruments. It's got no relevance at all. It's pop—it's exactly what we're not doing; it's completely cynical. It's so obviously someone just looking for a new image."

TALL AND SKINNY, clad in baggy suits with holes in the most awkward places and a set of teeth that make Keith Richards' seem like an enviable piece of dentistry... Shane is a good advertisement for the sort of abject poverty the Pogues claim is their main problem.

I'd also suggest that a certain lack of discipline, probably attributable to a sizeable alcohol intake, spoils them at times and they sound more sloppy than energetic. Recently, however, they have been improving significantly and seem to have reached the right balance between control and the true heart and spirit of their music.

Their appearances are haphazard, and with no manager things tend to be disorganised and, as yet, there's been no record company patronage. (I dread to think how they'd deal with them anyway.) But they're well past the stage of just doing it for a laugh, and Shane has got his sights set high.

"I want to be on *TOTP* because I want money basically, and also as many people as possible have to be subjected to this. After that it's up to them whether they like it or not.

There's no way we're going to compromise the basic ideas for anybody. I think we can get on *TOTP* without compromising.

"If I was sure we couldn't, then I'd compromise," he grins. *Gavin Martin* •

1983

JULY - SEPTEMBER



Billy Bragg: "no frills" LP from the Bard of Barking

ALBUMS

Billy Bragg *Life's A Riot With Spy Vs Spy* UTILITY

Finally, one-man band Billy Bragg makes an appearance on vinyl following his steady progress as a hit-and-run live attraction. Clearly this is a low-budget job, wrapped in a genuinely unpleasant white-and-orange sleeve like an old Penguin.

The contents are simply Bragg with guitar, recorded "in straight stereo". For the price of entry ('no more than £2.99') you get seven of Bragg's own bittersweet compositions, ranging from the sprightly "Richard" through the punning "The Milkman Of Human Kindness" to the haunting and stately "Man In The Iron Mask". Having heard some of Bragg's demos and witnessed the wit and voltage he can put into a live show, I have to say this collection is disappointing. The recording quality is stark, or perhaps blunt is a better word, with no frills whatsoever. It might have been a good plan for Bragg to have included "The Cloth" with a drum machine, to supply a little variety.

Still, there's no doubting the quality of his songs, and the boy's

potential has to be considerable. You may have noticed me waffling on about Bragg in the past, but just let me repeat that he creates deceptively robust melodies out of almost nothing and clothes them with lyrics by turns compassionate, bitter and perceptive. Most importantly, Bragg possesses that inestimable advantage of a razor-sharp earthy wit which can get him out of any number of tight corners. Still recommended, but there's better to come. Adam Sweeting (MMAug 6)

Virginia Astley *From Gardens Where We Feel Secure*

ROUGH TRADE

A perpetual spring of artistic inspiration is the fact that we don't know what we've got until it's gone. Ecstasy is something we experience (if we're lucky) and the

desperate appreciation that we should have caught the moment, cherished it and feverishly fought to prolong it is necessarily an afterthought.

Innocence and purity (concepts not often found in this paper) are retrospectives and to be aware of them is, in essence, to be no longer innocent or pure. Our childhood days, especially, are a paradise lost, a wonderment of acquired impressions free from the responsible burden of self-realisation. Once our instincts awaken into contemplation, it's too late. That time is gone and, try as we may, we can never go back.

From Gardens Where We Feel Secure is a rare and precious thing, an evocative elegy; the best we can hope for,

a momentary fragment of complete recollection, pregnant with all the fleetingly suggested emotional traumas of an induced déjà vu. How it works is simplicity itself -

recreating one golden moment, one summer's day from its fidgeting dawn to its drowsy dusk. It can be lying in the long grass gazing at the sky while all around sounds and smells fuse to intoxicate and lull the senses into timelessness.

It can be waltzing through a water meadow, dispensing clouds of pollen as, far off, through the open window of a music room, a gentle breeze wafts the sounds of a piano lesson. It can frolic through an orchard as big as the world. It can

be, as one of its titles reflects, "A Summer Long Since Past".

I don't want to waste time here dwelling on the execrable idiocy that frustrated the release of this album for more than a year, I'd rather just pray the weather holds to complement its arrival. But what's all this got to do with rock 'n' roll? Well, nothing actually, except that *From Gardens Where We Feel Secure* is the first substantial work from one of our most creative young composers/musicians.

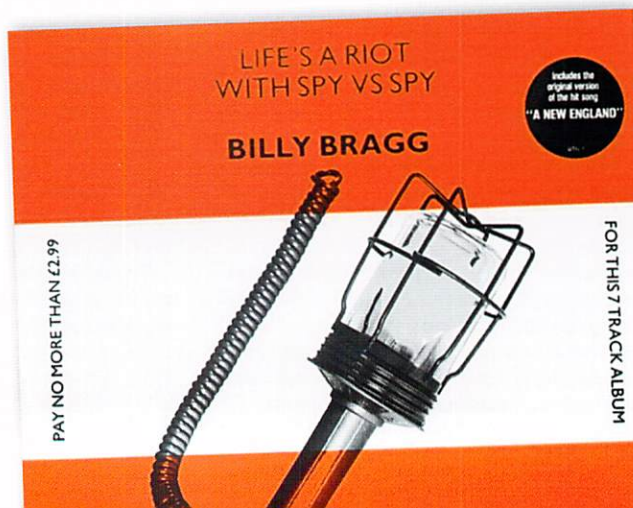
No term seems appropriate, because Virginia Astley spurns such regimented categorisation and that's what, almost incidentally, this is all about; breaking down the walls of prejudice and broadening the listening tastes of a generation far too long discouraged from investigating vast areas of music by the incomprehensible rituals and ludicrous pageants of cultural snobbery.

But, if you must have equations, *From Gardens* probably wouldn't exist without Eric Satie, Brian Eno, or The Beatles. Basically it's a piano piece occasionally, sparsely and tastefully tinted with synthesizer, flute and acoustic guitar and laced with taped effects - a twittering dawn chorus, a carillon, a creaking garden swing, a choir of children, a braying donkey, a hooting owl - to trigger precise associations for our imaginations to imbue with personal recall.

Its beauty is its sensitivity; its purposeful if naively doomed pursual of its intention without ever resorting to gratuitous embroidery. It is never the gimmick I can hardly help making it sound - in fact, I've lived with a tape of this album for nine months or so now and, in its many repeated plays, it has never once palled, never once failed to set off a rich response of thoughts and feelings.

I suppose comparisons with *Tubular Bells* are injudicial, but, certainly the potential is here for Ms Astley to delight a similarly large audience. Essentially though, *From Gardens...* is a private piece, something into which you invest your own personal experiences and allow the tricks time plays to imbue the past with a rosy sentiment. And, for all those who'll allow some self-conscious hip bigotry

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to persuade them *From Gardens...* isn't cool enough for their taste – it just goes to show that, for all their sloganeering, some people will never be able to tell soul from shoe leather.

Steve Sutherland (MM Aug 6)

Robert Plant *The Principle Of Moments* ATLANTIC

A fan of Robert Plant since I first heard *Led Zeppelin II* I've come to expect a certain standard of excitement, invention and technique from a singer who must be rated as one of the best in the world.

The last thing I bargained for was Plant producing an album as dreary as this. Plant's first solo effort, *Pictures At Eleven* was a little gem; one of my favourites of last year, in fact.

But all the drama, the style and the sheer clout appears to have gone AWOL as far as *The Principle Of Moments* is concerned. Plant sings adequately, but he's let down badly by his band, the production and the quality of the songs.

There are eight new compositions on the album, written by Plant and members of his band, but none of them are at all memorable. Plant scarcely raises his tempo beyond a mere canter. For example, on "Thru' With The Two Step", he lazily wraps his vocal chords around a dull and droning melody line which, in terms of quality, could easily be an out-take from the last *Men At Work* album.

On drums, Plant has recruited Phil Collins and Barriemore Barlow and neither do much more than a journeyman's job. Guitarist Robbie Blunt is scarcely able to fight his way out of the maze of clichés while bassist Paul Martinez is merely adequate. Keyboardist Jezz Woodroffe might as well have taken the day off, for all the impression his contributions make.

The production – credits are shared by Plant, Benji Lefevre and Pat Moran – is basic and echoey. It does little to enhance either the vocal or instrumental performances. Yes, it's a disappointment all right. I think the main let down is that *Principle* could have been recorded by any one of a whole host of dreary bands. It lacks class and it lacks distinction – which is something I never thought I'd find myself writing about Plant. Brian Harrigan (MM, Jul 16)



Toothing their horn: Andy McCoy and Michael Monroe of Hanoi Rocks

SINGLES
REVIEW
1983

SINGLES

REM *Radio Free Europe* IRS

In a week largely unsullied by decent records, this is... reasonable. Highly traditional and guitar orientated but sung and played as though the group at least intend to get to the end. I wonder what it was like reviewing singles in 1967? "Far out", I should imagine. (MM, Aug 6)

Rock Steady Crew *(Hey You) Rock Steady Crew* VIRGIN

A feeble, watered down, jolly hockey sticks version of the ElectroBronx idiom. Robbed of visceral impact; it fails to have any point to its existence at all. Except to get on the radio. And sell lots of records. And make lots of money.

Oh yeah, that's what it's all about!

Oh God, it's awful, take it off, TAKE IT OFF! (MM, Sep 24)

Hanoi Rocks *Until I Get You* LICK

Black leather, cheap smack, Iggy Pop, Keith Richards, these are a few of the favourite things for young rockers who should know better. "Until I Get You" is the sound of the '70s twisted into the present for what purpose, one wonders? Is this really what little girls like? (MM Aug 27)

UB40 *Red Red Wine* DEP INTERNATIONAL

Rather less glum than usual, but UB40 still sound unaccountably dour; even when their mood is as innocuously sentimental as it is here; their music seems crowded by doubt and cloudy premonitions. A drab re-working of an old Neil Diamond song, "Red Red Wine" limps along, a touch off colour in most departments and soundly asleep in the rest. Hardly party-happy at the best of times, this is UB40 sounding droll and not a little gormless, trying awkwardly to sound light-hearted and charming. The final effect is like being French-kissed by a sloth: wet, lingering and sloppy. (MM, Aug 13)

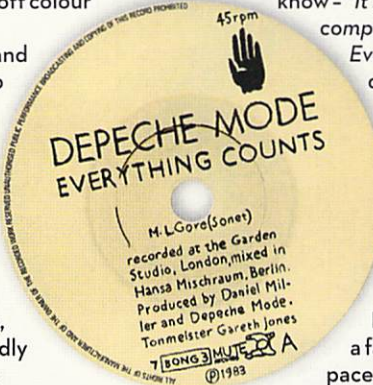
Depeche Mode *Everything Counts* MUTE

Dependable as the postman, Depeche Mode deliver another little packet of impeccable pop which I was happily prepared to hate, but couldn't. The contents are as expected; a whacking great thud of a beat with twiddly bits jumping all round it; a nagging chorus; rich vocal contrasts; a thoughtful production and an arrangement that guarantees the final sparkle. It's the lyric that got me, though. Not that the Mode are telling us anything we didn't know – "It's a competitive world/ Everything counts in large amounts" – but there's some amusing wordplay to be discovered round here. Proceeding at a fairly sedate pace, this is a number you'd jiggle rather than dance to. (MM Jul 16)

know – "It's a competitive world/ Everything counts in large amounts" – but there's some amusing wordplay to be discovered round here. Proceeding at a fairly sedate pace, this is a number you'd jiggle rather than dance to. (MM Jul 16)

Billy Joel *Tell Her About It* CBS

A good way to wind up Stickboy le Sutherland is to insist that Billy Joel is one of the finest songwriters and performers of his generation, which of course he is. So I've heard. This record is chubby and full of wind, which I hope cannot be said for its creator. (MM Aug 6)

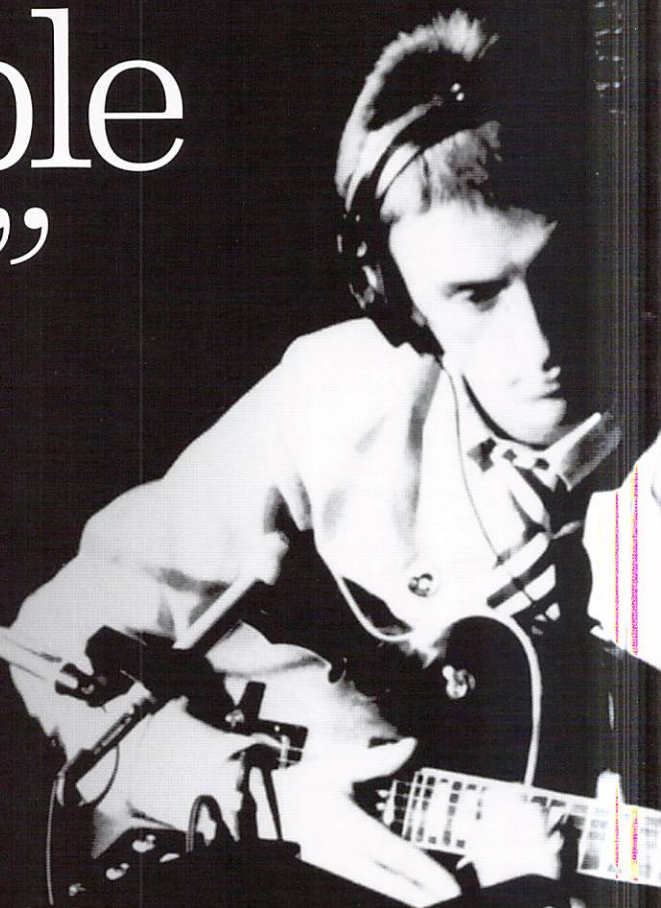


1983

JULY - SEPTEMBER

"I'm not saying I ain't a miserable bastard"

PAUL WELLER returns with a new band, THE STYLE COUNCIL. "We don't wanna do any far-out shit with fuckin' synthesizers or Swiss Alpine horns," he says. "I'd sooner settle for being great than original."



Introducing
The Style Council



Sharp-dressed men: The Style Council's Paul Weller and Mick Talbot, 1983

ALAMY

— MELODY MAKER AUGUST 13 —

WHOT THE HELL does Paul Weller think he is? He's had a few labels flung at him in his time – miserable bastard, Spokesman For A Generation, spearhead of the Bulldog Breed. To some extent all these hats have fitted, but as he points out with his tongue somewhere in his cheek, he is a Gemini.

"I hope you're not gonna make too much in the article about how different I am and how I've changed and all that," Weller said to me as we approached the end of this interview last week.

Hmmmm... it's tempting. But of course it's one of the peripherals of fame that everybody thinks they know you. Paul Weller with The Jam was noted for his dour pronouncements about big subjects like Youth and Society. Paul Weller, Style Councillor, seems to be undergoing the painful process of growing up in private, something he's never had the chance to do before.

But he admitted it was his own fault. "This probably sounds a bit mellow," he said apologetically, "but I really just wanna try and get on with the job of enjoying my life now, as much as I can, while trying not to get too lazy and complacent about things. I didn't really get a chance to enjoy the last few years and that, for different reasons.

"I try and savour each..." – he chuckled to himself – "...each moment as well, I'm not winding you up, I really do. 'Cos otherwise life just rushes past you. That six or seven years or whatever with The Jam just went like that, they flew past. I was 18, then the next thing I knew I came out and I was 24. So now I just savour it, y'know – I try to anyway. Because it's a very precious thing to me."

So does Paul Weller really know who he is? I'd interviewed him once before for the now defunct *Sound International* after *Sound Affects* came out, and he'd surprised me by admitting that interviews made him more nervous as time went by. I could tell by the way his hand shook that he wasn't just saying it for effect. It has also surprised me that a man whose public pronouncements made him appear aggressive, obsessive and dogmatic actually had a problem with sitting down face-to-face with scribe and tape recorder, and talking.

Long pauses would be interrupted by gabbled bursts of sentences which collapsed untidily on top of each other, like a rugby scrum squabbling in the mud while the ball had already sped over the line 50 yards away. Weller had the unfortunate gift of communicating nervousness to other people.

This time around, on a blazing Thursday in the hottest July for 324 years, Paul Weller brought along a little moral support in the shape of fellow Stylist Mick Talbot, who watched the proceedings with amused detachment and failed to rescue Weller from any awkward questions. "Come on, Mick, say something," Weller pleaded after five minutes.

"Alright, alright," groaned Talbot. "I gotta wake up yet..."

AT WELLER'S SUGGESTION, we'd adjourned to the caff next door to Polydor. The sun was already well into its stride, though it was only 10.30 in the morning. After the interview, Mick and Paul were due in the studios to continue work on their album.

"Bite early, innit?" I protested.

"We always start this early," breezed Weller. "In fact we've had to delay it

today 'cos you were coming." Cheers, then. This was, of course, a sly dig at the rockist way of life, which rarely begins before three in the afternoon.

You will appreciate that we're dealing with the New Europeans here, sharp young men who wash behind their ears and don't squander their hard-earned cash on wasted studio time or morale-sapping stimulants. We settled ourselves around the inevitable batch of cappuccini and rolled the tape.

I kicked off by suggesting that the new Style Council record, "Long Hot Summer" and its three accompanying tracks, recorded in Paris and packaged accordingly, was somewhat arty-farty, not very Paul Weller.

"Whatcha mean?" demanded Weller. "What are you judging that on?"

Well, on the things you used to talk about in the past, the headline stuff. What's all this with French lyrics and French sleeve notes?

"There's loads of things that go into an idea like that, the Paris thing," he explained. "We thought the music suited it, we fancied recording somewhere else partly because it makes a bit of a break as well, a little bit of a holiday, and mainly we just wanted to do something a bit different and get away from the conventional way that people work.

"Some reviews have said how pretentious it was, which is what the idea was – it was supposed to be quite funny. A lot of people missed that because they think they've got me bagged, they tend to think they know my mentality, but they don't know fuck all about me really. Most of the public character I've got, if I've got any, has only been created by you lot anyway." He laughed fleetingly, about semi-colon length.

Ah, you mean "Paul Weller the miserable bastard?"

"I'm not saying..." began Weller, but Talbot interrupted. "He's not saying he ain't."

"I regret a lot of my actions in the past, but there's nothing you can do"

"No I'm not saying I ain't a miserable bastard," chuckled Weller. "No, I mean obviously it's not totally created by the media, and I must have helped in some way towards it."

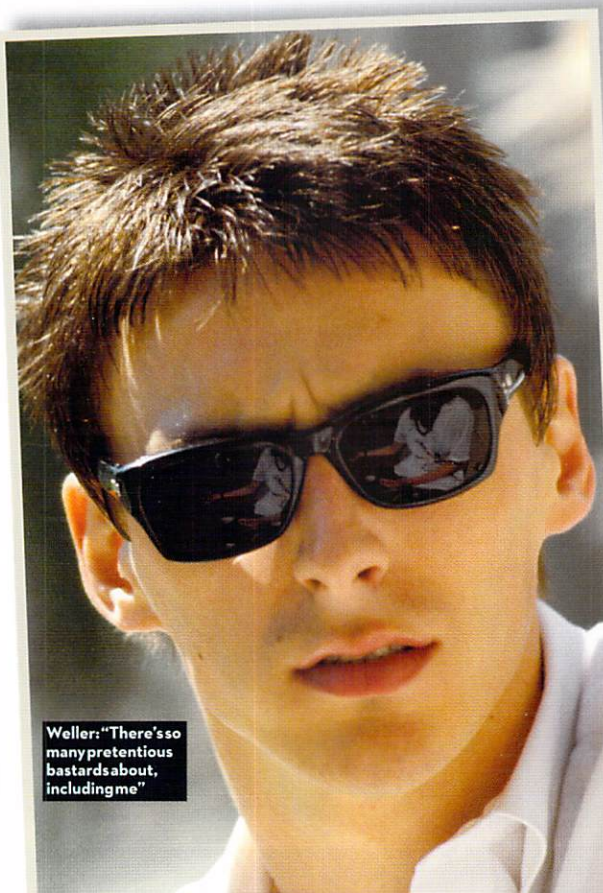
Yeah, if you put yourself in the firing line that's what happens. You haven't been doing many interviews lately, but with The Jam there was always the anti-rock attitude and the social commitment stance. You're obviously not talking about those things so much now.

"But I can't talk about the same things in every interview," Weller protested, "because people would just get bored, you know. I don't wanna keep repeating myself but that doesn't mean I don't feel the same way about certain

things. I just don't want to keep talking about it, because what does it do? It doesn't further it. I think the Style Council is more anti-rock in the way we work and what we've done in the past. We just want to keep it as exciting and interesting as possible, that's the main thing."

The Style Council's three releases so far have been markedly dissimilar from each other. First there was the softly soulful "Speak Like A Child", then the explosive militant funk of "Money Go Round", and now the Paris collection, with its R&B instrumental "Party Chambers", the Gauloises-and-autumn-leaves romanticism of "The Paris Match", the lonely "Le Depart" and the somewhat tepid A-side.

The emphasis has shifted significantly since Jam days from explicit statement towards a less empirical eclecticism, using the loose umbrella of The Style Council to speak in numerous tongues – a softer range of dialects in place of The Jam's strident barricade-storming. This Paul Weller hears voices in his head where The Jam was sometimes just a ringing in the ears.



Weller: "There's so many pretentious bastards about, including me"



All white on the night:
Weller performs on
The Tube, 1983

Have you given up being a Spokesman For A Generation, Paul?

"I'm just part-time now," retorted Weller, "I only do evenings."

I told him that I'd often heard conversations along the lines of "I hate Paul Weller because he says, 'Give up all this jaded rock garbage and do what I say instead'" – in other words, people felt he just wanted to impose his own rigid set of ideas on them in place of anything which had gone before.

Weller looked contemptuous. "I couldn't really care less what people are saying, quite honestly. Most of it I find really funny, 'cos they don't know me anyway. But most of that 'Spokesman For A Generation' stuff was only the papers anyway, I never said I was one."

"I just find it a big cliché and I can't really take it seriously. If there are things I write in songs that people identify with, I don't think that particularly makes me a spokesman, just because a lot of people feel the same way."

But are there never times when you wish you weren't known for being 'Paul Weller', with your name (metaphorically) in lights? Do you ever resent your name becoming that well known?

"Not really, no," he said. "I do resent it sometimes, but then again ever since I was 14, I really, really wanted that, so I can't blame anyone else but myself for it. The only things that bother me are... well, like that



thing you were saying before, that the new single doesn't sound like me, y'know? I can't make any sense of things like that because... what do I sound like?"

It's not necessarily the sound of the music; it's the fact that it's pretentious.

"It's supposed to be," he said tersely.

Yes, I persisted, but there's all this stuff in French, plus the blatherings of the Cappuccino Kid...

"Don't you like those bits on the back?" asked Weller innocently. "Don't you get anything from them?"

Um... no, I think I could put it better myself. Weller seemed pensive. "Hopefully some people get something from it. It's a bit of a mixture, it's meant to be funny as well. I think it's good to put something like that on there, like if you've got a record as heavy as 'Money Go Round' to have something else there, sort of human side. I dunno, I like it. It means a lot to me, I get a lot from it."

But Paul, isn't it the kind of thing you would have thrown out if it had been suggested with The Jam, like "Ah, that's bullshit"?

"This isn't The Jam, though; this is The Style Council," he pointed out. "My ideas change all the time. I can't remain the same on every single subject." »

PAUL WELLER STILL talks too fast and sometimes mumbles answers to the pavement, but it seems safe to say that the weight of the world, or at least of the British Isles, no longer bears down on his shoulders so oppressively.

"It's less important for me to go out and prove myself to other people, because I've had six years of people judging me, whether it be the press or the public. So it's not important to me any more, it's not important to me to play Wembley or Bingley Hall or to have Number One records. It's only important to make good music."

Regrets? He's had a few, but then again...

"I regret a lot of my actions in the past, but there's nothing you can do about it, so I just try and make sure I don't do them again."

Like what, for instance? Standing up on a soapbox, perhaps?

"No, I don't regret doing that. I felt it was necessary to do that. And if I felt it necessary again I'd still do that, y'know. Like people said with 'Money Go Round' it was a self-righteous lyric and all the rest of it, but I don't give a shit about that. To me it's an important thing to say, it's a statement I wanna make. I don't care what people are going to think of me."

Beneath the more cosmopolitan surface of the current Paul Weller there's still a belligerent streak of defiance. Like the beast in the cellar, it's kept under heavy lock and key, but it still goes on the rampage from time to time when somebody forgets to feed it.

"There's this kind of humility thing around at the moment," spat Weller scornfully. "You get all these crappy bands saying, 'It's just pop music, we're not gonna write lyrics that make 'em think. We're just a pop group' – y'know, this kind of humble shit. I don't find anything exciting or brave about that. People say, 'Well, you have to like their honesty,' and all that crap, but I think it's just a fucking excuse."

He cites Culture Club, Animal Nightlife, JoBoxers and Orange Juice as contemporary artists whose work he admires, "but at the other end you've just got that record company thing, that pre-packaged pop thing. All those faceless groups you see just dressed up in their tarty clothes and slapped-on makeup, they're useless. There's nothing behind them."

This is true, of course, but I felt it was my duty to raise the issue of Weller's Respond record label, home of Tracie and The Questions. There's much talk of this being music for "young people", I pointed out, but it's young people playing an old style of music. It's basically old soul music, isn't it, like Tracie's "The House That Jack Built" or The Questions' singles?

"I don't agree with that, Adam, I'm sorry. No. I'm not saying it's not influenced by that because of course it is, but I think it sounds very contemporary – to me it does anyway."

Well, the artists may be young and enthusiastic, but the form of music isn't anything new.

"Well, what else can you do, you know?" demanded Weller. "What else can you play music on? We don't wanna do any far-out shit with fuckin' synthesizers or Swiss Alpine horns or something; we just want to play natural instruments. I don't see how else we can do it really."

"We didn't try and claim that it was gonna be a totally original new sound, although I think that will emerge anyway, because how can you be original any more? Everything's been done in the last five or six years – every conceivable type of music has..."

I agreed with Weller – I'd just been hoping he'd have a different answer. Mick Talbot chipped in. "It's just a question of making good music, innit?"

"I'd sooner settle for being great than original," Weller continued. "Originality's just what people hear in it anyway – if someone really likes a song it'll sound original to them anyway. I'm not bothered about originality, I don't even think about it."

"I just see music as either good or bad; it's such a personal thing anyway. I tell you one thing, I'm really sick of all this intellectualising of music. I've done it myself in the past, so I've been guilty of it, but the way the papers and that do it is just pointless. They're just leading themselves up their own arseholes."

So do you think that's what has damaged music?

"It fucking has," insisted Weller, "cos there's so many pretentious bastards about... including me... no, I do it on purpose. But there's so much crap talked about it, so many people who really believe all that shit that's written about them. I think that's ruined it."

"For me, the reason why black music's always remained so good is because it's always been intuitive. They've never particularly tried to intellectualise what they're doing or 'why am

I writing this song?' They've just gone out and done it and that's why it always sounds brilliant, to me anyway. It still does now and it always will, for that reason. In the white music scene you just get that intellectual crap and it ruins it. As I say, I've been guilty of that in the past but I've really been trying to avoid it."

In particular, groups like U2, the Bunnymen and perhaps even the mighty Simple Minds, get Paul Weller's goat. "Maybe I'm missing the point," he said. "Also it's just not my type of music, so maybe I've got no right to talk about it. But I saw U2 on *The Tube* and I just think it sounds old-fashioned. I think U2 are a load of wallies – if they had long hair and wore headbands no one would look twice or write about them. That thing you were saying about Respond being old-fashioned – well that's what I think of those groups."

But there were plenty of those rock-type elements about The Jam, Paul.

"Of course there were," he confessed.

"When we first started off, The Jam were a rock band. Towards the end I started trying to get away from that because I'd started hating it. But we were, yeah."

"I just saw a lot of elements of it that I don't think get people anywhere, which I don't find particularly positive at all. And a lot of people get confused with urgency and intensity and emotion, because the guitar's turned up full and it's going through a 200-watt amplifier. They tend to get that confused with real intensity and it's just a load of shit, it's sheer volume."

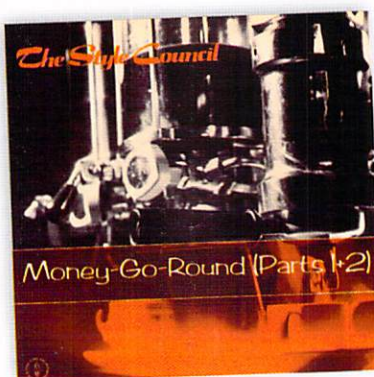
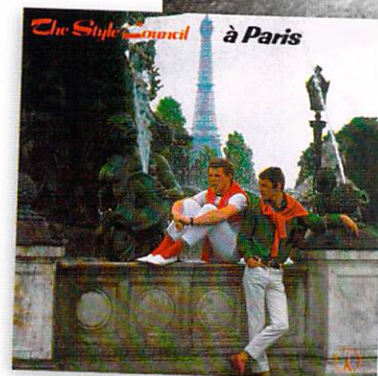
Not a man to mince his words, our Paul. In his restless flight from what he sees as pretension, he's more or less given up writing poetry in his spare time.

"I got a bit fed up with it," he revealed. "I wrote all kinds of wimpy things and real introspective stuff, which is good to get out of your system but it's probably boring for some poor fucker to read. So I didn't bother any more."

"I found there were a lot of poetry fans, young kids, which was good, but a lot of them were really introspective – '*my heart hung like a shadow on the wall*' and all this shit. Where's it gonna get ya? It's a good release and as a justification I suppose that's OK, but that's enough; it's not particularly good always to read that. I've still got some interest in poetry but I've mainly gone back into songs."

WELLER'S POLITICS, FREQUENTLY derided as half-baked in the past, have also come under the glare of this new realistic approach. Predictably, he sounded off about his disgust with Thatcher's re-election, but this sense of disillusion is tempered by a belief in people as opposed to creaky old systems.

Had he had more faith in this country and its future in the Jam days? "Not really, no. Well probably in the early days, yeah, it's only like with events of the last few years... like the Falklands war, things like when I see people out on the quaysides waving flags at the soldiers, waving the soldiers and sailors off. I can't have a lot of faith in a nation that does that. "But there's still people that I meet... it's enough for me to retain some kind of faith, anyway. And quite honestly, the more I think about it, the more





Weller and Talbot in Paris in May 1983, a month before recording the third Style Council single, "Long Hot Summer", in the city

I think that's how music works. Music's never gonna hit a whole nation's conscience, it's impossible to.

"But I don't see that as some kind of defeat any more, which I would have at some point in the past. Now I think even if it affects a few individuals it's worth it, and hopefully those individuals will add up to quite a number of people. I don't know. It's a bit pretentious of me to start talking about how it's gonna change people's ideas."

SO FAR, THE Style Council's major live appearances have been restricted to a couple of brief sets for good causes, at Brockwell Park and at a Right To Work benefit in Liverpool. Weller and Talbot had both been annoyed by the *MM*'s coverage of the Liverpool event, which seemed to them to be using their 20-minute set as an excuse to print pictures of Weller and to sell more copies of the paper, thus ignoring the true significance of the event.

"The review was OK. It wasn't that that bothered me, because I thought she made some good points," said Weller. "It was more the editorial stuff that went with it. Whoever did that was just exploiting us in that situation."

But isn't that the problem of living down the image of Paul Weller? You can't change who you are and the reason why you got that sort of coverage, I argued.

"But it's not my problem," fumed Weller, "it's *MM*'s problem – what they were saying was it's my responsibility and I've got to work this thing out. They were building all that crap up by putting 'Style Council Live' on the cover. That doesn't help me at all.

"Do they think we travelled up to Liverpool to play for 20 minutes for our egos? To make ourselves and our egos feel better? I can do that

having a wank in front of the mirror at home or something. We wanted to do that thing for a special reason."

After a few moments he felt calmer. "I would say the level of commitment in the Style Council is higher, actually... in the six months we've been going we've done in the past. The writing royalties from 'Money Go Round' are going to Youth CND, but I don't wanna come over as being the punk generation's Cliff Richard either – a do-gooder – I hate that stuff. I'm not doing it for that, I don't care what other people think about that, I'm doing it for my reasons. So anyway, I think the commitment is still there."

Do you reckon the Paul Weller of 1979 would recognise you today, I asked?

"He'd probably have been drunk," said Weller with a tight-lipped grin. "I'd probably have told him to fuck off 'cos he'd have been foaming at the mouth or something. We probably would have agreed on some things. I have changed in some ways but I don't think... it's not particularly any kind of exclusive..."

"The Paul Weller of 1979 would have told me to fuck off"

"I think politically I'm a lot sharper now because I think I know more where I stand than I did in '79 or whenever. I didn't really have a fucking clue. As far as I'm concerned I think I've improved a lot."

So you were naive before in some respects? "Yeah," said Weller doubtfully. "Well, I don't think I was naive, I was just a bit thick really. I just think I've got a bit sharper, and I think also I was into things which I now see as bullshit, you know, and I try and avoid them."

If God created all men equal, perhaps Paul Weller is just more equal than he used to be. At any rate, he's no longer an absolute beginner.

Adam Sweeting •

“Pride. Independence. Respect”

Legendary songwriter and producer **CURTIS MAYFIELD** gives a major retrospective interview. From his early career to *Super Fly*, God and drugs, nothing is off the table. Even his failed disco album. “I don’t think I was the greatest at what disco is about,” he says.

— NME JULY 8 —

A HOT SUMMER SATURDAY in London. Curtis Mayfield, a short stocky man dressed in a green safari suit and an orange T-shirt, is sitting on a sofa in his hotel room talking about The Impressions.

“I wrote most of the things, if not all of the things, for The Impressions, so once we found out what we were really about, it was always our way to write inspiration messages or a good love song.

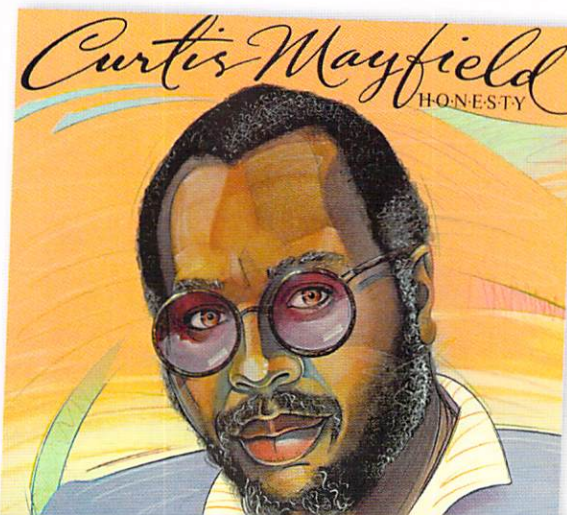
“Even throughout my way of writing a love song or an uptempo thing, the lyrics always tended to be a little more to the point where you could think about it. It would give you food for thought. That was just our way, our style, and so be it.”

His head peppered with white tufts of hair, his voice quiet and gracious, his manner one of dignity, Curtis Mayfield has usually been about great music and messages of inspiration.

Born in Chicago in 1942, by the time he was 12 he was singing with The Impressions. When he was 16 they had their first major breakthrough with “For Your Precious Love”, and, with the gifted Curtis writing their material, went on to be – through such songs as “This Is My Country”, “Wherever You Leadeth Me”, “It’s Alright”, “Meeting Over Yonder”, and the monumental “People Get Ready” expressing the hopes, fears, injustices and optimism of a generation – one of the most influential soul groups of all time.

They lasted until 1970 with Curtis, who in the meantime wrote prolifically not only for The Impressions, but northern soul favourites Major Lance and Billy Butler on the Okeh label. He also wrote for Jerry Butler.

At the beginning of the ’70s Curtis left the group to pursue his own career and took soul »





Curtis Mayfield, the man with the music and the message: "Don't call me a saint..."

a step further with his groundbreaking solo albums. In the first five years of his solo direction he was untouchable. Albums such as *Curtis*, *Roots*, *Back To The World*, *Super Fly* and *There's No Place Like America Today* saw Mayfield adopting his sweet falsetto voice to a tense, dramatic music a million miles away from the cool harmonies of The Impressions.

Like The Impressions, his music reflected the times he lived in but offered no single answer to the problems he saw. Instead, Curtis succinctly depicted the chaos around him—Vietnam, unemployment, poverty, drug abuse—with unflinching nerve.

Throughout his work, he publicly displayed his belief in God and, mainly through his classic *Super Fly* LP (the tautness of *Back To The World* I find more appealing), established himself as the soul man.

After the success of *There's No Place Like America Today*, Curtis quietly “retired” to concentrate on his home and family. He has 11 children by different women (“Hey, I wouldn’t put all that on one woman”), and felt a cooling-out period was required. He’d been on the road since 1958.

“It was a constant will of my own to succeed,” he says. “Every success element was a diploma for me. I didn’t earn it at school, I had to earn it among people. And whatever my gift was, that allowed me that development.

“But while I was doing all that, I also wanted to do karate, play basketball and, of course, the need of every man to want his own family. Money isn’t enough. You need the human contact. After *Super Fly* we were in the air two or three times a day and all of that it was appreciated and loved. However, you can’t raise family and raise children like that. You want to see them grow up and you don’t want your children to have to walk in your shadow.”

When he did return, his popularity had subsided and his subsequent LPs completely lacked the inspiration and spirit of his earlier work. He even dabbled in disco for *Do It All Night*.

It’s now ironic that his last LP, *Honesty*, which is a brilliant return to his former strengths, a quiet reaffirmation of his special talents, has largely been ignored and Curtis Mayfield is now without a recording contract. Actually, it’s more than ironic; it’s a biting comment on the music industry. And as he has no label backing for his English tour, he is without an essential horn section.

“I couldn’t afford it,” he states simply.

Our conversation lasted about two hours and was somewhat akin to meeting a wise sage who has seen it all and come through with his strength and pride intact.

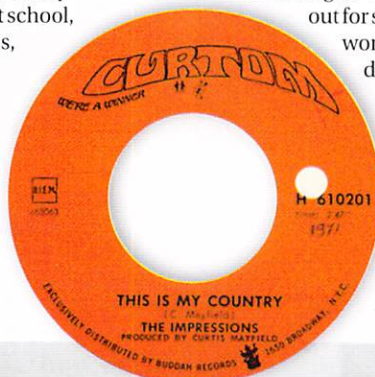
It’s no surprise that his last LP should be entitled *Honesty*.

You’ve just completed a tour of America with The Impressions.

That’s right. We called it the Silver Anniversary Tour and we were out for some six to seven weeks. We actually did about 31 days, working the weekends only. It was really an ideal thing to do because it gave us a chance to come back together and sing a lot of good songs that we hadn’t done for a long time.

How did it go? Because I recently read a Marvin Gaye interview where he was saying that American audiences tend only to listen to material that is new and are contemptuous of older material.

Well, that’s not totally true. The American audiences are somewhat spoilt because they have a variety of



The Impressions in the studio in 1965: (l-r) Sam Gooden, Fred Cash and Curtis Mayfield



everything to choose from and things are always being replenished. Here's the new! And here's the newer! And sometimes you get caught up in that.

After a while you kind of get fed up and you tend to want to come back, especially as you get older, to the things that you grew up with, with emotions and feelings and sensitivities in it. We had quite a bit of audience response to us all over the country, doing things from the past as well as the present. I think it all intermingled, and of course music in America tends to be somewhat directed to the younger set of people – which leaves the guy round 32, 35, 40; he has nothing to relate to anymore. And I think it's important that you keep those people that are around your own age, and have grown up with you, as well as to secure new fans.

Well, The Impressions seemed quite unique to me in that you seemed to be one of the first soul groups to tackle social matters in your songs. Were there any others?

Not so much back during our time. Things were very much off into rock 'n' roll during those earlier years, the '50s. I like to think of us in terms of us coming in on the cuffs, where there were the LaVern Bakers and the Fats Dominos and The Drifters, the Clyde McPhatters, you name them. And we were a young group of people who were coming in, but still there were the old-timers who helped us.

However, our coming out in the late '50s sort of put me right into the area of the black movement, the struggles, all the things that were happening in the 60s with Martin Luther King and minority people trying to own more of themselves through their civil rights.

I was very conscious of those things and it has always been my way to write messages of inspiration, even about current events, no matter how controversial. It seems to draw me as long as I can see some truth or some honest realism about how I sense people want to be.

Did the other two Impressions, Sam and Fred, feel the same way?

They seemed to appreciate it because our response from people was always very real, simply because the songs – “This Is My Country”, “Choice Of Colors”, “We're A Winner” or “Amen” – seemed to hit upon the realities of what everybody was all about. While we didn't have the fantastic success of The Temptations, or some of the bigger groups... that were selling many, many records, there seemed to be a place for The Impressions because it always seemed to relate to the consciousness of people.

It made us individual in an era of rock 'n' roll where no one else was really doing it. Then, of course, others would begin to turn around and you would hear James Brown – “Now say it loud! I'm black and I'm proud!” – when those kinds of things were never said or related on such a level. It made us feel very good.

The other two fellas' backgrounds were of the church and gospel music, so we always had our harmonies and we always related pretty good.

Yes I agree, because tied in with that social conscience was a strong religious feel.

I would say so: “People Get Ready”, and things of that nature. I've always had my own sensitive feelings, but as a youngster they probably were more of curiosity and relating them to my own personal emotions. However, my breeding was between my mother – who was a very creative person herself who used to recite a lot of poetry – and my grandma, who during those earlier years was out to earn her degree as a minister.

She had a little storefront church in Chicago and while I lived with my mother, I spent a lot of time with my grandmother during the summertime. We would travel across the country and she'd go to different conventions and take us. The upbringing was of a very spiritual and religious background, especially on her side of the family. We even started a little group. I met Jerry Butler when I was very young because he joined our group. Myself, Jerry and three of my cousins were known as The Northern Jubilees out of Chicago.

We'd travel with our grandmother and we'd sing, and that's how we picked up the music. She called her church The Travelling Soul Spiritualist Church, which was ideal because we moved around a lot.

“Money isn't enough. You need the human contact”

(Laughs) So I guess I picked up a lot of her ways unconsciously. Just sitting in a church as a child, seeing her as minister, read, preach and speak of inspiration from different texts in the Bible.

Did you enjoy childhood?

Oh yeah, I think so. As much as anybody else. As a youngster you don't play on how poor you are or where you are as long as mother and surroundings are somewhat content. You don't understand, or you don't see the levels of struggle or racial slurs and all of that stuff. If you're bred fairly well and you have a certain amount of protection, and hopefully you have some modicum of common sense, you come up pretty balanced.

When did you first become aware of the imbalance in society?

I guess my first noticing of it wasn't even on a black and white level; it was probably between the two families.

Like my grandmother seemed to have more.

She had the church and she helped my mother a lot with her children, buy the clothes and stuff like that. Then the comparison of us living in one room with my mother, that would help show the difference. However, my mother always seemed to have the knack as to how to bring about other things to make you not play on the fact that you didn't have as much as another.

I guess, subconsciously, especially during the early years in America, just from hearing the old people talk you'd pick up lots of things of what the past has been, what the present is and the relationship of different races out in the streets, even before you've been introduced to them.

You come into the world innocent and emotionally sensitive. You cry, you laugh, you play, even you fight, but it's of innocence. Colour has nothing to do with it. You only learn that from those in seniority.

So it never hits all at once. You grow into whatever it is and then it's how you are balanced out by your peers as to how you are then able to relate, think and even sense towards others.

After you joined The Impressions, in the early '60s you also wrote material for the Okeh label, for people like Major Lance and Billy Butler. Did you have to adopt a different approach when writing for them?

I never tried to go as in depth as I would for myself because it wasn't my way to put someone else into a category that they weren't about. But being a creative person and being competitive, I could write a good “The Monkey Time”.

There was a tune Major did which would make you think if you listened to its lyrical content – “Um Um Um Um Um Um”. It's about walking through this crowd and there's this man sitting on a bench, he just moaned and it made no sense, all he said was ‘um um um um’ and the lyric was: “I couldn't help myself, I must have been born with a curious mind, I asked this man just what did he mean when he moaned, if he'd be so kind, and he'd still just go, um um um um.” You know what I mean? It was something to think about despite the rhythm.

How about outside America. Were you aware of The Impressions' impact, say, here in the UK?

No, I never really was. As a matter of fact, it was a long time coming for us to come to England because we were afraid to get on aeroplanes.

Really?

(Laughing) Yes. Back during the earlier years we would not fly. We were deathly afraid of flying, and I can recall several times agents would tell us that we had quite a following here. They would even tell us that there was a group over here performing as The Impressions. (Smiles). But we never gotten round to coming to Europe, and I'm really sorry that we didn't. However, we finally began to get on aeroplanes and fly a bit, and that was an experience in itself. Now they're like taxis.

The Impressions were also influential in Jamaica. I believe Bob Marley and the early Wailers were modelled somewhat on you.

Yes, we found that they loved the lyrics of “I've Been Trying”. “Minstrel »

And Queen” was a very big record out there, and they just seemed to like our style. I guess Bob Marley was probably a kid coming up and the influence of The Impressions and our civil consciousness as to people, and how we were the first about expressing those thoughts, probably motivated him as to his own independence with his own people, and his own need to be of value and say something of value.

We went there once and played for the prime minister, along with Johnny Nash, and we found that we had a great big fan club there. We didn’t even know it! We were met out at the airport; so many people. Made us feel very good.

Yet throughout that success, you always seemed to have kept level-headed.

Well, I suppose it was my grown-up way, even as a kid. That was all I had, was my mind to think and to try and keep it level and not to space out. (Laughs). I found that what I had, I knew it was a gift.

In my opinion, one comes into the world and what does he do? He’s confused about this, he’s confused about that and you learn enough to know that you don’t know nothing! (Laughs). Then all of a sudden you find that you’ve been blessed with something, a vehicle that you had no intention of using. But somebody lays it out, a yellow brick road, and shows you that you have an ability to do something that is so natural to you, you bypass it and try to do everything else but that.

I was capable of finding that out at an early age, and with the help of other people, guidelines like The Impressions who were older than me, they had a will. We are going to make it, we are going to do this and here’s Little Curtis, wow!

Give him a little respect and hey! We’ll guide him and with him we can go on and make it.

Probably because of the respect they allowed to come down on such a youngster, I couldn’t let them down by being such a silly young dude. You begin to want to think intellectually at the level of your peers, and them allowing you to do it you go on and grow up.

The ’60s were such an influential and turbulent time in America, how do you now view those years?

Well, it was definitely that, but it was very much necessary, and thank God the turbulence was just of enough value to make those of conscience understand that there was true turbulence and that those of conscience were making it. So it was, let’s change it a little bit, let’s start relating, let’s give a little, so all people can come up a little bit prouder about what we as peers were supposed to be claiming to the world.

But events like Martin Luther King’s assassination must have been a big setback?

Yeah, of course. It hurt me very deeply; it hurt a lot of people deeply.

For many people the rebel was in many, many ways probably the easiest target for those who did create the turbulence, because they at least allowed an outlet where some kept it inside. If you keep it inside, it can only harm the body and destroy the mind.

But many people, both black and white, were very, very painfully hurt by his death not to mention the loss of the real things about a country.

There can be no money put to the value of the loss of a Martin Luther King. What is a country’s

riches and what is a country’s real power as to what they are all about? It’s certainly not money. It’s the minds of men and women to raise a country and give off the right vibes and to have the respect of a world; not to mention maybe another world that’s looking on. (Laughs)

A lot of people still talk about the ’60s as an optimistic era.

Well, always remember that everything right can eventually, give it enough time, become wrong. And everything wrong, give it enough time, can become right. It’s the balance overall and I think that what is most important is if you listen there’s nothing totally either way. You can listen to a debate, an hour of what you know is righteousness, and if they talk long enough you’ll be able to see some wrongs about it. And you can listen to something that is supposed to be totally wrong but if they talk long enough there maybe certain points that could be possibly right.

It’s like the scale of balance and it takes all people to make a beautiful world.

At the start of the ’70s you left The Impressions, but amicably.

Well, The Impressions were part of Curtom, my own record label.

Of course. When did you start that and why?

Oh wow, I think it was right after we recorded “We’re A Winner” in 1966 or ’67. Our contract with ABC Records had expired and I decided to form Curtom Records. I’ve always been about wanting to own as much of myself as possible, and after finding that we were basically doing all the promoting out on the road and we were doing all the running, I was ready to get into the record business. We formed Curtom Records and The Impressions signed up with me.

So come 1970, while we still came out with things like “Check Out Your Mind”, and we were still seeing certain amounts of success, being the lead singer kept me out on the road 11 months a year. How can you run a record company on one end and you’re out on the road at the other end? It didn’t make sense. I felt that I should involve myself more with company and business and make it of some value for a group that was so strong.

However, I didn’t want to retire myself as an artist. Even by bringing in Leroy Hutson as the new lead singer, I found myself writing a bit deeper and getting off into other things as to my own

“Super Fly looked to me more like an advertisement for cocaine”

Curtis performs solo on USTV in 1973. His *Back To The World* album that year dealt with the Vietnam war

GETTY



creativity, which brought out about the album *Curtis*. So maybe it was a blessing in disguise, and now Curtom had two artists.

What other things were you getting into creatively?

Well, I guess my lyrics. Say, for instance, the *Curtis* album. I had always been writing songs of inspiration that for the era seemed to be controversial. During the time "Choice Of Colors" came out, it was a different kind of song that rock'n'roll groups were doing. But here come the 70s and I found myself not only speaking inspirationally, I found myself also wanting to relate to my own, but in a different fashion.

Like, "We People Who Are Darker Than Blue" or "If There's A Hell Below", then, of course "Miss Black America"... this is where I found myself lyrically and creatively going, as well as the pretty things and the uptempo things. I've always been able to write more clearly when either my emotions were aroused or I could see into others' emotions and sensitivities and real values.

In your solo work you're both optimistic and pessimistic about affairs. Which one's the strongest trait in your character?

Well, they say that under the sign of Gemini he's more pessimistic than optimistic. I am optimistic or I probably couldn't have succeeded as far as I have in this world.

However, I use my pessimism. I will test the waters before I jump in. I will see how deep the hole is before I allow myself to fall in. I'll never jump off without using the pessimistic imbalance. They both can be of value. You can be over-confident, or you can be under-confident, but if you use both you realise that they can both be of value and that they can work for you.

You also created a new sound within soul music with your earlier works.

Oh yeah, I would think so. Lyrically and instrumentally. Songs like "Other Side Of Town". (Points at my notes) I notice you have some lyrics there from "Jesus"...

That's from your LP *There's No Place Like America Today*...

Which was one of my favourite albums. I liked the way it come off for me. It's funny, it took a certain mood to come up and come out with *There's No Place Like America Today*, because I didn't know how people would view it.

I found that in Africa people really appreciated that album, that I was writing songs that in context, for many, seemed to be more depressed but it seemed like the times. The economics were down, people were out of work and it just came off with "Blue Monday People", "When Seasons Change" and "Billy Jack", which was about a dude who was shot.

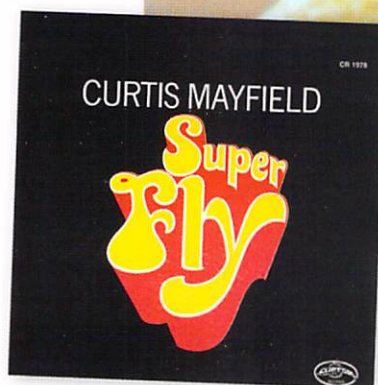
I found that for me it gave a lot of truth because many times that I am writing, I'm writing for me. It's almost like giving myself a sermon. Just allowing your mind to come out and then come back, read it and put it all in some kind of sensible manner. You can even listen to it and correct it if it's not totally what your head is about.

How did you approach *Super Fly*?

Well, it was probably one of the best eras because there were the clothes, there was the movie and there was an artist that laid out a lyric in depth that allowed them to accept the movie. Then there were the fads and there was even the introduction of what has been here a long time with people, getting off into cocaine. They were having a lot of fun.

How did you react to the drugs scene, especially within the black circles?

There was no great reaction because all my life I've seen people dealing in



drugs and using drugs, or smoking reefers, drinking liquor or taking aspirin! (Laughs) We're all, on both sides of the continent, drug orientated. Nothing allows you to use your head and let the body heal itself. They say, how do you feel? Here, take this whether it be on the legit side or the illegit side.

I had no great reaction about that except that I might note that while the script read one way, when it came to the screen the priest who was *Super Fly*... it looked to me as though it was more an advertisement for cocaine because it was just overly done.

And so be it because it put me on the fence enough to go a little deeper and make what I was about with the film, which was anti-drugs, where I could go to depths and speak a little deeper about what was really going on, while I knew that the media would look at the surface and the glitter, the big Cadillac and the clothes. But if it could be balanced out, that you could appreciate and enjoy the glitter but know in your head the facts of reality, then it's OK.

I take it you've never been seriously involved with drugs?

Well, I take the Fifth Amendment on that! (Laughing) However, I'm not strung out or hung up. I don't smoke, I don't drink and at the moment I'm free and clear of conscience as to any drugs.

Your solo work during the '70s also coincided with the Marvin Gayes, Stevie Wonders and Last Poets of the world, who were exploring similar topics to you. Did you feel an empathy with any of them?

Yeah, anytime they said the real things you had to join forces and feel a part of it. And you'd like to think that some of your earlier sayings were influences. »

1983

JULY – SEPTEMBER



"I guess... disco wasn't me": Mayfield in Los Angeles in 1981

To me, that was all beautiful during those times because there were things that related from one group to another, and you could feel masses really taking it in and understanding what they were all about and really using their heads. I'm a believer in (starts a little dancing movement) shake your shaggy, shaggy, but have some food for thought, too. Why not enjoy both?

But what effect has that music upon people?

(Firmly) Pride, independence, more value in relationships in family, more value on giving respect so you can earn respect, whether it be white and black or people of different continents. Social gatherings that don't explode in your face because people are in harmony and the music is of a value that helps keep them there.

I think there's nothing like you going somewhere socially and the music is of a value... it's not a preaching thing, you're still enjoying people, but the music is of a level where it's not diverting your head. You can dance, you can lay back and listen to real lyrics, and it brings you about socially where you can relate with others. You can give debate, listen to debate and that's what that kind of music is all about.

Whereas some musics, you don't realise it, but it's going against your grain or it's too loud or it's not saying nothing, or it's monotony.

Given that then, is it hard for you to reconcile your religious beliefs with all the injustices around in the world?

Sometimes it is because He made a very unfair world. However, that's just how I sometimes see it. It may take more knowledge, or more understanding, or maybe I ought to get deeper off to bring it all together. But whatever it is, it works for the world. I have to understand that the world and all the elements here work for it.

But for any one individual species in the world it can be terribly unfair. Look at the animals and how they have to survive and how they have to die and how sometimes, when they've got their thing together, an element from somewhere else comes and destroys it.

It's not because of them living wrong or not being righteous. It's because from somewhere something else come down on it and it's gone. It's unfair for one, but then it proves that these over here had to feed their babies, so

you look at that and you say, well, I can understand that. So it is in our social structure. Someone has to pay whether it be fair or not. Usually, it's unfair for somebody else.

Or you look at it on a larger structure. It's a beautiful day, everybody's doing OK and I'll be damned, there's an earthquake and 20,000 people just gone! Is that fair! You look at it on TV and you can accept it, but if you're in that predicament how are you going to think? You look up to your God and you say, I'll be damned! What's happening? I changed ten years ago! I got everything right, now everything is wrong.

Such is life. We all accept it. God gave us all minds to be curious, controversial and whatever we've got to say we can say it, and that helps a lot because if you couldn't you'd probably blow up.

It serves its purpose, because how else could I take on the role and want to be optimistic, to say, hey! everything is going to be alright when I haven't experienced what is the worst?

It should be understood that nothing is fair. We just have the mind and the mental ability to try and make it as fair and as sweet, based upon our principles and our society, as we possibly can. But we still kill up all the cows and eat them. We bring up chickens and eat them. We take some land over here and those people

got to suffer...

Does that refer to the balance scale you sing about on *Honesty*?

Oh yeah, I think I was speaking on (begins to hum) "*Third World say...*" Ah! I forget my lyrics... I have to hear those songs for them to come back, but it probably was. Then I end up saying, "There's no answer, what are you going to do?" No one individual can change anything.

Which you also say on "*Jesus*" from *America Today*.

Yeah: "*Don't call me a saint because there's nothing I can do. All I ask of you is that you do as I gotta do myself and look into my inner self, only you know how to be free.*"

You live and you grasp all of life that you can, but who is to say that life is to be anything but to survive? And the masterplan is to survive and replenish. That's all.

“Who is to say that life is to be anything but to survive?”

What happened to Curtis Mayfield in the latter part of the '70s?

During the latter part of the '70s I went off. I had my children and I raised them. I lived another part of my life which was just as fulfilling and probably more successful for my own head than the success you're speaking about through my records and making money and seeing my name in headlights. Sometimes that conflicts against home life and just being what an earthly person is all about.

Can you imagine having your children and you're such a figure in the world that people run into you and your children are dispersed? They

want autographs, you belong to them and you're not thinking that you're just a person with a family, trying to give them a little now. You must put all things in perspective.

Even so, you've been a respected 'name' since 1958.

Which has been a beautiful fulfilment for me and which only makes you need other things for yourself. For a body to be totally fulfilled it must have many things, and when you go to any one excess and you ignore the

other needs you are not a fulfilled person. Matter of fact, you can go haywire if they all don't come in balance. So the question you ask is almost like, why aren't you a Quincy Jones? Or why aren't you successful like these people over here?

Everybody has their own individual success, hopefully they are capable of putting it all into perspective where they can still be a happy person and lead a clear life as to what they are all about. If not, the success and the money was only for the media, to be totally exploited out of the individual's context because making money and being a person, a big person, all it is, is exploitation to earn bucks.

Hopefully, there is some value in it as to where we can respectively still say, well you've earned bucks from all the media, but was there anything said that people can use?

I'd like to think that my lyrics, or whatever I've done, have at least been of some value to the consumer. However, when the consumer moves on to other things, I shouldn't be so hung up about my own success that I can't learn to come back down in the balance of just being people.

As a matter of fact, success for a person, woman or man, is probably of more value as to, how does the man lose? How does the man fail? Can he or she get up again? How do they take on just being after having rode up in the air? How do they take on having to crawl on the ground? Only when you can accept both in the cycle do I see a person as successful. Then it's about his survival, his wit and his ability to still carry on and not be so influenced as to either end that he can't be a normal person.

Well, those latter-day albums, *Heartbeat*, *Do It All Night*...

Heartbeat I enjoyed. *Do It All Night*, I think everyone was locked up into disco and really, I guess... disco wasn't me. Or, there wasn't enough time for me to adapt to disco creatively. I don't think I was the greatest producer or performer at what great disco is about. So I tried and failed, in my opinion.

Through those years you also went through quite a few record labels.

We started off with Buddah, then we went to Warner Brothers, from Warner Brothers we went to RSO, and RSO was probably the shortest and last of the distributions. It was pending on the business and of course our ability to make money. They are all investments in a creative person and, in order for you to be creative, you've got to earn money somewhere, just to be out there.

It must have been difficult adapting to impersonal big companies after running the show yourself with Curtom.

Yeah, it sure was (laughing) because all my life has been, even on the up and coming... I had some kind of little label. In the end I decided to go with Neil Bogart of Boardwalk Records, and it was something that you adjusted yourself to. I was sorry to see Neil leave because he was, in my opinion, the key to whatever we were trying to do as far as Boardwalk was concerned. When he left it was like the last of the parents to leave.

Are you still with Boardwalk?

No, I'm not. I'm a free agent.

Does that worry you?

No.

Because I felt *Honesty* was a real return to form...

Yeah, I felt so too. But in my opinion I had no strength or believers in the company, and that's very important for an artist.

Are you still content with your life and the way it's going?

Yeah, I'm still doing the things I like to do, that I love. It's not necessary that it earns as big a buck that it sometimes did. I just believe in myself enough to think I'll always get by.

How do you feel about living in America?

The album?

No, actually living in the States.

Oh, it's my home. I feel good in it.

Any thoughts on Reagan?

Hey, he's accepted just like I accepted many other presidents. Remember it isn't the president, it's the people. They're the ones that hit the news, but remember they're the ones the people brought in whether it be a mistake or not. Who's to say that a country and its masses can't make mistakes? We all do. However, that's home and how I feel about it is like asking me how I feel about my family and my children and where I live. I accept his poor qualities just as much as I accept his good qualities.

But you are anti-nuclear missiles.

Well, those things sometimes come about. That doesn't mean everyone isn't anti-nuclear. Either way we're going to go. (Laughs) We're probably far too gone to give and take. The only good thing about it is that it won't harm the actual world. It will just replenish itself and it's got all the time in the world. (Laughs) It's just those who don't have that time, sometimes panic.

Looking over it, it would seem that you place your faith more in actual human relations than any kind of mass political answer.

It's probably because I know that best. Mass political things, to me, are manipulators. That's like 'If there's hell below we are all going to go'. The first thing, as I said earlier, is to gain enough knowledge to find that you are awfully unknowledgeable about everything. It can all become so confusing, and that's just life. However, that's not to say that we don't enjoy life. So be it.

It just seems illogical that your best LP in ages, *Honesty*, shouldn't have succeeded.

Oh, I enjoyed *Honesty*. It was my will to put together something that I thought would be very strong, competitive and maybe something appreciated. However, with all of that, it seemed in my opinion that it was done in vain simply because I had no real outlet for it. So be it. It's happened before many times.

It's probably just at the step of what could be my best. Who knows? You try and not let that break you down, where you can't respond back, because that's what the whole game is. You throw things up and hopefully one or two may stick out of 20 or 30.

What else can you do? You know what I mean? *Paolo Hewitt* •

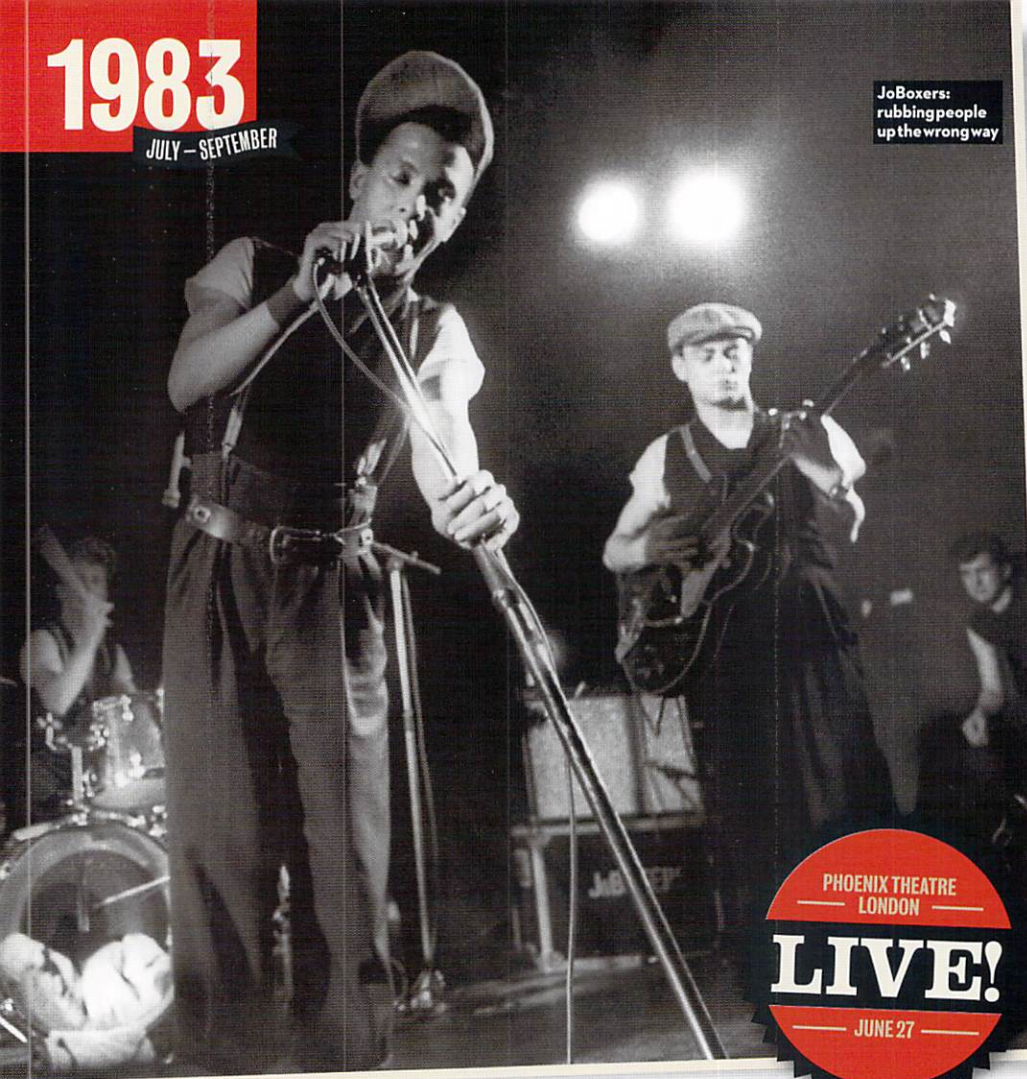
"I'd like to think that my lyrics have been of some value"



1983

JULY – SEPTEMBER

JoBoxers:
rubbing people
up the wrong way



PHOENIX THEATRE
LONDON
LIVE!
JUNE 27

Five working as one

MM JUL 2 JoBoxers' macho image does their intricate songs few favours.

THE TROUBLE JOBOXERS are having to persuade people that their roughneck image has nothing to do with their songs, but just the way they present them, should be terminated by live performance. That it isn't is simply because the people put off by the caps and baggies, boots and macho ID are staying away. This tiny Phoenix Theatre should be packed, but it's not. So what's to be done?

Lord knows but listen; let's cut the crap. The only mystery about JoBoxers isn't "Why won't she?" or, if she will, "Why does she do it with everyone else?" Their aims aren't that provocatively sexist. Yet.

They may look like a gang but they play like a team, and beneath tonight's bruising efficiency and corny bravado lurk some of the keenest and least-appreciated personal examinations currently operating in pop. The Boxers' team is five individuals working as one.

Theirs aren't the gratuitous gangbangs of Slade, but songs of desperate disappointment and rampant lust, bitter jealousy and healing hatred.

Theirs are honest, individualist statement songs that swagger – not as idle boasts but because they've either got something to

swagger about or because the alternative is to break down.

Theirs are good-time songs of personal pride that say "hold your head up", songs that won't have any truck with the miserable, useless self-pitying negativity of the likes of New Order.

But tonight, hampered by a piano that refuses to acknowledge a tune and a guitar that refuses to participate, JoBoxers seem more intent to do battle with their detractors than to play to their strengths and loosen the solidifying setbacks inherent in their image.

Their best song tonight is new and it's brilliant and it's called "She's Got Sex". It's a sharp, witty, sassy, pretty accurate expression of the way many (most?) males feel when the sap's rising. It will, of course, be called oiksome by many and offensive by more. And, of course, it is and it isn't.

I suspect there's no solution. I suspect the

'Boxers will continue to write songs of rare intimacy and intricacy and then spoil them by using them to deliberately rub people up the wrong way. Oh, there will be hits in the charts, but the crowds still won't come and justice won't be done through fear and disgust.

Steve Sutherland

**Beneath tonight's
corny bravado
lurk some of the
keenest personal
examinations in pop**

Depressingly earthbound

MM AUG 13 The Smiths, SPK and Howard Devoto remain unlikely bedfellows.

WELL, YOU CAN always hope, can't yer? Fat lot of good that'll do you on a night like this.

The Smiths were in flight as I arrived; warbling into the gloom as though the indifferent crowd somehow owed them something. Thrumming and strumming like The Farmer's Boys, with cow dung spilling into their waders, The Smiths remained obstinately and depressingly earthbound. I headed for the swarm at the bar.

An A&R man of my acquaintance tried to convince me that SPK were part of some sort of new movement which allegedly also includes Test Department. However, it will take more than his generous offer of women and drugs to convince me that a man beating on packing cases with lengths of car bumpers and a female singer who blends the worst of Siouxsie with out-takes from Lohengrin will ever be more than an excruciating racket.

Finally, Mr Devoto and his group took the stage. Howard strove to project an offhand bonhomie but failed miserably, leading his team into a rendition of "Way Out Of Shape" which sounded like a jaded country & western band plugging in for the fifth set of the night.

Despite loose-limbed versions of "You Never Knew Me" and "A Song From Under The Floorboards", Howard delivered little to make me disagree with Professor Worrall's hostile review of a couple of weeks back. Of his new songs, only "Rainy Season" came close to competing with the balding guru's past masterpieces, and even this was scarcely show-stopping.

Dave Formula exhibited no little subtlety at his keyboards, while Alan St Clair showed his guitar no quarter, but Howard seemed unable to do more than skate through the motions. Casual to the point of absent-mindedness, Devoto simply didn't seem to care, and by the end of the proceedings, nor did I.

The tide's gone out, Howard.
Adam Sweeting

LYCEUM
LONDON
LIVE!
AUGUST 7

Something almost unheard of



MM JUL 30 Duran Duran make a triumphant homecoming.

IF YOU STRAIN your eyes and peer back, way back into the sea of hands stretched above the heads keeping the beat of "Careless Memories" alive long after the song itself has ceased in a thunderous crescendo and the band has quit the stage, you can just make out the message on the sheet-and-bamboo banner tottering precariously above the cheering throng:

"WELCOME HOME DURAN DURAN, WE LOVE YOU!"

Duran Duran at Villa Park was not only an event that everybody present – band, fans and officials alike – will remember for the rest of their lives. It was a significant experience, a dream dawning into reality, the emergence of a major talent and a standard set for live performance so high that many are destined to try and match it and, I fear, most are destined to fail.

Or, as you've probably gathered by now, if you were daft or unfortunate enough not to be there you missed out on something very special because this was probably Duran Duran's best gig ever. Irrespective of how the band performed, the return to Brum was bound to be a highly charged, emotional reunion between Duran and their fans, but the orchestration and sheer magnitude of their triumph was stunning evidence of how far Duran have superseded all competition, how firmly they've become beloved of the fickle affections of this nation's young ladies, and how surely they've mapped out and followed through the manoeuvres of success.

They're doing something almost unheard of; they're peaking on a turning point, hitting mass popularity just as they're improving,

expanding and exploring. Just as they're growing sure enough to trust their own judgement and realise the essence of Duran Duran lies not in the synthesis of aping their heroes (they've long outgrown that!) but in the unique chemistry of five individuals.

They're setting sail on a voyage of discovery and, the marvellous thing is, they're taking a fair percentage of the world's youth along with them.

Framed against a monumental backdrop of classical pillars of pulsing light, Duran's Villa show was an emotional farewell, a step back into the future, characteristic enough to be accessibly familiar but so extraordinary in some senses that even the band were forced, later that night, to reassess their own idea of themselves.

Some songs played at Villa Park will, almost certainly, never be performed again – Duran have progressed past the enthusiastic but one-dimensional "Planet Earth" and sound uncomfortable struggling with the excess burden of ideas never fully integrated into "Nightboat".

"Friends Of Mine" and "My Own Way" were considered prime candidates for the chop, but the former suddenly stretched into a flexible vehicle for le Bon's increasingly dramatic vocal ambitions. The latter, pounding to an exhilarating and impromptu staccato halt, shocked the band into contemplating its reprieve.

Other confirmed favourites also behaved as if they couldn't afford complacency under the threat of the sprightly opener "Is There Something I Should Know" (never performed live before this week, remember), the raucous, taut and deceptively ramshackle encore of Iggy Pop's "Funtime" and the as-yet underdeveloped but rhythmically colossal

"Union Of The Snake".

Just as Duran proved at Villa Park that they're not content to let their reputation do their talking for them, so their songs responded to new challenges. "Girls On Film", for instance, sounded uncannily as if it was written three years ago with the present "big band" lineup in mind, so easily did it

accommodate and luxuriate in the twists and thrusts of sax, percussion and backing vocals.

Much has been made of Duran's dependence on tried, true, and allegedly dubious methods to achieve success, and certainly, within their stage presentation, there's astute showbiz calculation. Simon le Bon – not the world's greatest dancer – has been ridiculed as a bar-room Elvis mimic, Andy Taylor's storming gallops around the stage have been traced back to AC/DC's Angus Young and John Taylor's scream-inducing hip swivels on the lip of the stage have encouraged accusations of arrogance.

In a way, these criticism are just but, typically, Duran turn them all to their advantage. What the casual observer sees as le Bon's poorly studied panoply or rock poses,

communicates in its very inexpertness as sincere, expressive gestures to the fans.

JT's cockiness contains enough of the star to encourage adulation but also enough of the nod and wink to be a laugh, and Andy's guitar heroics add yet another dimension to Duran's already multi-faceted appeal. They can be everything to anybody, and thus no one – from Thin Lizzy followers to Jam devotees – need feel ashamed to enjoy them. This is not to say that they lack identity; on the contrary, it's a testament to their individuality that they scorn categorisation.

One need only compare their instant and genuinely won rapport with even the furthest corners of Villa Park to the comparative failures of support acts Prince Charles and Robert Palmer to appreciate Duran's intuitive and acquired expertise.

Prince Charles is, of course, the coarse street-funkster in chief; a man with a massive ego, a couple of songs almost fit to flatter it and the most turgid and clichéd live show imaginable. His rabble-rousing antics and patent insincerity cause no more than minor ripples around the immediate rim of the stage while his band of butchers bludgeoned even his most memorable numbers like "Cash Money" into hollow, heavy metal theatrics.

Robert Palmer was equally disappointing, the intimacy and subtlety of his songs lost in the cavernous arena and his unwillingness to meet the crowd half way resulting in his set never achieving a status beyond that of sluggish background music. Segueing minor hit into minor hit with barely an introduction, Palmer sank into his songs rather than trying to sell them and, great soul voice or not, he left us looking for clues as to why he couldn't enhance emotion with a little motion.

And so, unsurprisingly, the day belonged to Duran. Of the 20,000-or-so at Villa Park last Saturday, I'll bet no one, but no one, went home less than elated. *Steve Sutherland*



John Taylor: scream-inducing hip swivels

No one – from Thin Lizzy followers to Jam devotees – need feel ashamed to enjoy them



1983

JULY - SEPTEMBER

“The kings of doom”

More and more successful in spite of themselves, **THE CURE** remain mysterious. Members come and go, **ROBERT SMITH** admits. “I suppose I must be hard to work with,” he says. “I think it’s because I have a clear idea of how things should be approached.”



The post-Pornography
core Cure: Lol Tolhurst
and (right) Robert Smith

FIN COSTELLO / GETTY

— MELODY MAKER AUGUST 13 —

“I WORK ON MY own and other people work with me... that's The Cure.”

Oh God, here we go again. I mean, are The Cure or aren't they?

Pale as death, draped round the door frame, shirt undone, eyes focusing vaguely, Robert Smith picks out a few faces. He lurches forward and teeters precariously. He has just eaten fish, the first solid morsel, so he says, to have passed his lips for almost a week.

He feels sick. He's on a diet. He sips lemonade shakily, passes his hand absently through his hair and explains why he must go to bed.

“I've been hallucinating,” he whispers, to himself as much as to anyone else. “I just kept seeing faces... faces... everywhere...”

Hunger, habit and the nervous exhaustion of two impromptu gigs have sapped his energy and dulled his spirit. He apologises, sways and retires. So we still don't know: do The Cure really exist, if not why not, and if so, who are they?

“As it 'appens, guys 'n' gals... the sons of Dracula...”

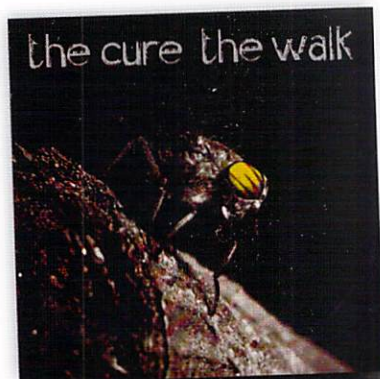
The Cure on *Top Of The Pops* was an event almost as absurd as Jimmy Savile's inanity. They looked and acted bored but, all across the nation, Cure fans, Cure converts and folks who can't tell The Cure from Culture Club, and couldn't care less, interpreted Smith's stifled yawns as enigmatic arrogance. Such is the power of reputation. Such is the impact of dressing in black.

Last Christmas I recited the “Alas poor Yorick” epitaph over the corpse of The Cure, cradled Smith's skull in my lap and pronounced this Prince Hamlet poisoned by a crippling sycophantic popularity.

Unwittingly I was wrong. I'd arranged a premature burial: either an imperceptible pulse was beating through that cold corpse, or this creature miming the motions on *Top Of The Pops* is the king's ghost come back to demand revenge on the traitorous and cowardly charts.

Whatever, people are taking “The Walk” to heart and I don't even know why it was made, let alone from whence sprang the unprecedented surge of sanity that galvanised the public into spending their cash on such a deserving record. I mean, why display taste, why change the habit of a lifetime?

ROBERT SMITH IS now sprawled on a dirty white towel on a grey shingle beach, refreshed by a long night's sleep and still dripping from a dip off the Cornish coast. Raising himself on one elbow, he ponders the priorities and plans, the faults and finesse of The Cure now and never. In four hours' time he will rise, leave the side of his deathly pale girlfriend Mary and coolly enthrall thousands who have undertaken the pilgrimage to the Elephant Fayre to pay homage to his tortured muse.



Right now, though, he just stares out to sea and says: “One of the reasons you thought what you did, that we sort of stopped after the last album, *Pornography*, was because things had become too structured and we were obligated to do too much.

“One of the ways out of that – even though it wasn't considered at the time, I think it was always hovering – was that if it became not a group then we would be under no obligation to do anything. Now no one really knows what's going on, except for me... and even I don't know what's going on some of the time.”

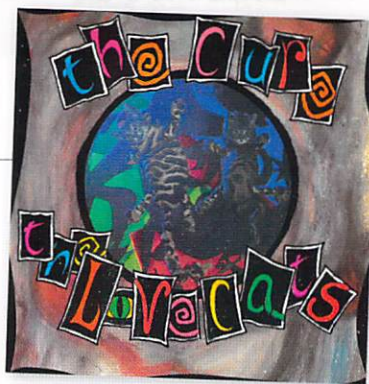
He's neither stoned nor revelling in some acquired vagueness. Robert Smith means it.

“I don't feel ready to have a formal Cure again, it seems unnecessary at the moment.”

Today, in the south-west of England, next week in America, and in 10 days' time, cutting a new single in Paris, The Cure will be Robert Smith, Lol Tolhurst (the original drummer turned keyboard player), Andy Anderson (the brilliant ex-Brilliant drummer) and Phil

“If it became not a group, then we would be under no obligation to do anything”: London, 1983





Thornalley, the co-producer of *Pornography*, on bass. After that it's back to scratch. Lol stumps up the beach to explain.

"After five or six years we've had a lot of people through, but in the end it worked out that only me and Robert really got on with each other permanently, for a long time. I think it's because we've known each other since we were five and we don't take each other that seriously.

"I never thought The Cure would pack up because there's too much of a bond between me and Robert to ever let it fade away. There's loads of times when we've said, 'we don't want to see each other for this length of time' or 'we can't do this, we can't do that,' but in the end there's always something that brings us back. It's like a shared history, the fact that we remember all the things we've done together before and it triggers off something. Maybe it's like a recall of people's emotions...

"I mean, the thing that keeps it moving is change more than anything else, just the need to change. Like, why I changed to keyboards was because I'd gone as far as I wanted with drums and, when we started, we never specifically decided on the idea of a band as such. It was just a group of people all interested in the same kind of thing and we'd work things out from that..."

Smith shuffles on the shingle but shows no sign of remorse.

"I suppose I must be hard to work with over a period of time," he admits, "I think it's mainly because I have a clear idea of how things should be approached, how they should be worked out and how they should end up, and I suppose that people just get fed up with that single-mindedness. That's understandable – I don't hold any grudges or beefs about people coming and going, but anyone that's been in the band has always known that compromises only go up to a certain line, and after that I make the decisions.

"The Cure's evolution just follows what I'm like and I can't really plan it. I mean, I can see the different phases in retrospect; like *Three Imaginary Boys* is very naïve; we were really young when those songs were written, and then *17 Seconds* and *Faith* are really uncertain records, and *Pornography* is quite violent.

"Things are only done like that after a certain amount of experience and, when that phase is coming to an end, then it is catalogued, which is how it's been done in the past and why there hasn't been anything forthcoming in the recent past since *Pornography* – because there's nothing there that's motivated me enough to think, 'Oh! You ought to do something about that!'"

That "nothing forthcoming in the recent past" conveniently circumvents two singles: "Let's Go To Bed", a failed disco excursion, and "The Walk", The Cure's recent top 10 hit. Smith draws his knees to his chin and explains.

"I just wanted to see if I could write a really dumb pop song that would get played on the radio, because I hadn't written anything like that for ages and ages. 'Let's Go To Bed' was a conscious effort to write something very pop, but it wasn't supposed to be a Cure single, it was supposed to be a solo single so that I just took the blame for it. I didn't want the name of The Cure to be tainted with a single like that, but there was a lot of rows and bad feeling around that time and so it got released as The Cure."

He grimaces, an uncharacteristic gesture that expresses his disgust.

"It wasn't commercial anyway. I realised when I did it – which is why I lost interest in it – that it wasn't horrible enough, it just wasn't quite dumb enough to be commercial. It didn't get anywhere, it didn't ever get played on the radio."

Lol attempts to ease the depression. "I think it was successful, though. We're always trying to change people's ideas of us, especially people who think of us as a bit po-faced, y'know, the kings of doom. A lot of people think we don't have a lighter side to ourselves, so it was like a funny experiment.

"'The Walk' was another experiment because we'd been very orthodox in the way that we'd used things before so we decided to do something all electronic. That's why we had Steve Nye to produce it, because we heard the stuff he'd done with Japan on *Tin Drum* and, although that's all electronic, it sounds acoustic."

"If you feel upset then maybe, with us, there's an exorcism"

"THE NEXT SINGLE," says Robert, "will again be just an oddity. I mean, like 'The Walk' is not really a part of The Cure's evolution, in a sense the idea of The Cure stopped with *Pornography* and won't be carried on again until we do another album or until I sit down and seriously do something.

These singles exist purely because I'm writing songs and if I write one that I think's good enough to be released on a record I put it out, but I see them as entertainment, whereas something like *Pornography* I thought of as much more than that.

Pornography was about things that have far more far-reaching effect, it was far more considered about... I dunno... some of the horrors that people go through just in everyday living I suppose. 'The Walk' is really just about an isolated incident – it's just like a dream sequence. I just didn't want to restrict myself to doing something which necessarily had to be very... passionate, I suppose."

So The Cure, as often accused, are contrived?

"No. All the records reflected how I felt at the time they were made. I was pretty doomy and gloomy when I did *Faith*, immensely doomy and gloomy in fact. Otherwise it would just be like a Tears For Fears sort of band – you'd be doing things that are transparent. Everything we've done has been... it's an awful word but, honest, our songs have actually represented life as it's seen by members in the band.

"People used to criticise me for wandering off into unreality, but that's one of the most ridiculous criticisms we've ever faced in that there's absolutely no such thing as unreality. I mean, how I perceive reality is probably totally different from how you perceive it. I hope so, anyway, some of the things you come up with!"

Thanks Robert. So what's the big deal with The Cure's perception? What is it that people find in Smith's private terror to titillate them?

"A bit of insanity? I dunno... It's like asking what I get out of listening to New Order or Joy Division. I mean, when I heard *Closer*, it didn't make me want to go and throw myself in the sea, but it reflected a lot of things that I thought and there's a fair few people that do things, not just in music but in the arts in general, that reflect parts of what I consider my own character and do it far better than me a lot of the time. I mean, I'm probably more critical of what we've done than anybody!"

"I try not to analyse it," says Lol, paddling. "It's a bit of fatalism maybe... an unsettling thing... it's not angst... what it is, is if you feel upset then maybe, with us, there's an exorcism. That's the nearest thing I can think of. I dunno... I've tried for ages to think up a phrase or some word that could describe it but I can't. It's probably a good thing because once you get to the stage where you can describe it, then the problem or the need to relieve it isn't there."

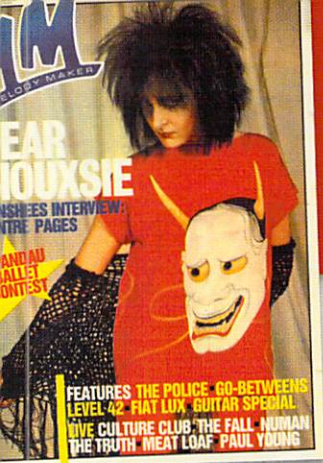
These words, openly uttered ankle-deep in cold water, are tantamount to an admission that The Cure are content to wallow and survive. It's the act of exorcism... no, the exorcism itself that fuels their creativity and the more you get to wondering why, the more you get to think that, yes, maybe this is one big miserable pose.

Have The Cure never gagged at the stench in a vandalised phone box? Have they ever witnessed an incontinent drunk split his head on the floor? Have they ever come home to find the walls smeared with shit and the cat's head kicked in? Do The Cure live in the real world at all or does Smith's argument that individual perception is all justify The Cure's egocentric existence?

And so you spend 24 or so hours on and off with The Cure and Lol talks of being bottled in a bar while Smith sleeps off his exhaustion. He talks of being run down by buses while Smith dreams of drowning, he discusses cannibalism while Smith struggles with slumber, he admits he couldn't cosh a rabbit out of its misery even if he could perhaps eat a corpse if his plane crashed in the Alps.

And you realise The Cure are not playing with fire for the thrill of it. Even relaxed and joking on the beach, they can't help but notice the frail skin that divides security from disaster. They can't help but be fascinated by fear.

The Cure aren't a cure, but they're no complaint either. Look around at the ills infecting the charts and be thankful for that fact alone. *Steve Sutherland* •



1983

OCTOBER — DECEMBER

THE GO-BETWEENS,
FRANKIE, THE SMITHS,
JOHN LYDON AND MORE



"Nearly all the
new music I like is
British": Madonna
photographed on
October 14, 1983

"I like to be at the centre of things"

MM NOV 5 A strong new dance music
personality. Introducing... Madonna.

YOU HAVE TO see Madonna on stage to really understand. Here is a special kind of spell; a fantasy both innocent and seductive. She dances with a classical grace and a professional's poise, but that's not all. For her to pull the microphone down between her legs, to open her red mouth and tilt back this child's face is somehow a sex cliché made fresh. How she can make such a heavy metal stance seem vital is a mystery that makes her fascinating. The way she moves with her team of dancers is nothing like you've seen before. Light years away from facile disco prancing and the fierce pump'n'grind of funk, they describe moods almost too noble for the music itself; motions rudely spiked with the frank images of sexual voyeurism.

Her appearance is strangely disconcerting too: a devil angel's face straight out of the monochrome pages of Kenneth Anger's *Hollywood Babylon*, and a small, tight body whose soft curves are more friendly than enticing. Between these two extremes, the knowing temptress and the little girl, exists a tension that is the essence of the whole exercise.

Of course, it's nothing new, and Madonna would be the first to admit that, pointing to the obvious spectres of Marilyn Monroe and Frances Farmer. But this isn't a game for amateurs; played badly it seems tawdry and crass. That she makes it work suggests that this isn't so much a part as a genuine projection. Maybe Madonna gets away with it all because it's as real as real gets.

Raised in the charged atmosphere of an Italian Catholic family in Detroit, she made a point of learning how to win exclusive attention in a competitive environment. Aiming to be a dancer, she started training in her pre-school days before enrolling at the University of »

PETER ANDERSON

BREATHLESS

MADONNA comes from New York and
everywhere. Well, that's
breaks into it.

Michigan to study ballet and modern dance. Moving to New York, she worked with a couple of dance troupes, dabbled in movies and then decided that music was her true calling. It all sounds like some sickly re-run of *Fame*, but she wastes no time in denouncing this new gilded version of the American dream in leotards. "Let me tell you," she says acidly, "my experience has nothing at all to do with that particular brand of escapism—I mean only a sucker would believe that stuff!"

After grubbing around Manhattan with various uncommitted punk groups she decided to get back to her roots in dance music and start writing for herself. Armed with a demo tape and her own compelling personality, she touted round the major labels, finally meeting up with Sire boss Seymour Stein, the man who signed Talking Heads and then made millions out of property and antiques.

"Seymour actually signed me up in hospital," she recalls fondly. "He was having his heart cleaned out! It was such a strange situation. I mean, here I am going into a hospital to meet this man I've never met before who's sitting there in his jockey shorts and drip feed in his arm! He was like drugged out of his mind as well, y'know."

"But he loved my tape—he was the only one who said I could go straight into the studio. Epic, Geffen, Atlantic, they all wanted more demos. So I thought, 'Well he seems like a nice man,' and Sire had this reputation as a label that took chances. What did I have to lose?"

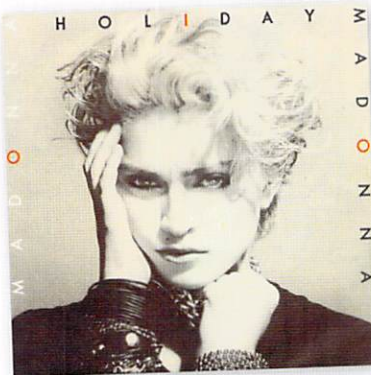
Her debut album is a slick amalgam of rock, funk and disco, the various strands of influence forged finely together by producer Reggie Lucas, a name usually associated with

black vocalists like Stephanie Mills and Phyllis Hyman. Madonna's singing brings to mind another black artist as well, the Michael Walden protégée Stacy Lattisaw, but unlike Stacy, Madonna's fire-and-desire lyrics conjure up a stronger and altogether more saleable image.

Despite her bedroom-wall potential, success has so far largely been supported by the black and hispanic communities, but the release of "Burning Up" and the accompanying video could rapidly change all that. Madonna pouts, pants and beats the ground in a frenzy of contrived frustration. Hands desperately pushing up her hair, she pleads, "*Do you wanna see me down on my knees.../Unlike the others I'd do anything/I'm not the same, I have no shame/I'm on fire, you know you got me burning up, baby! Burning up for your love.*"

In a way it's preposterous and then again there's this undeniable attraction in watching someone who just doesn't care about the rules of good taste and who can say and do the most outrageous things and still seem charming.

Considering her performance, with more heavy breathing than a marathon she comments: "Well I am passionate! That's the Latin in me. I'm also very manipulative, I like to be at



the centre of things. But as well as this outward aggressive side there's a part of me that's very shy. "You see I think it's really important to make yourself vulnerable to people in a performance. On the other hand it's nice to keep your

distance, too. I've always thought the most charismatic people have those dual opposites."

Here she recalls the seminal figures of the old Hollywood, stars that came out a period that now appears touchingly naive when compared to the '80s. "But I still think it's possible to stay open and childlike. There are basic human elements there no matter what the time is—they transcend era and fashion. I think it is very important to maintain the child in yourself. I think the people who aren't afraid to stay like that are the people who always come up with the freshest ideas."

In fact Madonna's "ideas" aren't the most original under the sun, but the enthusiasm and verve with which she presents them give them a new lease of life, a spark that let's you believe

she could have dreamt up the whole sweet-bad girl scam herself. Her recent show at the Camden Palace proved she had plenty of resources to cope with the unexpected (the complete collapse of the sound system) and the typically icy London crowd (something she'd already experienced earlier this year).

"Sire had this reputation as a label that took chances. What did I have to lose?"

While she's anxious to attract "the kind of people who might like Grace Jones", her current ambitions don't stretch beyond the celebration of teenage passion. "The world is in such a bad shape at the moment—who wants to hear about it in songs," she opines. "They want songs about falling in love and being lonely."

The incredible success of Grandmaster flash's "The Message" argues that things aren't quite that black-and-white, but Madonna eagerly dismisses their "voice of the people" stance. "I know Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five very well and they are so full of shit! Those guys are well off, believe me, and very sure of themselves."

"I'm tired of hearing records about how we live on the street, y'know; it's a joke at this point. They don't live on the street; that's their image. If you wanna make a hit record you're not living on the street, I'm sorry! And now they're singing about the evils of cocaine—what!"

For someone who lives and works in New York, Madonna has refreshingly balanced attitude about the city every other British dance group is busting to record in. "Actually, I get more of a buzz coming to London," she says, adding that the scramble in search of that Midas touch from Manhattan name producers is just another empty fashion.

"In fact nearly all the new music I like is British," she asserts. And to show her faith the next album will probably be recorded in London. "With all your bands in New York I shouldn't have any problem finding a free studio, don't you think?" Ian Pye



Madonna on Canal Street in New York City, December 1982



Yoko: new joint album with her late husband

"Historical significance"

NME DEC 10 *Milk And Honey* will include Lennon's last six songs.

JOHN LENNON AND Yoko Ono are to be featured on several albums "of major musical and historical significance", according to a statement issued by Polygram Records of New York this week, coinciding with the third anniversary of Lennon's assassination. They will all be released simultaneously worldwide, the UK outlet being via the Polydor label.

The last six songs recorded by Lennon, and never before released, are included on the album *Milk And Honey*, which comes out on 23 January – and it also features six previously unissued Yoko Ono tracks. It will also be available in cassette form, with a 12-page lyric and photo booklet, and it will appear at the same time as a Compact Disc.

Prior to this, tomorrow (Friday) sees the release of the LP *Heartplay: Unfinished Dialogue*, comprising 42 minutes of conversation with the Lennons. It's taken from the original 22-hour tape of one of the last interviews they gave, and it's been separated by Yoko into seven different sections, each covering a different subject.

Sandwiched between these two albums comes a new single on 9 January. The A-side features the classic Lennon song "Nobody Told Me", and it's coupled with a new Yoko song called "O Sanity".



John Lennon

Milk and Honey

Yoko Ono



June 30, 1983: David Bowie onstage at Hammersmith Odeon, London

"We're delighted"

MM OCT 29 Bowie concert benefits Brixton locals.

DAVID BOWIE HAS raised more than £90,000 for a London community group, following his benefit gig at the Hammersmith Odeon in June. And Bowie himself has had some say in how the £93,500 will be spent by the Brixton Neighbourhood Community Association. The success of the Bowie benefit is in stark contrast to the Duran Duran fiasco at Aston Villa football ground, when their charity show for Mencap, an organisation for the mentally handicapped, failed to raise any money at all.

Back in Brixton, the community association are intending to spend £10,000 on a senior citizens programme, and a larger amount will go towards the establishment of a new community centre. The existing premises in Mayall Road have to be vacated by the end of this year to make way for new building. Courtney Laws, association director, says the new centre will be named after David Bowie.

"We're delighted that the Hammersmith Concert was such a great success," he commented this week. "We do believe that the new community centre will be greatly welcomed by the Brixton community and provide well-needed recreational facilities. We have told Mr Bowie that we would like to show our appreciation of his efforts by naming the centre after him."

"Extra time"

MM NOV 26 Black Flag pay the price for bad behaviour.

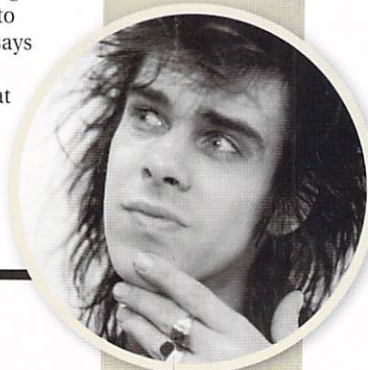
LOS ANGELES PUNK band Black Flag are in Los Angeles County Jail. They were locked up for contempt of court, but their original sentence was extended due to their reported "continuing bad behaviour". The group were sentenced to seven days in prison for releasing records when they were under court orders not to.

A spokesman said: "There was an injunction to stop them releasing any more material as they had a dispute with MCA Records in America. They weren't supposed to release anything until it was sorted out.

"They then released *Everything Went Black*, an album of previously unobtainable recordings, and they continued to put out records on their own label, SST. I suppose they said 'sod it' and thought they could get away with it, despite the injunction. They got locked up a couple of weeks ago, but since then they've been pissing the jail authorities around, so they got extra time. We expect them out next week."

➤ Wham! have this week lost the first leg of their legal battle against their record company, Innervision. A High Court judge has granted a temporary injunction preventing the duo from signing up with any record company. *NME Nov 19*

➤ Motörhead have had to cancel all work for the next several weeks following the collapse of guitarist Brian Robertson at a gig in Hanover. Robertson was examined by a German medical specialist, who diagnosed exhaustion and acute depression as well as respiratory sinus problems. The band have now returned to Britain, and an English specialist has ordered Robertson to go into a rest home for treatment and to take a three-week break from work. *NME Nov 19*



➤ The Birthday Party release a posthumous 12-inch EP on Mute Records this Monday. Entitled "Mutiny!", it features four tracks – "Jennifer's Veil", "Mutiny In Heaven", "Swampland" and "Say A Spell", and was recorded in Berlin earlier this year before the band split. *NME Nov 19*

1983

OCTOBER–DECEMBER

July 27, 1982:
Sun Ra on
stage at The
Venue, London

“Ancient Rome was alright”

MM NOV 19 An audience with Sun Ra: unnamed reader of unknown books, teacher of unattended college courses. “I’m the black sheep of the white race,” he explains.

IN A MEMORABLE moment in *A Joyful Noise*, a winsomely illuminating though technically rancid flick about Sun Ra, the mighty figure is seen turning to the camera straight-faced to declare: “They say history repeats itself. They say history repeats itself. They say history repeats itself. But history is his story. Now you gonna hear MY story.”

A barely perceptible humour appeared to crystallise for a second and then fade; whether it was a wicked glint in his eyes or the faintest trace of a smile at the corner of his lips, there was an unmistakable feeling that what had just occurred was a Ra-rified equivalent of a wink.

Just how serious is this Sphinx-like old sage, the curious, the interested and the committed must all have asked themselves at one time or another? To sing about the planets so consistently, to adapt the attire of an intergalactic Pharaoh and inform people you come from Saturn... just what the hell is this all about?

In person Sun Ra proves most serious indeed, despite the air of incongruity as he sits in an upstairs lobby of the Grosvenor

Hotel, Victoria, knitted Nile-hat perched upon pate as if in imitation of a tea-cosy, folded copies of the *Telegraph* and *Mirror* on knees.

Behind all the mythology and apparent madness, the sci-fi spectacle and manifestos of the mystic, Sun Ra seems like nothing so shocking as an eccentric grandfather, a rather kindly figure dressed, below headgear, in plain brown trousers and mouldy blue pullover that might have been bought in Marks and gently allowed to deteriorate around the rotundity.

Serious indeed. How did he feel about last night’s performances at The Venue, inquires the journalist, opting for a conventional opening gambit of polite, meaningless nibbles before delving into the interview’s meat and veg? But forgetting, stupidly, that the man at his side is hardly – understatement ahead – the conventional subject.

“Society’s movin’ out into space. People will have to, whether they want to or not”

“People are listening to what I’m sayin’, which is more than just a social thing, it’s somethin’ about survival,” replies Ra, before further explication of his theory of the cosmos. Some of this is occasionally hard to follow, though the gist is usually clear.

It’s difficult to follow because Ra – 72 years of age, according to members of his wondrous band, the Arkestra – tends to mumble some.

But before starting on the interview – you read scores of those every week, right? – you probably want to know why you should be listening to how some old guy you’ve only vaguely heard of thinks the universe is all based on equations.

The regular ploy of plugging a new single seems like a good place to begin. Out now is the marvellous *Nuclear War* on Dick O’Dell’s “Y” label, proclaimed to be the first ever Sun Ra 12-inch single. Performed loosely in the style of the Last Poets yet unmistakably stamped with the inimitable character of Ra-dom, it’s a wittily observed rap that shows up virtually everything you will have heard on the radio this month and deserves to be at No 1 for at least 10 weeks, but won’t.

Despite the gravity of its content – a warning of impending apocalypse – there was a sense of joyous, almost vaudevilian bonhomie flying around The Venue when the piece was performed there. The sight of the glitteringly, dazzlingly bedecked Arkestra circling stage and clapping hands to the sweet refrain “*When they push that button, your ass gotta go!*” was enough to have even the most pessimistic members of the nuclear family grinning as if pencils had been forced sideways into mouths. Our asses went, rhythm powered, not fission showered.

Yet this song represents but the merest slither of the Sun Ra experience; in its entirety the most daring and masterly exploration and evocation of styles, moods and periods.

The music is a kaleidoscope of geographical locations and temporal visitations; on one level this is an immaculate swing big band (Ra’s apprenticeship was served as a pianist with Fletcher Henderson in the ‘40s), on others an African percussion ensemble, a soul outfit, a rap crew or avant-garde orchestra.

The Arkestra’s reputation was made as the latter, yet live they are an easily assimilable experience for the uninitiated, underscored by a dynamic, astute sense of pacing; an eclectic’s proverbial dream.

“I’m really playing all types of music,” confirms Ra. “A lot of people think I just play avant-garde, but I can play anything.”

Talking of misconceptions, he denies rumours that “Sun Ra” is just some casually adapted pseudonym. “People say my name is Sonny Blount, but that’s not my name.

"At this point," he continues, "I'm practically close to getting involved in the affairs of this planet on an international scale... 'cos I couldn't do anything on a national scale. They got somebody for that. But they don't have nobody on an international scale to really speak or help other nations without falling to politics or religion or race. Just like the sun shines on everybody; that's what they need on this planet."

"What I was thinking about, I knew it was totally impossible to get musicians on this planet to co-operate and on a world front to present to people what's really happening. But this letter here makes me see there's somethin' else that's backin' me up that's not of this planet."

He hands me a letter from an organisation called "World In Concert" concerning a plan to hold simultaneous concerts in a dozen nations for world peace. In the movie *Space Is The Place* he's depicted giving a world concert, he says. "And here it's comin' up. For 24 hours, each country will present two hours."

"I think that's one of the most wonderful things that's ever happened on this planet; the musicians would be playin' not for money, not for fame, but because they're tryin' to do somethin' for humanity's survival."

"If a lot of musicians get together simply for survival of this planet, whoever owns this planet will be compelled to say, 'There's somethin' of worth on this planet, I'm not gonna destroy it?'"

A pedagogue, Ra did once teach at the University of California, which obviously had fellow academics' brains boggling.

"They didn't like what I was sayin'. They didn't even pay me for two months, they said I was in Egypt. I didn't have too many students. The title of the course was somethin' like 'The Black Man And The Cosmos'. Of course, no white people showed up, well, maybe five or six."

"I always gave them books to refer them to see that side of the truth. Unknown

books. I'm talking about equations, and I was talking about equations that the world had bypassed."

But why does he think not many blacks had turned up, either?

"Well, because they wasn't interested in the cosmos." He pronounces the word cozmose. "They was interested in some money; you know, America's money mad."

Does he feel like an outcast in America, then?

"Well, I made myself like that, because I didn't wanna be part of what they doin'. It's gonna go the way the rest of the kingdoms went. Ancient Egypt was alright, Persia was alright and Greece was alright as far as I'm concerned. I found some fascinating things about those countries. And Ancient Rome was alright, but somethin' happened."

So why does he still live in America, I ventured, noticing the needle stare of one of the Arkestra members just a few feet away. One or two seem to follow Sun Ra around, like bodyguards, referring to their master by his full title.

Ra chews this one over for a few seconds before replying: "I exist there. I don't really live there, because, as you say, I might be an outcast. I'm the black sheep of the white race and the black sheep of the black race... which makes me the blackest of all!" Ra beams, his face lit with mirth; the man may be serious, but he knows how to crack a gag.

Obviously he has used a multitude of ideas and influences from Africa, but has he visited countries in Asia or Latin America and heard music there?

"Well actually, it has been dubbed that way, but I'm not actually really representing Africa," muses Ra. "I would say the closest to it would be Ancient Egypt. Not Egypt today; they doin' some other things; a lot of places they ban music. If music's a universal language that means they're not universal, they're limited on Earth plane. That means they're missin' a lot; they're just lookin' at this planet. They're holdin' onto somethin' that has not proved to be good in the past, is not good now."

"It won't work, you know, because society's movin' out into space. People will have to, whether they want to or not; they should get themselves together in every country to draw attention to the space programme, otherwise you'll have an exodus of leaders from this planet. Leaders are gonna have to lead you, but they gonna be attacked, like recently where in one of the countries they bombed the presidential advisors."

"People need leaders. There's two billion people on this planet; they can't function very well without leaders."

On that point we disagree; but argue over every statement in a Ra interview and you could be detained for aeons.

But who cares? If you fail to adore this man you've flipped.

Lynden Barber



NME DEC 3
Folk-punk
agitator Billy
Bragg's hit list.

Music

La La Means I Love You
The Delfonics
The Tatler Ry Cooder
The Tracks Of My Tears
Smokey Robinson &
The Miracles
Groovy Times The Clash
End Of The Party The Beat
Jeane The Smiths
Sexual Healing Marvin Gaye
Everything I Need Sam & Dave
Song For The Siren This Mortal Coil
Broken Doll Wreckless Eric

Books

Zippystories Bill Griffith
Homage To Catalonia George Orwell
Barrack Room Ballads Rudyard Kipling
Slaughterhouse 5 Kurt Vonnegut
The Day It Rained Forever Ray Bradbury
Shaka Zulu EA Ritter
The Book Of Lists, I & II Wallechinsky,
Wallace, Wallace
The Oxford Dictionary Of Quotations
2000AD (weekly)
Warrior (intermittently)

Films / TV

Badlands, Bloody Kids, Animal House, The
Tin Drum, Whistle Down The Wind, Teenage
Command Performance (The Tami Show),
Blue Remembered Hills, A Kid For Two
Farthings, Goal!, C4's First Love series

Likes

Tea, Ribena (in cartons), trash guitars, the
NHS, Marmite, taking showers, 75% of all
TV programmes (especially the adverts),
photocopiers, playing football, playing gigs

Dislikes

Beer, chocolate, solo performers
who use tapes, dentists, elites
of any kind, breaking strings,
bad technology

Heroes

Frans Masereel, Yuri
Gagarin, Pete Johnson and
Albert Ammons, Eddie
Cochran, Dennis Potter,
William Blake, Holland/
Dozier/Holland, The 1966
England team

Heroines

The Shangri-Las, Nina
Simone (right), Aretha
Franklin, Pauline
Murray, Nastassia
Kinski, Sarah Greene,
those Greenham
Common girls



The Planetary Premiere... SUN RA: A JOYFUL NOISE

The New Film by Robert Mugge



Friday, October 24
7:30 & 9:30 pm
\$2.00
International
House,
3701 Chestnut St.
For more information, call EV 7-5125

Robert Mugge has brought us several acclaimed portraits of influential Philadelphiaans, among them Frank Rizzo (ANATHEUR NIGHT AT CITY HALL, shown on PBS in 1972), A DOCUMENTARY (MELBOURNE), and Father Time (documentary). George Crumb (GEORGE CRUMB: VOICE OF THE WHALE). With SUN RA: A JOYFUL NOISE, he takes on (or is taken on by) perhaps the key figure in avant-garde jazz during the last 25 years. Best known for his pioneering use of electronic keyboards (Ra voice through the floor, luminous, playing wily on a multi-tiered organ topped by a glowing orb), African polyrhythms (as dancers float across the stage, through the air), free-form improvisation (they hand doesn't often know what's coming next, "in the future, they'll know even less," he says), big band boss (the ever-changing Arkestra, eight reeds, three brass, four percussionists, two drummers, guitars, basses, dancers, singers, vibes...), Sun Ra will cut stadiums in Europe, but the Arkestra sometimes outnumbers the audience in the States. His music is part of a personal (perhaps) mythology that sometimes seems of interplanetary travel with musical glimpses of ancient Egypt. His vision is part of a music imbued with unique ritual force.

International Cinema is presented by the Neighborhood Film Project of International House, a non-profit corporation. The series is made possible, in part, by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts (a federal agency), the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, and the 11th Street Museum Foundation.



1983

OCTOBER–DECEMBER

“New and emotional”

THE GO-BETWEENS and their literate, compelling songs just don't seem to fit in. Might it be because they're Australian? “We’re experimenting,” says Grant McLennan. “I do think we’re right at the centre. Eventually all the other dreck will be washed away.”

The Go-Betweens: (l-r)
Grant McLennan, Robert
Forster and new member
Robert Vickers. (Lindy
Morrison is out of shot)



— MELODY MAKER OCTOBER 1 —

THE LEGACY LEFT to this country by The Beatles dies hard...

It's not the fact that there's no home music scene of any great vitality or energy that's so frustrating as much as the feeling

that there ought to be, simply because that's the way it's always worked in the past.

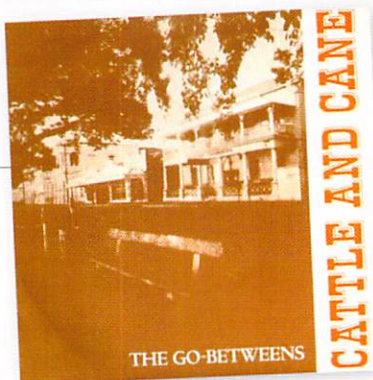
In Britain, we're used to having the spotlight of international attention on our music; we take it for granted that whatever's happening in this country is 'important'. We suffer from the most absurd, inflated superiority complex as a result.

But that's being British for you: Britannia Rules The Waves and all that patriotic, worthless, but frighteningly powerful nonsense. The first industrial nation runs down the plughole to the sound of a vacuously jolly dance of death: the sound of *Top Of The Pops* these days is the sound of a corpse kidding itself that it's full of beans.

Of course, music that provokes surprises and evokes is still produced here, it's just that we no longer expect it as a matter of course. For a less blinkered version we have to keep ears and attitudes tilted towards any number of sources traditionally either dismissed, patronised or only recognised begrudgingly (remember the phrase "Krautrock"?). There are a number of world centres for popular music. That's the way it's always been, it's just that our vanity is less easy to stomach these days.

Probably the most important thing our country has retained is its music industry infrastructure, and though even that's looking sickly and pale at present, it's more than exists in most other places. It's a telling fact that the only essential rock group of the '80s—The Birthday Party—came from Australia. Equally it speaks volumes that they had to come here before their importance was recognised in their home country.

It also says a lot that one of the most gracefully haunting singles of 1983 is by another Australian group; The Go-Betweens' "Cattle And



Cane", a track from their softly textured and sometimes beautifully ethereal second album *Before Hollywood*.

Not that this is part of some crass attempt to build up some mythical Antipodean wave; it's more that The Go-Betweens' country of origin has been of crucial importance in forging their identity. Unlike many groups in this country, they still maintain an

admirable idealism—an uncompromising belief in their music and distaste for the manipulative moguls operating inside the major record corporations. They don't like Britain much; they're here briefly because their record company is Rough Trade. It has faults, but they feel it's been about the best option on offer.

"A lot of it comes from our backgrounds." The Go-Betweens' drummer Lindy Morrison launches into her explanations without a single pause. "In '77 and '78 and '79 we were constantly being challenged by the really conservative system we lived in, where hardly anyone had any faith in what we were doing.

"Then we came over here and it was the same thing, we were seen as quirky and strange because we were Australian. Because everyone saw us as 'weird' or something, it just means we're not happy to join forces with people who have always treated us as if we were 'the other side'. Why give in to them, just because it's now fashionable to join forces with people you know don't think the way you think? I'm still angry with those people who were in positions of power to put our music out but never did, and always treated us as a silly group of amateurs."

THE MISTS OF independence hang heavily about The Go-Betweens—they seem less of a 'rock 'n' roll group' than a small itinerant artistic community, a close-knit group of friends who define themselves in terms of their separation from the music around them.

The title *Before Hollywood*, the front cover shot of Morrison, Grant McLennan and Robert Forster (a fourth member, Robert Vickers, has since joined) in an antique shop, their unfashionable American influences and their spectral, evocative lyrics add to the feeling of distance and stark individuality.

Here is a group who have detached themselves from their home country, who flaunt imagery associated with the past, whose songs are redolent of travel and a strong sense of place, of childhood and remembered thoughts and feeling.

"We would have been happy in the 18th century; I would have been anyway, I could quite forget about the 20th," says Grant when I suggest The Go-Betweens are a group out-of-place and out-of-time.

Lindy immediately leaps in: "If you look at our histories we're not out of time, out of place, we are exactly right at this moment. And that goes right from the time when punk hit me, when I was playing drums in an acoustic band and it was very easy to go onto electric instruments, and at that time girls were being given the big push. And I ran into these two, brought up on American films and Dylan and mid-'70s punk from America. And we all meet up—we're the only people in this town (Brisbane) who are ambitious musically, and we wanna get out of that town. And we did it all in the right time, and I still think we represent the right exact moment in time.

"When Geoff (Travis) called us into his office on Saturday to give us a lecture on how we were losing Rough Trade money because we hadn't had a hit he said, 'We

A most unusual pop group

NME JUN 11 Grant W McLennan, Lindy Morrison, Robert Vickers and Robert Forster take their pick.

Likes

GWM: Carole Lombard, Jimmy Stewart, Cognac, Piero Della Francesca, jeans, Christmas
RV: Monet, Degas, Renoir, Bonnard, Gramercy Park, Singapore, CBGBs
RF: Girls who wear glasses, Widows, Katharine Hepburn, history

Reading

GWM: Rilke *Duino Elegies*, Katherine Mansfield *Collected Short Stories*, Charles Dickens *Great Expectations*, JM Synge *The Playboy Of The Western World*, William Fairfield, Modigliani
RV: Joseph Conrad, Kingsley Amis, Graham Greene, Hemingway
RF: John Kennedy Toole *A Confederacy Of Dunces*, Lillian Ross *Picture*, Nick Kent, newspapers

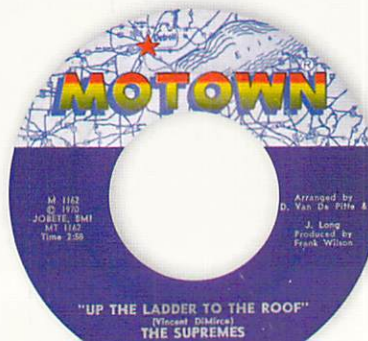
Music

GWM: Creedence Clearwater Revival, The Birthday Party, The Mamas & The Papas, Blue Orchids, Velvet Underground
LM: (drum tracks) Jet Black on The Stranglers' "Golden Brown"; Ringo Starr on The Beatles' "Come Together"; Budgie on The Slits' "Typical Girls"; Martin Hughes on Robert Wyatt's "Shipbuilding"; Tony Thompson on Diana Ross's "Upside Down".
RV: Van Morrison "Brown Eyed Girl"; Bob Dylan "I Want You"; Supremes

"Up The Ladder To The Roof"; Velvet Underground "Oh Sweet Nothing"; Nancy & Lee "How Does That Grab You?"
RF: Yoko Ono "Walking On Thin Ice"; Ray Charles "I Can't Stop Loving You"; Buddy Holly, Talking Heads as a three-piece; The Stooges *Funhouse*

Films

GWM: *Masculin Féminin* (Godard), *Beat The Devil* (Huston), *The Mother And The Whore* (Eustache), *Love In The Afternoon* (Wilder), *Vampyr* (Dreyer)
RV: *Notorious* (Hitchcock), *Treasure Of The Sierra Madre* (Huston), *Strangers On A Train* (Hitchcock), *Chinatown* (Polanski)
RF: *The Apartment* (Wilder), *Fury* (Lang), *The Late Show* (Benton), *Jackson County Jail* (Miller)



know that fashion and history turns about and it's just a matter of waiting for it'. Well perhaps that's the case."

Adds Grant: "We're doing something new and something very emotional, and we're experimenting. It's just a matter of the focus. I do think we're right at the centre, and eventually all the other dreck that's washed around will be just washed away."

One of the group's two writers—he and Robert Forster work separately—Grant McLennan exudes a sense of purpose and firmness of tone that isn't in any way diminished by the quietness of his voice.

When asked if they consider themselves to be a 'pop group', McLennan replies: "I think we are a pop group, but we're the most unusual pop group there's ever been. Although we work with melody, we sometimes work against it, and that's like one of the cardinal sins of pop music."

He lists some of the characteristics that exemplify their strangeness—their unusual rhythms ("Cattle And Cane" boasts a tricky but effective 11-beat time signature), their sparseness and lack of decoration, their words and subject material, their relative ages, the way they play, the way they look, the fact they're from Australia.

Another of their special qualities is their subtlety and consequently lack of immediacy—many of their songs fail to make an initial impact, but germinate and slowly flourish with the movement of plants.

"People often mistake subtlety or reticence for naivety and wimpiness," says Grant. "If people do that then it's quite pathetic. You just can't have those two qualities if you want to be in the charts, so that's our dilemma..."

THE GO-BETWEENS EXHIBIT
a gentleness of touch and sensitivity of approach that is unforced and quite natural.

There's a femininity about the band, something Lindy takes as a great compliment.

"I think that's true, I think the boys in the band have allowed the feminine side of their nature to show and probably reacted strongly against the macho elements inherent in the Australian male.

Also, most men born post-'53 have been allowed to be more feminine, I think, if they're conscious of the world. I always say I don't trust anyone born before 1953 anyway!"

LIKE AMERICA, AUSTRALIA is a country of immigrants, where the mythology of the pioneers is deeply ingrained in the national consciousness. Perhaps it's this that sometimes gives the group a strangely individual American resonance. While "Cattle And Cane" is exclusively Australian, containing references to the fields of cane and timber houses of Queensland, a song like "Two Step's Step Out" is more ambiguously located, with lines like "the steamer's left" and "sold my horse".

Certainly part of their Americanness is due to their fascination for American literature, films and music. Lindy can't quite see it though.

"Because I know these two so well, whenever anyone makes out American influences, whatever they write, their music seems so uniquely their own that I can't see that influence anymore. I might have when I first



Reacting against Aussie macho: Go-Betweens Robert Vickers and Lindy Morrison

"I always say I don't trust anyone born before 1953 anyway!"

joined the band, mainly because they shoved Modern Lovers and Tom Verlaine and Bob Dylan down my neck. For the first year I was in the band that was all I was allowed to listen to.

"I see them as a direct reaction against being from Australia, so that makes them Australian artists. There are writers like them, like Patrick White and David Ireland, they're the same people who fought against everything that is male and aggressive and arrogant in the Australian white person. To talk about influences from America is irrelevant for me."

As the interview draws to a close Lindy reveals they're thinking of asking John Cale to produce their next album; that is, if they ever get it

recorded, since Rough Trade haven't enough money to pay for it.

The Go-Betweens may end up signing with a major company because the only other option will be no more records at all. Somehow I can't see them compromising their attitudes or music one iota if they do sign. And I think we should drink to that. *Lynden Barber* •

1983

OCTOBER–DECEMBER



Tom Waits:
single snapshots
of emotion

ALBUMS

Tom Waits

Swordfishtrombones ISLAND

With 15 tracks, this is sketchbook Waits and indicates the range of his writing gifts. Maybe it's the influence of writing music for movies, but there's no doubt of a new concision about his work here. Where he used to stack image on image in every number, he can now feel confident about getting the emotion across in a single snapshot.

The longest piece, "Shore Leave", is the old Waits, featuring a sailor "in a Hong Kong drizzle on Cuban heels rolling down the gutter to the Blood Band". He alternates two manners of delivery, narration and song, allocating them to the description of neon clip-joints or to the homesick letter to his wife and it's very effective.

"Soldier's Things", however, is brief, moving and unforgettable. Over regretful piano, he lists the items left behind in a dead soldier's home, twisting the list into pity with the line: "This one's for bravery, and this one's for me, and everything's a dollar in this box." It's a sale of effects, and it doesn't waste a word.

There's the usual forlorn

reminiscences on "Johnsburg Illinois" and "Town With No Cheer", and a "Waltzing Matilda"-type bar-room lilt to "In The Neighbourhood". "Dave The Butcher" and "Just Another Sucker" are all-instrumental numbers, the latter so beautifully orchestrated in its tentative advance that it sounds as if even the horns are bumping under the bow. "Frank's Wild Years" certainly were, judging by this baleful narrative. "Doused everything in the house, torched it, parked across the street and watched it, laughing."

At his best, Waits can customise any item at the Uncle Sam Trading Post, from shaving cream to chewing tobacco. The riffing rocker, "16 Shells From A Thirty-Ought Six", drives that inspired phrase right into the mind. He sounds like Howling Wolf on "Gin Soaked Boy" and rocks "Down Down Down" along on what sounds like gabble.

Diction is always a problem with Waits, and it's frustrating not to have the words on the sleeve. I never found out what the title track was about in detail, except that it concerns some poor doughboy who "came home from the war with a party in his head". "Trouble Braids" is another, like "Underground", where the furry ball of vocal sound triumphs over meaning. Pity the urgency in the band makes you wish you were keeping pace.

A good album, full of good lines and clever, original musical ideas.

Brian Case, MM Oct 8

Cocteau Twins

Head Over Heels 4AD

The Cocteau Twins are unique. Meandering but never dull, their songs are imbued with

a complexity that winds around and through the complementing lyricism of Robin Guthrie's instrumental flexibility and Elizabeth Frazer's compellingly attractive voice. *Head*

Over Heels is a big step forward from their inconclusive debut album *Garlands*.

Now that bassist Will has left the band, Rob and Liz have introduced a new variety into their songs. "In The Gold Dust Rush" is almost a pop song, for goodness sake! With lullaby lyrics still only vaguely decipherable, you find yourself substituting jellybaby words to songs that lilt and leap through a secret garden of pastel imagery, though perhaps it's time they printed the lyrics instead of leaving it to guesswork. "Sugar

Hiccup" is another vocal roller-coaster with a bright, bouncy chorus and a whimsically evocative vocal. "Multifoiled", however, is a real shocker from the Cocteau Twins, pugnacious bass, drums and piano adding fire to Liz's newly hardened voice.

Never a band to inspire half-measures, you either love their complicated sound-weaving structures or hate them – they certainly offer a varied package on this LP. "My Love Paramour" and "Glass Candle Grenades" (don't the titles themselves carry a lyrical passion?) explore the possibilities of the Frazer vocal range, bending and twisting her voice to impossible extremes. The folky tinge she displayed on *Garlands* has been replaced by a depth and breadth of logic, wisdom and variety that bodes well for the Cocteau Twins' future.

"Five, Ten, Fiftyfold" is a gyratory but soothing elegy that broods gently, with a simmering beauty – there's no doubt about it, the Cocteau Twins have come home. Their unguarded vulnerability is their strength; their magic is a fluid element that won't ever be explained.

Helen Fitzgerald, MM Oct 22

The Rolling Stones *Undercover* EMI

Fortified by Phyllosan or who knows what manner of useful tonics, the Stones aren't having much trouble being over 40. Not for them the convoluted soul-searching of a Townshend or the holy-roller gloom of a Dylan. *Undercover* sticks close to what they do best, and spits out a few bones while doing it.

Quite undismayed by the ever-glossier march of studio progress, the Stones have cheerfully made *Undercover* sound as rude and shambolic as possible. Thousands have tried to imitate their ramshackle raunch over the years, and none have succeeded. Indeed, there are several points where their dangerous looseness topples into blundering incompetence

– "Wanna Hold You" is the token Keef vocal, and a pretty pathetic one at that. They could have got better results from a Walkman.

But it is these glaring errors which give the Stones their malingering charm. Richer than most third-



world countries and probably better off than the Treasures, come to that, the Stones may be oafish and arrogant, but they're never pompous. They live outside the law and I'm sure they're not altogether honest, but do they cringe and pretend to be humble? No. They flaunt it ("Our toilets are nicer than most people's homes").

The best thing about *Undercover* is Jagger's singing, which is almost completely free of the absurd camperies and daft accents he often likes to affect. In "Too Much Blood", especially, he sounds tougher and funnier than he has in decades. It's a grotesque ditty about a bloke in Paris who eats his girlfriend and then buries the bones in the Bois De Boulogne. "Did you see The Texas Chainsaw Massacre?" asks Jagger. "Orrible, wasn't it?" As the band hustle through a steamy funk/rock backing track, he raps mockingly: "When I go to the movies I like to see something more romantic, like An Officer And A Gentleman. Something you can take the wife to, ya know worrimean?"

Side Two is full of classic Keefery. "Too Tough" is a compact rocker driven by Sir Keith's slashing riff, while "It Must Be Hell" is a blatant repeat of "Soul Survivor" from *Exile On Main St.* "All The Way Down" is a ragged, boozy singalong with a dash of C&W, and "Pretty Beat Up" prowls threateningly among Charlie Watts' piston beat and David Sanborn's underfed saxophone. Everywhere there is the rusty clank of guitars.

There's nothing startlingly new on *Undercover*, though there are signs that the Stones have assimilated their black influences more thoroughly than hitherto. "Undercover Of The Night", "Tie You Up" and "Too Much Blood" acknowledge new bearings in American funk but gleefully discolour them with the Stones' dubious patent medicines. "Feel On Baby" is tacky fake-reggae with funny whoops and cries popping unexpectedly out of the undergrowth. Odd.

Still, if *Undercover* is frequently sloppy, it never sounds jaded. "She Was Hot", for instance, is positively exuberant, a fanciful tale of sex in 70 cities. There's a sense of a band playing for the hell of it and sod the overdubs.

The sleeve is ghastly, by the way. Adam Sweeting, MM Nov 12

SINGLES REVIEW 1983

Quirky but homely:
Johnny Marr (left)
and Morrissey of
The Smiths

The Cure The Love Cats

FICTION

As if some macabre folly cast Vincent Price instead of Jeremy Irons in *Brideshead Revisited* or some sinister senility chose Tobe Hooper to direct a series of Jeeves. "Love Cats" is a postmodernist's dream of a nightmare, a purrrfectly corny example of the past purrrceived impurrrfectly, the flaw maliciously irritated and then put to use.

In this purposeful madness, the last of The Cure's "fun" single trilogy, Robert Smith's imagination is squirming proof that through TV, radio and video, the past now plays as active a part in the present as the present itself, revitalised through easily available images, ravaged out of its rituals and roles and reinterpreted as a malleable source of fractured associations.

"The Love Cats" is Smith's masterpiece of disorientation, a mental collage of history unhinged. Herman Munster takes spiked tea with Jean Cocteau while a taxidermist twitches the net curtains in anticipation of a cannibal feast. But how to praise something so zany? How to approach its kaleidoscopic approaches? Well, at a pinch its psychedelic cocktail jazz, a strychnine nursery rhyme where every allusion (illusion!) triggers off a tunnel of flashbacks, but it's so much sillier than that.

Sing the slapdash chorus, swoon to that devil-may-care decadent swing. Single of the week? Single of the year(s)!

MM Oct 29

The Smiths This Charming Man

ROUGH TRADE

Well, what a perfectly 1984 band this bunch of Sun-styled pervos turned out to be. A slightly alternative, terribly literate Haircut One Hundred playing Beatles tunes ever so tasteful and up-and-off tempo. Swinging students, less harmful than Joyce, more modern than MacInnes, quirky but homely, suggestively homo - maybe that's what all the fuss was about? Whatever, worth at least two minutes of what's left of the rest of your life. MM Oct 29

Madonna Lucky Star

This sex-kitten's not just content to manicure Shalamar until that chipper groove claws its way into your nervous system with nails of steel, she's preened Randy Crawford's thrilling twitter into a cutesy proposition that promises ecstasy and secretes danger.

Psychopathically astrological, "Lucky Star" should be the song requested by Clint's obsessive lover-cum-pursuer in the remake of *Play Misty For Me*.

I mean, who'd succumb to a come-on like: "Shine your heavenly body tonight?" But then again, who'd dare resist?

MM Oct 29

Julian Cope Sunshine Playroom

PHONOGRAM

Latent hippies unite! The old coot has finally flipped his lid, flown the coop,

lost his marbles. But in the process made one of the finest and most sublimely distinctive

records of his career.

An intriguing construction indeed, deep and resonant classical strings broken by a manic psychedelic adventure beat and slinky horns. Dark dreamy vocals lend a cracked-looking-glass effect to an already disorientating atmosphere and the chorus has an eerie chill to its insistent promise. Not to be missed. MM, Nov 12

Frankie Goes To Hollywood Relax

ZTT
Frankie Goes.... seem to wallow and finally get swallowed up by their own silly schoolboy beliefs

that sexual innuendoes and words like "suck" and "come" are not only going to titillate what they see as our equally immature sense of fun, but will elevate this blatantly untalented band (still living in '76 with their pseudo-funk disco crap) to a status of credibility that surpasses the evidence of their wares. If they're so preoccupied with risqué sex I suggest they look to either Ian Dury for humorous vulgarity or Divine for upfront filth and stop sniggering like adolescents who've just glimpsed their neighbour's knickers. MM Nov 12



1983

OCTOBER–DECEMBER

“You’re stroking my ego and I love it”

Having learned a thing or two about playing the media, **JOHN LYDON** returns to the UK for a press conference. On the agenda: pubs, movies, PiL and Malcolm McLaren’s plan to re-form the Sex Pistols. Or not. “How...” Lydon asks, “...you going to re-form Sid?”



Blue meanie:
John Lydon in
Japan, 1983

— MELODY MAKER NOVEMBER 5 —

THIS IS A story of Lydon, né Rotten, recently absent but not forgotten... so one might conclude from the teeming millions of Grub Street hacks, pop mag pundits, gossip columnists, rank sensationalists, snappers galore and assorted scribbling objects who turned up to witness the scrawny carrot make a grand appearance at the Royal Lancaster Hotel near Bayswater last Wednesday.

Looking at the board in the foyer, it seemed that Rotten had lost none of his old sense of humour – “McLaren, Dick” was supposedly booked into one of the adjoining suites, and if hardly hilarious, it at least added to the hope that these proceedings would be as stripped of pomposity as it’s possible to get.

What a wag. Holding court like some cheeky princeling brat landed bum-wise on the throne due to some untimely death amongst the royals. The suite was, of course, expansive and, no doubt, expensive.

Hacks dutifully nibbled at the cocktail snacks and guzzled whatever booze could be tempted out of the bottles of the servants and slaves on hand, the paparazzi bristled with lenses and aluminium flight cases, while Rotten looked like he was about to greatly enjoy whatever it was he had in mind for us. Which turned out to be nothing especially astonishing, but, of course, often splendidly entertaining.

The conference was to serve a dual function: to announce the return of Public Image Ltd (“Me”, as he put it), and the British release of the film *Order Of Death*, in which Rotten makes his acting debut opposite Harvey Keitel.

Directed by Roberto Faenza, an Italian little known in this country, the film concerns the intrigue that develops between a police lieutenant and Rotten’s Leo Smith, described in the synopsis as a “pale asexual freak”, who is “devoured by an overwhelming guilt complex”. The cop is keeping a swish apartment that he bought secretly with crooked drug money. Smith’s arrival on the scene adds to the man’s paranoia, and from there apparently things start to happen. I say apparently, because no one seemed to have seen the film, including yours truly, which probably accounted for the absence of any kind of critical comments concerning Rotten’s performance from the assorted globules of hackdom coagulating in the seats.

Or maybe they were just too afraid of pushing their luck too far in front of a man (well, just – Rotten still physically looks like he’s barely out of adolescence) who still displays a tongue that can make a monkey out of anyone it pleases in the space that it takes most people to clasp their hands together for mercy.

Interestingly, even when playing the punk role on Wednesday, which he can only really ever eschew at the price of public apathy and press indifference, Rotten was never outrageously rude or crudely insulting. Perhaps it’s this that gives him his mantle of charisma. It’s possible to walk away from an event such as this feeling that he’s put every single person in their place (and that’s down, that’s really down!), yet on reflection it’s difficult to figure out how he actually did it.

Of course he snarled, he performed, and like businessmen in bondage, most of us inwardly moaned with pleasure at the humiliation of it all. As long as this was kept within the bounds of a game then it was acceptable, but nobody seemed to like the prospect of a real horsewhipping.

I’d planned to ask him why the PiL *Live In Tokyo* album was so pathetic, but sort of crumbled into biscuit mix instead.

Rotten’s cleverness is in understanding the power of understatement and silence – an ironic strength for a man whose pennant of acidity is usually thought of as nailed to the mast of rage. The man is a true star and doesn’t have to do a lot to prove it.

Every answer Rotten fields, flings back or broods upon brings forward into the mind the imagined response of some lesser interviewee. How they would squirm and bullshit, ummm and urrrr through the massed onslaught of interrogative projectiles, shuffling posteriors and grunting like pigs scuffling for space.

I thought I’d got him when I asked, in ever-so-clever manner, whatever had happened to his much-trumpeted plans to get into video... as if this would make him really embarrassed.

“It was a load of mouth,” he deadpanned. “Sorry.”

And smiled smugly. What more was there to say? At other times the man veered distressingly close to sincerity, his demeanour almost assuming the contours of a normal human being. But thankfully eventually broken up by wisecracks.

The proceedings had been started by a grubby little hack from a tit mag, who wanted to know why he’d come back to the UK.

“Well, why not? You lot want me here. I don’t mind, believe me,” offered Rotten helpfully, before telling the multitude that after three years of New York he’d had enough. But he was “never gonna live here any more. I think this country’s finished. I think we all know that.” Indeed.

He was to record in England around Christmas, he informed us.

Did he have any new material, queried a foreign journalist, possibly Japanese, who was to make most of the running for at least 10 minutes.

“Of course!” snapped Rotten, his impatience at the dull-wittedness of the entire journalistic “profession” resounding like a struck bell.

“What do you mean, of course?” ventured the foreign gent – a brave and tenacious man indeed. He seemed to object to the live album consisting of old material.

“Well, what do you expect on a live album?” whined Rotten, raising his voice to the level of insolence. “I mean, that ain’t no big deal, that’s just a live album. You can’t expect, like, an entirely new set of songs that aren’t released officially, that’s just like cutting your own throat!”

And then, like a tetchy parent scolding a naughty and stupid child:

“You’ve waited this long, a few more years won’t do no harm.”

All hacks present slightly sniggered.

The foreign hack said that PiL had played “Anarchy In the UK” on their last tour.

“Yeah, we did it in Japan. It went down really well, but then again, I’ve never ever, like, played Japan in my life, so it’s quite relevant that I did it there.”

Various minor questions yielded little, until a dreadfully professional freelance insisted on asking why he’d been away from England for so long, which gave our man on the podium a chance to pass the hat round for sympathy as he recounted the tales of police harassment we’d heard countless times before. The freelance had obviously been fast asleep up until this point, for he insisted on boring us with the same question that some other sod had asked several minutes ago. Rotten was surprisingly patient with the fool.

It was this that gave the signal for the Fleet Street smooth crew to start oiling silver tongues. “John,” they would invariably start, as if they were old pals who’d known Rotten since schooldays. They’d then follow it up with some hopelessly banal question, which, if it didn’t elicit the correct response, could easily be changed before it went into print, the discrepancy to be blamed, if challenged, on the sub-editors.

“John,” quoth one unctuously, as if there were just the two of them in conversation, reclining onto leather padded seats in a cocktail lounge in some distant tax haven, “John, is there nothing you’ve missed about England?”

“Nothing at all, except the pubs.”

Whaddya like about New York so much?

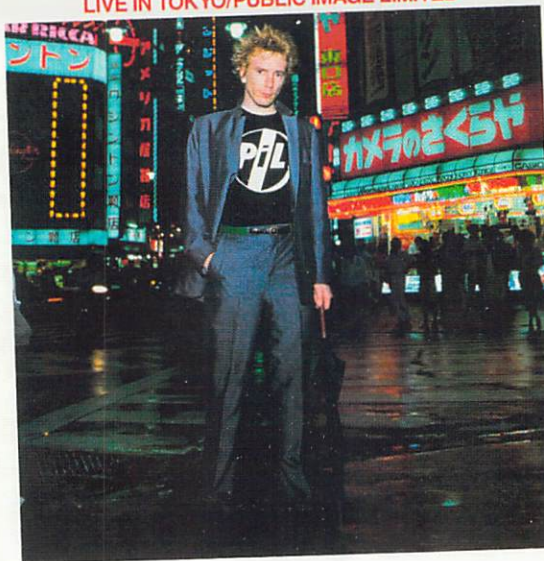
“It’s a much more healthy atmosphere,” plus further droning. How did you land the acting role?

“Through sheer talent.”

Have you got a steady girlfriend?



LIVE IN TOKYO/PUBLIC IMAGE LIMITED



"Probably."

Are you going to tell me her name?

"No. My favourite colour is blue."

And so on... One woman had the utter audacity to ask if it was true that the Sex Pistols were going to play at Carnegie Hall. One felt sorry for her. Her news editor had probably made the rumour up only the previous day because the entertainment pages were a bit short.

"It's news to me," mumbled Rotten.

It was at this point that the woman made an even worse mistake. "Well, Malcolm McLaren said..." she began.

"Oh, come on now, please!"

interrupted Rotten, the disgust almost visibly rolling down the side of his mouth in rivulets. "Alright – let's drag it down to the level of silliness. Whatever Malcolm says is bound to be a lie. I mean, the man is a pathological liar. Do me a favour, it goes without saying, almost!"

Had McLaren been in contact with him?

"No, his manager Bernie Rhodes has, about re-forming the Sex Pistols. But that's a joke, isn't it really? How you gonna re-form Sid?"

Grins, cackles and other eruptions of mirth occurred across the room, as if John had just cracked a real funny.

A Scottish hack demanded to know why he was planning to do a British tour when only a few years ago he'd been critical of bands like the Stones and The Who playing night after night on extensive tours.

"I'd hardly call what I'm doing extensive," replied Rotten. "There are intervals. What I do is a holiday with musical interludes."

"It's still a tour," observed the Scot, a truculent fellow.

"You can call it what you like, mate. It doesn't bother me, I know I'm right."

And with that the issue was over. It's pointless attempting to hurl accusations of hypocrisy at Rotten, as if he were some Judas of punk who has betrayed the believing masses. His revelation that the current lineup of PiL consists, apart from drummer Martin Atkins, of American musicians picked from Holiday Inn-type cabaret bands, is typical.

Ostensibly they were chosen because "I wanted to get as far away from trendy hairdos (*the phrase rolled around the mouth for maximum effect*) as I possibly could. The music counts, if you can call it music."

He appeared to be serious, but as always with Rotten there was a touch of ambiguity. It's not that he's always ironic, more that it's impossible to know whether he is being ironic or not, and it's this knowledge that no one can figure out a way to pin him down that adds to his inflated sense of confidence and endearingly humorous arrogance.

Whether he's being serious about PiL at the moment is difficult to say, but it's a safe bet that he must treasure the irony of a group of cabaret musicians performing "Anarchy In The UK" and "Death Disco". His is the most un-English of personalities and it's not difficult to see why he took to New York. Even when he's being quiet, Rotten is loud. He even used the phrase "upfront" at one point.

Was it much fun being a celebrity, someone asked?

"Well, yurrr, of course. This is a giggle, innit? You're stroking my ego and I love it very much. My favourite song is 'It's Hard To Be Humble When You Know You Don't Mean It'."

Had he ever thought of giving any of his time or money to people less fortunate than himself, asked a doubtless overpaid hack who probably spent most of his time heaping slander and monstrous invective on those less fortunate than himself?

"I don't know anyone less fortunate than myself," deadpanned Rotten to honks of hilarity. "Why are you laughing?"

What did he want to go on to in the future?

"My millionaire mansion in the country, I suppose."

No, in a general sense...

"My general millionaire mansion in the country."

People laughed. The man's cheek and bravado seemed almost astonishingly outlandish. Virtually every hack present would, if given the

"Whatever Malcolm says is a lie. He is a pathological liar"

chance to swap lives, adore the attention Rotten was getting, yet most could never bring themselves to publically admit it. How many stars do? And how many of those who place their narcissism in the market square do it with such a sense of panache and ambiguous humour?

Of course, in pop terms he is virtually an old goat, is duplicating the industry measures of the mid-'70s brontosauri (entry into films and live double album, indeed!), and has just had a hit single ("This Is Not A Love Song") with a song of almost cretinous banality.

See him orchestrating the hacks at an event like this, though, and

it's tempting to forget all that. It's not so much what he says as the way he says it, emphatic delivery alternating with walls of blankness on which the hacks can scribble their own graffiti. A John Lydon/Rotten press conference is probably more entertaining than a live performance by the current PiL will ever be. He should draw the correct conclusions, set a table up on stage at every venue he's due to play, and invite the audience along to fire questions.

And he'd be advised to cease a worrying habit of lapsing into arid areas of discourse, something that threatened occasionally last Wednesday to turn him into yet another ghastly media bore.

Mistake One was rambling on interminably about how the US video channel MTV was opening up the States. Was this supposed to be telling us something new?

Mistake Two consisted in telling us that radio stations in New York actually did their own remixes of records. Did he think we'd been living in caves for the last couple of years?

Mistake Three – well, the first, but who's listening? – was much travelogue about New York, how safe it is if you don't go into the wrong areas. Was he trying to send us all off to sleep?

Mistake Four was acting like a classic paranoid on the subject of John Lennon (another English New Yorker initialled JL, but let's not get mystical). "There's an oddity about his death, isn't there?" said Rotten quite seriously. "Why did he get out of the car to walk in? Usually the car went into the building. You know, very strange..." Was he trying to convince us that he was turning into some kind complete nut?

Mistake Five was telling us that the Japanese "imitate the West so blatantly", as if this was a blindingly inspired insight. Wow!

But the worst mistake of all was reserved for his opinion of Culture Club. He didn't really like them, but "Boy George has got a voice, you can't deny that".

The phrase "Cliche! Cliche!" immediately sprang up in the mind's eye with the devastating impact of a volcanic eruption. Accompanied, of course, by alarm bells and flashing lights. It was at that point that I started to suspect that, despite his youthful appearance, Rotten was beginning to show his age... Could this be the first signs of a mellowing out?

The suspicion was lent further weight by his rather conservative disdain for the ubiquitous coxcomb quiffs of Britain.

"God, it's like a fashion catwalk out there, innit?" he complained, like a disgusted aunt tutting disapprovingly. "Wacky hairdos, that's the first thing you meet at the airport. Even the baggage attendants."

But so much negativity on the critic's side must eventually amount to nitpicking. Perhaps we should end on a positive note. Asked for views on the current punks (a term he hates) about town, his answer was as refreshingly dismissive as you would expect.

"Oh yeah, that's sad. I must admit, the leather jacket brigade with the studs, it's a bit au fait (sic); it's as embarrassing as rockabilly or any of that digressive kind of trend. The idea should be to move on, not go backwards."

Suddenly he looked bored.

"Well, that'll do. I've yacked for quite a bit, ha ha. Goodnight – go home."

The hacks dutifully dispersed. I chuckled quite a lot. *Lynden Barber* •

“I’d almost given up hope”

In troubled times, **FELA KUTI** plays London. He opens up on politics, the recent raid on his home, his many wives, and on African culture. But aren’t some of his attitudes sexist? “I was just trying to make the educated women realise their position,” he says.

— MELODY MAKER DECEMBER 3 —

INITIALY, ENTERING THE fogged dishevelment of the hotel room, I’d thought him naked. He was sitting on the rim of the bed smoking a bulbous cigarette. He looked pensive, in command of his surroundings. His limbs—lean, poised, sleek—were the colour of a mild roast cup of coffee and his underpants, a thin strip of material hidden in the crease formed by his upright position, of virtually identical hue.

Fela Kuti had a wary, feline look about him. Smooth and small-boned, he seemed the kind of person who could inflict a lot of damage with the minimum of forward planning. His aura was that of a panther.

Two nights previously he’d been standing on a stage in Brixton dressed in pink.

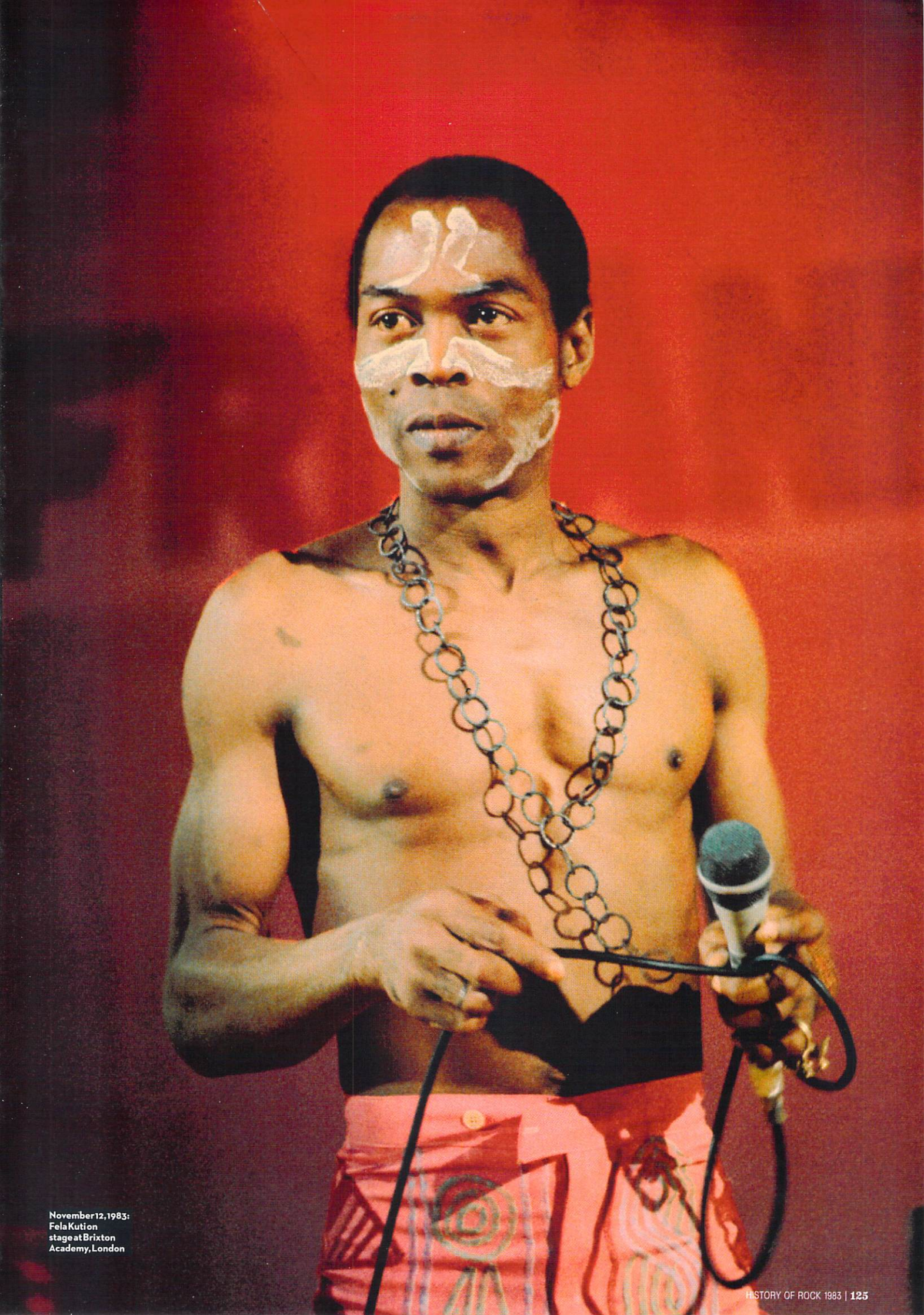
Exchanging greetings, I took up a position on a padded leather couch directly opposite. The

room was full of the sort of people you would expect to see hanging around a guy like Fela Kuti—cronies, hangers-on, musicians, wives, friends, I didn’t know who they were. All I knew was that their eyes were boring into the side of my head like lasers. I didn’t like the feeling of eyes boring into the side of my head like lasers.

At some point I was going to have to tell Fela that I hadn’t been knocked into Kingdom Come by his concert; »

DAVID CORIO / GETTY





November 12, 1983:
Fela Kuti on
stage at Brixton
Academy, London

that it was too slow-moving, too long, too laidback, too casual. It was something my reflexes decided was going to have to come later. My conscience wasn't about to wrestle the point.

The people kept on staring like lasers. I opened with a throwaway question, just to get things rolling. The first thing that hit me was how slow his rate of speech was. Words came out solo and in couples. He was thinking about the reply, measuring his response, handing it out like rope going over the side of a ship to help a sailor gone overboard. I thought about what I'd imagined Fela to be like and relaxed a little. It was as if someone had just stamped on a scorpion crawling across the carpet.

Encouraged, I wondered aloud why a Nigerian like Fela should call his group Egypt 80. I got a reply that lasted five minutes.

Africa needed to learn about its culture so that it could develop, Fela said. He knew a lot about this. He'd read history books. But most Africans didn't. African history had traditionally been passed down via music and culture, but for the past 300 years that hadn't been happening too well.

"Now, our culture is very spiritual in Africa," he said. "Egypt is a spiritual place – was a spiritual place. Those pyramids today, nobody can ever know how those stones were carried. But these things were carried by spiritual power, you see? It belongs to Africa, so Africa must organise on a spiritual level in time.

"Now right now, the Arabs are occupying Egypt. All Africans think that the Arabs own the place, they've even forgotten that the Arabs fought a war to get the occupation of that place – do you understand?" He said, "Do you understand?" a lot. It was a figure of speech.

He told me he wasn't talking about the current situation in Egypt. He just wanted Africans to realise that Egypt was the black man's property. That was why he had called his group Egypt 80.

I worried about this a little. It had troublesome implications. I asked if he thought black Africans should take over Egypt and drive the Arabs out of the country. He produced an utterance that sounded like "Ho, oh!" and shook his head, as if to say "now wait a minute, kid".

"You see, I am not saying drive people away from Africa. All I'm saying is that if all Africans are going to get united then the Arabs have to do exactly what the Africans want, to remain there, you understand? If they remain there and Africa is united, there are so few that they cannot do anything. They will soon be very much alienated, their presence there will make them leave by themselves. If Africa wants to organise itself culturally, spiritually, the Arabs will either have to accept it or leave peacefully. I don't think anybody will drive Arabs out of there."

We were talking about politics. When you interview Fela Kuti, you don't sit around talking about what brand of microphone he uses. At his

concert at the Brixton Academy – the old Fair Deal – Fela had two banners draped across the back of the stage. "Pan Africanism Will Save The World" and "Blackism – A Force Of the Mind". With Fela Kuti, politics and music are one.

I guess it must have been two years ago that I discovered this. Some sleazy bandit from one of the recording corporations had sent me a copy of a record; *Black President*, it had been called. I'd liked it a lot. I'd liked it as much as good curry, as much as Sunday mornings in bed.

But besides the effervescent mixture of funk, jazz and Nigerian elements that Fela had called "Afrobeat", I'd been intrigued by the man's lyrics, by his history.

Fela Kuti sang one long song called "ITT" that attacked the role the vast American conglomeration played in the Nigerian economy. I learnt that he had his own political party, the Movement Of The People, and planned to stand in the Nigerian general election. That his political activities had incurred the wrath of the Nigerian authorities to such all extent that in 1977 several hundred troops surrounded his home – a barbed-wire fortress dubbed The Kalakuta Republic – savagely beat everyone in sight, raped and molested most of his 27 wives and threw his mother out of a first floor window; she died shortly afterwards.

To draw an analogy, it was as if several hundred riot police had sealed off Joe Strummer's road in 1977 (when The Clash seemed kind of threatening) and attacked with canisters of tear-gas.

Most of Fela's lyrics are political. His whole being is political. Every show he plays is political.

So that was why I was sitting in a hotel room talking to Fela Kuti about politics.

I'd wanted to know why Pan-Africanism was going to change the world and not just Africa. Fela was telling me. "If Africa was allowed to organise itself, the spiritual life of Africa will develop, then we'll have better medicine, we'll have new things to contribute to the world. And everybody would start to hear about it and want to participate in it. You know, like we participate in the white medicine, they may now see it is more important to participate in African medicine.

"Cos I see that nature is going to rule the world in future, and the African culture will mostly depend on nature and spiritual powers. If the

History man: Fela Kuti in London, November 1983



Egyptians didn't use machines to carry stones, that means Africans may start to teach the world how to use the same things."

I wondered if he blamed Western science for many of the world's problems. He did. "I read in books that if you ride in cars too much, vibrations inside the car shortens life. And I also read in a thesis that the Egyptians first of all built a locomotive engine, and they abandoned the idea because it was bad for the human beings."

I didn't agree with all of this. I agreed with Fela's paleolithic view of women even less. One of his Nigerian hits was called "Mattress". It stated that woman's function in life was to serve as a mattress for man, who lies on top for rest. In Carlos Moore's biography *Fela: This Bitch Of A Life*, Kuti is quoted as saying: "It's part of the natural order for women to be submissive to man." And: "To make the husband happy, that's the woman's job." I think you get the general picture.

What's difficult to understand is why Fela, of all people, should adapt such a hideous philosophy, when his views on colonialism are progressive, his mother founded the Nigerian Women's Union and was the first African woman to visit Eastern Europe and China, and the person who politicised him was a woman – Sandra Smith, a militant involved in the black liberation movement who he met when he was in America. But then Fela is also quoted as saying that he used to be afraid of women. Behind every sexist is a simpering wimp overcompensating like billy-o, you might say. I would.

So, how many wives have you now. I queried?

"Now I have 11 left. The others left – they got tired of me, one way or another."

Why have you got so many wives?

"Oh, please! These are not many, for me. The reason why I'm sticking to 11 is because... we have some staying at my house now, my friends, and it's so small for me and everybody's sleeping so roughly. I'm going to complete the house I'm building. Since five years they've dislocated my economy. So 11 wives is not enough for me at all. I'm just relaxing, to have a break. When I get myself together, I'm going to have many more wives than this. It's very important for me, I like my women around me."

Do you think it would be legitimate for a woman to have many husbands?

"Say it again?"

I said it again.

"I don't want to discuss the legitimacy of it. For African culture it is illegitimate for a woman to have more than one husband, but a man can have many wives. Why it is legitimate, I've never ever bothered to think about it. I just leave it as culture."

From Fela's answer you could be forgiven for thinking that every man in Nigeria has two wives. This is what Fela's lawyer, Tunji Braithwaite, said at his first attempt at a mass wedding: "This marriage cannot take place. It is against public morals. And me, as Fela's lawyer, I am going to advise him that it's against the law of this country and that he may be prosecuted for bigamy." The priest later ran away.

I pressed ahead. You've been quoted as saying that woman's function is to be on the mattress, I said. Do you still agree with that?

"You see... woman..." He paused. There was a slight cough that might have been a chuckle, I couldn't tell. "Once you agree to be with a man, you are supposed to serve the man, and do all what the man likes. Because Africans believe a husband will never do what is bad for his wife. So that is why the leadership of the husband in the house is always the final matter in the African cultural concept, because it is quite legitimate for a woman to leave a man any time she wants to. If you feel your husband is doing something wrong to you, just leave. There's no need to disobey him, there's no need to do things he doesn't like in the house. So basically the woman must remain under the man."

Why?

"Because that's what nature says."



You see where I find a contradiction in some of your political views, I started to say, before being interrupted.

"Well, you're talking about politics now."

We wrestled like this for a few seconds. I wanted to know how come he was against oppression of the black man, but not the women?

"No, you see, I didn't say woman can't participate in the society."

But she has to do what the husband tells her.

"Yes. You see in Africa today many women, because they go to school, they want to turn their homes into white homes and things like that. That was where I was coming from really, you see."

I was only singing on that concept, I was not political at all on that record. I was just trying to make the so-called educated women realise their position as women, not as bosses or partners."

He started talking about sex, deflecting the discussion onto something else. He must have thought I was as soft as yolk.

The point I'm trying to make, I said, getting exasperated by this point, is that there's an analogy between racism – which says there is one superior race, which others are supposed to be subservient to – and sexism, which says that males are the dominant gender and that women should serve the man.

"So what's the question?"

I was beginning to feel that he really had no concept of what I was talking about at all; that he really couldn't see the contradiction.

"Racism is not sexualism."

I know. I'm saying you can be oppressed by race and you can be oppressed by gender. That's what I said. I was getting weary of repeating myself.

"For me sex is between the individual. Racism is more of a new thing in the world, it's caused by slavery, colonialism. Racism has no place at all in this world for me..."

THE PHONE RANG, a convenient semicolon. I considered this line that sexism was okay because it was part of black culture. I considered that racism was part of white culture too. Did this make it okay? I wondered for a moment.

I didn't wonder much longer. Fela was off the 'phone. While we'd been talking the room had largely emptied of people. Sitting beside me was a man in ceremonial robes. This, said Fela, was Kwaku Addei, his spiritual brother, who now took part in his stage act. The man was silent.

"At a certain point in my life I'd almost given up hope of helping to change my society; everything seemed to be going against me – everything. All my friends were leaving to join what they were saying they didn't like – I'm not blaming them, because everybody must have honesty, and when they can not carry the struggle..."

"For me, I just couldn't compromise my ideas and philosophy. Then I met him. And since I met him I've seen so much spiritual light. I just felt he could perform in public so people could know the essence of his greatness."

We talked about other things. His party was dormant, because he didn't have the cash to back it up. The authorities had raided his club, The Shrine, and people were afraid to go there now. The last Nigerian election – in which he didn't stand – had been rigged by the ruling National Party. He said music was a weapon and he wanted to preach his idea to the whole world.

I told him I'd been disappointed by the concert. It was too slow-moving. I liked the records a lot better.

"Oh, I see. Anyway, that's cool... because Europeans think that African music must be fast. My music is very spiritual, and I don't write music to please audience. I must first of all enjoy what I'm playing."

We talked some more. A whole lot more, but newspapers, they don't have a lot of space these days. We said goodbye. I turned my collar up and walked out into the howling November wind. *Lynden Barber* •

"I have 11
wives left.
The others
left – they got
tired of me"

1983

OCTOBER-DECEMBER



December 16, 1983: Holly Johnson, drummer "Ped" and a warm Loatherpette film FGTH's version of "Ferry Cross The Mersey" for Channel 4's *The Tube*

REX FEATURES



“We’re just having a party”

FRANKIE GOES TO HOLLYWOOD are a pop band “giving it loads of sex”. A sceptical writer enters their world, and emerges... sceptical. “It’s such wonderful imagery,” they say. “Though if you haven’t been in an Amsterdam leather bar you won’t understand.”

— NME NOVEMBER 5 —

THIS BIG PLASTIC igloo with its shiny red surfaces and its gaudy yellow lights is the ideal place to fill up with junk food. You sink into the gooey, unwholesome surrounds the same way as you lap up the relish-covered, cheese-slobbered burgers in the soft doughy buns.

But Frankie never knows where to stop, his password in life is “give it loads”, and he rejoices in excess. “Have you ever had a Tastee-Freez? They’re really... it’s sort of like a very soft, really creamy, sweet ice cream. It just slides down inside—ooh-ooh, really divine.”

Frankie scoops the spoon into the aeriated nipple of cocoa-coloured whip-stuff and stretches it out towards his other half, Mmmmm! “Try it, try it you’ll love, you’ll love.” The globule of ice, full-fat milk solids, preservatives and colour slithers down the throat like a cool healing balm onto the chili, French fries and cheeseburger already in there vying for space. Frankie leans back, rolls his eyes, temporarily sated, paralysed with satisfaction.

But soon he’ll be up and off again out into the night, seeing what other ways he can find to amuse and stimulate himself. He’s at it already. Earl’s Court is Frankie’s kind of town after all. Over at the salad bar »

a bronzed, bearded Middle Eastern type catches their attention. I look up from my grub and they smile knowingly at each other. "Yes he is quite cute, isn't he?"

Frankie is getting ready for the evening, the cruising and the cowboys (he loves to see a guy dressed in uniform), the scribbled indiscretions on the toilet wall and, his favourite bit, at 11 o'clock when they all leave the pub and line up around the block, taking it in turns to go cruising. There's all sorts of little games and codes that lie ahead, and when he gets onto the tube and sees a guy carrying a motorcycle helmet (a motorcycle helmet on the tube!) Frankie feels at home.

"It was really great last night – we had to go out and give out 20 invitations to act as extras in our video. It was like going out and being told to pick up 20 men," smiles Paul.

A little history

What are you doing here? Someone who just stopped reading *The Picture Of Dorian Gray*, who'd rather listen to half an hour of Mary Whitehouse than two minutes of Quentin Crisp. Who's never heard of homophobia, just "good sense". Well, how about: finding out the whys and wherefores behind Liverpool post-punk S&M gay cabaret act Frankie Goes To Hollywood, the latest release from Paul Morley and the sparkling Zang Tumb Tuum conglomerate. And also filling in a few details, sinking into the environment they feel at home in, trying to keep an open mind.

Frankie Goes To Hollywood was formed just over a year ago by Holly Johnson, one-time guitarist with Big In Japan and solo artist on Liverpool independent label Eric's. Fuelled on anything from Bowie to Burroughs, Jean Genet to Lindsay Kemp, The Velvet Underground to T Rex, Johnson set about presenting a scorching leather-bound version of the lifestyle he and soon-to-be-recruited pal Paul Rutherford led.

They built up a steady love reputation, female duo The Leatherettes providing attraction for the heteros, and were approached by a succession of A&R men whose stock reaction was: "I loved it, but I don't know what my boss would think." An appearance on *The Tube*, however, brought response from the then emerging Morley/Horn ZTT partnership, and the group took the opportunity to work with the famous producer immediately.

Blessed are the pop stars – they will get paid to indulge their fantasies

"We used to know Paul Morley when he was in Manchester and he was working for the *NME*. We used to hate him, to be quite honest; he was like this div from Manchester. He made people like Howard Devoto, created their whole standing as far as the press was concerned. Made them out to be much bigger than their capabilities, which was a shame because Howard Devoto was quite talented. Maybe now he's doing the same thing with us in a way. I guess we fitted into his little fantasy, and he fitted into ours" – Holly.

FGTH didn't receive an advance from ZTT ("When you're working with someone like Trevor Horn you don't mind making sacrifices") and they're down in London staying in the Columbia Hotel on £5-a-day expenses. Still, they seem to have enough to get some of that smoking stuff, and both Paul and Holly are quite relaxed, interspersing conversation with slow, stoned giggles. They start to tell me about the video they are ostensibly here to make with Bernard Rose (who directed UB40's "Red Red Wine").

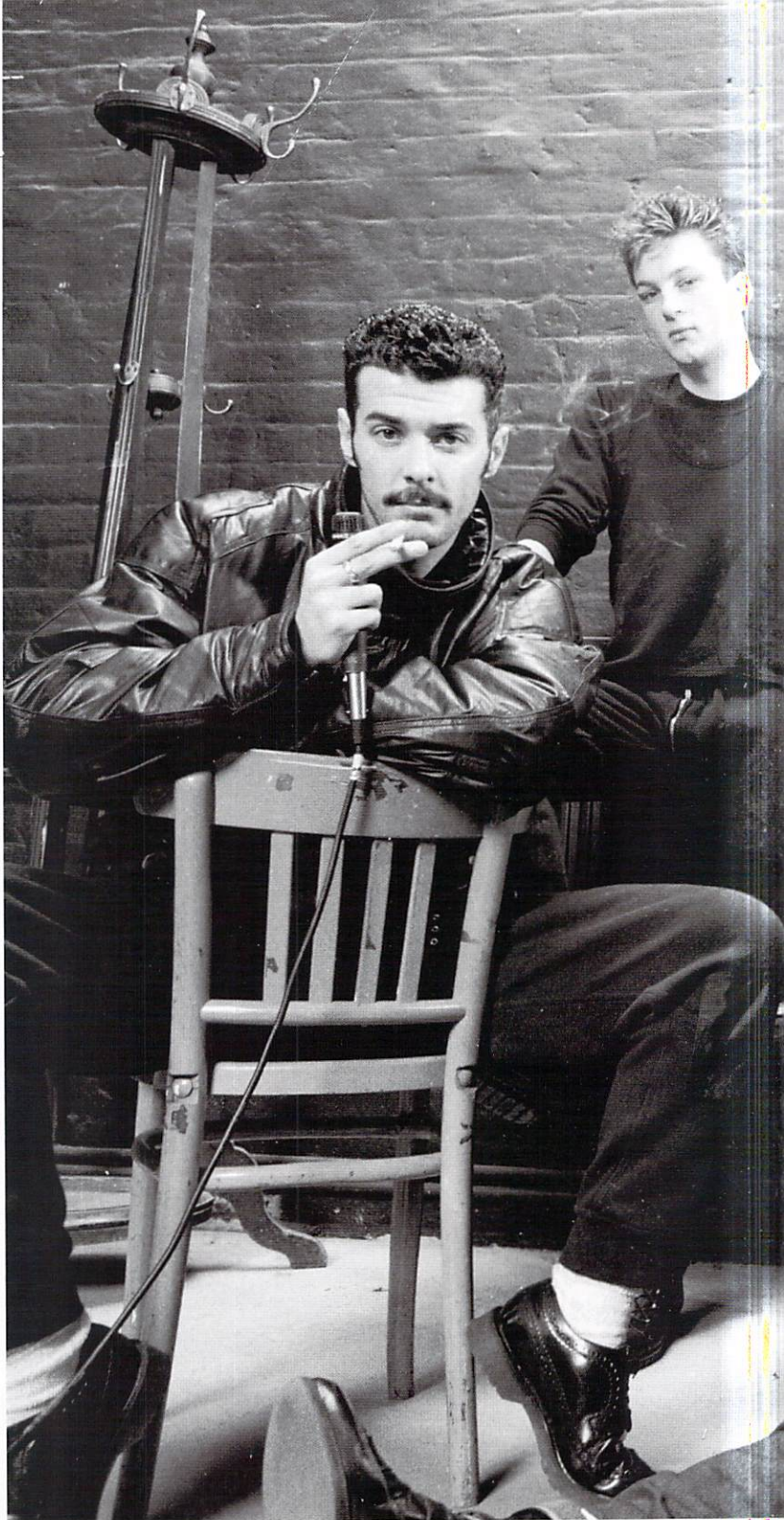
Holly: "The basic idea is that there's this virginal character Frankie and his girlfriend's just left him. He's never had sex and he's walking down the street and gets lured into an orgy scene by this character in black. It's going to be a club scene, the sort of clubs we like to go to.

"It's interesting drawing a comparison with the Soft Cell thing. Where they pantomimed it, we're going to do it for real. OK? So it's going to be Emperor Nero in this club, a huge man who gets his whole body shaved for sexual kicks and feeds people to tigers and lions. We're using the actual Esso tiger..."

"Really strong images, like a Fellini film," chips in Paul, inexplicably.

"For us it is just like getting someone else to play out our fantasies. That's the whole idea. We're just having a party.

"It's such wonderful imagery to use, though if you haven't been in an Amsterdam leather bar you won't quite understand. There's lots of ideas behind the name, we twist it loads. It changes all the time. If you



imagine it as this Hollywood Babylon on the other side of the planet that Frankie wants to get to.

"He's lived his whole life hearing about it, seeing images of it filtered through movies and television – it's where we've got all our information about living and how to communicate with people."

But they seem intent on warping the golden sense data of the dream factory. Compelled to a sort of homoerotic outrage...

"We really had to hit hard to get off the street, child. To create a reaction, especially in Liverpool because there's so many bands. To stand out we had to give it loads, loads of sex, because that was the easiest and quickest shocker to get attention."

But all that ancient Roman, Nero imagery, isn't it very decadent, very stupid?

"It's totally decadent, but then that's totally glamorous as well. Things haven't really changed. The way people used to go and watch gladiator fights and much blood and gore – they just go to the movies now, is it a sign of society about to tumble?

"Well, it's been tumbling for a long time. It grows really quickly again; I don't think it will ever die – it'll just reach a limbo."



Frankie in early 1983: (l-r) Paul Rutherford, Mark O'Toole, Brian Nash, Peter Gill and Holly Johnson

Another lump of sugar in a different orifice

The track the video is promoting is "Relax", the first ever FGTH release. A monster jam disco-sex workout. It's Frankie as you'd expect him to emerge, all squelching and sucking, kept on course by a thundering pelvic thrust metronome beat. Its roots are in the disco of summer, Sylvester and mid-'70s [Norman] Whitfield, its head twisted and turned by McLaren's plundering escapades, but its heart is in a sleazy bordello, pining for the sweat and punk in the backroom.

Holly: "It's like these untamed creatures meet Trevor Horn and his stamp is all over it. Because it was our first single, and there's no ready-made market, we just had to have as much fun as we could when we were making it. We just thought—buzz—and then we'll know when it's right.

"I always loved the sounds that Trevor got on his records, but it seemed like something far beyond our reach because it was so sexy and commercial. I always thought the content and people he did it with was rather weak until McLaren. But I still died when he phoned us up.

"I mean on 'Relax', Trevor interpreted the sound, of course. I mean, he's a really strong guy, OK? It's hard to really talk about this. We're aware of the situation, we're a band produced by Trevor Horn and it's shoved down

our throats a bit. We were wary of being his puppets at first, but as soon as we met him that all went out the window. He's just a human being; he's that little guy who used to be in Buggles."

I think of the shallow, squirming sexuality presented by current pop—the vanity and preening of Wham!, Spandau, 'googoo and Heyward, and wonder if maybe the sleazy pantomime of FGTH will knock things up a bit, get someone to buckle down with it. Are they out on their own?

"I think it's becoming a bit trendy, actually; after our *Tube* show you got quite a few like Fashion and even that Tracie girl giving it much more sex and whip. I think it's catching on.

"But with those people it's in a very superficial way, because they haven't got the bollocks to go for it really. They only know it as an image, not a reality. You get studs and leather in every magazine now, but it doesn't really count for much. Like that whole punk thing was borrowed from a gay S&M attitude, but it wasn't given any attention at the time.

"Our main purpose is pleasure, to communicate a good feeling. Sex is part of it, sex is enjoyable, isn't it? It's about not being hung up or feeling guilty about any particular so-called deviation you'd like to get into. It's quite normal. The gay/S&M angle is regarded as taboo, but it's just »

1983

OCTOBER–DECEMBER



Trevor Horn, Frankie producer and co-founder of the ZTT label, talks to Muriel Grayson *The Tube*, 1983

people getting down, getting into enjoyment because it's not long that we are here.

"I met this Irish guy in a pub once and he asked me was I into M&S; it was really lovely. So sweet."

Into the lion's den

Holly: "Child, the first time we turned up for a gig in London was in Cha-Chas and we were put in a cage, a fuckin' cage, and suspended over the dancefloor. They put a mirror opposite us so people could see us from the bar. The support act was a guy in a leopardskin toga who put skewers right through his face and through his arms – lots of blood and stuff. We had to follow that."

Sounds like you were in your element.

"To a degree, yes. But you know what most of the kids down there are like. It's all World's End clothing, hipper-than-thou attitudes, and we were like these screaming animals in a cage. The reaction was really cool."

Paul: "They're such a cool audience to handle. I don't know what's wrong with them. Spoilt, I suppose. They think that they're it, but we know we are. I'd like to have seen them in the cage, that's for sure."

Sometimes they've been able to turn the tables and use the limelight to their advantage.

Holly: "The time we played *The Tube*, Jools Holland was sitting around moping all day. I think he's sort of bitter because he's a real muso and he's on the other side of the camera. Very sad. He needed cheering up, so we bound the Leatherettes in pink ribbon and gave them to him. He brought them to his hotel and showered them with champagne, real champagne."

And a little more history

Holly didn't attend school too much after the third year. He started to hang around town, and around parks. He met people there, people who had a great influence on him. This is probably mirrored in the roles he and Paul (the tall dark stranger) take in the video. It's Holly who sings and writes the songs with either the bass player and/or the drummer; Paul is the image co-ordinator, having spent a year in London before the group formed, on the dole but still "giving it loads on the gay scene". Apart from his back-up vocals he is in the band mainly because of his "stunning" looks, and he obviously exerts some influence on Holly.



Holly: "Back in '77 it was really exciting because there's always been really odd, arty people in Liverpool and suddenly you were finding yourself in there. It was great because I found school pretty hard to handle. I was well shy, always the weirdo."

Paul: "One week if you wore makeup you were a queer, the next you were a punk. It was great, a chance to do things. This sounds really heavy, but it was a chance to be honest with yourself, to be yourself. I think it's a bit more jaded now. It's still a really good place to have a rest. We didn't realise that when we felt we were stuck there, but now, in the past year, we have."

Holly: "There's some great people in Liverpool – Jayne Casey of Pink Industry, a very big influence on us both. The early gigs were great – girls in leather, boys in leather knickers, oooo-ooh. As far as having a good time, people in Liverpool aren't shy at all."

"Smack? That's the dark side of it; it's true there's still a lot of it on the streets. We have a lot of younger friends into it and there's nothing you can do to pull them out of it. It's really sad; you have to keep away from those children or they'll try to drag you into it. It does my head in even thinking about it."

Back-to-back with "Relax" is the FGTH version of "Ferry Cross The Mersey", the federal republic of Liverpool's national anthem these past 20 years. It is a hitherto unexplored, unexpected side to the group and shows that Holly has a depth and emotive base to his voice that would shame many. At first I thought of

Ultravox doing "No Regrets", but then I thought of something far more stirring, a genuine overhaul and upheaval. It is the spirit of swinging '60s Liverpool pulled through to the bleakness and uncertainty of the present day. Camp, grandiose but oddly affecting.

Holly: "That was Trevor's idea; I thought, 'What?' and just laughed it off. Then I thought, 'Don't be so negative; just try it and if we don't like it then throw it out.' Well he came up with this beautiful, amazing backing track that gave me a chance to sing rather than just shout."

"It's a really sad song now and I think it's really important. It's just like an extension of the documentaries we've had over the past year. I think now Liverpool things are starting to break through because everyone is working their bollocks off up there."

The future

Paul: "We've been thrown in at the deep end now, what we always wanted, but when it happens you realise you're in deep water. It's funny to catch yourself in it, you just crack up. Fame sounds fun but I don't think anyone is ever prepared for it. It's the sort of thing I dream about, everyone recognising you, going, 'It's them, it's them.'"

Holly: "Ultimately it would be great to do a Frankie Goes To Hollywood movie, with music an essential part of Hollywood, obviously. We were amazed how much everyone picked up on the sex attitude, actually. It was just something we were exploring. We've got an idea to do a Disneyland video, a real glamour video, for instance. We just want to have fun."

"I think the media will absorb what we're doing eventually, the way it absorbs everything. Then we can just change the theme of our movie. It doesn't have to be sex – we can shock them that it isn't that kind of thing."

FGTH have stopped playing live for a while. They say it's because of lack of finances; Morley says he wants to ban all live performances for two years at least. But their campaign is planned – two more singles, "Welcome To The Pleasure Dome" and "Two Tribes", are already

"The early gigs were great – girls in leather, boys in knickers"

scheduled. The latter they describe as their masterpiece, an allegory between inter-global and personal relations.

Definitions: 1. Sleaze

Holly: "When we do play live, our sound is going to be a lot rougher than on record. Over the past few months we've come to the stage where we believe we are a valuable musical force again, whereas before we thought we were a side-show sex thing. Our music has got a lot smoother, smoother with sleaze and class.

What's sleaze? Go to Amsterdam, child, and you'll find out. Divine sleaze – it's either something you are or you aren't."

Paul: "Sleaze is kind of like sex that is classy. Not crude, not ugly.

Holly: "A good image of sleaze for me would be a 1930s drinking bar with jazz musicians hanging round and black and white prostitutes at the bar, that kind of scene."

2. Normal sex

Holly: "I don't know what normal sex is. I think all sex is normal, because it comes from people and people are normal. There's not much that is socially acceptable if the bastions of society, the judges and Mary Whitehouse, are deciding. They're just people with extremely closed attitudes."

Paul: "Being that closed is perverse. Not being able to face up to that honesty with yourself is perverse. She must have seen so much porn, must have a huge guilt complex! Maybe she's never had an orgasm. Has Mary Whitehouse ever had the big O?"

3. Decadence

But how far can you go; don't you have a concept of decadence?

Holly: "Decadence is a dead weird word, OK? It's someone who is off the party rather than on it. I looked it up in the dictionary and it said a decaying era. I heard it in connection with people who were wild and off-the-wall, supposedly. I don't really understand it as a concept, it's a real voyeurs' concept."

4. Morals

Don't you have any morals, then?

Holly: "Morals? Things like the 10 Commandments and all that. Oh yeah, but that's just a natural human weakness, isn't it? Maybe it's not a weakness, maybe it's strength. I'm trying not to give anyone a hard time – aren't you? That's about the only moral I've got."

Don't worry about the taste barrier, Holly, just go right on through?

"Amsterdam was fab, I was totally knocked out. Whereas in England the leather bars are quite tame, there they are totally overboard. Like Tom Of Finland, who is a homo-erotic illustrator – he paints brilliant images of guys in leather, uniforms, sailors and stuff. His pictures are on the wall, the bar area is caged off and there's slings and jackboots hanging from the ceiling and a giant cock in a light rope from one side of the ceiling to the other and it's coming at the knob. Then you go to the backroom and there's an orgy going on. I was really impressed by it, the freedom of attitude."

Where is the magic and thrill in sex taking

"An Irish guy asked me if I was into M&S. It was so sweet"

place in such unhygienic, graphically crude surrounds?

"It adds a whole new kind of theatre and performance to it. You almost have to be prepared to fuck in front of 10 people. It's fierce. Sex is a performance, especially when it's with someone that means a lot to you, but even then you are patronising and entertaining their existence. Any performance – on stage or in bed – has got to be from the heart or it doesn't make it, doesn't cut it."

Of course the harder and more often they come, the harder they fall. Holly admits that the promiscuity that the gay scene thrives on leads to the possibility of all sorts of horrible diseases.

"Aids, yeah, there's that danger. Children, don't catch Aids! May they find a cure, that's all I've got to say about it. You can look at it as retribution. Armageddon's round the corner.

"The second coming. Hey! The second coming, that sounds fun. There's lots of theories, people say it's the CIA and germ warfare. It depends on the most entertaining one at the time."

As a force in the world of pop and populist entertainment, I'm not putting too much faith in Frankie Goes To Hollywood just yet. I like their record, but it's hard to tell whether they've made it as puppets or real talents, as threats or comic cuts.

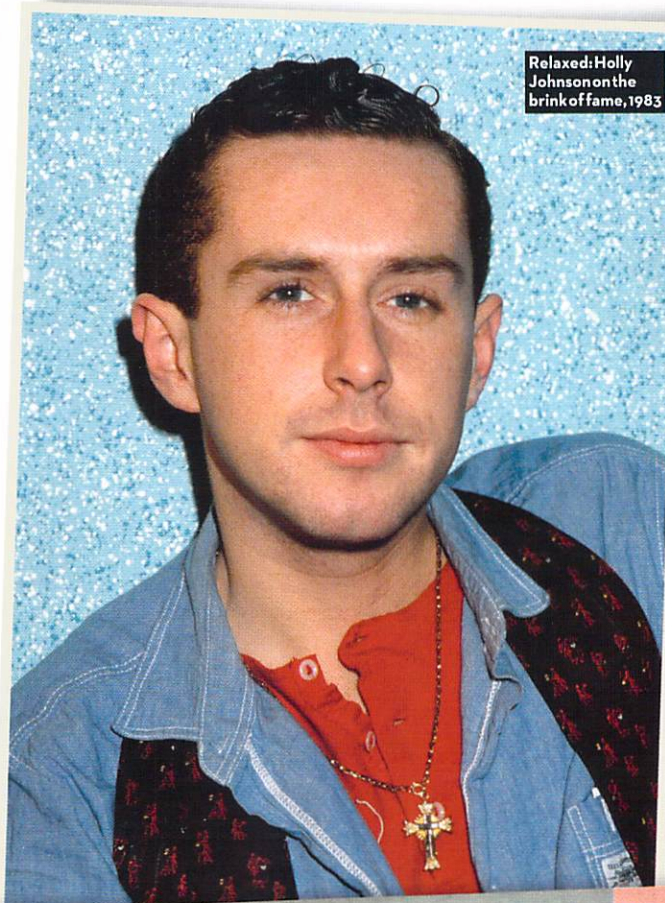
I'm suspicious of the arthouse influences they draw from – a mixture of the tart, the tawdry and the hard to trust, and whether they're going to use their sexuality preciously, as an excuse for all sorts of tedious overblown imagery (jackboots and inflatable peni). Maybe they'll try to do something really skilful, really daring. It's early days yet, but for two 23-year-olds they sometimes seem very easily impressed.

"I want big business, I get off on it. Like when we were recording our single, the studio was like this huge Greek dome and Chris Blackwell walked in. He was like the emperor with a beautiful white girl and a beautiful Jamaican girl at either side. I kept thinking, 'This is Chris Blackwell of Crosse & Blackwell. This guy can actually go and watch Grace Jones record.' I got a real buzz off that," says Holly.

The exit

What am I doing here? The Coleherne isn't very busy early in the evening and Paul and Holly are obviously a little disappointed. I'd come to see them at work in their natural habitat, but there wasn't much work to be done. Gradually the place started to fill up and Holly was enthusiastically telling me how they'd contrived to have various, um, slogans inscribed on the run-out groove of their record. The place was getting a bit clammy, all leering brutes and young prancing gigolos.

I felt like telling Holly about a little bar in his beloved Hollywood. There they have proper barstools, a selection of the world's finest beers and a single woman can always be assured of being harassed. At the bottom of their menu they have a motto: "ABSOLUTELY NO GAYS ADMITTED". It was just an idea, but it seemed much easier to get up and leave. *Gavin Martin* •



Relaxed: Holly Johnson on the brink of fame, 1983

PINK AND PERKY!

1983

OCTOBER-DECEMBER

“What have I done now?”

OZZY OSBOURNE,
partially reformed
madman, has a new album
out. At home, he talks
horror movies, Greenham
Common, even music.
“I don’t worship the Devil,
I’m not a Satanist at all...
In fact I’d like to think
I’m a good person.”

— MELODY MAKER NOVEMBER 26 —

A S DOWNTO earth as a crap in the woods, Ozzy Osbourne, father of three, strikes the newcomer as the index of contemporary Britain. He reads *The Sun*, the nation’s most popular rag, has an absence of pretensions about stardom, and likes Boy George because, among other reasons, he gives he and his workmates something to talk about in the tea-break.

Hearing Ozzy talk like this it’s possible to temporarily forget his reputation for the ingesting of avifauna. He complains about being known as the demon bat-chewer though the image is here to stay, come what may. Ozzy seems less of a devil than an assembly line worker on his way to the nine o’clock shift at Longbridge.

His arms are pale, flabby and bear the remains of old tattoos—the legend OZZY being the most memorable. He still laughs at Allan Jones’ one-time description of ex-colleague Tony Iommi as “Jason King with builders’ arms”, heartily concurring that the Black Sabbath guitarist did indeed model himself on the droopily moustachioed TV character. And he is magnanimous enough to allow for the onslaught of critical jibes in the press; it’s just people’s personal opinions, he says.

On stage, the man-of-the-people image stays well to the fore. No fancy stage movements for Ozzy, nor on this current British tour any stunts such as dwarf-extirpation or similar sensation. Ozzy Osbourne has two basic movements on stage—stalking, shoulders hunched, from left to right and back again, and the sudden thrusting of the arms into the air, two digits held aloft in each hand. The crowd respond to this with a frighteningly intense devotional fervour, pumping the peace signs back at the stage with the insistence of pistons gone apeshit. The kids must identify with Ozzy.

He doesn’t wear satin trousers, therefore mirrors their essential ordinariness.

“If I was to wear tight satin everybody would be able to see how fat I really am!” jokes Ozzy, his manager/wife Sharon hooting at the very thought. Ozzy jokes quite a lot. Are there large elements of self-parody in what he does?

“No, not really,” he says, momentarily as serious as a Bible. “The kids that come and see me, there’s a little bit of Ozzy Osbourne in those kids. You see ‘em last night? They all got on stage and had a little headbang »

MARK WEISS / GETTY

THE
RETURN
 OF
BATMAN

OZZY OSBOURNE used to be a



Ironman: Ozzy poses with his daughter Aimee in New York City

1983

OCTOBER–DECEMBER

A pile of tosh

MM DEC 10 Ozzy's third solo album narrowly fails to charm the **MM** critic.

Ozzy Osbourne
Bark At The Moon EPIC

Chap of chaps as he undoubtedly is, Ozzy Osbourne makes criticism, acclaim and even normal fan reaction totally superfluous. Like Lemmy, he overruns overkill to a point way beyond parody, and his legend has long overshadowed his music.

Ozzy is much like the elderly family Alsatian. He still likes to bare his fangs simply because he can and he still manages to scare the shit out of the postman, but everybody else knows he doesn't really mean it and they watch him clawing the kennel with affectionate amusement.

Even records seem like an inessential appendage in Ozzy's self-made role as the unthinking man's favourite loony. His gigs are good for a laugh and a migraine, his interviews are a riot and one feels, in consequence, morally obliged to buy his records.

So here we have Oz whacking it out with his customarily subtle blend of sledgehammer vocals and chainsaw arrangements, and you just know he had more fun pretending to be a werewolf on the cover than he did laying down the vocals.

Last week in *Sounds*, somebody described Oz as the "Liberace of HM", which is pushing it a bit, though it does effectively illustrate the extent to which Osbourne relies on gaudy muck for his glory. Because the record itself is a pile of tosh.

It's basically a series of mundane, unimaginative standard riffs, badly recorded, tamely produced, barely doing

justice to the horrors of titles like "Rock 'n' Roll Rebel" (never heard that one before, Oz), the werewolf title track "Bark At The Moon" and "Spiders" ("Creepy crawly things filling up your bed/Soon you'll feel him crawling through your brain").

They are interspersed with a couple of token ballads, "So Tired" (which sounds like ELO) and "You're No Different" (a laughably clumsy attempt at sensitivity). An eerie organ intro gives "Forever" initial promise, but this rare shock of inspiration is quickly trampled beneath

exceedingly fierce metal footwear, and even on the best track, "Waiting For Darkness", the intimidation still seems half-hearted.

A lyric sheet is, however, thoughtfully

provided to ensure we miss none of the grotesque sexual innuendo of "Now You See It Now You Don't", or the heartfelt protestation of "Rock 'n' Roll Rebel"... "God only knows why they couldn't see the obvious/Is it because they manifest the incubus..." Brilliant. Absolutely brilliant.

Still, you've got to buy it, haven't you? I mean, if nobody buys his records then there won't be any point in interviewing him any more, and then where would we be?

Colin Irwin

ALBUMS REVIEW

1983

with me. It's good fun. I feel like the conductor of a mad orchestra, you know, like a teacher of rock. You know, I can't put it into words without coming over to be a twat. I don't ever think, 'Aren't I the greatest, look at my turquoise rings and all the rest of the bunk that goes with it.' I used to walk around with so much turquoise that if I'd have fallen over they would have to have had a crane to pick me up again, and I just said to myself, 'What the fuck am I walking around like a Christmas tree for?'"

Ozzy Osbourne's basic philosophy seems based around the simple phrase 'fun', and is the hardest point of view in the world to argue against. Voice a suspicion that there might be more to life than this and you are automatically placed in the camp of the cantankerous.

THE SHOW PUT on by Ozzy's group at the Bristol Colston Hall struck the writer as nothing less than an excuse for an outbreak of mass cretinism, the predictable in chase of the predictable, yet when faced with the instantly likeable Brummie you know that nothing you could possibly say could make any difference to his basic response... the kids get off on it and what's wrong with that?

"Face it, eventually it's gonna wind down for me and I'll be able to sit down and look at me old scrapbook and say, 'Yeah, it was good fun...' Which it was."

Ozzy mentions Black Sabbath, and immediately grimaces with disgust. "I mean, Black Sabbath, forget it, you know, that was such a fucking bore for so many years it was untrue. That band made me feel old, made me feel over-the-hill. I vowed when I left Sabbath I'd never be in the situation where I'd do it just for the name. You could have four mongoloids up there called Black Sabbath and they'd pull a crowd. The name Black Sabbath is like a legend, it's like Robin Hood, it's like a pantomime now. I wish them all the luck in the world, I'm just glad I'm out of it now."

Talking of pantomime, some might suggest that singing about being a "Rock 'n' Roll Rebel" in 1983 smacks of the same, but not Ozzy.

"I think people like a rebel, people like someone who's anti-this and anti-whatever the systems says, and that's what I always try to be. The reason I wrote the song 'Rock 'n' Roll Rebel' was because in America, especially, I was branded as The Anti-Christ, The Devil Worshipper, The Son Of Satan and all this crap. I wouldn't even know the first thing about that stuff anyway, so I wrote down, 'Whatever you wanna call me, go ahead, but all I know I am is a rock'n'roll rebel.'"

He says all this with a surprising lack of self-consciousness, and won't accept that the dangerous edge of the 30-year-old musical institution of rock is deceased.

"It disappeared because you yourself can't recognise it, 'cos you've gone on to something else. It's like folk... folk's been around for hundreds of years, and there's still a big audience for that. Country & western's the same... jazz... it's now become an established form of music."

This sounds suspiciously to me like an unconscious admission of the salient points of my argument, but I press ahead: in what sense is he a rebel?

"All I'm trying to say about being a rebel is that I will not conform to what these people want me to do. I once did an interview on the radio about a year ago in the States and this woman said, 'I won't let my son come and see your show.' I asked if she'd seen any of my concerts and she said, 'No.' So how can you judge it, say it's awful? And that's what I'm saying in that song. People will believe what they'll believe in, the Ministry Of Peace, whatever, and people will hide behind titles... kill thousands of people but it's OK because it's the Ministry Of Death, y'know?"

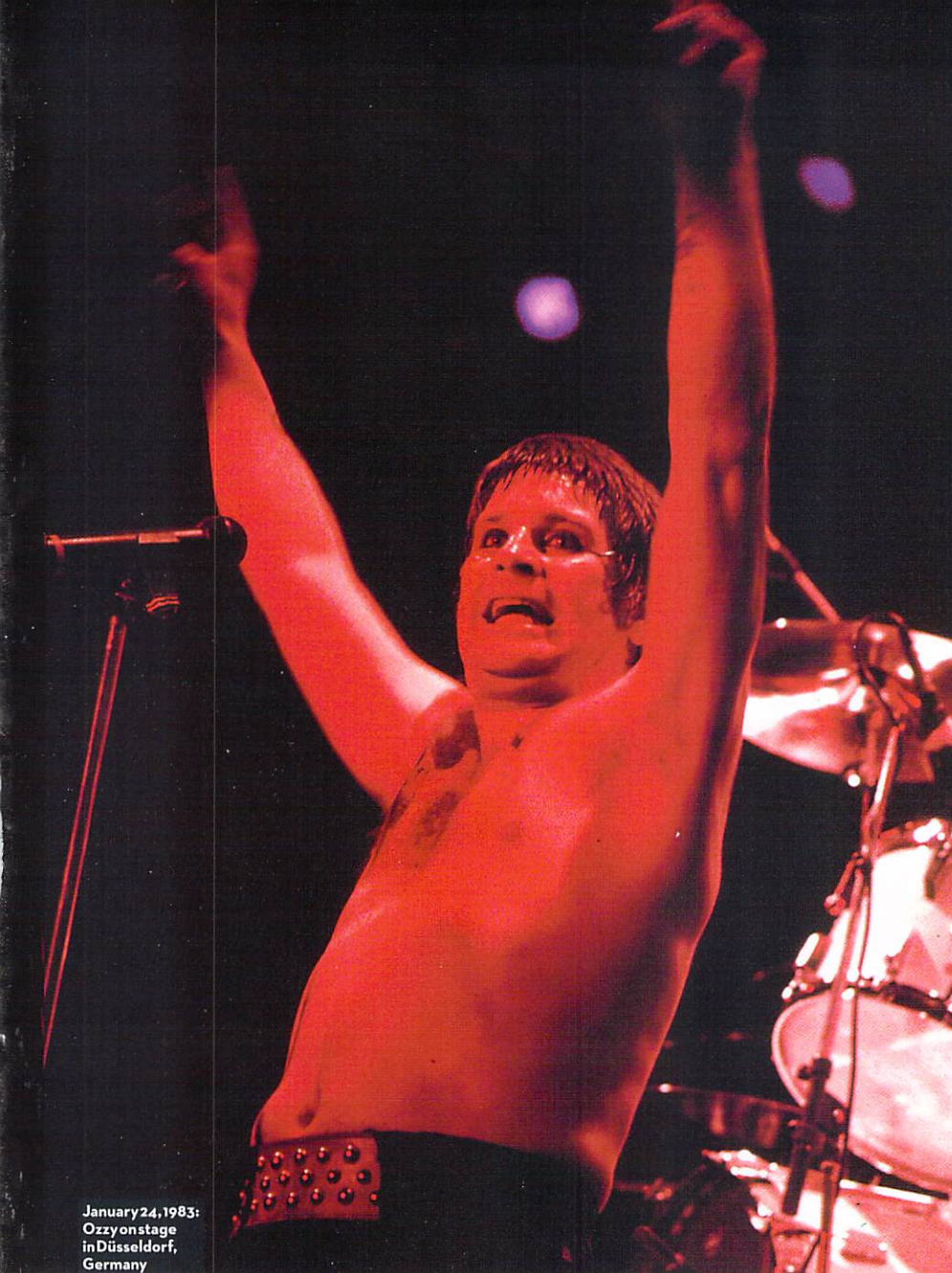
Ozzy says that all he's trying to do is make kids aware that the world's a cruel place.

"When I was in Black Sabbath, in the very early days when we did things like 'Paranoid' and 'War Pigs', we never realised that we affected so many people in America, because we didn't really know what America was about, it was like going to Mars at the time. 'War Pigs' really got to them because of Vietnam."

"Groups like Black Sabbath were the original punks, if you like. The message is still the same, the approach to giving 'em the message has changed, that's all - 'leave us to be our own tribe', you know? 'Why should we conform to your messed up situation?'"

IN MANY WAYS a family man, with a 15th-century cottage in the Staffordshire countryside, Ozzy Osbourne seems the unlikely of rebels. His six-acre estate includes a lake; in his spare time he likes to





January 24, 1983:
Ozzy onstage
in Düsseldorf,
Germany

go fishing and shooting. He's in no way a millionaire but admits to being "comfortable". Sharon accompanies him when his group is on the road.

Somehow it's difficult to square this joker sitting opposite with the image of a man ensconced in the worst ravages of tasteless heavy metal excess (besides dining on a bat, he also once bit the head off a pigeon at a record company meeting and used to hurl chunks of liver at the audience as part of his stage act). Doesn't he get pissed off in interviews when all people want to talk about is "Ozzy Osbourne, the man who chews live bats"?

"If I was an ordinary guy like yourself or any man on this train and picked up a dead cat and chewed on its head, somebody'd say, 'Fuck me, I got on the train this morning and I saw this guy chew a fucking dead cat's head.' And then that would be forgotten."

Delivering in thick Brum, Ozzy manages to make the idea of dead cat digestion as everyday as the brushing of teeth.

"But every day after that ridiculous thing happened, before they talk about me, my past, my present, my future, it's always 'Hey, Ozzy—what do bats taste like?' or 'Ozzy, is it true you blew a goat up?' or 'Ozzy, did you really saw the legs off a Doberman?' I mean, it's incredible. They think I must get up in the morning, go, 'Mmm... today's menu's going to be three cow's eyes, four cats' bollocks...'

"I always seem to get into a situation when I hit the bottle, like we all do, you have a drink to get smashed and you wake up and think, 'Oh fucking hell, what have I done now?' The Alamo incident happened on booze."

"Groups like
Black Sabbath
were the
original punks,
if you like"

(The time when he was arrested in Texas urinating on the door of the Alamo—captured on film by *MM*.)

"It always happens that whenever I'm there getting drunk there's somebody there with a camera. But it did the trick and I'm not complaining," he admits. Notoriety has its uses, especially if you've left a popular heavy metal band and are in danger of being written off as an old fart. Yet he still maintains an air of hurt innocence when the subject of devilry crops up.

"There was a song on my first album, 'Mr Crowley', and the reason that came about was that in rock'n'roll with the likes of Ritchie Blackmore and Jimmy Page, the name Crowley kept popping up as if it was a hip thing to talk about. I didn't know anything about him. I wrote this song that went, 'Mr Crowley, what went on in your head/Who were you and what were you about?' And that's all it was, a question, 'cos I didn't know anything about him."

"So from it stemmed [the perception] that I'm a Crowleyite. People hear one word and they judge everything by the one phrase, you know? Is it getting to the way that people can't mention the words 'Devil', 'Satan', 'Evil' and 'Death'? I don't worship the Devil, I'm not a Satanist at all... in fact I'd like to think I'm a good person."

Naturally, heavy metal is a comic-strip music, thus the forces of Good and Evil are necessarily oversimplified, placed into positions of conflict for their symbolic and entertainment value. In much the same way that horror movies work...

"The first film that ever really changed my head around was *The Exorcist*," says Ozzy, seemingly unaware of the joke, "the first film that I thought, 'This is real, y'know.'"

He rejects the modern filmic nasties such as *The Evil Dead*, preferring something with a bit of a storyline to it. "I saw *The Return Of The Zombie Flesh Eaters*. As soon as it started it was blood, snot, blood, snot, eyeballs falling on the floor, arms ripped off, torsos all over the place, and it's just like horrendous, y'know?"

"The best comedy film I've ever seen was *Psycho II*—I laughed my arse off in that film. It was so pathetic. The last shot, when his mother comes in and he asks if he can have some coffee and he smacks her around the head with a shovel, Bob Daisley, the bass player, who was with me, shouts, 'One lump or two?!' I collapsed."

SO, OZZY OSBOURNE, fur-coated man of metal... if born into a different age, what would you be?

"I think I'd like to be an astronaut." And then a correction: "I'd like to have been born in a time before the nuclear age. It frightens me to death." Greenham?

"I think it's good, but they should go and find some husbands; I think most of 'em are just lesbians who've got nothing better to do with themselves. I mean, we all know about it, and they're doing a good thing in one respect, but... I dunno. Are they gonna achieve anything?"

"All I know is that it's a terrible thing that they have these things. As I said to this guy in America, 'Do you think they'll ever drop the bomb?' and he said, 'There's never been a gun made that hasn't been fired in anger.' Whoever loses a conventional war will push the button. What's he got left to do? If any nation's crazy enough to push the button it's the French. They've already been overrun once in the last war, so they don't want to let it happen again."

British to the core, even down to the French-hating and radical-baiting. I have this theory that whatever party Ozzy Osbourne votes for at the next general election will be the party that forms the next government. Maybe he doesn't read *The Sun* every day. I forgot to check. *Lynden Barber* •

1983

OCTOBER–DECEMBER



Mean, raunchy rhythms: ZZ Top's Dusty Hill (left) and Billy Gibbons

Steeped in blues

MM DEC 10 Texan boogie rockers ZZ Top charm a large British venue.

A FEW DAYS PREVIOUSLY BBC 2 had scored a century with their brilliantly presented tribute to the "Soundies", the jukebox visual clips of the '40s featuring Slim Gaillard—bagels dunked dangerously—and Fats Waller and his amazing dancing eyebrow.

I mention this because ZZ Top at Wembley gave similar sensations of pleasure. Like the old jazz joke-boxers, ZZ Top paint smiles and snap ankles in a single entertaining motion and still keep the integrity intact.

While most rock'n'roll groups display a depressing sense of ironic distance and those that do have it handle it with boxing gloves, Top realise that it helps to have a close relationship to the object of the ironic commentary.

"This part here is gonna make you sick," commented Billy Gibbons in Deputy Dawg

drawl introducing a song called "TV Dinners". I hooted and twitched trouser simultaneously.

The greatest misconception about Top is that they're some kind of grotesque heavy metal morons soaked in denim and dim wits. Someone asked me if they sounded like Lynyrd Skynyrd; it was like asking if Modern Romance sounded like King Sunny Ade.

The fact is that ZZ Top are steeped seriously in the blues, delivering their roots in a deep Southern funk. Various, they are Ry Cooder through a fuzzbox or Cream minus chrome strip and fins, look like they've just wandered in from a Louisiana swamp, hold guitars the way they should be held

LIVE!

WEMBLEY ARENA
LONDON

NOVEMBER 30

How can you fail to warm to a group who give their songs titles like "Cheap Sunglasses"?

(Ramone-like, about the heels) and on one songs come so close to the great John Lee Hooker that had I a hat I would be hurling it towards the ceiling for joy. An anachronism, maybe... but what a great anachronism!

Now how can you fail to warm to a group who give their songs titles like "Cheap Sunglasses" and "Wouldn't Touch It With A Ten Foot Pole", play some of the tastiest and most tasteful blues solos you heard in a rock band—Billy Gibbons, Official Hero—have a bassist and guitarist who move in synch and wear beards to the navel and have a non-hirsute drummer called Frank Beard? How could you resist a group that play

rock how it should be played—short and sweet, minus excess baggage, with some of the meanest, raunchy rhythms you've stomped a slipper to in yonks? I know I couldn't. Surprise of the year. *Lynden Barber*

Parallel all the way

MM DEC 10 New Order celebrate a successful year... after a fashion.

THE ACADEMY, FORMERLY the Fair Deal, is a big cold barn of a place, but New Order probably didn't notice. Big and bright, cold and distant, they've refined an iron-and-steel modern dance from which the heart has been systematically squeezed by mobile hi-tech safety nets.

A group presumably gets the audience it deserves, and this crowd were attentive, reverent and for all I know bored to death. Upstairs between acts, they sat around cross-legged, skinning up absentmindedly and talking about the SWP. But New Order couldn't have noticed.

The band's super-realist funk is capable of becoming a celebration of delirious proportions – witness the mighty “Temptation” – but they don't seem to go in for that sort of thing. Post-Arthur Baker, they took the stage to the accompaniment of a massively tactile taped rhythm track which soon revealed itself as “Confusion”. Here was a promise of power and hypnosis, aided by the clean streamlining of the mix.

The following “Temptation” was pretty fine too, surging over Peter Hook's high singing bass. Bernard Albrecht (newly blond) can't sing, of course, but then he doesn't really claim to. The voice provides a little bit of much-needed human error.

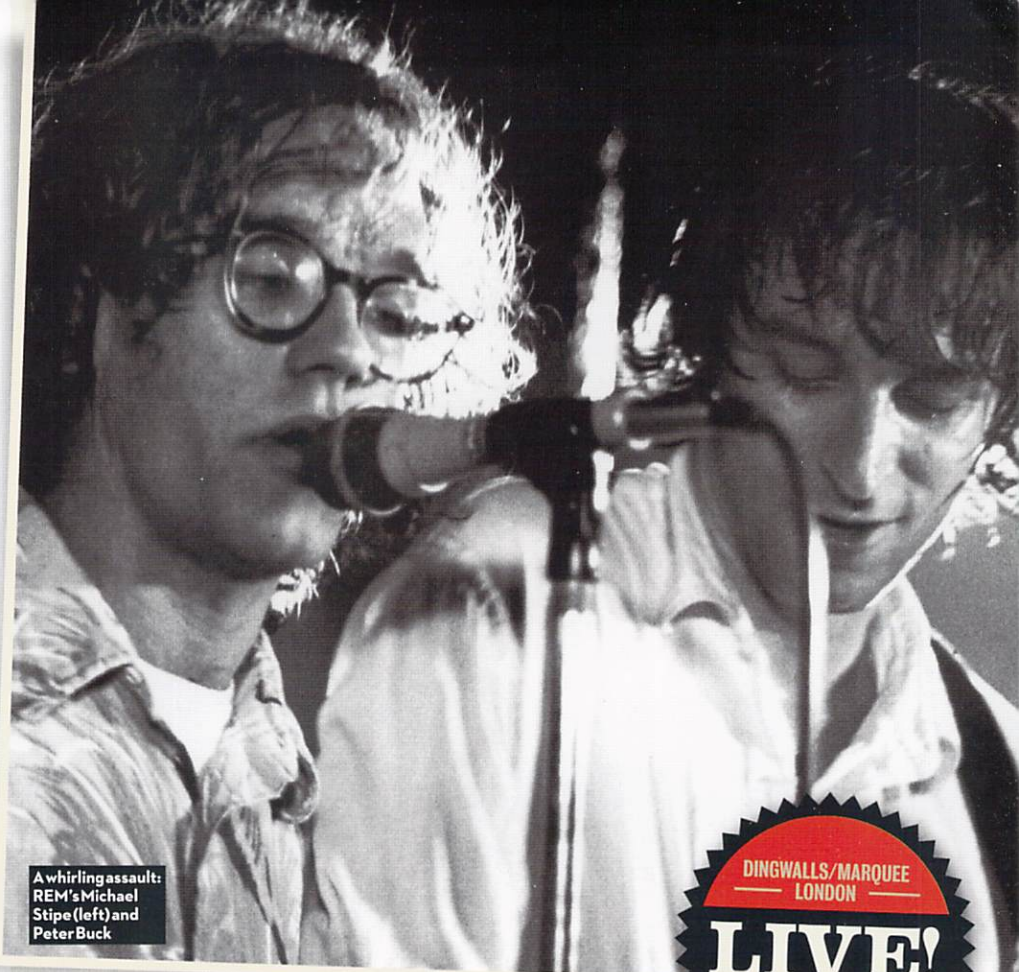
But from here it was... parallel all the way. New Order are perfectly designed, down to the elegant probing fingers of light which meshed crisply overhead as the group strolled easily through their paces. Unmoved and consequently unmoving, everything stayed firmly in its place – rich, ringing guitar chords, pulsing synth and sequencers, and dazzlingly accurate drum treatments (both live and mechanised).

The crowd absorbed all this as if it was their due and nothing more. “Age Of Consent” was theoretically thrilling; a crisp 3D matrix in cool blue, and “Your Silent Face” was professionally precision-tooled.

Apart from a smattering of whoops for “Blue Monday”, the audience generally stayed rooted to the spot, possibly searching for subtitles. The disinterment of rarely seen Buñuel flicks was never greeted with such pontifical obeisance. I was disappointed – elevation had seemed imminent, but gravity pulled everybody down.

New Order sauntered off into the wings; everybody clapped for a few seconds and then went home. New Order “don't do encores”, y'see. I'd like to care about New Order, but why should I bother?

Adam Sweeting



Awirling assault:
REM's Michael
Stipe (left) and
Peter Buck



A kinetic exhibition

MM DEC 3 REM shake of their mystery for an explosive London debut.

REM'S MURMUR is the most beguiling album of 1983, a record whose mysterious atmosphere and elegant musical designs infiltrate the imagination with an emotional resonance that very little else released this year has even begun to match.

More than a few heads, then, will have been twisted off their necks when the group simply exploded onto the stage at Dingwalls in a ferocious howl of feedback and stormy drumming that reached a tempestuous peak with a version of “Moral Kiosk” that took a torch to the original and threatened to burn down the night. This was seriously frenzied stuff, definitely not for the fainthearted; miraculously, though, nothing of the album's subtlety was lost, it was merely intensified, toughened up, the record's restraint replaced by a whirling physical assault that brought to mind unusual visions of the Ramones pistol-whipping the repertoire of The Byrds.

Hair straggling wildly, falling uncombed over a face that was a twitching landscape of nervous tics, vocalist Michael Stipe looked like an asylum inmate, arms wrapped around his body as if trapped in a straitjacket out of whose confines he would occasionally escape, his arms flapping,

then, like exclamatory semaphore signals. Sounding hazardously like a threshing machine let loose on a Rickenbacker, guitarist Peter Buck was similarly possessed.

Treating the stages of both Dingwalls and the Marquee like they were trampolines, Buck was a kinetic exhibition, his playing raging from the strafing runs of “Sitting Still” (no chance!) to the gang-busting chords of “West Of The Fields”, “Carnival Of Sorts” and “9-9”. Melodically precise, he was cooler on

the reflective, beautifully composed “Talk About The Passion” and “Pilgrimage”, but cut wild and loose on virtually everything in sight, turning a six-string flamethrower on “Gardening At Night”, whose whimsical title disguises the song's fierce nocturnal tensions,

and reducing the strident “Catapult” to flaming rubble.

Perhaps the most devastating moments of two sensational outings were reserved for the encores of the Marquee, when a discreetly scored version of The Velvet Underground's “Femme Fatale” was used as a launching pad for an overwhelming “Radio Free Europe” whose dramatic momentum threatened complete hysteria, with the mighty Buck coming on like a tank attack over the continental shift of Bill Berry's drumming. A quick return is a must. *Allan Jones*

This was frenzied stuff; miraculously, though, nothing of Murmur's subtlety was lost

1983

OCTOBER–DECEMBER



“We merit a great deal of attention”

“People are dedicated to us because we deserve it,” says Morrissey, singer of a remarkable new band called **THE SMITHS**. “We don’t have to be cool any more,” he says of recent post-punk. “That is the basic thing about Smithdom.”

The Smiths in Manchester, May 15, 1983: (l-r) Andy Rourke, Johnny Marr, Morrissey and Mike Joyce



PAUL SLATTERY / PHOTOSHOT

Magnificent Obsessions

— MELODY MAKER NOVEMBER 26 —

WHEN MORRISSEY SPEAKS, he nurses the side of his head with a sensitive hand as if he were trying to soothe some nagging pain or ease out the words by the soft persuasion of his gentle fingers. He frequently creases his brow and looks worried, yet rarely have I met a man so confident, so convinced by the worth of his own demanding mission.

Looking out across a cruel landscape, he sees himself ushering in a new form of beauty; a defiant but sensual challenge to everything that is wasted and ugly. He recalls his teenage years as a period of misery and emptiness and, now that he has finally conquered a depression that seemed never-ending, he wants us to share in his triumph, be inspired by his example.

This complete dismay with the past means he refuses to even talk about it. Morrissey lives only for the present and the future, about which he enthuses with a warming optimism, reeling off long, considered sentences spoken quietly but always with a winning air of authority.

These days everything in his life appears to be falling into place. There's hardly time for anything beyond work and sleep. When we meet he's tired and pale, recovering from the previous night in the recording studio, and before long we find ourselves in a taxi battling through the London traffic towards a station, another journey, another destination.

The medium for Morrissey's genesis was The Smiths, a group unassuming by name but magnificent by nature. This new beginning came about when he crossed paths with guitarist Johnny Marr and the two discovered they shared a common vision that simply had to be realised.

With bass player Andy Rourke and drummer Mike Joyce, The Smiths surfaced in the autumn of last year, quickly attracting a dedicated following in their home city of Manchester and then later in London as well. Their quintessential line-up was a deliberately classic arrangement, representing the group's return to the pure fundamentals of pop: melody, rhythm and most of all, emotion.

So far they have released two excellent singles on Rough Trade that boldly express the group's intentions; "Hand in Glove"/"Handsome Devil", and "This Charming Man"/"Jeane", the 12-inch of the latter featuring two different versions of "Charming Man" and two new songs, "Wonderful Woman" and "Accept Yourself", possibly their finest yet.

While admitting their debt to '60s pop, especially the Byrds and Buffalo Springfield (Johnny actually uses Roger McGuinn's old 12-string Rickenbacker), The Smiths have nothing to do with nostalgia, setting their sights firmly on fresh horizons. If their music is filled with light and space, as it so often is, that's merely a reflection of themselves rather than some slavish attempt to capture the magic of another time.

Johnny Marr is in love with the sound and scope of guitars, and how it shows; his arrangements and playing glisten and sparkle, forming a luscious undercurrent that's impossible not to get swept along with. And Morrissey's dreamy voice, satiated with romance and idealism; is already competent enough to translate his high-flying aspirations.

Had he perhaps surprised himself?

"Not really, no," he replies, unassuming as ever. "You see I went through a long, strange period of self-development with words and singing, so I really felt ready when the time came. I didn't feel, 'good grief can I do it, can't I do it?' I was just really so desperate to do it that I just did it. When you're really desperate it's surprising what you can do!"

His former unhappiness hinted at, he's reluctant to expand any further, denying that there's any conscious attempt to mystify his background. Beyond confirming that The Smiths are his first venture into music and public performance, he's unwilling to say more.

"I really don't believe that there's anything in my past that could possibly interest anybody," he states matter-of-factly. "I don't really want to bore people with unnecessary paraphernalia. Actually I wish there was something mysterious in my past, but I'm afraid it was just dramatically dull!"

When The Smiths play live they go out of their way to make the occasion a real event. Morrissey emphasises the group's appeal for a return to honest emotion and a new hope for the future by his onstage conceits, the most well-known of all being the way he throws flowers at the audience. There's no irony intended, he says, and reveals his endearing

modesty once more when considering the group's fervent disciples.

"People are dedicated to us because we deserve it. We try. Our reception hasn't surprised me at all, in fact I think it will snowball even more dramatically over the immediate months – it really has to. I feel very comfortable about it, and I'm very pleased. It's all quite natural because I really think we merit a great deal of attention."

"You see they understand that I really do mean it when I shower people in flowers. They appreciate the honesty in that act. It was something I felt compelled to do because the whole popular music scene had become so grey and black, so dull! I thought something had to be injected and flowers were just a very sensible injection."

Those colours, grey and black, crop up a lot in Morrissey's conversation. To him, they're synonymous with the way modern culture is flattening out into a nightmare of video games and synthesized muzak. Which makes it paradoxical that The Smiths should adopt such a pointedly drab name and come from a city always associated with long macs and grim faces.

"At the time we formed," Morrissey recalls, "the northern bleakness was flirting with this kind of Parisian surrealism – all these inverted groups from Salford with terribly profound names! The most surreal, overtly artistic names were being pinned to the most pathetically dull groups, so we thought we'd latch ourselves onto the most simplistic name we could possibly think of and still produce inspiring music. All these other mordant individuals were just hiding behind this cloak of pseudo-surrealism and otherworldliness. It was all so fabricated and at the end of the day it amounted to an enormous nonsense."

"Simply by having a really straightforward name we were saying that you don't have to hide behind any veil of artistry to produce something worthwhile. I think these groups thought they really had to confuse people, that they really had to be misunderstood, otherwise they'd have no value. That kind of mentality looked down on simple music that could be comprehended, it tried to trivialise it. So The Smiths are a way to squash that. You really have to be yourself and be very down-to-earth and say what you want to say – do what you want to do. We don't have to be cool any more; that is really the most basic thing about Smithdom."

Factory Records still casts a dark shadow over Manchester, and Morrissey welcomes its receding significance. From the start, he says, he wanted nothing to do with the steely elitism that organisation had purposefully fostered. "They really did make a tremendous contribution to the cool attitude," he complains.

"They encouraged people by example to be hipper-than-thou. It was all so closed and aloof which is completely opposed to the whole notion of Smithdom. I always thought the original idea of Factory – a Northern indie label – was much more appealing than anything they produced. They really became very conservative and boring – I suppose it was easy making everything grey, it probably saved them a lot of thought and materials!"

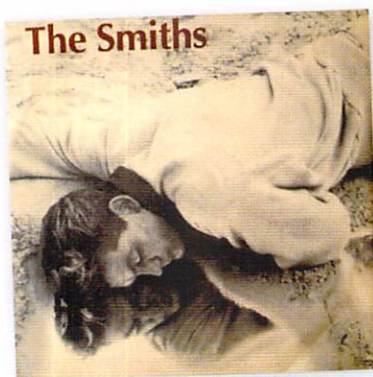
"We realised it was a spent force straight away when it came to considering record companies. At the time we arrived they didn't seem very interested in new groups anyway – I think they had financial problems or something. They'd become like an independent version of Warner Brothers. Although they felt very sure of their grip on the music scene they were really very deluded inside this overblown organisation."

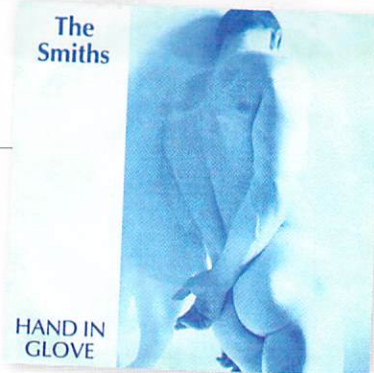
Bypassing Factory, then, the group eventually settled for a deal with Rough Trade – a typically unfashionable choice but one they felt their hearts were in. In fact it wasn't an intended move, and they went the usual rounds of the majors after several invitations by interested A&R departments before settling on Geoff Travis' still uncompromised indie label.

"We went to see various people from the majors but we felt out of place at every meeting. Our aims weren't really in line with theirs, whereas with Rough Trade we thought there was an immediate empathy between us. Experiencing the majors first hand was actually a pretty horrendous experience – they couldn't really see beyond what was popular, what had already sold."

If you haven't gathered by now, The Smiths aren't just a group, they're a crusade. Through their music and the ideals it embodies, The Smiths are determined to rekindle optimism they fear is nearly extinguished. For Morrissey, the decadent kick of living life on the edge of the apocalypse is one more dead-end drug.

His dreams are massive – and why not? To hear him speak is like listening to some sort of crazy evangelist, only Morrissey isn't mad, and the more he says the more he amazes.





"Popular music seems to affect almost everyone," he opines calmly, "and I think something very substantial can come from it. Its potential is so great! It can virtually change the entire universe," he adds, totally deadpan.

And yes, there's more: "I hope people will hear the music of The Smiths and realise it's played with real heart and soul. I hope they also realise that we are playing this music because we have to. The Smiths is a complete open book and it's there for anybody who wants to gaze upon it, and believe me, everything will spring forth. You don't need masses of literary knowledge to understand what we're doing. Yet simply because we are easy to enjoy doesn't mean that we're dealing in something inconsequential.

"The difficulty in music right now is to be straightforward. People refuse to be open and accessible—it's a craft that's disappeared. The only thing people can do now is befog the public and be obscure—which is of no value. The whole thing is about communication and what communication is there when your words are absurdly oblique?"

The lyrics to all The Smiths' songs are written by Morrissey, though he also evolves melodic ideas with Johnny, the group's musical mainstay. Deliciously atmospheric, the songs swirl around your senses, beckoning the listener into a world built on promise and a childlike honesty. It could all end up sounding terribly twee and affected, but Morrissey has the native wit to avoid pop's worn clichés. The new Julian Cope he isn't.

His lyrical vocabulary has revived a whole host of words and phrase more associated with the '30s than the '60s; "charming" and "handsome" among the most favoured. "I use such words," he explains, "because I think they're very positive words and much needed at the moment. It's better for people to think of themselves as charming and handsome than unemployed and miserable."

Surely an autobiographical reflection that harks back to the missing years before The Smiths, especially when he reveals that the motivation to write in the first place, "came through my own general depression, my disgust, my horror! But the reasons for writing aren't something I think about much really," he adds. "I've done it for such a long time now that to question it really seems quite ludicrous. It's like saying, 'why do you breathe?'"

Another explanation for Morrissey's chosen imagery is that he is at pains to write about beauty in an entirely asexual manner; his way of undermining "the unnatural and artificial barriers placed between the two sexes." It would be nice to think that such sentiments might be tolerated in 1983. After all, the charts must feature more gay artists at the moment than ever before. But sadly a national music paper took it upon themselves to slur the name of The Smiths with ridiculously irresponsible accusations hurled in their direction.

Worse still, this vicious innuendo was picked up by the gutter press and fed to millions. Of course, it was all lies, for some the grist of good copy, and the music paper concerned has since bent over backwards to buy off The Smiths with column inches, probably through the realisation that they could ill-afford to miss out on that dream of editors everywhere, the semi-mythical "next big thing".

The charming man that he is, Morrissey dismisses the whole dismal episode with a shrug and a little bitterness. "That's all history now," he says as if that very statement could erase the past. "It hasn't recurred in any dangerous way and ironically it subsequently won us more coverage in that paper than we'd ever got before."

Trying to set The Smiths in the recent context of pop is almost impossible, simply because they really have no peers, and no personal history to speak of either. Morrissey admits his great respect for fellow Mancunian Mark Smith (no name connection here) but that's as far as it goes beyond a kind of common indignation for the creeping apathy that makes our post-industrial country so rank.

"I understand what grieves Mark Smith completely, and the anger he feels for the people around him who see themselves powerless to do anything about their position in the scheme of things. But what is also so appealing about Mark Smith is that he shows compassion, which is a rare thing right now."

"The Smiths will push people to think for themselves"

Other groups who have dabbled in the legacy of the '60s—Orange Juice and Aztec Camera for example, both Rough Trade deserters—appear to be almost foreign bodies as far as Morrissey's concerned. Pointing out that his inspiration is largely literary and cinematic anyway, he relishes a monologue on modern pop music.

"It got to the stage when I was so angry with music, I felt I really had to interfere in some way. Break up all the squalor, which we're still trying to do. A big challenge to undertake? Well yes, but you know it's quite simple when you really think of it. And when you get within close proximity you realise it can be done. So many of the people involved in popular music are really such light individuals—they only seem threatening seen from a distance."

It's not unusual to find Morrissey wearing beads and an open-necked smock onstage, and while this signifies a healthy distaste for style worship, and the land of a thousand haircuts, to paraphrase John Lydon, he's not trying to bury his head in the sand of dreams.

"I think style is something you have to pay attention to," he argues, "because of the social climate we live in. People, let's face it, are obsessed with style—you can't get away from it. But I think you can be in there and giving a separate message. Try and suggest to people that maybe it's not that important after all. People in this country fall back on style because they don't have a great deal else. They need something to do with their money and something to help them feel interesting. Which is fine, in many ways, it's an art form, but it can get to be a little over obsessive I think, and override other things which are much more important."

Which clearly begs a question. What do politics mean to him?

"You have to be interested in politics these days," he asserts firmly. "If you're not, you're a completely lost individual. Whereas, years ago, politics seemed to be this thing that was secluded for a minority of intellectuals, these days you can't get away with that argument—you have to be attuned to what's happening, there's so much at stake. There's absolutely no excuse for people who aren't politically aware."

"I really believe that complacency is bred. It's a recurring theme promoted by a government that says, 'look, do not worry about nuclear weapons—we will look after you.' Governmental issues aren't translated in a way understandable to most people. Issues are deliberately veiled to prevent people from grasping the point at hand and then forming their own opinion."

"This government runs on a bedrock of naivety. They won't give things away, obviously, it's not in their interests. Ultimately people feel that it's all beyond them—we want to change that. The Smiths will push people to think for themselves, to believe they can really do something."

This is the right stuff! I vote for The Smiths immediately and draw your attention to the fact that they will soon be playing the Electric Ballroom for Peace Year and putting their money, as usual, where their charming mouths are.

As the station looms into view I ask if he'd ever thought of moving down to London, and what do they do when back in Manchester? "We play bridge," he tells me, charmingly of course. "No, we don't have time to do much right any more, which is nice, you know to be losing a stone a day and never sleeping."

"London? Yes we did toy with the idea a while ago—but only for a second! Actually there's just no question of it! It's such an impersonal place, which is very difficult to say when a lot of our popularity is based here and so many people have welcomed us."

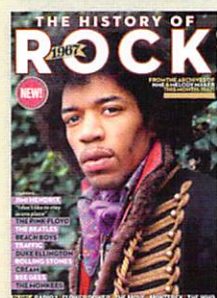
"There's something frighteningly artificial about everything here; the whole place is geared up for tourism now. London's a kind of massive souvenir shop, a façade of how London used to be. It just isn't English any more—it seems very Americanised, which is something to dwell upon with horror."

But to honour the spirit of Smithdom, it would only be appropriate to end with something more encouraging. Soon The Smiths will release their debut album on Rough Trade. Perfectionists, they've re-recorded their songs and brought in a new producer, John Porter, who, according to Morrissey in his inimitably reserved style, "has worked with lots of interesting people and is continuing to do so!" Prepare to be charmed. *Ian Pye* •

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THE HISTORY OF ROCK

1982

FROM THE ARCHIVES OF NME & MELODY MAKER

A MONTHLY TRIP THROUGH MUSIC'S GOLDEN YEARS
THIS ISSUE: 1982

NICK CAVE
"Irresponsibly violent"

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Readers' letters

MM JUL-DEC Something is rotten in Denmark and mod passes its sell-by date.

Shane on you

Why does Shane MacGowan of The Pogues think he holds the monopoly on Irishness? I should think that with names like O'Hara, Kilkenny and Brennan, Dexys have some right to introduce an Irish element into their looks. So what if they wear dungarees, no shoes and grow stubble? Maybe they really are tinkers.

SIERSE O'DONOVAN,
Southampton (NME, Sept 3)

Lords of misrule

A couple of days ago I went to see Lords Of The New Church, who played in a newly occupied building. I can't remember to have seen a group as bad as the Lords. They played so loud that it just was one big mess, shouted out really sick jokes about sex diseases and Danish girls and about how stupid the audience was.

Me and some other people threw some bottles after them. I think that I hit the drummer. The group walked off stage. That was the best part of the concert. They came back again and played some more shit with the result that a couple from the audience smashed the electric system so they couldn't play anymore. Then they went off stage again. What a laugh.

After that, we went down to their air-conditioned lux-bus and smashed all the windows with bricks. I just hate self-satisfied groups who think they own the world, like the Lords. Some English groups who visit Denmark really think that they are so great and fantastic that they can shit on the audience without response. But watch out.

PETER NIELSEN, Copenhagen,
Denmark (NME, Oct 29)

Letter of the week - Paolo Hewitt

Roger and out

Meet Roger. Roger is your typical NME reader, he probably likes New Order and pretends to remember the days of Joy Division ("Oh yeah, course I was there then..."). He believes swearing mindlessly will mysteriously give him some status compatible with maturity (re: the absurd over usage of swear words in your rag - esp the ludicrous and aptly titled Gasbag). He also thinks chart music is for kids (re: your perpetual elitist comments with

regard to the unpretentious Smash Hits).

In short, Rog buys an elitist, "TRENDY", "hip" student-orientated rag that says nothing for people without at least an inkling of a middle-class background (they're the ones with a culture compatible with its style). And he buys it BECAUSE it's very clever to know what no one else knows, even if the charts represent the majority of people's tastes. Remember, if the NME's heard it - you probably haven't... Rog tells me he's going to see Test Department next month, not that I blame him of course.

MIKE, Bookham (NME, Sept 3)

Punk satire's not dead

One was wonderful! TWO were terrific! But not even super-goth CHRISBOHN could get THREE "seven years have passed since that first bleak winter of punk"'s into one issue! Ah well, there's always next week.

LUCIANA F, Harpenden
(NME, Oct 29)



Re: PiL appearance on *The Tube*. Ex-Sex-Pistol John Rotten announced today that he has turned his back on the pop world for the cabaret circuit. Rotten, who claims the "chicken in a basket" scene is "where it's really at, maan", will be performing with his new group PiL who he recruited from a well-known night spot in Batley, West Yorkshire. Johnny promised his fans that he will be featuring new routines of old favourites such as a Chas 'n' Dave-influenced "Pretty Vacant" and a duet with female impressionist Janet Brown on "God Save The Queen".

A spokesman for the Mecca Organisation assured fans that dress restrictions would be relaxed at all their venues to allow for a more intimate atmosphere.

To coincide with the tour Virgin Records are releasing a medley of Rotten's hits, while a video directed by Julian Tenpole will follow shortly.

DAVID X, Keighley, West Yorkshire
(NME, Nov 19)

Mod is dead

Oh dear, who can this person be? What is the meaning of shirtless, rug-squirming, chest-caressing, greasy-haired, toe-popping activity by Old Father Time chap name of Paul Weller? Maybe too many "Long Hot Summer" make him have heat stroke. This floating along river on barge behaviour is so demanding! I think song is attempt at sensuality of kind sung by Marvin Gaye person, but Mr Weller tan no good enough and him chest too scrawny. Him speak like a pseud that watch the rupee go round. No matter what he do, he just end up making money. Please to explain this nonsense! **LAUREL,** she uncomprehending one (NME, Nov 19)

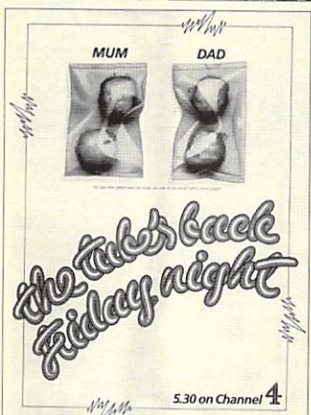
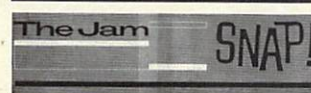
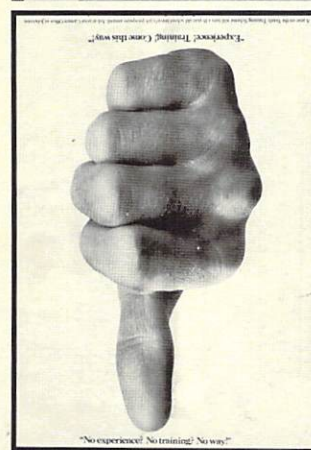
I said "Snap!" when I saw that all the tracks on The Jam's new album were identical to those already in my collection.

JUDY WILSON (NME, Nov 12)

"Soulful" Weller's ugly plagiarism is glaringly obvious - his utilisation of brittle, leaden rock structures and mannerism circa Who '67, plus his courtship with mod - that clean-cut, complacent and tribalistic narrow mindedness akin to heavy metal or ska - regressive and square compared to punk and its offspring. As Mark E Smith pointed out, The Jam's marriage to mod was just a case of more youth masturbation.

After shedding The Jam, Weller cultivates more nonsense in the guise of The Style Council, aided by such dullards as an ex-Merton Parka and the epitome of blank, bald youth - Tracie. Their limp songs sure fit besides Freeez and Paul Young.

As for Weller's "political message", maybe he did conjure up "insights" for his sheep-like fans, but this achievement is checked by the aforementioned attitude and mentality, which is as radical as Spandau or The Clash. **PAYLOY'S DOG,** Huddersfield (NME, Sept 3)



1983

MONTH BY MONTH



Coming next... in 1984!

SO THAT WAS 1983. We knew when to go out. We knew when to stay in.

Certainly, that's not it from our reporters on the beat. The staffers of *NME* and *Melody Maker* enjoyed unrivalled access to the biggest stars of the time, and cultivated a feel for the rhythms of a diversifying scene; as the times changed, so did they. While in pursuit of the truth, they unearthed stories that have come to assume mythical status.

That's very much the territory of this monthly magazine. Each month, *The History Of Rock* will be bringing you verbatim reports from the pivotal events in pop culture, one year a month, one year at a time. Next up, 1984!

THE SMITHS

INTERVIEWED SEPARATELY, MORRISSEY and Johnny Marr reveal what powers the nation's newest musical phenomenon. Morrissey, for one, is keen to dispel notions of a tragic adolescence. "I wasn't handicapped in a traditional way. I didn't have any severe physical disability, therefore the whole thing sounds like pompous twaddle. I just about survived it, let's just say that."

VAN HALEN

A MEETING WITH the virtuoso rock phenomenon. "The posture on stage is hyper-macho without any sense of humour attached or without casting a wayward eye at any of the proceedings," says David Lee Roth of pre-Van Halen hard rock. "Y'know, it all becomes one big Marlboro cigarette commercial. It's all muscle and grip and men's magazines."

THE STYLE COUNCIL

ON THE ROAD with a more playful Paul Weller, and up close with his buddy The Cappuccino Kid. Weller explains The Style Council: some jazz, some soul... sometimes he'll be playing bass. "The music the guys are doing now, they not being precious, it's saying, 'This is just music, so listen to it.' We don't want to be categorised, like, 'This is jazz' – you know what I mean?"

PLUS...

REM!
NINA SIMONE!
NICK CAVE!

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Every month, we revisit long-lost NME and Melody Maker interviews and piece together *The History Of Rock*. This month: 1983.

"It's not really work/It's just the power to charm..."



Relive the year...

**DAVID BOWIE RETURNED AN OLDER, WISER AND
(SLIGHTLY) MORE TRADITIONAL MAN**

**THE SMITHS INTRODUCED "HANDSOME"
TO THE ROCK LEXICON**

**NEW ORDER WENT GLOBAL
WITH "BLUE MONDAY"**

...and NICK CAVE, LEMMY, THE POGUES, THE CURE, MADONNA,
FRANKIE GOES TO HOLLYWOOD and many more shared
everything with *NME* and *MELODY MAKER*

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