



# THE HISTORY OF

# ROCK

1977

A MONTHLY TRIP THROUGH  
MUSIC'S GOLDEN YEARS  
**THIS ISSUE: 1977**

THE HISTORY OF ROCK | 1977

## THE CLASH

*"We ain't ashamed to fight"*

STARRING...

DAVID BOWIE

SEX PISTOLS

FLEETWOOD MAC

PETER GABRIEL

MUDDY WATERS

ELVIS COSTELLO

LED ZEPPELIN

THE JAM

TELEVISION

AC/DC

★  
FROM THE  
ARCHIVES OF  
NME &  
MELODY  
MAKER  
★

FROM THE MAKERS OF UN CUT

**PLUS!** RAMONES | TOM PETTY | BUZZCOCKS | IGGY POP | KEITH MOON



# 1977

MONTH BY MONTH



## Welcome to 1977

**A**FTER THE WIDELY publicised stirrings of the Sex Pistols at the close of 1976, punk rock has now become more than a media sensation. It is a widespread discussion, talked about in political – and increasingly even in musical – terms. Bands such as The Clash, Stranglers and Sex Pistols are actually releasing albums.

Mick Jagger has checked out the bands in New York and listened to the singles (“Chelsea, ‘Right To Work’ – that one’s awful”). Keith Moon makes a riotous trip to the Vortex club, to confront punk rock head on. Robert Plant, who has seen The Damned at the Roxy, is unconcerned. “The dinosaurs,” he memorably says, “are still dancing...”

Still, they are a little on the defensive side. Plant seems anxious to downplay punk’s youth, claiming Rat Scabies and Johnny Rotten are older than they look. They’re not – indeed Plant himself is only 28 – but generationally speaking, he may as well be a cabinet minister. He is professionally expert and enormously wealthy, but in this changed musical economy, this only contributes to his irrelevance.

His discomfort is not soothed by the press. Punk doesn’t only politicise youth and revolutionise the way in which records are made, it also effects change in music papers, which become bolder in layout, more irreverent in tone. Features by staff writers such as Tony Parsons contain important interviews with bands like our cover stars The Clash – but these only support the main thrust of his communiqué.

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 13th edition, dedicated to 1977, you will find verbatim articles from frontline staffers, filed from the thick of the action, wherever it may be. In court with Keith Richards. Looking at the Westway with The Clash. Being called a wanker with Keith Moon.

It is Moon, in fact, who best articulates the anxieties of his generation of musicians in 1977 when he reveals to a young punk in the Vortex a simple biographical fact.

“I’m 30,” he says.

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THE HISTORY OF  
**ROCK**

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REX FEATURES, WARING ABBOTT / GETTY



# 1977

JANUARY – MARCH

IGGY POP, SEX PISTOLS,  
PETER GABRIEL, AC/DC,  
RAMONES AND MORE



## “Not guilty”

**NME JAN 15** Keith Richards in court charged with possession of LSD and traces of cocaine on a silver chain.

**ON MONDAY MORNING**, a gold Rolls-Royce drew up outside Aylesbury Crown Court and Keith Richards stepped out to face a two-count indictment alleging possession of LSD and cocaine.

Keith was white-faced and sombre as he entered the small courtroom, dressed in a plain black velvet suit, a white silk shirt and scarf, and stack-heeled boots. Charges were read out and both times Keith answered quietly, “Not guilty.”

The prosecution described how, just before 4am on May 19, 1976, the police received an emergency call to investigate an accident on the southbound section of the M1 motorway near Newport Pagnell. Richards’ seriously damaged Bentley had run off the motorway and into a field, ploughing through a hedge and fence.

By the car were people: Keith Richards, his son Marlon, aged seven, an American called Mr Sessler and two unidentified girls. Taken to a police interview room, Richards was searched. In an inside jacket pocket, it was alleged, was found a folded piece of paper, and inside that another piece of paper.

Police believed the stain on the second piece of paper to be LSD and arrested Richards on a charge of possessing a controlled drug.

Keith was then taken to the Newport Pagnell police station, while officers searched his car and found a silver chain, on which were attached several objects, including a vinaigrette (a scent or smelling-salt holder dated 1870 and worth £150), a miniature silver flick knife, a hollow silver tube, and a car key.

When Keith was shown the chain he denied it was his, the court was told. Keith, it was said, informed police that many members of the Stones and their entourage used the car and that the silver chain could belong to anyone. Of the jacket in which the stained paper was discovered he said, “We all wear each other’s stage clothes. I don’t know what it is.”

The court heard that forensic tests showed the silver tube on the chain to contain traces (130 milligrams) of an off-white powder, including 39 milligrams of pure cocaine.

The jury were shown two photographs from the Stones’ Leicester concert of May 15, 1976, in which, it was alleged, the chain that Keith was wearing was the same as the one found in his car. »

January 11, 1977:  
Keith Richards  
arrives at Aylesbury  
Crown Court

CHALKIE DAVIES / GETTY



For the defence, Sir Peter Rawlinson, questioned the right of the police to search a man involved in a car accident for drugs, when he was, in the opinion of the police themselves, under the influence of neither drink nor drugs.

In evidence, PC Sibbet said his suspicions were first aroused when he found some pills in Keith's bag. "However," Sibbet said, "the pills were later found to be salt tablets, but on the strength of that we searched him."

Det Sgt Bull of the Thames Valley Drug Squad described how hollow tubes like the one on the chain are "used to sniff cocaine and amphetamines". He also said LSD on paper could be swallowed or sucked.

A forensic scientist told the court that there was enough LSD on the paper for one dose, while the antiques officer of the Thames Valley police was said to have measured the distances between the objects on the chain in the car and the objects on the chain in the Leicester concert photographs.

After a recess, the defence told the jury that they should have no preconceived ideas of what a rock star is like, and should also bear in mind that fans shower bands with gifts before, during and after a gig.

Mick Jagger was sat in the public gallery as Keith took the witness stand and, when asked by the defence about playing lead guitar, replied, "It means I make a lot of noise."

Richards then described how fans always throw gifts at the band - "autograph books, jewellery and food". He maintained

the chain in the photos was different from the one found in the car: "I'd never seen it before the police showed it to me..." He said the same thing of the stained paper.

The prosecution voiced its doubts concerning Richards' assertion that the Stones have a number of jackets the same size "made up for all the group before a tour". And that was the conclusion of both Keith's stay in the witness box and day one of his trial. As *NME* went to press, the case was continuing. *Tony Parsons*

**"I'd never seen it before the police showed it to me"**

## An ominous shadow **NME MAR 5 Keith on heroin-trafficking rap in Canada.**

**R**OLLING STONE KEITH Richards and his girlfriend Anita Pallenberg have been busted in Toronto on heroin charges. In Richards' case the charge is the very serious one of "possessing heroin for the purpose of trafficking", an indictment which carries a maximum life sentence.

All of the Stones had gone to Canada to complete their new live album. On the arrival of Richards and Pallenberg, Anita was arrested at Toronto International Airport and charged with possession of hashish and heroin. Police said 10 grams of hash were found, along with a spoon which, after laboratory analysis, was said to show traces of heroin.

It was as a result of the ensuing week-long investigation that Royal Canadian Mounted Police and provincial officers from Ontario on Sunday raided Keith Richards' hotel room and, allegedly, discovered an ounce of heroin worth approximately £600 at street prices. Keith was arrested and taken to the home of a Toronto Justice Of The Peace. He was released on \$1,000 bail to appear in court on Monday next week. Anita was due to appear in court today (Thursday).

The Stones had gone to Toronto planning to hire a local club in which to record material for their upcoming double live album. The *NME* understands that three sides of material are already in the can, comprising cuts from their 1976 US and European tours (including Knebworth).

The double live album - due later spring/early summer - will be the Stones' last under their deal with WEA, prior to the switch of Rolling Stones Records' to EMI in the UK.

At press time, representatives of the Stones were insisting that the group would remain in Canada to complete the live album project.

Richards' bust is by far the most potentially serious ever experienced by the group, and comes only weeks after his UK drugs conviction in Aylesbury.

The two events together - if the one is proved and the appeal on the other is unsuccessful - must now cast an ominous shadow over the Stones' future ability to enter the United States (with Keith) to tour.



March 7, 1977: Keith arrives at Old City Hall in Toronto

## Further intrigue

**MM MAR 19 Indiscreet liaisons. A new label. Threat of imprisonment. Can the Stones survive their latest dramas?**

**T**HE PAST FEW weeks have been just like old times for the Rolling Stones, whose enduring news value has been emphasised once again by tales of drugs and scandal.

It all started at the end of February when Keith Richards and girlfriend Anita Pallenberg were arrested in Toronto, charged with possession of heroin for the purpose of trafficking. The offence, under Canadian law, carries a maximum sentence of life imprisonment. The following week, when Richards appeared in court, he was further charged with possession of cocaine.

Meanwhile, in downtown Toronto, the Rolling Stones played two shows at the small El Mocambo club on March 4 and 5. The gigs were not, as some newspaper reports suggest, "unpublicised". The band's US press agents had invited at least two major American magazines and among the other visitors was Margaret Trudeau, the 29-year-old wife of the Canadian prime minister.

The gossip columns, at the beginning of last week, gleefully ran after-the-show stories about how Mick Jagger had supposedly smoked a "marijuana cigarette" in front of Ms Trudeau and her security men. And she had also, so it was said, gone to the gigs in preference to celebrating her sixth wedding anniversary with husband Pierre, who remained in Ottawa with their three children.

Such gossip, however, was mere small fry compared with the bizarre events which made headline news a few days later. Margaret Trudeau left Canada for New York at the same time as Jagger and Ron Wood. Despite denials all round, speculation was rife that she had, in fact, run away with Jagger.

Further intrigue came when a New York columnist claimed that it was Wood - not Jagger - who was the object of Ms Trudeau's affections. "He can probably tell you more about where Margaret is staying than maybe even the prime minister," reported "Suzy" of the *New York Daily News*.

One extraordinary consequence of all these rumours was the drop in value in the Canadian dollar, which fell by one-and-a-half cents against the pound. The Stones/Margaret Trudeau affair was held, by many commentators, to be a contributory factor in this decline. Positive proof of the power of rock 'n' roll.

On top of all this, Fleet Street had started to speculate on the future of the band, with one report even suggesting that the Toronto shows were, in fact, the Stones' last-ever live performances. The truth, however, is rather more mundane, even though the sensational headlines of the past three weeks have tended to overshadow the band's reason for being in Canada; they are simply fulfilling the terms of their recording contract.

In 1971, the Stones signed with Kinney Records - now called WEA - after leaving





NEWS SPECIAL  
**STONES**  
 1977

Signing with EMI, not Polydor: the Rolling Stones in New York, 1977



Margaret, wife of Canadian PM Pierre Trudeau: Jagger fling?

the Decca label. The band's contract had been one of the most highly prized ducats in the history of the music business and, although 21 companies made offers for their signatures, the Stones eventually decided on Kinney because of their relationship with Ahmet Ertegun, founder of the Atlantic label.

There had been, initially, brave talk about forming a label which would be distributed by a new, "alternative" system, thus cutting out the big-business middlemen of the major record companies. Practicality won the day, however, and Ertegun persuaded the band to sign with Kinney.

Although the actual details of the Stones' deal were never officially revealed, it is believed they were paid one million dollars as an initial advance. Certainly, it was neither the highest nor the lowest offer the band received. In return, the Stones guaranteed to make six albums, starting with *Sticky Fingers*.

Album number five, *Black And Blue*, was released in the summer of last year. At about the same time, the band began to shop around for a new recording deal.

The Stones' representatives, particularly their business manager Prince Rupert Lowenstein, had talks with a number of companies, including EMI. They, however, dropped out of the running while the German-owned Polydor became favourites for the band's signatures.

By January, Polydor were so confident of signing the band that details of the proposed deal leaked out to the press. The Stones were to be paid in the region of \$850,000 (£400,000) for each album and among the agreed plans was an LP of re-recorded '60s material.

It was no secret that Polydor were on the verge of getting the Stones. At MIDEM, the international music business fair held in Cannes, France, during late-January, the company planned to announce the signing with a press conference and reception in Sardinia.

All this, however, had to be scrapped at the last moment because, according to some reports, the Stones had become disenchanted with the company as a result of the press leaks. Other rumours suggest the band increased their demands, and the company refused to meet the new requirements. Whatever the reason, however, the Stones did not sign with Polydor, but instead surprised the whole music industry by announcing, on February 16, a deal with EMI.

Serious negotiations with EMI had started at the beginning of the year, at about the same time as Polydor were confidently expecting to sign the band. The first time most people at EMI knew about the deal, however, was when Jagger was taken around all the company's departments on February 11.

Again, details of the deal are as closely guarded as the Kremlin's defence budget, with none of the company's representatives prepared to commit themselves to a precise figure. The contract, however, is for six albums - and there is no time limit. One estimate puts the contract at £2 million against a royalty rate of 21 per cent, but this has not been confirmed.

The deal means the Stones - on their own label - will be released by EMI everywhere in the world, apart from the United States and Canada. The band's future in North America - obviously, the most lucrative market in the world - has yet to be decided, and this is why the events of the past few weeks have come at such a crucial time for the Stones.

The best way of promoting a new album is by touring, as the Stones proved last year when they played in Britain at the time of *Black And Blue*, their most successful LP in years. But, if Keith Richards is convicted and imprisoned - or simply banned from the USA - it will obviously reduce the Stones' selling potential. It is inconceivable that the band would tour without Richards.

## Before the drug busts, it is believed that RSO were frontrunners for the band's contract

Before the Toronto drug busts, it is believed that RSO - Robert Stigwood's label - were frontrunners in the competition for the band's contract. One report put the sum involved at a staggering \$15 million, which would have been the biggest recording deal in history. This would have included at least one film, as well as 10 albums.

Among the other companies seriously interested in signing the band were Capitol - owned by EMI - together with CBS, MCA and Atlantic. The drug charges, however, are certain to have brought fresh problems to the negotiations and, so far, no decision has been announced by the band.

The Stones plan, nevertheless, to continue using their own label, no matter which company eventually signs them for the United States. But it is not yet clear whether any, or all, of the old material on the label (including the Rolling Stones' five albums) will be available to the new company.

The band's own songs, however, have just been signed to EMI Music, the company's publishing division. The deal, which is worldwide, is effective from April 1 and includes all the Stones' compositions during the past five years.

But before they release anything else, the Stones have one more album for WEA. And that is the reason they are in Toronto. The album, likely to be a double LP, will be a live recording taken from their concerts over the past two years.

And the two club gigs, far from being the band's last-ever stage shows, were simply an opportunity to cut more material for the album, which should be released before the autumn. The first EMI album, meanwhile, has not even been tentatively scheduled and a spokesman for the company said they thought it unlikely to be released this year.

Anita Pallenberg was fined £220 in Toronto on Monday for possession of cannabis and heroin. Robert Partridge

Dope, scandal, contracts and the Stones' future

GETTY (2)



March 10, 1977: the Sex Pistols and their manager Malcolm McLaren sign a new contract with A&M outside Buckingham Palace



## “We shall have to leave Britain”

The trials of trying to tour or record when you are the Sex Pistols.

### MM JAN 22

The Sex Pistols have finally split from EMI, less than four months after they signed a recording contract with the company on October 16.

Leslie Hill, managing director of EMI Records, announced this week: “In accordance with the previously stated wishes of both parties and the verbal telephone agreement made on Thursday, January 6, the document terminating the contract between EMI and the Sex Pistols has now been agreed.”

Malcolm McLaren, manager of the band, was not available for comment on this announcement, which brings to an end a long series of claims and counter-claims made by McLaren and EMI over the termination of the band’s contract - as detailed in *MM* last week. No information on financial compensation for the Pistols on the loss of their contract has been revealed.

The question of who will sign the Pistols next remains open. Chrysalis remain among the contenders, as do CBS, but Polydor are out of the running. A spokesman for the company told *MM* last week that they had no interest in the Pistols.

### NME MAR 12

Sex Pistols are on the brink of signing a new recording contract. Manager Malcolm McLaren told *NME* this week: “The terms of the contract have been agreed, and we are delighted with our new deal. All that remains is to put our

signatures on the dotted line. As soon as that is done, we shall be making an official announcement later this week.”

Meanwhile, as reported last week, Sid Vicious has replaced Glen Matlock on bass. According to McLaren, Matlock left because of “his different tastes and other ambitions”.

Final word from McLaren: “We shall be signing our new contract in front of Buckingham Palace!”

### NME MAR 19

A&M Records have signed the Sex Pistols. The pact was sealed, as manager Malcolm McLaren forecast in last week’s *NME*, in a ceremony outside Buckingham Palace last Thursday - the significance being that A&M are rush-releasing the group’s new single “God Save The Queen” on March 25.

McLaren stressed that the two-year deal carries a guarantee of £150,000 - not £50,000 as was reported in the national press. He does not anticipate any difficulty in obtaining BBC and local radio airplay for the single. “It’s not a punk-rock version of the National Anthem, but the boys’ own genuine tribute to the Queen,” he added.

The Pistols’ main problem now is securing venues where they would be allowed to perform in Britain. They are hoping to headline a major charity concert at a London theatre next month, but this is dependent upon whether the GLC gives approval at a meeting between the Council and McLaren later this week.

At present, the Pistols are banned from appearing in virtually every major city in Britain owing to local council rulings. Said McLaren: “We want to do dates in major cities, but the ban is still in effect almost everywhere. The only possible exceptions are Liverpool and Newcastle, and they are by no means definite.”

A series of European dates are being lined up for the end of April, and the Pistols are due to record their first A&M album in May. If there is still no relaxation of the British ban, the Pistols would then tour Japan, Australia, the United States and Canada -

where, McLaren assured *NME*, the band would be welcomed.

He added: “The rest of the country will be watching our meeting with the GLC. If we are allowed to perform in London, we hope that other councils will reverse their decision. If not, we shall have to wait until after our overseas tours - because if they prove to be successful and without incident, then maybe they will open a few doors here at home.”

And if all else fails and the Pistols are not permitted to work in Britain? “We shall have to leave Britain for good,” said McLaren.

**“If overseas tours are successful, maybe they will open a few doors here at home”**



# Long periods of time without speaking

**NME MAR 12** Bob Dylan's wife files for divorce.



Bob Dylan: faces handing over half his royalties

**M**AYBE HIS MATZOS made crumbs in the bed. Maybe he played his guitar early in the morning. Maybe he just had too many visions of Johanna. Whatever, last week Sara Dylan filed suit for divorce from her husband Robert Allen Zimmerman on the grounds of irreconcilable differences. The couple have been married for 11 years and have five children.

The formidable Mrs Dylan has obviously acquired a taste for the good life; she is demanding not only custody of the five kids, but also half Bobby's entire possessions, including the copyrights to all his songs and their attendant royalties.

For the moment she's making do with exclusive use of the family's new Malibu home, a \$2 million house built in a highly unorthodox style that was previewed in Thrills some months back. Sara was apparently largely responsible for the house being built, while Dylan is reputed to loathe it.

Of the five Zimmerman children, eldest is from Sara's previous marriage. Jesse Dylan is said to be closer to his father than to Sara, but the others are all evidently closer to their ma. Friends of the couple have pointed to major differences in the characters of Bob and Sara, who is a former model. On the Rolling Thunder Revue, for example, Sara apparently liked to stay in top-flight hotels, and carried a large number of trunks for her clothes. Dylan, on the other hand, seemed as happy to doss down in the trailer with a change of jeans and T-shirt.

It is also said that he two would go for long periods of time without speaking to each other, not so much through hate, but because they had little to say. Others point to the strain of being married to Bob Dylan, and the strain that his public life necessarily imposes on the marriage, with attendant problems about protecting the children and so on.

According to reports from New York, Bob and Sara are currently meeting with lawyers in an attempt to end the acrimony since she filed for the divorce this past week.

Friends of the couple have said that one of her charges was that Bob "beat" her; others say that he claims she was hysterical and he merely slapped her, etc. There were also rumours that Sara was working as a waitress in a Greenwich Village cafe called The Figaro, but this proved unfounded. However, it is thought that she wants to resume her career as an actress, for she has been taking workshop classes at Lee Strasberg's Actor's Studio in Los Angeles.

News that the Dylans had split asunder was greeted with malicious glee from certain of the more cynical members of Dylan's NME fan club, who recall that the last time Dylan had woman trouble and was separated from Sara, he came up with *Blood On The Tracks*, widely reckoned to be his finest work in years (and perhaps a persuasive element in Sara and Bob reuniting). *Julie Burchill*

➤ A top-security blanket has been thrown around EMI's plans to release a Beatles live album in mid-spring. Reason for the secrecy isn't clear, as it's known that original Beatle producer George Martin is remixing the tapes of their 1964-65 Hollywood Bowl Concerts and that The Beatles themselves have given their go-ahead for the project. Release is planned for May, backed by massive TV promotion, utilising film footage from the Bowl concerts.  
**NME MAR 26**



➤ Generation X lead guitarist Bob Andrews was hospitalised on Friday night after being hit on the head by a flying beer mug while playing the Easter Ball at Leicester University's Clare Hall. Generation X and The Boys, who were supporting, had been receiving a hail of plastic cups and empty beer cans, but halfway through the headliners' set full cans and glasses started flying. Andrews dropped to the floor, covered in blood but still playing, and later had a couple of stitches in the gash. One observer termed the aggressors "Led Zeppelin heavies", while another had them down as the rugby club. The Damned and The Stranglers recently spent an evening dodging beer cans at Essex University.  
**NME MAR 19**

# "Problems" **MM JAN 22** An inflatable pig. A full year recording. Just what is holding up the new Pink Floyd album?

**P**INK FLOYD'S NEW YEAR has started with a technical hitch. The band's new album - their first since *Wish You Were Here* in 1975 - has been hit by problems over the sleeve design. The album, called *Animals*, was to have been released on January 14. But this week Pink Floyd's manager, Steve O'Rourke, told the *Melody Maker*: "There have been problems with the artwork for the sleeve. It's nothing serious, but it means we've not been able to keep to the original release date."

"We still haven't fixed a definite date, although we hope to decide that over the weekend. It looks as though the sleeve will be ready in time for us to release the album on January 28."

This setback comes at the beginning of a vital three months for the Floyd, a period when they step back into the limelight. Although they have long since proved themselves one of Britain's biggest bands, the Floyd have been virtual recluses for well over a year. Their last British concert appearance was at the 1975 Knebworth Fair, a spectacular open-air show which even featured a Spitfire flying overhead. That concert was followed, in September 1975, by the release of *Wish You Were Here*.

Since then, however, nothing has been heard about the band's activities - apart, that is, from the 50-foot flying pig which, last month, was flown over London's Battersea. Photographs of the pig will be used on the *Animals* sleeve.

"The band spent the whole of last year recording the new album," claims O'Rourke. "It was finished and ready for release by Christmas, although of course we were then held up by the sleeve problems."

The album, which features just three tracks, called "Dogs", "Pigs" and "Sheep", comes at a crucial time for the band, who since *Dark Side Of The Moon*, have become victims of their own success. Their last album, for instance, sold extremely well by most bands' standards, although it was commonly regarded as something of a flop for the Floyd. *Wish You Were Here*, which received only lukewarm reviews from the critics when it was released, stayed in the *Melody Maker* chart for 22 weeks and failed to make the No 1 position.

It had been, of course, completely overshadowed by the extraordinary success of *Dark Side Of The Moon*, which first entered the chart on March 31, 1973. Although it, too, strangely failed to reach No 1, the album spent a total of 128 weeks in the chart, a feat rivalled only by Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells*.

Even now, *Dark Side Of The Moon* makes occasional appearances in the MM chart. The album also established the Floyd in the United States, where it was the band's first chart-topping album. Such phenomenal success is virtually impossible for the band to repeat, although all the Floyd's subsequent albums will be inevitably compared to *Dark Side Of The Moon*.

To promote *Animals*, therefore, the band have chosen to return to the British concert stage this spring, their first shows for 18 months. They play four concerts at London's Wembley Empire Pool, from March 17 to 20, and then four shows at the huge Stafford New Bingley Hall, from March 28 to 31.



# 1977

JANUARY - MARCH



September 11, 1977: David Bowie at Elstree Studios near London, where he appears on the upcoming TV special *Bing Crosby's Merrie Olde Christmas*

# “He’s into something new”

Litigation and synthesizers. Dysentery and Iggy Pop. Disguises, Eno and muzak. From these strange bedfellows comes **DAVID BOWIE’S** mysterious new album *Low*. “He’s so full of ideas, I have to edit him,” explains Tony Visconti. “It’s too intense to be around him.”

— MELODY MAKER JANUARY 29 —

**D**AVID BOWIE’S LAST image, as a kind of wasp-waisted performer in a Weimar cabaret, would hardly prepare one for reports of the figure he’s currently cutting in Berlin, where he now lives. It seems that the famous red hair, now returned to its original mousey colour, has been scalped to a crew cut, that he’s grown the curving moustache of a prosperous bürgermeister, and having put on some weight, and wearing a cap pulled down low, he spends his time frequenting both the cultural establishments and workingmen’s haunts of that city.

More Günter Grass than Joel Grey, he obviously continues in his fascination with all things German, which reached notorious proportions early last summer in his well-publicised speech about fascism.

None of this will much surprise keen Bowie watchers, who have observed his bewildering metamorphoses from an acoustic performer and mime artist to an ambiguous commentator upon rock stardom with *Ziggy*, a doom-monger with *Diamond Dogs*, a moon-agesoul singer with *Young Americans* and *Station To Station*, and the star of Nicolas Roeg’s futuristic art film, *The Man Who Fell To Earth*.

It’s not difficult to see why Bowie is the most interpreted, and the most reviled, rock star of this generation. He’s consistent only in the diversity of his actions. He doesn’t respond in the ways expected of rock stars when each tour he presents a different public face and no two albums are truly alike.

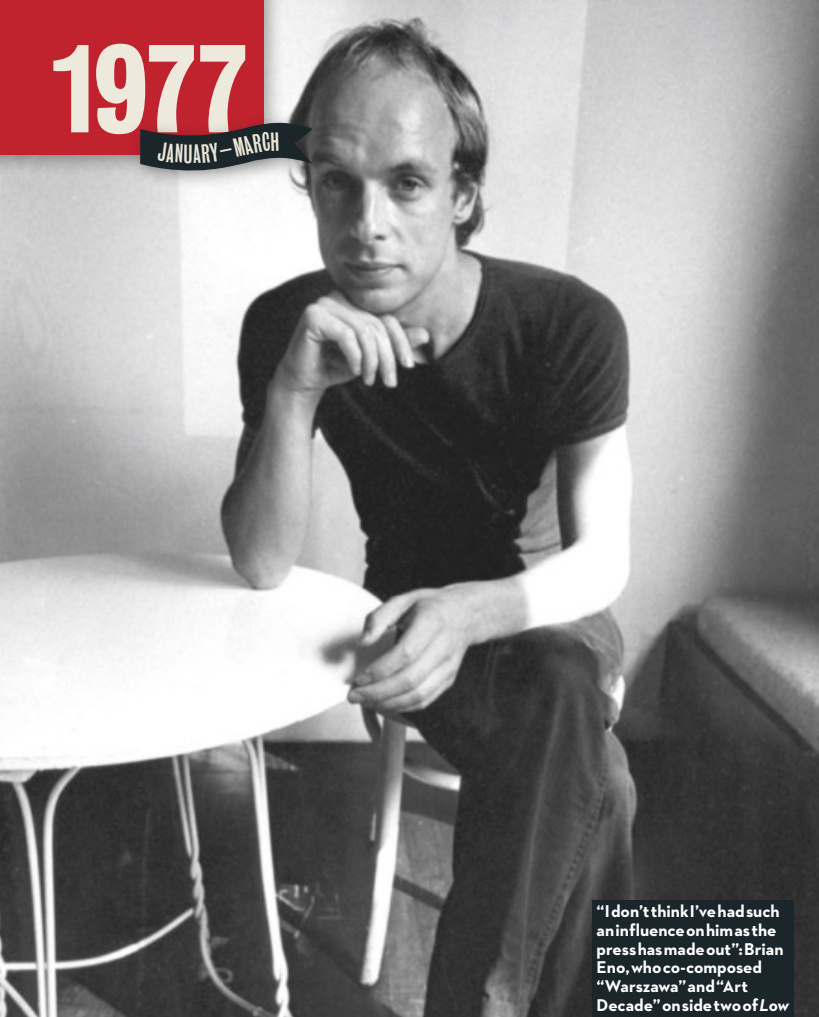
Eclectic to a fault, unlike all other major rock performers he has wilfully neglected to define his own oeuvre, beyond reflecting a certain preoccupation as a lyricist with a technological future and as a musician with mutations of mainstream styles.

While undeniably a stylist, as is borne out by the attractive pastiches of *Pin Ups*, he has too much artistic substance to justify that as a condemnation.

*Diamond Dogs*, for example, despite its musical roughness, seems increasingly to me a classic projection of a lost and rabid society, even though I was indifferent to it when it was released.

Similarly, although I still don’t much like a lot of *Young Americans* and find it rather empty, I can nevertheless appreciate the different perspective he brought to white soul, which at first seemed merely parodic. Perhaps, therefore, much critical distrust of him may have two origins: in his refusal to stand still and be explained, and in the coldness and isolation, the cerebration evident at the heart of his work, which puts off critics and record-buyers who have become accustomed »





"I don't think I've had such an influence on him as the press has made out": Brian Eno, who co-composed "Warszawa" and "Art Decade" on side two of *Low*

to the warmth and responsiveness of the rock 'n' roll tradition, a tradition that he has gone out of his way to usurp.

Of all his records, the new album, *Low*, is the most controversial, and right in the target-line of this critical bias. It's radically different from *Station To Station*, because it appears to have been conceived as a "mood" album. Its creation revolves around the synthesizer; the vocals on the first side are brief, and on the second, which consists of four electronic instrumentals, they are used only as textural aids. Furthermore, the "mood", even as far as its expressed in whatever lyrics there are, is utterly bleak and depressed, as the album's title would suggest.

Yet for several reasons *Low* strikes me as a remarkable record, and certainly the most interesting Bowie has made. It's so thoroughly contemporary, less in its pessimism, perhaps, though that's deeply relevant to these times, that in its musical concept: the logic of bringing together mainstream pop—in the album's disco bass-and-drums and conventional lyric—and experimental music perfectly indicates what could be the popular art of the advanced society we are moving into, in a way that the Rolling Stones, say, or even the Sex Pistols, whose music relies totally upon its black-derived rhythms, could not hope to express.

The devices of experimental music are scattered throughout the album—for instance in his employment of phoneticism (on "Warszawa" and "Subterraneans") and the reduction and unspecific nature of language—but in themselves they are not unusual; after all, the German groups like Kraftwerk and Tangerine Dream have also devised superior muzak, and the synthesizer has long been a staple weapon even in the vulgar hands of ELP. But it's interesting not only that Bowie is moving across the tracks from the lyric and vocal tradition, unlike these bands, but that he's also an artist who to a large extent has a "fan" following, far more populist than T Dream or ELP.

The successful synthesis of popular and experimental music—described by Brian Eno, who played a major role in the making of *Low*, as two parallel mainstays will more likely be achieved by a popular artist such as Bowie who has a greater understanding of, and intimacy with, the mass audience. In this context, *Low* is quite a daring venture for a performer whose modus operandi—ie, the size of his tours and venues, the cost of his albums, etc—is determined by the charts.

An artist of the same magnitude, like Stevie Wonder, for example, may have a better appreciation of synthesizers and have more satisfactorily assimilated electronics into (black) pop music, but he's always respected the conservatism of his audience and used this knowledge to enhance his abilities rather than transform the nature of his music.

On the other hand, Lou Reed's *Metal Machine Music*, an album which invites some comparison with *Low*, seems like a bizarre aberration, or certainly an eccentricity, because our past experience of him as a deadpan lyricist, often working the theme of decadence, doesn't prepare us to believe in the experiment; moreover, it had limited influence because RCA didn't promote it.

RCA, it appears, have also been dismayed by *Low*. The album should have been out for Christmas (the deadline for its recording was November 16), but RCA executives freaked because they weren't sure how to market it. Some of them thought they had another *Metal Machine Music* on their hands.

There is also a story that Tony Defries, who managed Bowie during his rise to stardom, and has retained his proprietary manner, tried to have the album stopped on the grounds that there weren't enough vocals and it would damage Bowie's career. All of which has been disproved by Bowie's seemingly automatic entry into the charts.

According to Tony Visconti, the American who co-produced *Low* with Bowie and who has worked with him since 1967, Bowie was determined to surprise everyone with *Low* out of a fear, irrational though it may appear, of seeming predictable.

"To promote the last two albums he must have done more than 200 shows," says Visconti, whose wife, the former Mary Hopkin, sings briefly on "Sound And Vision". "He was absolutely tired of being RCA's sure thing, and he also felt he was losing his pioneer spirit.

"David described the album to me as far back as July, because he asked me if I could produce Iggy's album first and then his own, which he said was going to be very revolutionary.

"He was trying to produce Jimmy's [Osterberg, Iggy's real name] album at the Chateau d'Herouville, but he said the engineers were proving hopeless. I told him it was impossible for me, and just to do his best." (The album, in fact, is called *The Idiot*, based upon a painting Bowie found, dating from 1906, of a man who Visconti says bears a striking resemblance to Iggy Pop.)

Visconti, however, was enthusiastic about helping to record what was then being called *New Music Night And Day*, a title designed to express the difference between sides one and two, which in the planning stages was even more radical. Bowie intended both sides to be absolutely contrasting, but the first was meant to be "raw rock 'n' roll", not the strange rock musak that's resulted, where two of the cuts, "Speed Of Life" and "A New Career In A New Town", even have no vocal at all.

What happened, explains Visconti, was that Bowie then laid down 10 tracks in the style of the first side and was going to abandon the idea of two different sides but for the event that he developed something of a mental block about the lyrics.

"Ever since *The Man Who Sold The World* he has written the lyrics after the music, but in this case he couldn't come up with more than one verse for some things, which is why a lot of the tracks fade out.

"His mood was far from optimistic when we were recording at the Chateau. It was absolutely the worst. A lot of things were happening to him, and we had a lot of setbacks. For one thing, we found the studio totally useless. The people who now own it don't seem to care. We all came down with dysentery. David and I were in bed for two days.

"Also, he chose the Chateau to get away from all those people in America, but they all found out where he was. He really is too gregarious for his own good, he's too kind, and he just couldn't tell them to fuck off. So we got no work done."

The album was finished, in fact, in a week and a half at Hansa By The Wall, a studio in the old "West End" of Berlin. They were watched by East German border guards as they recorded.

More distressingly, Bowie was suing his immediately previous manager, Michael Lippman, in Paris. There were several reasons for the dissolution of their association, but Bowie maintained for one that Lippman pledged he would get the right to score *The Man Who Fell To Earth*, which eventually went to John Phillips.

"Subterraneans", the last track on *Low*, was actually composed for the soundtrack, which Bowie worked on with Paul Buckmaster.

"He was away for about four days in Paris, dealing with this deposition," says Visconti, "and he was absolutely down for that month. I must say I have great respect for him for calling it *Low*, 'cause that's exactly what he was. The reason there are not that much lyrics is that he had absolutely nothing to say; there was nothing outside himself. So I think for the first time in his lyrics he's really saying something about himself."

The decision to persevere with the two-side concept was further promoted during Bowie's absence in Paris, when Eno wrote "Warszawa", the piece that begins side two. Bowie apparently said it reminded him of a Polish choir he had heard as a child, and a "Polish" vocal was added—in reality some phonetic speech slowed down and then speeded up—so that he sounds, in his own phrase, "like a 12-year-old Polish boy glorifying the Socialist state".

Eno's involvement with *Low* was important but not crucial, as has been suggested. He was only at the Chateau for one week in the whole of the September they recorded there, and is on just two of the four tracks on the second side. Nevertheless, his records, like those of the German groups T Dream, Neu! and Kraftwerk, had a catalytic effect. Indeed, when Eno got to the Chateau he was astonished to find that both Iggy and Bowie could hum, note for note, *No Pussyfooting*, the electronic album he made with Bob Fripp.

Several of Eno's hypotheses and attitude towards music, such as the artistic potential of muzak, are shared by Bowie, he feels. Eno, for instance, is approaching the Planned Music Company, which markets muzak in this country, with a view to producing records for them that are not only environmental but which also express that tension between doubt and certainty that creates art—"ambient music," he calls it, "that works in the same way as nice lighting: it tints the environment."

He's been encouraged in this belief by the commercial success of his own *Discreet Music* on the Obscure label; low-definition music that is apparently popular at dinner parties, it puts the "fun" into functional.

"I think this is something that Bowie is interested in as well," he argues. "The point of using phonetics, I believe, was to get rid of the language element. If you use language you cannot but help lead the mind in a particular way. As soon as there's language it creates a focus, and it's very, very difficult not to accept that as the central point of the piece, with the other instruments ranked, or arranged, round it, supporting it.

"Now if you want to have music that's got a 'drifting' aspect to it, it's very hard to make lyrics that will fit. I think he has just become aware of this problem of focus in a piece of music, of how much you want and how much you don't want. One of the interesting questions that all those German bands brought up was that they produced music that was very unfocal—it had a lot of 'drift' in it, if you like, whereas rock music has traditionally had a lot of 'anchorage'.

"Like myself, he was very impressed by the other tradition—the kind of vocal rock tradition—so the problem of the age, as far as I'm concerned, is to bring those two things together comfortably. That's why the record is experimental.

"When I did *Another Green World* I had a problem because I had some numbers of this 'drifting' nature, and others that were songs. I solved the problem by mixing them all up together, so the dichotomy isn't so evident as if one had put them on separate sides. I could have done it one side as songs and one as instrumentals and to tell you the truth, the reason I didn't was because I didn't dare.

"I thought, this is gonna be too bizarre to do. I thought it would indicate that I thought these two things to be unrelated to one another. So I admire him for what he did. But I don't think I've had such an influence on him as the press has made out, or assumed. It is his album, and he got in touch with me because I think he recognised that I was in a similar position.

"I know he liked *Another Green World* a lot, and he must've realised that there were these two parallel streams of working going on in what I was doing, and when you find someone with the same problem you tend to become friendly with them."

In fact, Eno suspects Bowie strongly influenced his own approach to music concerning the marketing of disposable records, a corollary of his fascination with muzak.

"He said when he first heard *Discreet Music*, he could imagine in the future that you would go into supermarkets and there would be a rack of 'ambience' records, all in very similar covers.

"And—this is my addition—they would just have titles like 'Sparkling', or 'Nostalgic', or 'Melancholy' or 'Sombre'. They would all be mood titles, and so cheap to buy you could chuck them away when you didn't want them any more."

Bowie, by all accounts, is said to lead a rigorous intellectual life. According to Visconti, he literally assaults himself with ideas. In Berlin he has been going in art galleries almost every day; his knowledge of art approaches that of a connoisseur, Visconti claims.

"Every time I go there he's into something new. Also, he's the only guy who, when he's on tour, never stays in his hotel room. He always puts on a disguise and goes out onto the streets.

"The last time I was in Berlin we went out to a working-class place, a kind of Hammersmith Palais. And there are all the drag clubs which are quite respectable over there. He really wants to know what people are doing and thinking.

"We can work together because he's a very non-technical person—he probably couldn't change a plug—and I can translate what he wants. I'm a very, very fast worker, so he's not frustrated with me, and I'm an arranger and a musician as well [Visconti plays bass]. But he's so full of ideas, if anything, I have to edit him. In fact, it's too intense to be around him for any length of time."

Eno also pays tribute to his intellectual curiosity, pointing out that Bowie has resisted every encouragement from the music industry not to be interesting. "In a sense," Eno says, "I think that most of his albums are quite experimental in that they strike me as always being to do with hybridising things. He's quite conscious of being eclectic. *Low* is a transitional record, you see, as most records are by people who are interesting."

Yet Bowie impresses even his friends as being fundamentally detached from people. Certainly he's contemptuous of the music industry and press, but also none of his personal friends, it's said, are musicians, apart from Iggy (whom he now manages) and perhaps his guitarist, Carlos Alomar, with whom he has a very good working relationship. (Visconti

says that "Fame" grew out of Alomar's riff to a version of Springsteen's "It's Hard To Be A Saint In The City", which Bowie was producing in Philadelphia for a three-piece—including Ava Cherry and Warren Peace—called The Astronettes. Because of business hassles, the group never appeared on record.)

Visconti is one of his oldest friends, and he maintains that Bowie takes pride in being emotionless. "I've seen him at the edge of despair, but as far as marriage and love are concerned, he claims to be above it. Everything goes to his head and not his heart."

"Be My Wife", therefore, whose emotional message could not be more explicit, would appear to be an unusually unguarded moment in the career of an artist who has generally heeded that dictum of Arnold Wesker: that an action taken without intellect is flabby and sentimental.

Whether *Low* is yet another role for the cracked actor or, as I think, an inspired attempt at creating truly modern rock music—or even, as is possible, both of those options—it cannot be called flabby. At the very least, though Bowie may be a snake, his twists and turns are as extraordinary to behold as the periodic sheddings of his appearance.

In the meantime, he continues to live abroad, perhaps for the next two years, and perhaps still in Berlin, a walled-in city that is stuffed with all the benefits of civilised culture. Berlin lacks only one attribute, but that a major one: the beauty of nature. And where in David Bowie will you find that? *Michael Watts* •

"Most of his albums are to do with hybridising things"



# “We ain’t geniuses”

The **RAMONES** make a second album, and spend a very strange evening hanging out with **PHIL SPECTOR**.

Later, they ponder their reputation. “They call us assholes,” says stealth Eric Clapton fan Tommy Ramone. “I guess we really get to them.”

— MELODY MAKER JANUARY 1 —

**N**EW YORK: THE evening began, somewhat ominously, with a slow ride in an antiquated elevator whose door didn’t close. Ten floors later, its passengers emerged in Redfield Sound, a small rehearsal studio on West 20th Street where a buffet meal was served with champagne. *Nuggets* was playing quietly through studio speakers, an apt choice since Lenny Kaye, who compiled these relatively obscure tracks onto one album, was prominent among the throng.

The occasion was the first public hearing of the Ramones’ second album, *Ramones Leave Home*, which, after the invited listeners had been given an opportunity to get suitably wired on alcohol and/or pungent smoking mixture, was played very loudly to the assembled guests.

Three of the Ramones were present, Johnny, Dee Dee and Tommy, all dressed in the obligatory jeans, tennis shoes and leather jackets. Joey, the singer, is currently in hospital, where he may have to have an operation on his ankle; he was represented by his brother. Also on hand was John Camp, the bass player for Renaissance, whose music seems at the absolute opposite end of the music spectrum to that of the Ramones. Significantly, Camp declined to be photographed with the three Ramones present. Renaissance, of course, record for Sire in the US, as do the Ramones.

While sophisticated would not be quite the right word, the Ramones’ second-floor effort is a good deal less raw than their first. Greater attention has been paid to the production, which makes the overall picture a lot less amateurish than before. They’ve discovered echo, and this takes away that rather flat, droning vocal sound and adds immensely to the numerous guitar riffs.

Once again there’re 14 tracks that make up just over 30 minutes, and consequently each song averages out at just over a couple of minutes. There are no guitar solos, no slow songs and just one non-original, “California Sun”. The urgency is still there and on at least one track you can hear Dee Dee Ramone’s frenzied count-in which stands out so much in their live shows.

Coupled with their new-found studio inventiveness is the use of vocal harmony, hitherto scorned in favour of vocal unison. One track sounded uncannily like the early Who, in the days when Roger Daltrey was experimenting with a not-quite-falsetto vocal style, while another reminded me of the Stones, circa *Between The Buttons*, probably because the instrumentation was sparser than usual.

But the majority of tracks exude that manic, urgent approach to an instant flash of song that marked the first album. Ideas are never developed, just exposed »





# D-U-M-B



Joey Ramone: known as Jeffrey Hyman before adopting the alias Jeff Starship as lead singer with glam-punk band Sniper in 1972, then co-founding the Ramones two years later

flat and brutal, over before they've almost begun and only occasionally memorable. So many instant tracks played so fast back to back make it extraordinarily hard to differentiate between one and another, especially when the mix favours the guitarist rather than the singer.

I didn't catch one title, apart from "California Sun", yet the lyrics seemed to deal with boy/girl relationships rather than violence or glue-sniffing, a gesture that will surely find sympathy with people who make up radio playlists.

"We spent at least twice as long making this album as we did on the first," guitarist Johnny Ramone told me after the album had been played. He could not, though, remember just how long that was: "Most of November, I think."

Despite the punk image of the Ramones, Johnny, like his colleagues, is an amiable enough fellow even if he is not too bright. It's difficult to prise more than a couple of sentences from his reluctant mouth.

"We like to get the idea of a song across quick, leave out all the slack and play fast," said Johnny when I commented on the length of the tracks. "We try to write a song a day when we're due to record. We'll get up in the morning and say, 'Let's write a song today,' and get on with it. Sometimes it takes 30 minutes and sometimes it takes the whole day. Then we rehearse it to get it right until we play it on stage."

"We even had a few songs that we didn't even bother to record, and one that we recorded but left off the album. We wanted to keep it to 14 tracks."

Johnny was particularly vague about the cancelled British tour with the Sex Pistols. He had wanted to go over but manager Danny Fields decided against it and the group seem to have little say in business matters, probably a wise state of affairs.

"I enjoyed the last time we went to England," said Johnny. "I remember playing the Roundhouse on July 4, Independence Day, and that was fun. It seemed that the dates on this last tour weren't so good, so Danny cancelled it, but we're due back in February or March."

The Ramones will play some dates in New York over the Christmas period provided that Joey's ankle has healed up, then spend early New Year in California before coming to England.

At the end of the evening a young, dark-haired girl opened her blouse to reveal a perfect figure. The gesture, largely unnoticed, was enough. We spent the evening prodding each other with safety pins. *Chris Charlesworth*

— NME MAY 21 —

"HEYMAN!" PLEADS a panic-stricken Dee Dee Ramone. "If ya hit me, I ain't gonna hit ya back! I've got too much respect for ya! Anyway, I don't know how many armed bodyguards ya got hidden in the kitchen who'll come burstin' through the door with their guns blazin' if I do!"

Nevertheless, Dee Dee stands his ground. Arms pressed rigidly against the sides of the body, fists clenched, eyes half-closed, bracing himself for a KO punch that is never launched.

"Just leave me alone will ya!!" he hollers defiantly at Phil Spector – who, after handing me his automatic pistol for safe keeping, is executing a fast Ali shuffle inches in front of his distraught house guest.

Joey, Johnny and Tommy silently anticipate the next move. If there's got to be a rumble, they're ready – if somewhat reluctant.

"I came over here this evening at your invitation," pleads Dee Dee, who's no longer talking to Spector but screaming at him at the top of his powerful lungs, "to admire your house, listen to your music and party, not to fight with ya, so just cut it out, before someone gets hurt!"

I don't think Dee Dee's referring to himself. The blank cutesy mask that usually adorns Dee Dee's fresh features has in seconds become screwed into an expression of terminal angst. The kid's confused.

"Dee Dee R-A-M-O-N-E – I mean that's your name?" Spector continues taunting, "I was also brought up on the streets of New York, so let's see if you've learnt anything... one on one... So whatcha waiting for!"

The evening had commenced quite favourably. As soon as the Ramones' scene-maker Rodney Bingenheimer and yours truly had arrived at the heavily fortified Chez Spector, we had been made to feel most welcome. In fact, it appeared that Spector was on his best behaviour.

First, the youngest of Spector's three kids had dashed up to Joey and after taking stock of his height had asked, "Are you a basketball player?"

"No," the embarrassed stick insect had replied.

"Are you sure you're not a basketball player?" was the repeated enquiry.

"Sure!" affirmed Joey, precariously rocking from side to side on his long, spindly legs.

From the moment we entered the room, it was obvious that Phil Spector was fascinated by Joey Ramone's quirky charisma, in very much the same way as he had been enamoured by Blondie's Debbie Harry, a couple of weeks earlier.

"J-O-E-Y-R-A-M-O-N-E... J-O-E-Y-R-A-M-O-N-E," Spector would trill in admiration like a cracked record. If he could transmogrify Debbie into a '70s version of Ronnie Spector, then Joey was Dion's heir apparent.

Spector made no secret of the fact that in Joey he sensed the kind of dormant potential from which Great Phil Spector Productions are made. No pussyfooting: Spector expressed a desire to produce a Joey Ramone solo album.

Flattery didn't get Spector anywhere. After hours of discussing the matter, Joey politely informed his new-found fan that the Ramones are a four-man democracy and that they've made no contingency plans for individual projects.

Not to be deterred. Spector insisted that the Ramones would never be bigger than they are right now. He suggested a possible label change.

"I can make you into the stars that you want to be," he claimed.

They listened to what he had to say. Seemingly, money was no obstacle. He quoted telephone-number guarantees. The Ramones were impressed. The Ramones were dumbstruck. The Ramones became confused. Communication breakdown and a rapid deterioration in detente.

Part of Phil Spector's home entertainment often includes the sort of bizarre black-comedy antics I've described. Pushing unsuspecting visitors beyond their limits and then observing how they react. One day it'll backfire. Dee Dee refuses to allow Spector to get the better of him.

"I'm neurotic," blurts the exasperated Ramone. "And, of all people, you should appreciate what that means!"

That remark stops Spector dead in his tracks. Spector apologises profusely for his behaviour and a less-than-memorable soiree reaches an anticlimax.



**A**STHE TITLE of their second album implies, the Ramones left the comparative safety of their home in Queens, clad only in the threadbare clothes they stood up in, to discover Middle America. Here's the crunch. Except for a few big cities, Middle America hadn't heard of the Ramones. That's when the trouble started.

Being Big In Britain, A Cult On The Continent just didn't cut it with the hard-nosed proprietors of singles bars where nobody wearing leather, denim and sneakers was admitted.

To make matters worse, \$250 a gig doesn't cover \$500-a-day road expenses.

Things are a bit better for the Ramones out here on the West Coast, but only just...

Earlier in the day, I ran the Ramones to ground in LA's Tropicana Motel – an infamous rock 'n' roll pit-stop which may have long since seen better days, but still boasts the best and cheapest coffee shop in town. Nobody serves grease better than Duke's.

The Ramones seemed quite at home in its claustrophobic confines. Apart from a pile of old comics and rock papers on the floor, the only other signs of occupation were Dee Dee's sweat-soaked sneakers drying in the sun outside the bathroom window and a small black leather hand-grip stuffed with clean T-shirts.

When the Ramones leave home, they travel light.

When, in the first weeks of this year, the Ramones released their second LP, our man Murray confirmed in his review what so many people have already felt about the Blank Generation's Mop Tops – that unlike most groups who achieve immortality via a Saturday-morning television cartoon series, the Ramones bypassed the Jackson Five/Archies route by at least five years and manifested themselves as real-life cartoon characters the moment they stepped on stage at CBGB a couple of years back and realised they outnumbered their audience. The Ramones have confounded the sceptics by demonstrating that they are far from being a one-off ephemeral phenomenon.

Dee Dee plays bass. A rehabilitated ex-doper, he confesses that he used to live in a glue bag. That's him squatting barefoot on the floor remarking that if the rips in the knees of Joey's denims get much bigger he'll be wearing Bermuda shorts. Joey's the tall gangling one. He was

the neighbourhood outcast until the rest of the band befriended him. No cartoonist ever dreamt up such an original character. Joey sings. He's also very shy.

The guy who just took the phone off the hook is Johnny. He talks very fast, plays buzz guitar and thinks a lot.

Tommy plays drums. He acts tough. Probably fights dirty. He's reclining on the bed tucking his dime-store shades into his tangled hair. They remind me of the Bowery Boys!

Tommy speaks first. "Ya know... a lotta people didn't even think we could put out a first album."

His tone was cynical. "They said, 'These guys are great live, but can they do it again?' We have. But I guess they'll probably always say that about us!

Joey nods silently in agreement. Tommy argues that just because the Ramones' music is humorous, there are those who refuse to take the group seriously.



“We missed the spirit of the '60s – that good-time feeling”

“We ain't geniuses,” brags Tommy, “but we sure ain't dumb. A dumb person couldn't write out lyrics. We just tell it like it is. And, in a way that most kids can understand.”

Gabba-Gabba-Hey!

Perhaps, I proffer, any schmuck smear is just a backlash from those people whose musical tastes have become too sophisticated? The remark doesn't register with anyone in the room.

I draw pictures. I get a minimal response.

“They call us shitheads,” says Tommy, “they call us assholes... I guess we really get to them.”

A cruel smile decorates the edge of his mouth. “They just don't understand what rock 'n' roll is really all about!”

A product of trash culture, the Ramones soak up inspiration from movies, comic books, TV and every other form of instant mass media, like bread soaks up gravy. This particular afternoon, they get inspired.

To a man, they're intrigued by a news item on TV about someone with over 20 dogs and cats who died in an apartment and has been devoured by his/her pets. The pathologist, says the newscaster, has yet to sex the skeleton.

“I think,” jests Johnny, “we'll probably write a song about that. Anyway, rock 'n' roll should be a fun thing. You don't have to go out on stage and yell at the crowd, ‘Ya wanna boogie! Ya wanna rock 'n' roll? Y'all high?’”

**W**ITHOUT GOING INTO boring detail, the roots of the Ramones are to be found amongst the remnants of innumerable aborted high school garage bands, but according to Johnny, the Ramones banded together for a different reason from those groups they'd been associated with.

“We'd been friends for about 10 years or so, and we were just getting bored with music. We just couldn't take it any longer.”

“We all seemed to miss the spirit of the '60s,” interjects Tommy from the bed. “All that good-time feeling has gone. Rock got too progressive, which is fine if you like that kinda thing, but we felt there was a desperate need for the great rock feel of bands like The Kinks and the Stones.”

Tommy continues. “Where we come from, there's a great guitarist on every block. I guess it's the same in every neighbourhood, like you'll always find a good tenor sax player in every big apartment building. So it's no big deal any more.

“When Eric Clapton came along it was great, but now there's a million kids playing Clapton guitar licks. Maybe they're not playing them quite as good, but they're playing 'em just the same. Everything became too slick. The excitement had gone. There were no pop songs.”

“So we wrote some songs we wanted to hear,” says Johnny. “The only reason that the Ramones came into existence was simply because American radio has become so low-energy. I'm certain ‘You Really Got Me’ or ‘Do Wah Diddy Diddy’ wouldn't stand a chance on the radio if they had come out now instead of the mid-'60s.

“At least England managed to move into the '70s with singles bands like T Rex and Slade, but most of their records didn't get airplay in America.”

Though press coverage has been forthcoming, the Ramones have received restricted airplay.

“We're working on that one,” admits Tommy.

Could be that the Ramones' new surf single, “Sheena Is A Punk Rocker”, will resolve any imbalance. If it doesn't then we might all as well pack up and go home. Any buzz-saw band that persistently plays at 78rpm must have a head start over the rest of the pack. That's, of course, unless they run out of energy.

“We usually wear out audiences before we wear out ourselves,” insists Ramone Johnny.

“And we're getting faster every day. We listen to our second album, and that's faster than our first, and even that sounds real slow. Our normal set consists of 17 songs and takes 30 minutes to perform. A month ago, the same set lasted 37 minutes.

“When we played Seattle the other week,” he reveals, “we knocked up 17 songs, took a five-minute break, came back, played another 14 songs, a couple of encores, and we still hadn't been on stage for an hour. The only trouble is, it tends to make us feel faint!” Roy Carr •



The Ramones in 1977:  
(l-r) Dee Dee, Joey,  
Tommy and Johnny

1977

JANUARY - MARCH

The **SEX PISTOLS** enter Europe. Behind them: Bill Grundy, tabloid outrage and a dispute with their label, EMI. Ahead: an unimpressed Dutch crowd and some long negotiations. “We just acted our natural selves,” says Paul Cook. “It just beats me.”

“The more madder the better”

The Sex Pistols in early 1977: (l-r) Paul Cook, Glen Matlock, Steve Jones and Johnny Rotten

ALAMY



# Spitting into the eye of the hurricane

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"Right, you fuckers, we're gonna do one more": Rotten, at the behest of his manager, cues up another encore

**Paul Cook:** You done the one at the 'Undred Club that time, didn't ya?

**NME:** Yeah, a long, long time ago.

**Glen Matlock:** Was you the bloke that was gonna "split down the middle"?

**NME:** No, the main thing I've written about you was in the Stranglers piece, actually...

**Cook:** Luring 'em into saying naughty things. [Hugh Cornwell had called Rotten "a paranoid clown".]

**NME:** People were saying at the time what a bad deal it was for the Pistols, running into all this trouble, and it seemed to me if anything it was helping you, because you were getting all these front pages. I mean, you're a household name now. But I must admit it seems to have changed somewhat since then.

**Matlock:** Backfired? In some ways, yeah. It's all part of it, though, isn't it, all the mad hassle. The more madder the better.

**NME:** I don't know how you stand the pressure of it, though.

**Cook:** We're used to it already. I just think it's a load of bollocks. I don't know why they all write about it.

**Matlock:** You don't believe it till you've been the other side of it really.

**Cook:** Like that thing at the airport. I'm not kidding, straight up, we couldn't believe it when we got over here. Someone phoned up, said this that and the other – we just couldn't believe it. There was a press bloke waiting, I suppose; just waiting at the airport for something to 'appen. We just acted our natural selves. It just beats me.

**NME:** Wasn't there anything at all?

**Cook:** Nothing. Really. The bloke from EMI was with us all the time. He would have said if there was, but he didn't.

**NME:** I've heard you're gonna refuse to let them [EMI] break the contract.

**Cook:** Come on, we're not just gonna let 'em say, "Get off the label, do this, do that."

**NME:** You wouldn't rather just go somewhere else?

**Cook:** That's the point, innit? We're just letting Malcolm sort it out.

**Matlock:** A contract's a contract. If you sign a contract, right, and six months later they say you gotta tear it up...

**Cook:** If they do it with us, what chance have other bands got?

**NME:** But I would have thought that working with a company that was so against you, you'd rather just get out.

**Cook:** Yeah, but it's the people at the top who are against us. The people in the record company, like the A&R guys who work on the shop floor, they're behind the band, and they've got absolutely no say in it. It's yer John Reads – he's the guy that's in charge of all of EMI, not just the record company.

**Matlock:** He doesn't normally interfere.

**NME:** What happened before the Grundy interview? It seemed at the time like you were just sitting there – right, here's our opportunity, we're gonna get on the box and...

**Matlock:** Swear!

**NME:** Create havoc.

**Matlock:** No, we just went there and sat in a room for a bit and had a beer each, and he asked us a few questions – we just answered them. That was it. We never even spoke to the guy before it. He was just, like, sitting there, y'know – he looked a bit kinda pissed.

**Cook:** I think he incited (*obscured*), but he asked John – John said "Shit" under his breath – and he said, "WHAT WAS THAT?" He said, "Nothing, no, nothing." He said, "Come on, come on, I wanna hear it", y'know. What does he expect?



## — NME JANUARY 15 —

**A**MSTERDAM'S PARADISO IS much bigger than I'd imagined it to be – at least twice the size of the Marquee, for instance, with the ambience of a much friendlier Roundhouse, a balcony, two quirky bars, pool and pinball, a high (five-foot) stage with stained-glass windows behind, and hardly any sign of the public dope scene for which it's famous.

Two black guys morosely attempt to sell cocaine outside as *Guardian* rock writer Robin Denselow and I shuffle in just in time for The Vibrators' opening number.

For most of the audience, "No Fun" is their first taste of live English punk rock, and there could hardly be a better way to start: tongue-in-cheek nihilism, stampeding guitars and grotesque flash. They're amused, seem to enjoy it, give it quite a good reception. The Vibrators' set is reviewed in full in *On The Town*.

Backstage, The Heartbreakers and Sex Pistols wander in as The Vibrators wander out. After a while there's a completely different population in the concrete-box dressing room, and I sidle over and set up the tape machine next to Pistols drummer Paul Cook.

**NME: There's also at the moment a rather nasty rumour going around that you didn't play on the record.**

**Cook:** We 'eard that too. We got on to them straight away and got a letter of written apology. We 'eard it on the radio, couldn't believe that one either. It seems totally wrong to go... (*obscured*)

**NME: One of the rumours is that Spedding was on the record.**

**Cook:** Spedding can't play as good as that (*laughs*).

**NME: You did some work with Spedding, though, didn't you?**

**Cook:** Three tracks. A long time ago, though. We really rushed in, but we come out of it all right. He produced on 'em. It was all right.

**NME: But the single is categorically you lot?**

**Cook:** Sorry?

**NME: The single's definitely you lot?**

**Cook:** Oh yeah, yeah. What a question! (*Laughs*) How can you believe it?

**NME: I don't believe. I gotta ask it, haven't I?**

**Cook:** Yeah, OK. We 'eard it on Capital Radio; we just couldn't believe it.

**NME: How's the audience here taking you?**

**Cook:** Oh all right. They was getting going last night.

**NME: They seemed to like The Vibrators.**

**Cook:** All the bands went down really well last night.

**NME: What are your favourite bands out of the other bands that are around?**

**Cook:** These boys.

**NME: The Heartbreakers? What do you reckon to The Vibrators?**

**Cook:** Ah, you're trying to put me in that trap again what the Stranglers fell for.

**NME: They didn't fall for anything. They'd decided to give that interview before I walked in the room.**

**Cook:** How other bands can just go out and say things about... I think any band that's about at the moment, trying to do something new, give 'em credit for it whether you like 'em or not.

Don't just go out and slag 'em off, whether you like 'em or not. I think it's good that they're just doing it, that it's something new.

**Jones: (From across room) Who's this?**

**Cook:** He's from the *NME*.

**Jones:** What's your name?

**NME: Phil McNeill.**

**Jones: (Aggressively) Oh, are you?**

**Cook:** No, they've been good to us lately.

**NME: We've been good to you all along. What's all this about spitting at the audience?**

**Cook:** We don't. You been reading too much *Daily Mirror*.

**NME: Well, in the wake of reports of John spitting at the audience, some bands have started doing it.**

**Cook:** We read that in the press too, and suddenly we were playing and everyone started spitting at us.

That's what they thought we wanted, y'know. Gobbing at us. In Manchester or somewhere.

**NME: What's your reaction to seeing people with safety pins through their cheeks?**

**Cook:** I've seen that too, yeah.

**NME: It seems like it's a development of John wearing safety pins through his shirt.**

**Cook:** Let 'em do what they wanna do, that's what I say. Who cares?

**NME: And what about the great Nazi thing that's going around now? You got a lotta kids coming to your gigs these days wearing Nazi emblems and safety pins through their faces and God knows what else.**

**Cook:** They take it too seriously, they really do. If they wanna wear a Nazi armband, let 'em. I don't think kids

are that political, really mean what they do. They like the shape of it. It's a good shape.

**NME: What about the Pistols? What's your politics?**

**Cook:** Do what you wanna do. That's what we're doing, and getting turned down for doing it. Do you wanna talk to John for a while? (*Rotten is standing nearby, back to us; Cook tugs his arm*) John. John! Here, this is Phil...

**Rotten:** No way.

**Cook:** He's from...

**Rotten: (Obscured, shrugging Cook off)**

**Cook: (Slightly put out) All right. He don't wanna do it.**

**T**HE HEARTBREAKERS' SET flashes by. It's been said here already – the Dolls, a heavied Ramones, not so fast, though – the reception's comparatively quiet but the friendly atmosphere combined with the blazing rock onstage... it's a helluva gig.

Interview The Vibrators in the Paradiso office. They're euphoric because the guy from Amsterdam's other main club, the Melkweg, who blew out the gigs he'd booked for The Vibrators when the Grundy/Pistols thing erupted, came down last night and has booked them in for two days' time.

A charge shivers the room as "Anarchy In The UK" lams out in the background; Malcolm McLaren arrives and huddles heatedly with The Vibrators' manager. Bread.

A few songs into the Pistols' set we wind down the interview; it will appear here sometime soon. But let's go check the naughty boys...

The Johnny Rotten Show is well under way. Long time no see. Not much sign of the vast improvements in playing we've heard about: the sound's

much clearer than the early days, but the music is still primitive. Without Rotten they're a good, hefty drummer, an ordinary bassist and a mediocre guitarist.

"Substitute" and others go by. The crowd are up for the first time, standing fascinated but diffident. Rotten goes through his ostrich-poses, the chin jutting, the mouth leering, the eyes rolling. They're playing what seems to be "No Future". It boasts the title line from the National Anthem.

There's a long break, with a lot of aural and visual agro between the punters and the Rotten/Matlock duo, then they resume the song, very loud. It's sloppy, and it reaps silence.

A green-haired lady is sitting under a Christmas tree stuck on the wall behind the drums, and as they go into "*(We're so pretty, oh so)* Pretty Vacant" it occurs to me, vacantly, that it looks like she's wearing some gigantic hat.

The Pistols are playing tighter, but it's still mighty basic. Jones compensates for his limited skill with a fair line in one-note breaks.

Johnny Rotten is a perplexing performer. He has an extraordinary ability to enrage his audience.

At the most basic level it's his insults and his bad behaviour, but Rotten has something deeper. It goes deeper, too, than his contempt for society in songs like "I'm A Lazy Sod". And surely it goes beyond his looks, his fleabitten, hunchbacked cadaver.

Somehow this guy repels virtually everybody, and somehow his power reaches through the taunts to the sensibilities of thousands, maybe even millions, of people who have only ever heard his name and seen his picture.

Yet he is mesmerising. He can't be ignored. He's not just some hooligan who swore on TV, he drags the most »

"We're not just gonna let 'em say, 'Get off the label, do this, do that'"



March 2, 1977: Paul Cook and Steve Jones in the audience for The Heartbreakers at the Roxy in London's Covent Garden

casual observer into, usually, a love-hate relationship; probably the most charismatic rock star to emerge since Bowie.

Suddenly a couple of kids at the front who have been hitting Rotten with woollen scarves start throwing beer. Not glasses, just beer – but for this laid-scar mob it's the equivalent. While Rotten stands there, Cook erupts from his stool and he and the girl chuck beer back, Matlock kicks his mic stand very nastily off the stage, and the rhythm section storms off, Jones still rifling, and Rotten sends the girl to get the others back. They eventually return for the only really furious piece of music they play all night.

Meanwhile Malcolm McLaren stands impassive upon the mixing desk riser, his three-piece-suited solicitor behind him

The show really begins about now. It's got nothing to do with music, but so what? It's Entertainment. The band have left the stage – all but Rotten, who sneers, "If you want more you can clap for it." Feeble applause. The disco starts, and feet start shuffling out.

But a chant is generating. Yes... yes... the Pistols are coming back. "Whatcha Gonna Do 'Bout It", nihilism incarnate.

They end but don't go. "You're boring," drones Rotten. This weird challenge to the audience to respond. I look round at McLaren – and see that he his standing there gesticulating to Rotten, the upswept arms of the "Get Up" movement and the hands clapping overhead... and Rotten is mimicking McLaren. This shows ends when Malcolm says so.

The crowd raise a half-hearted chant, Rotten's response: "Right, you fuckers, we're gonna do one more, so move or else forget about it."

It's a very good version of "Anarchy", lots of echo on the voice. End of Act.

End of act? No way, McLaren is signalling Rotten again, and puppet-like, Rotten copies him. Whether the audience wants one or not, there's going to be another encore. There is, and this time Rotten stomps off before Malcolm starts signalling.

The point of all these false encores eludes me, unless the Sex Pistols are actually unliberated enough to get an ego-boost out of such conventional trappings of success.

Their music is lumpen, but the spectacle is marvellous. That last sentence could easily be applied, coincidentally, to shows I've seen in the past years by Queen and the Stones – and like those bands today, the Pistols' main success is in show business.

**MALCOLM HAS AGREED** to speak to Robin Denselow and me at his hotel. How the hell do we find it?

We wander off in pursuit of the beleaguered mad scientist. It's freezing and I haven't eaten all day. We walk for miles. As we near our destination, Steve Jones runs past, bums five guilders off me virtually in return for showing us where he's staying, much to my bemusement... Finally we're there.

And behold, McLaren appears. For some reason we can't go in, so we conduct the interview standing on a hotel step by a canal at three in the morning. McLaren looks even more wasted than I feel, talking unstopably like a man possessed, staring into space. There could be 2,000 of us listening.

"We've had word that most of the majors won't touch us with bargepoles."

You haven't had offers from people like Polydor, UA?

"No, that's all guff, man – who's spreading those kinda rumours?

There's nobody after us. We've had, I suppose you call it, votes of confidence from the shop floors of various record companies, but you begin to realise that those sort of people don't have any control over the situation, just as it's happened in EMI.

"We've had people like the guy from EMI Publishing, Terry Slater; he rang me up today and he feels totally pissed off that he's been totally overruled. He's the head of EMI Publishing; he signed us four weeks ago

December 11, 1976: the Pistols and manager Malcolm McLaren (left) at EMI's Manchester Square studios, where they record demos of "Problems", "God Save The Queen", "Liar" and "No Feelings"





for £10,000 and now he's been told that's all got to be quashed. He's been made to look stupid.

"The same goes for Nick Mobbs, who threatened to resign. He's now been told that would be very unhealthy for him, so they can produce a wonderful statement saying on EMI no one has resigned.

"There are different bands with different points of view. The real situation is that people on the board of directors at EMI do not agree with our point. The people who actually work for EMI, they do. But if they come out and make a statement to that effect they will get the sack, or they'll have to resign.

"Those truths have never come out. What appears in the press is that we have been thrown out by all of EMI together, a wonderful consensus of opinion."

If it comes to the crunch and they force you to terminate, will you repay the advance?

"How are we going to repay the advance? We've already spent all the money maintaining ourselves here and on the tour. We're out here promoting their single – it's not just our single."

Is it out here?

"Yeah, that's the reason we're here. We weren't doing any other European territory simply because EMI sent a memo asking them not to release it. EMI Holland got the record out before that memo reached them. Now they're withdrawing it."

Are they blocking its sale in England?

"Oh yeah, it's being withdrawn in England."

If you do split with them, what happens to any tapes that are in the can?

"Those questions have been raised. They would prefer that we take the lot and go away with it. It's been very easy for them. Someone signs a contract for two years: that is an agreement between two parties. If

you can tear that contract up in two months because they dislike the opinion of the band – by "they" I mean the EMI board of directors – it makes a farce of the whole situation.

"What about all these other bands that are coming along? They sign a contract and some guy at the top, not some A&R guy who's responsible for signing, says, 'I don't like what I'm hearing about this band, I don't want them on the company any more.' So they go out the window."

Who are the guys who've come over here?

"The managing director of EMI and the head of the legal department – Leslie Hill and Laurie Hall. They came over to terminate the contract and we haven't terminated it. They want us to have another meeting; at the moment they haven't met any of my proposals, probably because they have been told they can't meet anything.

"We had a two-hour meeting tonight. It's been very nice. We've come away to Holland and someone's decided behind our back to "mutually terminate" the contract. Legally, we're still on EMI Records..."

"Now people on the EMI board are saying, 'Why the hell did we sign them in the first place? They're musically inadequate, it was too much money...'

"But I spoke to Leslie Hill, the managing director of EMI Records, prior to us signing. It was him that was exhilarated by the band and thrilled at the idea of signing the act. He was fully aware of their public image, and he will not deny that.

"EMI had all the tapes to all the Pistols' songs. They heard them, they were excited at the prospect of signing this act and commercially gaining through it. We had had offers from other companies, but I went there because the sympathy with EMI was strong on the shop floor.

"Nick Mobbs, Tony Slater on the publishing side, David Munns on the promotion side, Mark Ryder the label manager, Paul Watts the general manager and Leslie Hill the managing director all wanted to sign this act. Now they're saying, 'We have 4,000 employees on EMI and if we took a consensus of opinion I don't think you would raise the amount of votes necessary.'

"I made a proposal; I said, 'OK, find us an equivalent contract.' If I walk into Warner

Brothers they're going to say, 'Well, man, you didn't make it with EMI, the bad publicity, et cetera.'

"What they did on TV was something that was quite genuine. They were goaded into it, and being working-class kids and boys being boys, they said what they felt was... OK. They don't regret it.

"The KLM situation at the airport was fabricated up to a point. Yeah, the band might have looked a little bit extraordinary, they might have spat at each other. Big deal. And someone may have appeared a little drunk. But they weren't flying the plane, they don't need to be that sober.

"There are these bands now that have some sort of petition, like Mud, Tina Charles, all these other Top 20 acts, and sent round this petition to all the record companies saying that they do not support this kind of music."

(NME talked to Mud's manager, Barry Dunning, on Monday. He denied Mud had signed any petition, nor would they ever do so.)

"My lawyer asked: 'We'd like a meeting with John Read or the rest of the money.' They'd rather give us the rest of the money than have a meeting. John Read speaks on behalf of all the shareholders, he controls EMI Ltd, which covers far more than just a record company. He wouldn't meet us. He sent Hill instead; every time you just get to speak to Hill. Hill has his orders and he can't move from that point."

How much money have you had of the £40,000?

"Half. The first year. But that has been spent on supporting a tour.

"We ended up selling the fucking record at the bloody door in Rotterdam and at the Paradiso last night. It's a joke."

What's next, a big legal battle?

"I don't know. I asked Hill if they can reconsider their situation, quite simply – and if they can't, why can't Capitol Records, who we're signed to in America? 'Oh well, Capitol Records decided to go along with Manchester Square.' They don't want any part of it.

"I said, 'What happens if we're on another label and the distribution is through EMI? Are EMI gonna distribute the record?' They can't really answer that. It's very difficult, it really is. I feel pretty bad about it.

"Hill's now saying, 'Can't you go to Virgin Records, I hear that's an interesting company.' Bollocks, man – we went to Virgin Records before we went to EMI and they didn't wanna know.

"If we walk into another record company, what are they going to say?

'If you can't play anywhere and we can't hear your records on the radio and EMI decided to drop you...' What the hell are they going to do?

"It's not just EMI, it's people behind the scenes, guys that go on the radio and say we didn't play on our record, the guy that's scared to put us on *Top Of The Pops* even though we're in the breakers because the BBC don't want to be seen to be associated with us.

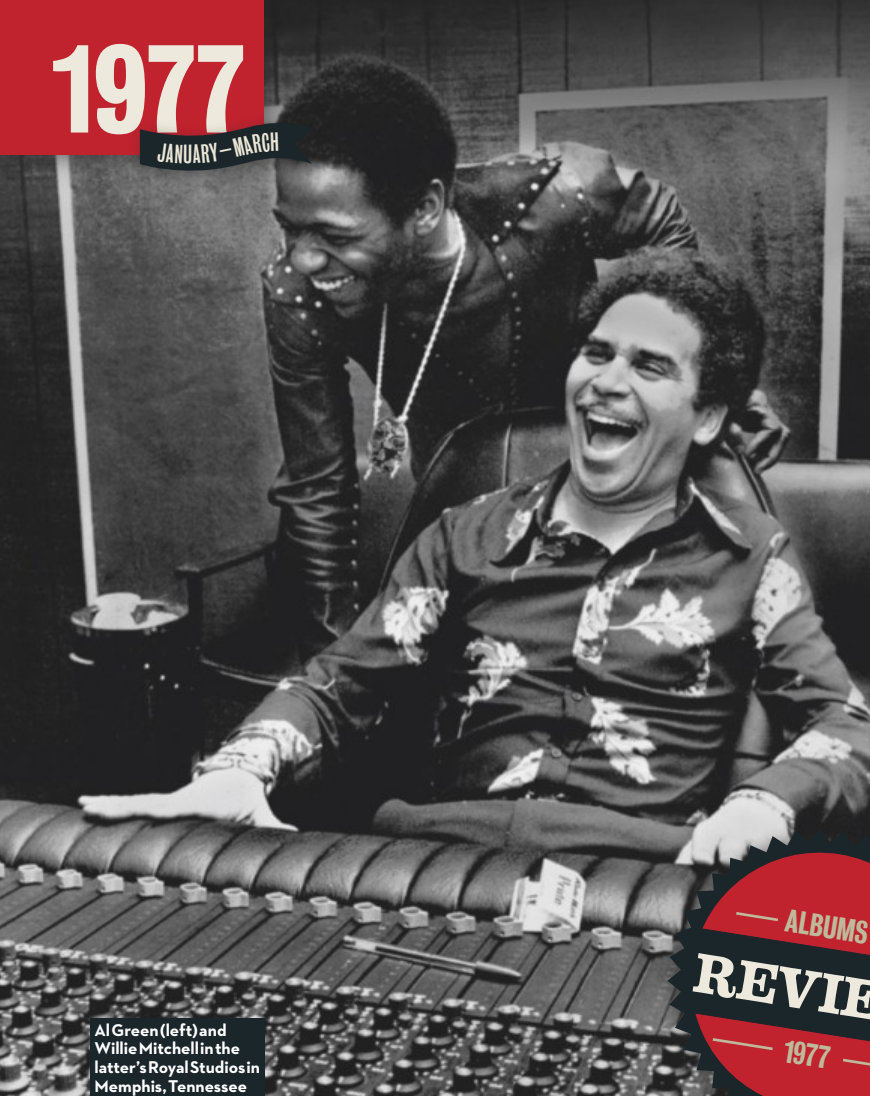
"What's it all about?"

**UNTILLASTWEEK** I had no sympathy whatsoever for the punks-as-martyrs line, but if what McLaren says about them not being able to land a contract anywhere is true (I still don't really believe that one), and EMI Records do succeed in breaking their legal contract simply on account of 30 seconds of televised swearing, then I'll, I'll...

Phew, for a moment there I Almost Cut My Hair!

The McLaren interview was recorded on an EMI tape. *Phil McNeill* •





Al Green (left) and Willie Mitchell in the latter's Royal Studios in Memphis, Tennessee

ALBUMS  
**REVIEW**  
1977

## ALBUMS

**Al Green** *Have A Good Time* LONDON  
**Bill Withers** *Naked & Warm* CBS

Green and Withers are both eminently distinctive singers and writers who've been hampered by their very individuality, Green more so because he's always worked with the Hi studio session team and producer Willie Mitchell; which is fine if (as I do) you like Howard Grimes' drumming and the work of Teenie, Leroy and Charles Hodges, but it does set a rather too well-defined perimeter of appeal.

Withers, because he has worked more readily with a variety of musicians, has brought fresher aspects to his music but, essentially, its heart remains the same.

Green's album is a good showcase for his voice, but too many of the Green/Mitchell songs are merely competent efforts. The one outside song, "Nothing Takes The Place Of You", a ballad, draws a magnificently hurt performance from the singer. Elsewhere there's a fine fuzz-toned guitar intro lifted from Elmore James to "The Truth Marches On" and his gossamer introduction to the title track is convincingly authentic.

"Happy" finds Green at his free-ranging best, while "Hold On Forever" is genuine exultation. Of all soul or R&B singers working today, Green is simply the most flexible within his own style. It is the confines of that style that have stunted wider peculiarity in Britain. Subjectively, I could listen to Al Green all day and often do, but objectively I do not think I could honestly build a watertight case to convince a non-believer.

For a man who used to install toilets in jet planes until far later into life than he cares to remember, Bill Withers hasn't done too badly. His voice is not the reliable and expressive instrument that is Green's, but Withers has his own, very personal style which comes from knowing his vocal limitations yet not always accepting them. Like Green, after a spell of popularity in Britain his star has dimmed somewhat, but the quality of his albums hasn't. Neither artist tours here, and thus they are ignored by radio and record buyers alike. Withers' initial success came via good songs and a fresh-sounding nasally voice which created a warm musical ambience. *Naked & Warm* is firmly in that mould, though his songs are less immediately

memorable and his accompaniments have become much lush, his arrangements fuller. *Naked & Warm* is not an outstanding Bill Withers album, but its highlights, "City Of Angels", "Close To Me", the title track and "My Imagination" are good enough to last until his next set.

Geoff Brown, MM Jan 22

**Earth, Wind & Fire**  
*Spirit* CBS

Touring here in 1975 as support band to Santana, EWF created quite a stir with well-arranged, modern funk and a bravura live show which included such ludicrous effects

as a rotating rostrum, its incumbent soloing while he looped the loop. All this fol-de-rol, one concluded, was used to camouflage their material's lack of

substance. *Spirit* further confirms that impression. The big single, "Getaway", is attractively danceable, the album is cleanly produced (by EWF leader Maurice White and Charles Stepney) and the group play with the sharp precision one expects of a top American funk band and sing high harmony vocals pleasantly. But their pretensions towards cosmic relevance do not ring true and ultimately seem, like the aforementioned twirling drum rostrum, just another gimmick to kid us that they're more than the merely listenable, well-recorded purveyors of light love songs they seem. Geoff Brown, MM Jan 22

**Billy Connolly**  
*Atlantic Bridge* POLYDOR

Billy Connolly's previous albums for Polydor (*Cop Yer Whack For This* and *Get Right Intae Him*), despite the enormous commercial success they have enjoyed, have not reflected his genuine comic talent. Those familiar with the earlier *Solo Concert* double set on Transatlantic

Records will know that Connolly is capable of the most bizarre and hilarious flights of the imagination, with a commendable ability to sustain a constant flow of comic ideas and observations and build around one joke an elaborate fantasy. Those who know only the aforementioned Polydor albums, edited clumsily from live performances, will have an image of Connolly only as a popular comic infatuated with mild vulgarity, and overlook pieces like "Sergeant Where's Mine?" (still one of the most acid and pertinent comments on Ulster) and the later "Join The Army". This new album, taken from recordings of concerts at the Carnegie Halls in Dunfermline and New York, is fortunately a far more accurate representation of his talent, and occasionally catches Connolly at this most inspired. The Dunfermline concert presents us with a familiar Connolly performance before a predictably partisan audience well acquainted with his work, and Connolly responds enthusiastically to their appreciation. There are few surprises here, but "Rodney And Cynthia" is one of his most hilarious routines, delivered with infectious relish, and his attack on *Stars On Sunday* and its principles is delightfully vindictive. It is, however, the side recorded in New York that most immediately engages one's attention. The audience is surprisingly familiar with Connolly's work, which is just as well because he makes no concession. "Play 'The Welly Boot Song'", shouts a woman at one point. "No," Connolly responds viciously. "Make me." The side opens with two of Connolly's more tolerable country & western parodies, "The Shitkicker's Waltz" and "Half-Stoned Cowboy", both amusing for the vigour of his performance, but which fade completely in comparison with the centrepiece of this album, "Death". It's Connolly's funniest and most inspired routine since the classic "The Crucifixion".





There is an old Scots proverb, he reminds the audience, that says there is more fun at a Glasgow funeral than an Edinburgh wedding. He then proceeds to offer his considered opinions on death in general and funerals specifically. He is not enamoured of interment – “what a terrible thing to do with people” – and is not altogether fond of cremation. They should, he suggests, try to brighten that process a little to attract more customers: fly a few banners, he says, to advertise its advantages. Things like, “Come and watch Elizabeth Fry... come and watch Robert Browning... come and see Captain Cook..... see how Robbie Burns...”

You know, tasteless things like that. I love it. In fact, to use a favourite phrase of Mr Connolly’s, the entire album is a stoater. *Allan Jones, MM Jan 15*

### David Bowie **Low** RCA

Any understanding of this album ought to be prefaced by Bowie’s comments in last year’s *Playboy* interview that his favourite group of the moment was Kraftwerk, and that he was excited by “sound as texture” rather than as music; “producing noise records seems pretty logical to me”.

Add to that the fact that Bowie is currently living in Berlin, and that he’s said to be a friend of T Dream’s Edgar Froese, and you have the rough background to *Low*, a record which once again exemplifies his fascination with ideas rather than emotions, and thereby emphasises his position in the vanguard of “modern” rock music.

For *Low*, while not precisely an album of “white noise”, is more experimental, rather than just different from any other of his records. Unlike his albums up to and including *Young Americans*, there is no readily apparent lyric context because the machines of the studio have largely taken precedence over his singing; if *Low* has any theme at all, it has to be gleaned from such tracks as “Be My Wife”, “What In The World” and “Sound And Vision” where he’s singing about self-isolation (thus “low” equals

“depression”, I suppose).

True to his suggestions in *Playboy*, Bowie has made an album of moods and textures that spring from a general employment of the synthesizer, wielded both by Bowie and, more particularly, by Eno. It’s going to be said, if it hasn’t already, that Eno

has been the inspiration here. Certainly, side two, where he uses, with Bowie, a variety of synthesizers on “Warszawa” and “Art Decade”, is wholly electronic and instrumental, whatever vocals there are having been doctored for effect. RCA, therefore, probably regard Eno as something of an evil genius, because the nature of these tracks seems rather at odds with the official fan-club leaflet they have included with the album.

I wouldn’t go nearly as far in my mistrust. Though there are some quite interesting moments, such as Bowie’s playing of the Gravel Sax on “Subterraneans”, this side inflicts on me the same boredom induced by all portentous space music. It doesn’t seem as interesting or experimental as most of the works on Eno’s own Obscure label, let alone measuring up to Reich, Berio, Stockhausen and all the rest, although it might go down well in the Pink Floyd/T Dream market.

Most Bowie fans anyway will invariably play only side one, which in the Bowie canon is really a musical bridge between the second side and the heavy-metal soul of *Station To Station*. The overall impression is of disco rhythms filtered through a Germanic consciousness, a Hunnish practice that I’ve come to find quite pleasing. Some of it sounds like backing tracks just waiting for a vocal. “A New Career In A New Town”, for instance, and “Speed Of Life”, which is dominated by tremendous bass and sledgehammer drums. But elsewhere Bowie has achieved what I think is a rather unique songform by successfully marrying pop music with electronic concepts. Much too powerful for Muzak, it’s music that’s highly appropriate for an age which despises articulacy and subtler feeling, which increasingly turns from the spoken word to the comic book, the television, and all other technological apparatus. It’s oddly the music of Now – not exactly what is currently popular, but what seems right. *Michael Watts, MM Jan 22*



Hawkwind on the Marc TV show: (l-r) Adrian Shaw, Simon House, Robert Calvert and Simon King

## SINGLES REVIEW 1977

### SINGLES

**Stranglers**  
*(Get A) Grip (On Yourself)/London Lady*  
UNITED ARTISTS

The Phil McNeill Fan Club make their recording debut with a stunning double-sided single of distinctive, intelligent, contemporary rock’n’roll that sounds like Roxy Music would have if that old capped-tooth smoothie Ferry had been influenced by The Doors (as opposed to Humphrey Bogart at the start of his male menopause). The B-side, “London Lady”, is perhaps more like the noise you would have expected from a squad of elder punksters – Hugh Cornwell’s slashed-out riffing more upfront on this two-minute-25 song than on the A, where the main feature is Dave Greenfield’s swirling keyboards backing up the hookline chorus (which is maybe strong enough to get them some “chart action”). *NME, Feb 5*

**Hawkwind**  
*Back On The Streets* CHARISMA

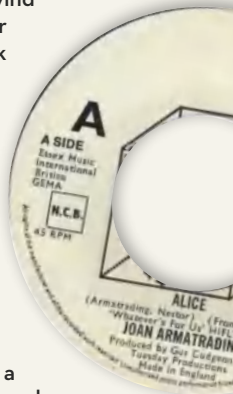
Unlike the majority of dandruff-encrusted hippies, this lot have never been averse to knocking out a decent single once in a while. “Silver Machine” was OK and the sunk-without-trace “Kings Of Speed” was great. This single sounds more like the stuff you hear coming from the stage of the Roxy than does The Stranglers’, which just goes to prove once more how meaningless labelling anything punk rock is. Here you get cranked-out basic chords designed to make you eardrums bleed, lyrics that are unintelligible apart from the chanted title-chorus, and the rhythm section playing like they enjoy feeling those blisters squish against their instruments. *NME, Feb 5*

**Rose Royce**  
*Car Wash* MCA

The theme from the American box office smash movie starring Richard Pryor and The Pointer Sisters (remember The Pointer Sisters?). This is a cute sidestepping two-beat number reminiscent of Donnie Elbert in a rough mood, with strings so dirty they almost ooze onto the vinyl. Rush released owing to public demand, and already high in the soul and disco charts, it’s about the agony and ecstasy of hosing down Volkswagens: “You may not ever get rich/But let me tell you it’s better than digging a ditch...” Sure it sounds a lot more fun to wind up working in a car wash than in Frank Zappa’s gas station, but have they really constructed a double album around the song? *NME, Jan 8*

**Joan Armatrading**  
*Alice* CUBE

A sad little song about a chick with a near-perfect face and a deranged mind – ah, nothing changes. An inoffensive pussyfooter, and not the sharp ice-and-fire Armatrading we all wish we knew and loved. Joan sounds more comfortable with love than death anyhow: “It’s harder to live than to die,” she warbles uncertainly. From the 1972 album *Whatever For Us*, a case of cashing in on the part of Cube maybe, but they’re wasting their time. If there’s one thing that doesn’t go down well with the Great British Public, it’s girls singing about girls, which is why the greatest rock’n’roll single of all time, Patti Smith’s “Gloria”, got nowhere. *NME, Jan 8*



1977

JANUARY - MARCH



March 19, 1977:  
Peter Gabriel  
onstage at the  
Palladium in  
New York City

# “The right intensity”

The charming **PETER GABRIEL** opens up about Genesis, Bowie, the Sex Pistols (“I enjoyed Rotten...”), Bruce Springsteen and taking on the industry with his new solo career. “The fact that I’m an ex-public school boy put a lot of musicians off working with me,” he says.

— NME MARCH 12 —

*So I went from day to day  
Oh, my life was in a rut  
Till I thought of what I'd say  
Which connection I should cut  
I was feeling part of the scenery  
I walked right out of the machinery*  
Peter Gabriel (“Solsbury Hill”)

**T**HE LATE '70s are here and The Rock Machine isn't always a turn-on any more. In fact, to some it's indistinctly repugnant, as readers of this paper should have noticed if they have been paying any attention to the punks' and their supporters' war cry of “Back to the streets” (though, in the case of the latter, I wonder how much of it is being anti for anti's sake, and just how many of them wouldn't relish the prospect of being the rich old pop stars they supposedly despise?).

But actually to come out against the all-powerful and utterly seductive Rock Machine when you're part of it – the beast itself swelling your ego and bank account alike – is another thing, an entirely admirable one at that and perhaps even art for art's sake. Which is just what Peter Gabriel did when he quit Genesis two years ago, immediately prior to their final thrust towards the top of the British rock hierarchy.

All right, I know you could say such a move was ego for ego's sake, but having met Gabriel a couple of times and listened to his recently released first solo album, there's more to it than that.

As Gabriel's publicist notes with an air of relieved satisfaction, the former Genesis figurehead is a lot easier for an interviewer to deal with these days. While hardly the world's most languid subject, he – like his erstwhile colleagues Tony Banks, Mike Rutherford and Steve Hackett – has mellowed out considerably in the fast few years.

It still takes a good half-hour before this extremely articulate human being actually relaxes and begins to assemble his utterances into anything like lucidity, but there's not so much as a hint of a stutter from Gabriel's mouth these days.

Gabriel actually feels more comfortable in front of a camera – or anywhere else where he can project a visual image rather than a verbal one. On the other hand, he certainly isn't a vain man, couldn't give a toss for fashion and today »

GUS STEWART / GETTY

**PETER GABRIEL**  
made it big.  
It got to him.  
He pulled out.  
Now he's back.  
What's his excuse?  
**STEVE CLARKE**  
asks.

looks for all the world like a '60s provincial rocker who hasn't got it quite right.

The biker's jacket is fine—in fact it's the same one he wore to depict Rael (the New York punk around whom *The Lamb...* was built) on his last tour with Genesis. And the black rollneck sweater beneath the open-necked white shirt is OK, but the jeans are on the sloppy side, not to mention the sneakers...

**G**ABRIEL HAS DRIVEN down from his apparently limmodest home on the outskirts of Bath for this day of interviews—which means he was up at seven this morning. Favourite listening for Gabriel in his car of late is none other than Bowie's *Lou*.

"I think it's a very interesting album," he opines. "There's an edge he gets to side one that punks don't get near—the menace in the guitar, bass and drums."

He rarely sits down in front of his stereo to listen to music, and on the few occasions he buys a record it's usually something he and his daughter can dance to.

These days Gabriel is almost exclusively into songwriters. He lists among his favourites Bruce Springsteen, Randy Newman, Paul McCartney, Joni Mitchell, Becker-Fagen. Springsteen's much-maligned autumn '75 Hammersmith gigs, of which Gabriel saw the second concert, was the most exciting thing he's seen on stage in a long time. ("I didn't think I'd like it at all, but it moved me simply because he was feeling something himself.")

Gabriel's partiality to Springsteen is evident on the refrain of the first part of "Humdrum", the song that closes side one of the solo album. And "Waiting For The Big One", the second of side two's quartet of songs dealing with the apocalypse (Bowie and Jackson Browne aren't the only ones who've seen the end coming down), lies somewhere between Newman's compassionate cynicism and Tom Waits' booze-drenched pathos.

But that's only half the story, since Gabriel also employs a highly unpredictable arrangement for what is basically a sleazy slow blues, characterised at first by the perfectly absurd piano of Jozef Chirowski and later by the devilishly precise power chords of the great Steve Hunter, heavy-metal supremo to Lou Reed and Alice Cooper in the past. Just to keep you guessing, a choir sings the final choruses.

More than anything else, Gabriel now wants to forge an identity for himself as a songwriter. He thinks it'll be easier for him to do this in America, where he's currently touring, than in Britain where he considers himself thought of as primarily a performer. And because Genesis seem to sound the same now as when he was in the band, he reasons it will be more difficult for him to be accepted as a songwriter here.

Says Gabriel: "When I was first with the band I got credited with writing everything. That wasn't true. Now I get credited with writing nothing, but if you ask Tony and Mike, the group's two main music writers, they'll tell you I used to end up doing all the vocal melodies."

Gabriel, of course, was also the group's major lyricist, responsible for the often impenetrable, not to mention precious, mesh of glimpses into mundane British life, cosmic buffoonery and *Alice In Wonderland* fantasy that made up much of the group's lyrics. Even so, it is difficult not to be moved by the combined effects of the words and music to, say, "Supper's Ready"—and Gabriel's saving grace was always the quirky sense of humour he injected into the group's material.

These days Gabriel's songs are much more down to earth lyrically and feature relatively modest arrangements. "Solsbury Hill" is the most overtly personal song on the album. As well as dealing with how he saw his situation in Genesis, the song is a joyous celebration of the life-force. With its simple and infectious melody and arrangement, you get the feeling Gabriel's quitting the band was like having the proverbial weight lifted from his shoulders.

Although Gabriel wanted to get away from the Genesis song-format—quasi-orchestral arrangements, etc—and make a simple album (hence



there's no lyric-sheet), it wasn't always easy. Originally "Solsbury Hill" had seven sections, but with the help of Canadian producer Bob Ezrin, veteran of several Alice Cooper and Lou Reed albums, Gabriel was able to prune it down to two.

Even so, there are parts of the album that do resemble Genesis musically, especially "Humdrum" and the closing epic, "Before The Flood", musically a romantic statement, high on melody and with masses of Mellotron. A sublimely well-constructed solo from Dick Wagner (Hunter's partner in crime) adds another side to it.

As far as Gabriel is concerned, the only lyrical resemblance between what he's doing now and what he laid down with Genesis is his sense of humour, something which he feels is now missing from the band. With some reticence he says, "I don't like their lyrics. I don't think they now get any actual pleasure out of seeing words down on paper. I don't think it's so important to them—but there's still some really nice melodies there."

"I don't reckon I'm a great lyricist, but I think there's as much a craft involved in writing lyrics as there is in writing music. I don't think the band at the moment give it that much priority."

Since quitting the group over two years ago, he's seen them perform three times—at Hammersmith last summer (for my money one of last year's finest gigs) and twice on their recent British tour (at the Rainbow, where the tour opened, and at the last gig, in Bristol).

"I enjoyed the band at Hammersmith, but I was disappointed at the Rainbow where Chester (Thompson—the group's new second drummer) looked like a fish out of water. The feel wasn't coming through at all. Bristol was much better."

So what does he think of Genesis these days?

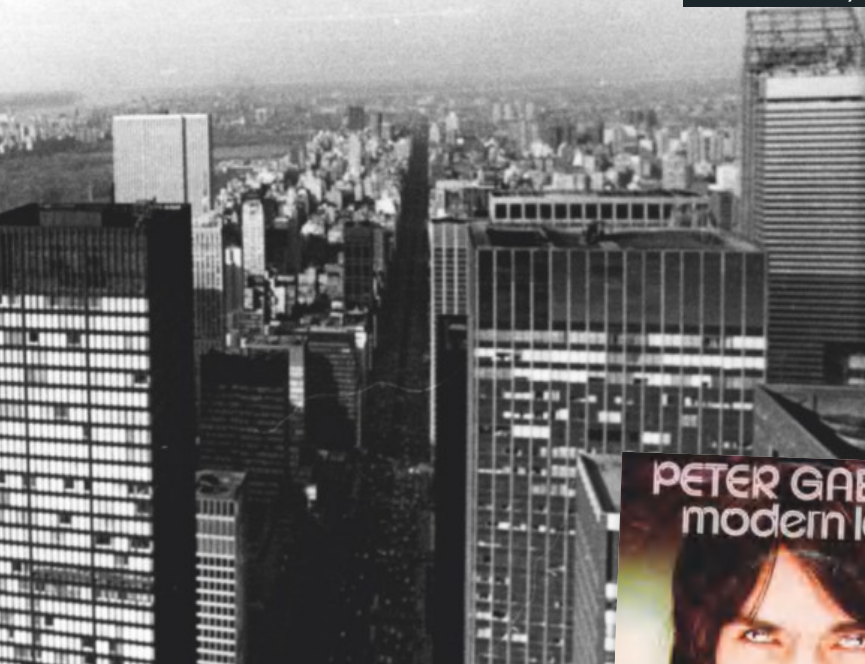
"When I was with the band, the emphasis was more on songs than musicianship, but now the playing and the execution has come up to match and maybe go ahead of the writing in terms of what they choose to feature. Because when I listen back to some of the other Genesis records I can hear what we were going for and how we failed on occasions to get the right feel or the right intensity or enough space."

"I remember quite often nervously filling holes which should have been left empty, and I think they're better at that now. In some ways Phil is a better singer than I am from a technical point of

"I think my leaving, in fact, kicked some fresh air into Genesis"



March 1977: Gabriel in New York, in the biker's jacket he wore onstage with Genesis when portraying Rael, the protagonist of *The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway*



tendencies in their situation which will encourage them to become rich old pop stars – to absorb those kinds of attitudes.

“It’s very hard for me, ‘cos they’re friends. If in three years’ time they’re still going on, I think they could well be bored with what they’re doing. I think they may be bored in a year’s time.

“As far as the punks’ attitude to bands becoming dinosaurs, there is a certain amount of hypocrisy in the way that they are being exploited and whether *they* can control it or not.

“I felt if I hadn’t left Genesis it would have become obsolete, or rather it would have become obsolete if we’d gone on as we were. We could have rehashed certain ideas and maybe produced some innovation, but within a fixed, stable framework that wouldn’t have put us to the test.”

Surely a lot of bands reach that point and carry on regardless?

“Yes, I think that’s true,” he replies – but laughing uproariously, refuses to name names.

**G**ABRIEL’S ATTITUDE TOWARDS the punks is an ambivalent one. On the one hand he thinks an amount of rebelliousness is just what rock needs now – what with rock stars now having the same status pre-war movie stars experienced, a situation which can certainly kill the communication link between performer and audience.

Says Gabriel: “I went to see Paul Simon in New York – a real star-studded affair. George Harrison was there. It was all very smug. It’s the same with professional footballers. Once you get into the multi-media boys it’s an elite thing and you move around anywhere – but at the expense of losing some of the contact with the people who actually listen to the music. That’s why I think the club scene is so important, because you really do get that intimacy.”

But then again, he feels the punk phenomenon was seized on too quickly by a copy-hungry media and a record industry about to break its neck in its fear of

missing the next boat – and not cleaning up on it. If the scene had been left alone to blossom untainted by such commercial pressures, the groups would have developed more as players and writers. Gabriel checked out the Sex Pistols before they were infamous.

“I didn’t much like their attitude to the support band. It was very much ‘We’re the stars’. Genesis used to get the same kind of treatment when they were a support band. I didn’t go for the music much, but I enjoyed Rotten. I was interested at that point because other people who I was with (not musicians, but personal friends) hated them with a venom I hadn’t seen for a long time. I thought anyone who can produce that reaction must be interesting.”

Gabriel is more enamoured of the New York punk scene – which has had time to develop and where both performers and audiences are older. In fact, Gabriel is pretty enamoured by America per se – particularly New York. Not only can he avoid any prejudices from an audience in America, he can also avoid them from musicians too, one of the main reasons he chose to record his first solo album there.

“The fact that I’m an ex-public school boy and come from the school of progressive rock would have put a lot of musicians off working with me here. At the very least they’d have had to like me despite those things.”

As things turned out, the American musicians who worked with Gabriel

on his album, Bob Ezrin’s house band, were so impressed with Gabriel and his material that they expressed a desire to work with him on the road. And so it will be. As yet there are no plans for Gabriel to work in Britain. He’d like to, but it all depends on how well the American tour goes. “If I feel it’s going well, then I’ll do it,” he says.

Now if that remark came from any other rock star, I’d take it with a pinch of salt – but seeing as how Gabriel had the integrity and guts to step right out of the machine which had made him famous in the first place, I’ll believe him. *Steve Clarke* •

view. Apart from anything else he has more control over his voice. Phil approaches it as a musician and gets it to sound better.

“I think the actual things written in the songs probably mean more to me and I tend to think I sang them as much as possible with... I don’t know... with emotion in the sense they mean more to me. So with ‘Supper’s Ready’, I miss that.”

Gabriel’s pleased Genesis have enjoyed greater success since his splitting, however anxious he is to carve his own niche all over again and with different implements.

“If they hadn’t been able to get going when I left I would have felt bad about it. At the time of my leaving they said I’d destroyed things for them and was being selfish. It was only gradually that they got back their own self-confidence. Now there’s no question of me having damaged it. I think my leaving, in fact, kicked some fresh air into the band. While in some ways they resented me being up front, they also sheltered behind me. And they had a responsibility when I left to come up with something strong.

“There was considerable emotional resentment because I got all the press. I felt Genesis were taking less risks. Maybe my leaving changed that. Had I stayed, things looked very rosy. We seemed just about to break America, and in my mind, as far as ego and ambition went I was always a year ahead anyway. So I thought we were as big as I wanted to go. And some of the fire seemed to be going out of the music.”

Does he regard his former colleagues as rich old pop stars, then?

“No,” he replies without any of his characteristic hesitation. “I regard them as people I spent two years with and am still friendly with. I think there are factors built into their situation – which are built into any situation as successful as that – which are conservative, which have to consider business interests.

“Which isn’t to say I don’t – but just the very scale of things, the number of people involved, means that the machine is so bulky that if you punch it the punch gets absorbed in the flab, rather than actually changing its course.

“Basically, I felt we’d built our house and we were renting it out. And for me the building is more interesting than the renting. I think there are



1977

JANUARY – MARCH

# “Something more than blatancy”

**IGGY POP** is off drugs, a changed man. A new album – recorded with his close pal, the now lesser-spotted David Bowie – is an attempt to pursue a different line in his work. Intrigued, **MM** travels to Berlin to attempt to find the pair.

— MELODY MAKER MARCH 5 —

**N**EXT TO MICK Jagger's adroit signing of the Rolling Stones to EMI, after months spent hooking such different fish as Virgin, RSO and Polydor Records, there has been no more interesting subject of speculation in music gossip than the whereabouts and plans of David Bowie.

Rumours of fascist studies in Berlin, of a Hitlerian cult and Howard Hughes-style intrigues, of heart illness and severe depressions, may have been on the level of *Photoplay* and *Silver Screen*, but then “stars” who cheerfully admit their own manipulation of the media should hardly complain when the media start making their own inferences. “Musicians”, after all, usually like to increase public knowledge of their relationship to their work.

The stories were amplified when it was recently announced that Bowie had produced, arranged and co-written all the songs on *The Idiot*, the first album for almost four years by his protégé (if that's the word) Iggy Pop, once of the Stooges. Not only that, but it was said that Bowie was managing, or at least “directing” Iggy's career. Suddenly he was Sol Hurok!

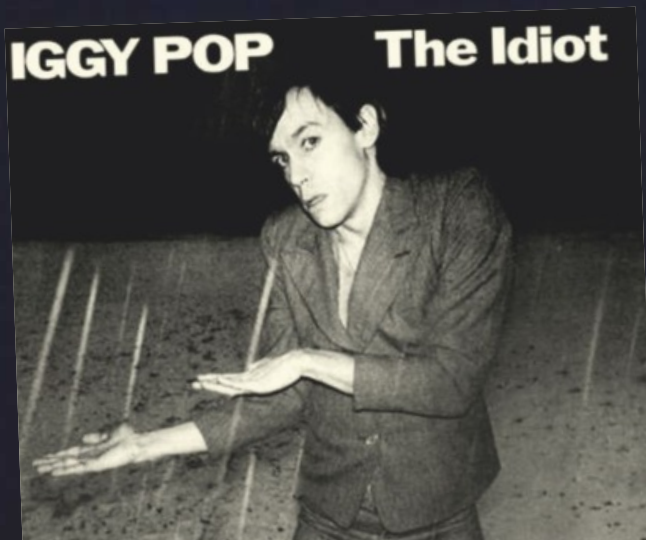
Harald Inhülsen was soon on the telephone from Braunschweig, a town about 200 kilometres outside West Berlin. A young filmmaker, Harald is better known as the president of Iggy's European fan club – at least, to British music papers. He sends out nude photographs of his girlfriend, Mechthild, the self-styled “Iggy's only true fan”. The latest show her lying akimbo on large posters of the former Stooge.

Harald had this story about their assignations with Iggy. He would call them up, and they would meet him at some specified place in Berlin. Sometimes Bowie was with him, though they hadn't seen him for three months. Yet Iggy would never reveal his phone number, nor where he was living. Harald said Iggy was frightened of upsetting Bowie, with whom he lived and who was near-paranoid about people locating him. The German press, it seemed, were stalking him around Checkpoint Charlie with notebooks, tape recorders and telephoto lenses, even though Bowie's popularity is not great in Germany. All the world loves a recluse, though.

“Iggy is under Bowie's control, I think,” said Harald in his best English. “He would like to break away. Get his own apartment.”

This was very interesting, since Iggy has always been presented before as the Wild Man of Pop – that sort of thing, a performer whose terrifying »

IAN DICKSON / GETTY







March 5, 1977: Iggy Pop at the Rainbow Theatre in North London for two dates before The Idiot Tour heads to Canada and the US

self-abuse has, in an intriguing way, made his audience voyeurs. When he first came to England in spring 1972, with Tony Defries, then Bowie's manager, he told me how he bashed his front teeth with the microphone, broke bottles on his chest, and once jabbed the splintered end of a mic stand into a young girl's head. He also liked to play golf. It was a little confusing. Such a nice, open chap, despite the big hat, pulled down low and shady, and those missing bits of tooth.

Later, Bowie mixed his CBS album, *Raw Power*, his best to that date, but Iggy returned to America, to Los Angeles, where he slipped back into old drug habits and gradual anonymity beyond the small circle of his cult. For a time he bunked with Ray Manzarek of The Doors and tried to be Jim Morrison; and he had few good things to say about David Bowie.

Then, abruptly, the friendship was restored when Bowie left Defries and went to live in L.A. Iggy was with him on a train that passed through Russia; he was also on Bowie's tour of Europe last spring and summer.

They began making *The Idiot* at the Château d'Hérouville in France that same summer, and finished it at Musicland in Munich and Hansa, the studio near the Berlin Wall.

All done, presumably, including the new record deal for RCA (his own label), with Bowie's money and influence. Indeed *The Idiot* has Bowie's own unmistakable handwriting.

"Remember the hat?" Iggy laughed when he called last week from Berlin. I said I hoped his teeth were in better shape (and remembering the fervent belief in dental care of Mainman employees, I'm sure they are).

I'd better explain.

This telephone call was a Promotional Device. When a rock artist is about to tour, especially when he hasn't performed in a long while, it's good to whip up a little press interest with an interview.

Iggy started this week in Britain a series of comeback concerts that will take him to Canada and America, and possibly back to Europe. As of writing, I hear the whole staff of one music paper were hiring a coach to go to the first gig at Friars, Aylesbury, so maybe he didn't need the interview after all.

It was very good of him to spare the time, anyways, in the eventual circumstances. He began by saying it was a beautiful day in Berlin. The sky was bright blue. A statement of some moment—he had hardly seen it for some time because he had been rehearsing all night and sleeping most of the day (it was 3pm his time).

Actually, he sounded in really fine shape. "I am very straight," he insisted. Then he laughed again. "Well, in relationship to drugs."

We got to more serious talk, about the new album. Not so much, like the others, a slap in the face, I said. "More like a pinch on the bum," he drily replied.

A reflection of life in Berlin?

Not exactly. He lived most of the time in Paris. "I have a girlfriend there."

Oh. That Harald.

"It might have more to do with the fact that before I went in to do it I didn't give a shit about what was going down in the music industry. I hadn't listened to anything for six months. I didn't give a flying..."

Fuck?

"Yeah, for the last two years I've been living a life of more... It was hard, very hard, to get along and try and do what I wanted to do. I felt I had something more to do than the blatancy—I felt it was too blatant—and just to say there are no drugs involved. As a matter of fact, I'd like to put out maybe 'China Girl' as a single because I wasn't twisted up and paranoid."

He broke off.

"Hey, I've really gotta go."



It felt as though someone were signalling to him in the same room. What about Bowie, I persisted—his influence on the album, I meant?

"This was made before the Bowie album. There's a great deal of his influence on it, but it's only as strong as guys in the past. I've always worked with one

person as the keynote, kicking ideas back and forth with me, like Ron Asheton, James Williamson. It was done very much in the manner that I've always worked. We sat in the basement, me on drums and him on piano. The lyrics were basically mine, but I've never been that closed about it. He wrote a lot of the music, and I wrote the lyrics, but the melodies are mine."

Why call it *The Idiot*? After the book?

No, he said, that was always the title he wanted. He hadn't read Dostoyevski until later, and then he was convinced. He had also seen, in a Berlin museum, a picture called *Roquairol*, of a guy who looked just like him. He had felt good about the title.

But he had to go. (Thinking quickly) I asked him if the new stage act would be at all different.

"I think it's exactly the same... It's hopefully not quite as nasty as the direction it started to take. But it's straight along the lines of *Metallic KO* [a current bootleg]."

Everybody would expect him to be outrageous, of course.

(A pregnant pause. His mood seemed to tighten.) "I've never had the sort of respect for these particular currents of thought to give a shit. And I don't quite think that, actually, I know what people come to see me for, and I know what papers write about it, and they are two different things."

"They come because they like the style of music and show. Of course, there are going to be some who see it otherwise. It's fine with me if they don't come."

Punk rock? "Anarchy In The UK"?

"I thought it sounded like me. I heard 'New Rose', which I quite liked. And I've heard of The Clash. But otherwise I don't know much about it."

(Signals flashing. This time he would really have to go. Desperate. Try to be crafty.)

This apartment in Berlin, is this where he lived with Bowie?

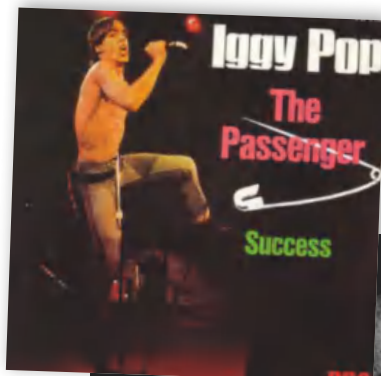
(A burst of incredulous laughter.) "Come on, man! You know I can't say. It's for David to say. You'll have to ask him."

I would if I knew where he was.

Ah.

Iggy finally rang off, and the next day I flew out to Berlin, doubtless attracted by all that fine weather they were having.

**D**ON'T ASK ME how I found out about the Schlosshotel Gerhus. Inside knowledge. Tucked away down a quiet road in the grand residential district of Grunewald, before it became a 40-room hotel it was a palace, built in the early years of this century by Dr



Pop with David Bowie, his co-composer and keyboard player in the studio and on stage during *The Idiot* Tour, spring 1977

Walthur von Pannwitz, once personal attorney to Kaiser Wilhelm II.

It's great and gloomy and baroque. To enter, one has to swing against huge and heavy wrought-iron gates. The cavernous hall is decorated in the rich style of the Italian Renaissance.

Footsteps echo hollowly on tile and marble. You feel quite alone. Indeed, there is only the immaculately white-jacketed figure of the maître d', sitting silently at the starched tables of a restaurant where no one ever seems to eat.

It is straight out of Visconti's *The Damned* (I refer, of course, to Luchino, not Tony – nor something on the Stiff label).

Yet there was a clue on the wall of the lobby, where, amongst photographs of Robert Kennedy and good German burghers gathered in the great hall, stood out a picture of Mick Jagger in his Midnight Rambler get-up. Is there any hotel these days, I wondered, that refuses rock'n'rollers?

Then the lift-boy further enlightened me. "Any English here?"

"Ja. Fifteen. Musicians."

"Oh really." Feigning disinterest.

"Ja. David Bowie." He pointed down a long, dark corridor. I handed him a Deutschmark. It really isn't worth very much these days.

By midnight I found out that he was wrong anyway, or perhaps his English wasn't good enough (what arrogance for us to expect it!).

After careful snooping from the picture gallery, I observed various bohemian characters briskly coming and going like characters from a Dumas roman-à-clef. These were the musicians.

But no Bowie or Iggy, and a rigorous third-degree of the hotel clerk ascertained that although both had occasionally stayed there, they now lived elsewhere. I sat pondering in my large, overcast room, a little intimidated by the indefinably German quality of its old, polished walnut and the reverent hush, stinking of money that glided in through the castellated windows.

But disgusted eventually with the standard of variety shows on German television, and disappointed to find that Harald was not at home snapping naughty shots of Mechthild, I absorbed myself in a fascinating interview with William Burroughs, in whose descriptions of cut-ups, fold-ins, word and mind games it's not difficult to recognise a model for David Bowie.

"I think that words are an around-the-world, ox-cart way of doing things, awkward instruments, and they will be laid aside eventually, probably sooner than we think. This is something that will happen in the space age. Most serious writers refuse to make themselves available to the things that technology is doing."

And this: "Like the advertising people, I'm concerned with the precise manipulation of word and image to create an action."

But Bowie's own opinion of this comparison did not appear to be forthcoming. An injudicious phone call tipped my hand. There were reports of fear and, indeed, loathing in the Bowie camp.

Iggy was especially disgruntled, as he had just granted me 15 minutes on the phone. I was sighted everywhere, like the Scarlet Pimpernel. Consternation grew. Having come not to bury Caesar but to praise him, I couldn't find a single body.

Apart from spells in Paris and Switzerland, where his wife Angela lives (they are said to see each other about every two months), Bowie has been living continuously in Berlin since last July in an apartment with a girlfriend and some other people, including Iggy when he's in Berlin.

Right by the telephone is a sign in German, "*Wie Sprechen?*" ("Who's Speaking?"), which he refers to whenever he doesn't recognise the voice of the caller.

In fact, although he's adopted at least one disguise of jeans and short hair tucked under a cloth cap, he has a star's typical ambivalence

"We sat in the basement, me on drums and Bowie on piano"



about his privacy; which is to say that he often likes to be recognised when he enters a public place.

This fear of his discovery is strongly communicated to his friends and acquaintances. A confidant such as Tangerine Dream's Edgar Froese, whose ideas can be seen to have influenced Bowie on *Low*, has to ring him up and inform him of who the company is if he wishes to invite him to his flat.

Bowie is well known to the musical community. In fact, Froese actually went to the Chateau for the original recording of *Low*, but he couldn't get to grips with the music; and Hansa By The Wall, where *Low* was completed, was used early on in their career by Tangerine Dream, although it's mainly employed for records of light music.

When she performed quite recently at the Kino Kant, a small, 400-seater cinema that hosts all kind of music from punk rock to the experimental, Nico tried to get in touch with Bowie to produce the album she is now making in Paris; but Bowie and Iggy wouldn't see her, apparently.

Despite stories of indifferent health (he smokes too much) and highly variable moods, he seems quite happy with Berlin and a culture that boasts both fine museums and some of the most extrovert drag clubs in Europe.

As one of his new songs would have it, it's almost a new career in a new town. There are even suggestions that his interest in German history and realpolitik will lead him to take the role of a young Goebbels in a movie project.

Yet one still keeps sensing a rather isolated figure, protected from the outside world by a diligent secretary in Corinne Schwab, one who wants to tie his friends jealously to him – like Iggy Pop.

Jimmy, as he's referred to by everyone who knows him – James Osterberg is his real name – has cause to be grateful and go along with Bowie. A kid who grew up in a caravan in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and whose life has been an often sickly switchback ride, he is growing elderly at almost 30 years of age in the role that's suddenly been thrust upon him of Godfather Of Punk.

But whether or not it's Bowie who has advised him to capitalise now, when punk rock is so hot, on renewed interest in his name, the advice is sound. London's Rainbow Theatre, where he will play this Saturday, was practically sold out within 24 hours.

According to Froese, who is not the most physical of performers himself, Iggy has a very good act, quite disciplined, with Scot Rick Gardiner on guitar and Hunt and Tony Sales, the sons of American TV personality Soupy Sales, on drums and bass respectively.

The rehearsals took place in another converted cinema, at 21 Viktoriastrasse, in what were once the Ufa Studios. Here, members of the Nazi cabinet, notably Goebbels, viewed German newsreel during the second world war.

Shortly to be pulled down, it is being currently leased by the Tangs for a small rent. Peter Baumann, one of the three members of the group, calls it "the Victoria" and regards it with evident awe.

Late Friday afternoon, when I arrived there, the final rehearsals had just finished and teams of roadies were loading the equipment ready for transportation the following day to England. There was no sign of Bowie or Iggy – they had been tipped off. But on the dressing-room door there was a crudely lettered sign: "Iggy's Idiot Lounge".

There was another piece of paper awaiting me when I got back to the Hotel Gerhus much later that night. The desk clerk handed me an envelope. Inside was a note that read, "See you in London. Enjoy the shows. Regards, Iggy."

Bastard. Michael Watts •

# “We’re as subtle as they are”

**AC/DC return to the UK, on a rock’n’roll mission.**

**“We just get on and play with plenty of balls, plenty of meat,” says ANGUS YOUNG. “Like Second World War songs,” adds BON SCOTT. “Chaps singing as they went to battle...”**

— MELODY MAKER MARCH 5 —

**“HE DIDN’T DO IT! He didn’t do IT!”** The outburst from the beer-bellied Welshman totally puzzles his mate, who has also taken a vantage point on top of a table to get a better view. “Huh?” comes the reply eventually. “Didn’t do what?” “He didn’t do IT!” The other’s voice adopts a tone of desperate disappointment. “He didn’t strip off. He didn’t flash his ass at us. He ALWAYS does IT.”

Just why the Cardiff Top Rank Suite attracted such a formidable crowd on a windswept, wet Tuesday night is a matter of some debate. AC/DC are the band who provide the music for the evening. Their 17-year-old leprechaunish guitarist, Angus Young, is the gent who didn’t oblige the punters by dropping his pants and revealing another side to his startling personality. Was that why they all turned out?

Whether or not it was, though, the fans went home happy. AC/DC, a weird concoction of Scottish and Australian rockers, gave them hard, hard rock. They’d probably seen all the moves before, heard the riffs do the rounds before this particular band decided to claim them, but they were attracted by the raw energy that had gone into packaging and presenting the show.

If this set wasn’t notable for its originality, it sure was impressive for the enthusiasm. It was the fourth gig of the current AC/DC British tour, and the band is feeling the pinch of the Sex Pistols’ TV extravaganza with Bill Grundy that occurred when they were home in Australia.

Venues, they’ve found, have closed their doors to rock’n’roll. Glasgow City Hall was one. AC/DC were prevented from playing that gig on this tour because of the damage over-zealous fans caused on their last appearance there.

And Liverpool Stadium is out this time, too, a direct result of the derogatory publicity rock had received since the Pistols/Grundy affair.

“Never mind,” Young Angus optimistically states, “they’ll open again when they’re losing money.” »

"I've gone on in gorilla suits,  
as Tarzan, as Superman...":  
AC/DC's Angus Young on  
stage in Hollywood,  
California, 1977



After only two years in Britain, AC/DC have already carved their own identity with rock supporters here, although their popularity goes nowhere near challenging their appeal down under.

They've just returned from an Australian tour, playing regularly as headline act in front of 10,000 fans, but they don't mind doing an about-turn when Britain calls. Tonight in Cardiff, for instance, I doubt very much if the audience figure approaches the 1,000 mark. So what, they say.

"We don't care how many people we play to," Angus says, through an accent that is a curious mixture of his early Scottish upbringing, his later Australian emigration period and a slight slur in his speech. "We'll play in front of two people if we have to. Nah-matta how many people's there, you play for them 'cos they pay. It's the obligation. We coulda existed in Australia, but eventually we would have to change, and we don't wanna change. Middle-of-the-road is the big thing there. We would have to get mellow and mellow and we'd end up like Tommy Steele."

Three of the band were born in Scotland. Apart from Angus, there's his brother, Malcolm, five years his senior, and the rhythm guitarist, and singer Bon Scott, the volatile frontman whose vocal and moody stage persona aren't a million miles away from Alex Harvey's. The band is completed by Australian-born duo of bass player and drummer, Mark Evans and Phil Rudd.

Three AC/DC albums have been released in Australia and two in Britain, *High Voltage* and *Dirty Deeds Done Dirt Cheap*, and the music on them is typical of the no-nonsense rock'n'roll that epitomises their stage set. Again, exciting if unoriginal. When they were in Australia, the band recorded another album with their producers, former Merseybeats George Young (Angus and Malcolm's brother) and Harry Vanda.

Angus is loath to use the word "mature" as a description of the new material. That's a little too pretentious, he thinks. Let's just say "classier".

**A**ND SO WE find AC/DC in the congenial surroundings of the Cardiff Top Rank, with more focal interest on the stage than a band of this nature usually merits. The cause for this ogling is, undoubtedly, the presence of Angus. His schoolboyish looks and rough baby-face features make him something of a freak offstage, but he fully exploits those assets for the band's live set, wearing a schoolboy outfit, short pants, blazer, shirt and tie, and cap. It certainly develops a manic personality on stage, racing round like a madman beating the life out of his axe, dashing occasionally into the audience.

The dance area at Cardiff is ideal for this gimmick, and Angus took full advantage of that situation. The audience reaction to the "star" of the show coming down from his pedestal to join them is fascinating. At Cardiff, when Young went into the midst of the bopping throng, it was like some scene from *Rock Around The Clock*, with fans forming a circle around him, clapping hands, tapping feet, encouraging him to batter away.

But, as the two lads earlier bemoaned, there was no flash of Angus's posterior at this gig. Ever since Young decided to turn his back on the audience and expose his bare ass to the Reading Festival campers last August, it's become almost expected that he should give every audience this, er, joy.

This history of Angus and his schoolboy rear goes back two years.

"Ah've always seen guys like Berry duck-walking and Jerry Lee Lewis stripping off, so I decided that I would wear that for a bit of fun. If I went on stage like this [jeans and T-shirt], I'd look dumb. That suit does me justice. For a start, I can pull the hat over me head and hide me face.

"I can do that and show off me knees. Flash me arse. Me bum's about the best side of me."

Oh yes, his bum. I informed him about the disappointed fans.

"Cos I didn't take off me pants? I only do that when I feel like puttin' shit on the audience.

Some audiences you get are really rowdy, and to shut them up you just go, 'Take that, ya poof.'

"It's just to shut them up, to quell them. I've been on stage, especially in Australia, and there would be guys there all night ribbin' me to do somethin' and they'd be shoutin', 'Angus has no balls,' until I eventually take off me pants and show 'em, because they're goin' to keep it up all night, so ya gotta shut them up pretty quick."

How long, I wondered, could he sustain the gimmick?

"As long as I want to. I've gone on in gorilla suits. I've gone on as Tarzan. I've gone on as Superman. I like wearin' those clothes. I like to go on lookin' the part so that straightaway it's something to look at. My thing is that I like to see somethin' to get people away from drinkin' to see what you're doin'. It's different when you look larger than life.

"It's to keep people interested, not bored. To keep them always lookin'. They pay to see somethin'. That's the way we look at it. Nah, I never get embarrassed, I'll do anythin'. The only time I get embarrassed is when you get a crowd that's stone-cold silent, but that only makes us work harder anyway. We get them in the end. We always have."

**T**HE CARDIFF AUDIENCE enjoys Angus's antics. They smile and laugh as he gets carried away. They're amused at the outrage.

Just as they are amused at the outrage of the lyrics.

AC/DC make no bones about what they're singing: sex and violence. From "The Jack" to "Jailbreak" Bon Scott's lyrics leave little to the imagination. Their new maxi-single shows that. The three cuts are "Dirty Deeds Done Dirt Cheap", "The Jack" and "Big Balls".

It isn't filthy, Angus maintains. It's intended to be funny. Try telling that to the BBC. Scott has another outlook: "Rugby clubs have been doing it for years. Songs like that. The songs that fought the Second World War were like that, with the chaps singing them as they marched into battle."

Angus: "There's not much seriousness in it. It's just rock'n'roll. Chew it up and spit it out. If you look at it this way, most of the kids in the street talk like that. In Australia, you see, we started in small clubs and bars, and when we came here we stuck by the same, places like the Marquee.

"Kids would be swearin' their heads off. They don't say 'turn it up', they say 'fucking turn it up' – we're as subtle as what they are. As far as radio stations go, you can turn on the radio and you wouldn't like to hear your songs on the radio anyhow, 'cos it's in there with Barry White playing his Love Unlimited. That's sorta like a bit degradin'.

"I suppose the radio plays are important in some ways. It gets you across to more people. But as far as changing what you are, that's wrong. We don't believe in that. You should let them come to you rather than go to them. It would be easy to sit down and churn out about 200 love songs, and you could guarantee one of them getting played sometimes, but you'd be selling yourself short."

Cardiff is a good one, it transpires, for the band. Although the sound is by no means perfect in the ballroom, it's loud enough and riffy enough for the fans. Unpretentious rock'n'roll. It never fails.

"A lotta people get us wrong," Angus complains. "A lotta people say that we can't play. I'm not sayin' that we're special. People say that we get on and play rock'n'roll and it's nothin' new, but we get on and play that rock'n'roll because we like playin' it. It's what we do best.

"We just get on and play rock'n'roll with plenty of balls, plenty of meat, plenty of spontaneity. That's our main thing.

"What makes ours different is that ours are good songs and we play them well. A lotta bands can play the basics but they can't play with quality. We can build a song at 100 miles an hour and play it right at that speed. It's got the right feel, the right everything, whereas you get a lotta bands who just play fast and don't give a fuck if they're outta tune.

"Good songs are essential. In the old days you had rhythm and blues songs like 'I'm A Man', Chuck Berry's 'Schooldays'. You put songs from nowadays up against them and they're nuffin'."

**T**HE SCENE CHANGES to a room at the Cardiff Post House, where Angus Young is plotting to revolutionise rock'n'roll, and Bon Scott, suffering a headache and jet lag, lies in a heap in the corner and isn't remotely interested in his plans.

I suggest to Angus that there's nothing at all serious about AC/DC. They're just a good-time band, with lyrics that mean nothing and music

that is just a rehash of what has been done before – like a rock version of Barry McKenzie. He bites.

"Well, we take it seriously to a point, but if everyone took it too seriously, we'd all be walking around with down faces and we'd all be living in the gutter. Bands who take themselves too seriously are fools, because they've taken it so seriously that they're not allowing themselves to enjoy it, whereas if they went on and played it as they should play it, it would be better.

"Yer punk,  
that's just a  
hip little thing.  
It's nuffin'"



AC/DC in 1977: (l-r) Phil Rudd, Angus Young, Mark Evans, Malcolm Young and Bon Scott

“The bawdiness balances out with other things in our set, but you’ve got to break up the monotony. It’s like Liberace. He can’t get up and play Beethoven all night, so he bends a little. It’s like if you put Beethoven and Bach and brought all those classical people back from the dead for a concert on TV one night and on the other channel you had the Lone Ranger, it’s guaranteed the Lone Ranger would pull the biggest rating, because it’s entertainment rather than pure boredom all night.

“I don’t know anybody who’s gone to see any of these serious bands who’ve enjoyed it. They may say it was great, that the music was good, but somewhere during that set they were bored and were too scared to admit it.

“If I went to see somebody that was ‘musical’, I’d yawn my head off. I’d end up walking out to the bar.”

“Musical”, I suggest, in the sense of bands like Yes?

“Yeah. To me, bands like Yes would be a bore to see, not unless they had some Sheila strippin’ on stage. Well, even then, Hawkwind done that. That shows ya what they gotta resort to, and yet people take them seriously. Yes would probably come on with a fantastic light show.

“I’ve never seen them, but they probably use a light show to cover up that they’re bored and that their music is borin’ and that they’re not makin’ people jump.”

He was saying that too many bands take themselves too seriously, they were self-indulgent. People like John McLaughlin. But, I reply, surely everybody in rock music is self-indulgent. Certainly, AC/DC’s live act that very night was rather self-indulgent. Bon, the sleeping beauty, emerges from his slumber to defend Angus.

“With rock’n’roll self-indulgence, the audience gets off on it,” he explains as he shakes off his stupor. “With a Yes self-indulgence, the audience is sittin’ out there baffled. They don’t know what the fuck is happenin’. When you’re playin’ clever stuff, you’re being self-indulgent and expectin’ the audience to cop what you’re playin’. In rock’n’roll, which is what we play, you’re givin’ the audience what you’re doin’.”

With that Bon collapsed, while I tell Angus that from what he had been saying, there must be a hell of a lot of modern bands that he doesn’t like.

“I was never interested in modern-day sorta music,” he answers. “I get off on all the old stuff, Elvis, Chuck Berry, Little Richard, Jerry Lee, swing records, Louis Armstrong and stuff like that.

“All the other stuff seems poor in comparison, even the production. You put Little Richard’s ‘Tutti Frutti’ on and put the wildest thing from today next to it and it sounds timid in comparison.”

That’s what they call progression, Angus.

“Well, they musta progressed the wrong way. I’ll tell you when it stopped getting’ good, when the Rolling Stones put out ‘Jumpin’ Jack Flash’ and ‘Street Fightin’ Man’.

“Past that, there’s been nothin’. Led Zeppelin and all that have just been poor imitators of The Who and bands like that. That’s when I reckon it stopped. The rest I wouldn’t even call progression.

“Guys like Jeff Beck and McLaughlin, all those guys should be playin’ jazz, and they wouldn’t even get a good run in those bands because there’s guys who’ve been playin’ that 50 years and would blow them off. People like Beck shouldn’t even be thinkin’ of playin’ and callin’ themselves rock’n’roll. They’ve into a different thing altogether.

“The same with the Harveys and those people. He’s another self-indulgent. Get him off. Put them all away. You get a guy nowadays to come out on a piano like Jerry Lee Lewis, writin’ songs like his and kickin’ fuck outta the piano and rippin’ his shirt off, and I guarantee that within a few years the guy would be one of the biggest things goin’. If I could play the piano, I’d be doin’ it.”

I was horrified to think that a tender 17-year-old musician was advocating that we should do nothing but repeat what has gone before.

“It’s not repeating. It’s just playin’ what has always been there. A good song is what it’s all about, whether it’s rock’n’roll or not. A good song, well played, well arranged and well presented, wild and excitin’ for a rock band, which is what we are. The rest aren’t rock’n’roll and they’re wrong to call themselves rock’n’roll. They’re just bleedin’ hip little things. Yer punk thing. That’s just a hip thing. It’s nuffin’.”

The first time he heard Led Zeppelin playing real rock’n’roll, said Young, was on their fourth album, on the track “Rock And Roll”.

“I’ve seen that band live and they were on for three hours, and for two-and-a-half hours they bored the people, and then at the end they pull out old rock’n’roll numbers to get the crowd movin’. That’s sick.

“They should have went on there and done an hour of good up stuff, which is what they’re supposed to be, the most excitin’ rock’n’roll band in the world, them and the Stones, and they’re not playin’ it.

“The Rolling Stones get up and play soul music. And this is supposed to be rock’n’roll. Leave that to the people who do it best, the black people, and get on and play what they are. If they played what they play best, they’d be a hell of a lot better and they’d probably find themselves at ease.”

But I was anxious to learn how AC/DC attached themselves to that earlier rock’n’roll generation.

“If we played ‘Schooldays’ tonight, you’d a seen what I mean, rockin’ and excitin’. Obviously, you can’t go on and do it like a revival band. We’re getting’ on and playin’ it as it should be played now. So many things now are involved. That’s not rock’n’roll. Bands shouldn’t leave what they play best.

“Like, people go out now and buy albums just because of the name. Rod Stewart has a new album out. Out they go and buy it. They don’t give a fuck what it’s like.

“The same with the Rolling Stones. I heard their last album and it was a piece of shit. One song that sounded remotely like the Rolling Stones. The rest a cheap imitation of a poor soul band. People should be given value for money, and they’re not.”

If Angus and AC/DC have their way, it appears, there will be changes. Mind your backs. *Harry Doherty* •




# 1977

APRIL - JUNE

**TOM PETTY, THE JAM, FLEETWOOD MAC, ELVIS COSTELLO AND MORE**







June 7, 1977: in the evening of the day the Silver Jubilee is celebrated with street parties up and down the UK, Virgin Records mark the release of the Sex Pistols' "God Save The Queen" with a boat trip down the Thames. Seen here before the band's performance below decks are Johnny Rotten chatting with filmmaker Julien Temple (back to camera) as artist and designer Jamie Reid looks on

## Insulting behaviour

**MM** **JUNE 11** Arrests follow the Sex Pistols' Jubilee boat party.

**M**ALCOLM McLAREN, MANAGER of the Sex Pistols, appeared at Bow Street Magistrates Court on Wednesday morning, charged with insulting behaviour, following a Virgin Records party aboard the Thames cruiser Queen Elizabeth the previous evening. He pleaded not guilty and was remanded on £100 bail until August 30.

He was one of 11 people arrested when river police boarded the cruiser after the Pistols had begun to play. None of the band was charged, but the brother of Pistols lead singer Johnny Rotten, James Lydon, was fined £3 after he admitted shouting and swearing on Victoria Embankment.

BRIAN COOKE / GETTY

Jordan, born Pamela Rooke on June 23, 1955: "If I ever see Freddie Mercury, I'll tip something over him"

## "I have faith in the clothes"

NME APR 16 A meeting with Jordan, punk face and close friend of Johnny Rotten.

**U**NDERNEATH THE THICK black lines and heavily rouged cheeks there might well be a stunning female trying to get out. It's so hard to tell, my dears, for Jordan does such a good job of covering up any good features she may possess. Even her hair (brown at the roots, white at the tips) is engulfed in a thick layer of lacquer.

Jordan (real name Pamela) is something of a star. Although she's a shop assistant (in Seditonaries, the shop owned by Sex Pistols manager Malcolm McLaren) there's little that is mere routine in her life. Because of her looks and associations with the new wave, when she went to America recently she was given the star treatment and even got a spot on TV.

Johnny Rotten is a close friend (yes, he does have some), and if he's bored, down or just plain fed up, invariably it is Jordan he phones to cheer his flagging spirits.

I met Jordan at the shop, situated, ironically enough, next door to a Conservative club, but there was little conversation about her as she strode purposefully across the road, seeming oblivious to the open-mouthed stare of Joe Public. Her obsession is fashion. So every incident in her life (she is 20) is referred to via associations with clothes worn and makeup applied. School was her pink period ("I had bright-pink hair."). Harrods (yes, Harrods) was her green period. America? Well, that was when she was into rubber. Spring '77 finds her clad mostly in black. A black jacket resembling

a straitjacket, all zips and bits), and black suede boots. The only break is vivid pink rouge and brightly coloured lipstick.

This strange fashion-conscious lady originated from Seaford, a quiet backwater near Brighton. Her parents weren't into fashion or theatre, but by the age of seven it was obvious their offspring was... "My father," says Jordan in a well-educated voice, "was a clerk. My mother was a barmaid [both are now retired]. They'll never get used to the fact that I didn't turn out the way they wanted."

And her mode of dress has also presented numerous problems with, er, the opposite sex. "I've been walking out with people, totally ordinary people, and they've freaked out just going down the street with me." Even the police have shown an interest in Jordan. "They once tried to arrest me for being indecently dressed in public." And what was the sweet girl wearing at the time? "Stilettoes, stockings with huge holes, see-through knickers and see-through bra." Ah, I see.

Prior to Seditonaries, Jordan worked for a time in Eastbourne - "Where I dressed the same." She later worked at Way In at Harrods, where "they were very good and never said anything about my green lipstick or makeup."

She adores working for Malcolm. "I'm very involved in the shop and have great faith in the

clothes. Vivienne [Westwood, McLaren's girlfriend] and Malcolm are the two most creative people around."

Jordan was one of the first people to ever clap eyes on the Pistols. "I remember watching them rehearse in Hammersmith before John was in the band. He was just a customer then." As a close associate of Mr Rotten's, can she tell when he is putting on an act? It has been suggested that Mr Rotten deliberately does so whenever a member of the press is present. "He never puts on an act - he won't compromise. If he feels like spitting, he'll spit."

Jordan sees Seditonaries' as "the hub of the situation that young people are in". And she adds: "We get other bands in the shop to get the clothes the Pistols wear. Mr Big even came in to buy vinyl trousers."

For some obscure reason Jordan does not like Queen. "If I ever see Freddie Mercury in public, no doubt I'll tip something over him," she confides.

What, I wondered, has Freddie done to incur such wrath? "Actually, I've never met him; only the drummer. It's just that they cater for a certain kind of people - hippy college people - and I feel violent towards him. I don't like what he's doing."

Jordan is not exactly modest when talking of her success when she visited America recently. "I was knockout," she says. "There were pictures of me in *Woman's Wear Daily* and I even made Channel 3 news. That was the time I was wearing rubber..." Rubber what, precisely? "Stockings, skirt..."

Not surprisingly, boyfriends never seem to feature in Jordan's life. Nor have they done so in the past. "I was very much an outcast at school. If it was kiss chase, they'd

run away from me. No boy would touch me. Still, I didn't really want their attention. But I was very hard up for people on my wavelength."

Now, of course, there are many others who share the outlook, although it's still difficult to walk down the street without getting rude remarks or gaping stares. "I remember once getting on a train and sitting opposite a woman with her young son. First she stared and then she asked the boy: 'Is that woman opposite upsetting you?' He nodded. Then she asked if I would kindly leave the carriage.

Well, of course I didn't! Next thing she asked me was if I was a stripper. So I turned round and asked her, 'Do you think strippers look like me?' And I also said that if I had a son like that I'd throw him out the door."

Back on the subject of Rotten, Jordan claims, "He's not really interested in permanent girlfriends. But he does need someone to pour his thoughts out to. He'll ring up and say, 'Please come over and keep me sane.' He said to me he liked me better than anyone because he liked my clothes and he felt I had the potential to say what I wanted."

And on these evenings, how (dare I ask?) do they spend their time? "We listen to an awful lot of reggae. John really likes reggae. It's the only thing we ever dance to." So now we know, my angels. *Velda Daquiri*

Wilko Johnson (left), who leaves Dr Feelgood during the recording of third studio album *Sneakin' Suspicion*



## “Called his bluff” **MM APRIL 9** Wilko Johnson leaves Dr Feelgood, citing “musical differences”.

**GUITARIST WILKO JOHNSON** has left Dr Feelgood – on the eve of a major British tour by the band. Johnson, who was a founder member, parted company with the Feelgoods over musical differences. Fred Munt, the band’s tour manager, told the *MM* that the split came when the rest of the band “called Wilko’s bluff”.

“Wilko gave an ultimatum that if they recorded a track called ‘Lucky Seven’, he would leave the band. He didn’t feel it was the Feelgoods’ type of music. But the rest of the band and the record company loved the song and insisted that it stay on the album,” he said.

The tour, which opens at Exeter University on May 12, will be the debut of a new guitarist, unnamed but already rehearsing with the rest of the band. He is from Southend.

Before leaving the band, Johnson recorded a new album with the Feelgoods at Rockfield Studios in Wales. It is scheduled for release in mid-May. Johnson has not yet announced what his future plans are.

The Feelgoods’ tour is designed to cover the areas not regularly played by the band, including, in response to letters from fans, two West Country dates. The band plan to tour Britain again in September, following their return from the USA.

The full tour schedule is: Exeter University (May 12), Bracknell Sports Centre (13), Crawley Sports Centre (14), Wolverhampton Civic Hall (15), Norwich St Andrews Hall (17), Ipswich Gaumont (18), London Hammersmith Odeon (19), Malvern Winter Gardens (20), Salford University (21) and Coventry Theatre (22). Support on the tour is the Lew Lewis Band.

## “In exchange for beer”

**MM APRIL 16** Beatles Hamburg recordings are legally contested.

**TWO LIVE BEATLES** albums are set for release within three weeks of each other – thanks to the band’s failure to win a court injunction preventing the release of the “unofficial” *Hamburg Tapes* album.

The Beatles and Apple attempted to get the High Court to prevent the release of *The Beatles – Live At The Star Club*. The album comes from a tape made by ‘60s Liverpool rock singer Ted “Kingsize” Taylor.

But High Court vice-chancellor Sir Robert Megarry turned down the application after hearing Taylor say that The Beatles had originally agreed to the tape provided he bought them beer.

The decision was bad news for EMI, who are planning to release a live album which comes from a tape of the band’s concert at the Hollywood Bowl in 1964.

That album is expected to be released on May 1, but no one from EMI would comment this week on a definite release date. They also remained silent about the High Court decision on the “Hamburg” album.

The “Hamburg” album should have been available in Britain last week, but the release was held up by the airport workers’ industrial action. There are 100,000 copies of the album in Germany, where they were manufactured, waiting to be flown to Britain at press time.

The albums are on Paul Murphy’s

Lingasong label and will retail at £4.99. None will be pressed in Britain. Murphy, who bought the tapes from Taylor, was unavailable for comment at press time.



## An unspecified figure **NME MAY 21** The Sex Pistols sign to Virgin. A new single, “God Save The Queen”, is imminent.

**AFTER WEEKS OF** speculation, it was confirmed this week that the Sex Pistols have signed with Virgin Records – for an “unspecified figure”. And their much-delayed new single “God Save The Queen” is the first release under the new deal – it comes out next Friday, May 27.

The Pistols have also nearly completed work on an album, and a Virgin spokesman described the advance orders for both LP and single as “massive”. A huge marketing

campaign is being mounted by Virgin to announce the new contract and upcoming single, but plans to advertise it on ITV last

weekend were thwarted when both Thames and London Weekend rejected the commercial, even though it was described as “not offensive or controversial”.

The Pistols have been without a record deal since their dramatic departures from EMI and A&M. Now they are back in business again, they plan to return to the gig circuit in the near future – provided they can obtain bookings. Existing bans on the group are, apparently, still in operation at many venues.



CUSSTEWART / GETTY

1977

APRIL - JUNE

On the tube, in the caff and overlooking the Westway with THE CLASH, spokesmen for disaffected youth. However raw, their message will find its audience. "It's not for them if they can't understand it," says JOE STRUMMER.

"We ain't ashamed to fight"

— NME APRIL 2 —

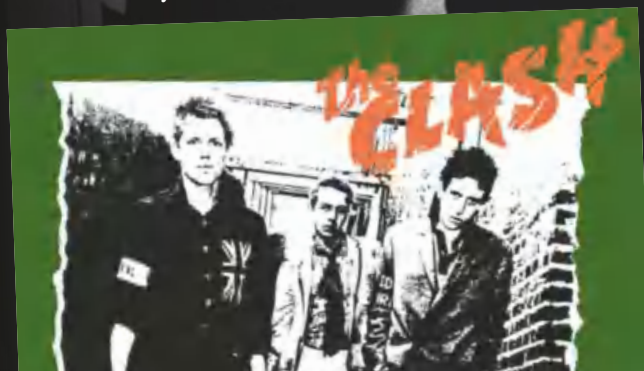
"ITAIN'T PUNK, it ain't new wave, it's the next step and the logical progression for groups to move in. Call it what you want - all the terms stink. Just call it rock'n'roll..."  
You don't know what total commitment is until you've met Mick Jones of The Clash. He's intense, emotional, manic-depressive and plays lead guitar with the kind of suicidal energy that some musicians lose and most musicians never have. His relationship with Joe Strummer and Paul Simonon is the love/hate intensity that you only get with family.

"My parents never... the people involved with The Clash are my family..."

The Clash and me are sitting around a British Rail table in one of those railway-station cafes where the puce-coloured paint on the wall is peeling and lethargic non-white slave labour serves you tea that tastes like cat urine.

Joe Strummer is an ex-101er and the mutant offspring of Bruce Lee's legacy - a no-bullshit sense of tough that »

ERICA ECHENBERG / GETTY





May 9, 1977: (l-r) Joe Strummer, Paul Simon and Mick Jones backstage at North London's Rainbow on the White Riot Tour

means he can talk about a thrashing he took a while back from some giant, psychotic Teddy boy without the slightest pretension, self-pity or sense of martyrdom.

"I was too pissed to deal with it and he got me in the toilets for a while," Joe says. "I had a knife with me and I shoulda stuck it in him, right? But when it came to it I remember vaguely thinking that it wasn't really worth it, 'cos although he was battering me about the floor I was too drunk for it to hurt that much and if I stuck a knife in him I'd probably have to do a few years..."

When The Clash put paint-splashed slogans on their family-created urban battle fatigues such as "Hate And War" it's not a cute turnaround of a flowery spiel from 10 years ago—it's a brutally honest comment on the environment they're living in.

They've had aggravation with everyone from Teds to students to Anglo-rednecks, all of them frightened pigs attacking what they can't understand. But this ain't the summer of love and The Clash would rather be kicked into hospital than flash a peace sign and turn the other cheek.

"We ain't ashamed to fight," Mick says.

"We should carry spray cans about with us," Paul Simonon suggests. He's the spike-haired bass player with considerable pulling power. Even my kid sister fancies him. He's from a South London ex-skinhead background; white Sta-Prest Levi's strides, highly polished DM boots, button-down Ben Sherman shirt, thin braces, eighth-of-an-inch cropped hair and over the football on a Saturday running with The Shed because for the first time in your life the society that produced you was terrified of you. And it made you feel good...

Paul came out of that, getting into rock 'n' roll at the start of last year and one of the first bands he ever saw was the Sex Pistols. Pure late-'70s rock, Paul Simonon. In Patti Smith's estimation he rates alongside Keef and Rimbaud. He knew exactly what he was doing when he named the band The Clash...

"The hostilities," Mick Jones calls the violent reactions they often provoke.

"Or maybe those Lemon Squeezers," Paul says, seeking the perfect weapon for protection when trouble starts and you're outnumbered 10 to one.

The rodent-like features of their shaven-headed ex-jailbird roadie known, among other things, as Rodent break into a cynical smirk. "Don't get it on their drapes otherwise they get really mad," he quips. He went along to see The Clash soon after his release from prison. At the time he was carrying a copy of *Mein Kampf* around with him. Prison can mess up your head.

Strummer, in his usual manner of abusive honesty, straightened him out. Rodent's been with them ever since and sleeps on the floor of their studio.

The Clash demand total dedication from everyone involved with the band, a sense of responsibility that must never be betrayed no matter what internal feuds, ego clashes or personality crisis may go down. Anyone who doesn't have that attitude will not remain with The Clash for very long, and that's the reason for the band's biggest problem—they ain't got a drummer.

The emotive Mick explodes at the mention of this yawning gap in the lineup and launches into a stream-of-consciousness expletive-deleted soliloquy with talk of drummers who bottled out of broken glass confrontations, drummers whose egos outweighed their creative talent, drummers who are going to get their legs broken.

"Forget it, it's in the past now," Joe tells him quietly, with just a few words cooling out Mick's anger and replacing it with something positive. "If any drummer thinks he can make it, then we wanna know."

"We're going to the Pistols gig tonight to find a new drummer!" Mick says excitedly. "But they gotta prove themselves," he adds passionately. "They gotta believe in what's happening. And they gotta tell the truth..."

**T**HE BAND AND Rodent have their passport photos taken in a booth on the station. Four black-and-white shots for 20 pence. They pool their change and after one of them has had the necessary two pictures taken the next one dives in quickly to replace him before the white flash explodes.

When you're on 25 quid a week, the stories of one quarter of a million dollars for the cocaine bill of a tax-exile rock-establishment band seem like a sick joke...

The Human Freight of the London Underground rush hour regard The Clash with a culture-shock synthesis of hate, fear, and suspicion. The Human Freight have escaped the offices and are pouring out to the suburbs until tomorrow. Stacked haunch to paunch in an atmosphere of stale sweat, bad breath and city air, the only thing that jolts them out of their usual mood of apathetic surrender is the presence of The Clash. Because something's happening here but The Human Freight don't know what it is...

*"Everybody's doing just what they're told to! Nobody wants to go to jail! White riot! I wanna riot! White riot! A riot of me own!! Are you taking over or are you taking orders?! Are you going backwards or are you going forwards?"*

"White Riot" and The Sound Of The Westway, the giant inner-city flyover and futuristic backdrop for this country's first major race riot

since 1959. Played with the speed of the Westway, a GBH treble that is as impossible to ignore as the police siren that opens the single or the alarm bell that closes it.

Rock 'n' roll for the late 1970s updating their various influences (Jones—the New York Dolls, MC5, Stooges, vintage Stones; Simonon—Pistols, Ramones, Heartbreakers; and Strummer—totally eclectic) and then adding something of their very own. The sense of flash of beach-fighting mods speeding through three weekend nights non-stop, coupled with an ability to write songs of contemporary urban imagery that are a perfect reflection of the life of any kid who came of age in the '70s.

The former makes The Clash live raw-nerve electric, a level of excitement generated that can only be equalled by one other band—Johnny Thunders' Heartbreakers.

The latter makes The Clash, or maybe specifically Jones and Strummer (as Simonon has only recently started writing), the fulfilment of the original aim of the new wave, punk rock, whatever; that is, to write songs about late-'70s British youth culture with the accuracy, honesty, perception and genuine anger that Elvis, Beatles or The Rolling Stones or any others in the Rock Establishment could never do now that they're closer to members of the Royal Family or facelift lard-arse movie stars than they are to you or me.

But so many bands coming through now are churning out cliched platitudes and political nursery rhymes. The Blank Generation is the antithesis of what The Clash are about...

Strummer and Jones disagree on the best environment for a new band to develop and keep growing. Joe

"We're going to the Pistols gig tonight to find a new drummer!"





"They'll take to us, but it'll take time": The Clash onstage in 1977

Clash roadie Rodent, who sleeps on the floor of their rehearsal studio

thinks it's all too easy right now, and having to fight every inch of the way when the band was formed a year ago is the

But, ultimately, they know that White Youth needs its own sense of identity, culture and heritage if they're going to fight for change. A riot of their own...

But can the masses take to the incisive reality of what The Clash are about and why they lap up the straight-ahead rock bands who push nothing more than having a good time?

"Maybe the reason those bands are so big is because they don't say anything," Mick says. "But we ain't gonna preach and sound like some evangelist."

I mention to Joe what happened when he walked on stage at Leeds Poly for the first gig that actually happened on the Pistols' Anarchy Tour. He said a few words before the band went into the set that they'd been burning to play for weeks, about how the gutter-press hysteria, local-council butchery and Mary Whitehouse mentality of The Great British People was preventing certain young rock bands getting onstage and playing for the people who wanted to see them. I remember him saying that 1984 seemed to have arrived early as the Leeds Poly students bawled abuse at him. With the minds and manners of barnyard pigs, the overgrown schoolchildren conveyed the message that they didn't give a shit.

"I think they will take to us, but it'll take time," Joe says. "But I don't want to go towards them at all, I don't wanna start getting soft around the edges. I don't want to compromise... I think they'll come round in time, but if they don't it's too bad."

"We ain't never gonna get commercial respectability," Mick says, both anger and despair in his voice.

Paul Simonon takes it all in and then ponders the nearest station that has a bar on the platform.

That's the difference between their attitudes to, how you say, Making It. Strummer is confident, determined, arrogant and sometimes violent in the face of ignorant opposition (a couple of months back in a club car park he faced an American redneck rock band with just his blade for support).

Mick Jones is a rock equivalent to a kamikaze pilot. All or nothing. The Clash gives him both the chance to pour out his emotional turmoil and offer an escape route from the life the assembly-line education the country gave him had primed him for. When a careers officer at school spends five minutes with you and tells you what you're gonna do with your life for the next 50 years. More fodder »

healthiest situation – whereas Mick believes in giving every help and encouragement possible while being totally honest with bands who are just not delivering the goods.

"I'm as honest as I can be," he shouts over the roar of the tube train. "All the new groups sound like drones and I ain't seen a good new group for six months. Their sound just ain't exciting, they need two years..."

The sound of The Clash has evolved, with their experience this year in the recording studio first with Polydor, when they were dangling a contract, and more recently recording their first album after CBS snapped them up at the 11th hour. The change in the sound first struck me as a regulation of energy, exerting a razor-sharp adrenalin control over their primal amphetaminated rush. It created a new air of tension added to the ever-present manic drive that has always existed in their music, *The Sound Of The Westway*...

And, of course, the subtle-yet-indefinite shift in emphasis is perfect for the feeling that's in the air in the United Kingdom, one quarter of 1977 already gone: "In 1977 you're on the never-never! You think it can't go on forever! But the papers say it's better! I don't care! 'Cos I'm not all there! No Elvis, Beatles or The Rolling Stones! In 1977."

"1977", the other side of the single, ends with the three-pronged attack shouting in harmonies derived from football terraces: "1984!"

**T**HE PRESSURE. THAT'S what they call the heavy atmosphere in Jamaica, the feeling in the air that very soon, something has got to change... The Jamaican culture is highly revered by The Clash. They hang out in black clubs, pick up reggae import singles in shops where it ain't really wise for them to tread, and express their disgust at the undeniable fact that in the poor working-class areas of London where they grew up and still live the blacks are treated even worse than the whites.



RAY STEVENSON / ELISA LEONELLI / REX FEATURES

for the big corporations and the dole. Mick is beating them at their own game by ignoring all the rules.

"Someone locked me out, so I kicked me way back in," he declares in "Hate And War".

His uncanny resemblance to a young Keef Richard allowed him to relieve an early identity problem by adopting the lookalike con trick which fools no one but yourself. Then he met Strummer, who told him he was wearing a Keith Richard identikit as though he had bought it in a shop.

"I got my self-respect in this group," Mick says, "I don't believe in guitar heroes. "If I walk out to the front of the stage it's because I wanna reach the audience, I want to communicate with them. I don't want them to suck my guitar off..."

And Paul Simonon: total hedonist. His fondest memories of the Anarchy Tour are hotel-room parties and broken chairs, things trod into the carpet and girls who got you worried because you thought they were gonna die like Jimi Hendrix if they didn't wake up. He's a member of The Clash because they're the best band in the country and it gets him laid a lot.

So what did they learn from the Anarchy Tour, so effectively butchered by the self-righteous Tin Gods who pull the strings?

"I learned that if they don't want you to play they can stop you," Joe says seriously. "And no one's gonna raise any fuss..."

"For the first four days we were confined to our rooms because the *News Of The World* was next door," Mick continues. "We thought, 'Shall we go out there with syringes stuck in our arms just to get 'em going?' Yeah, and furniture seemed to have labels saying, 'Please smash me' or 'Out the window, please!'"

And when they finally got to play, the minds in the Institutes Of Further Education were as narrow as those in Fleet Street. So Strummer gave them something—even though they were too blind to see it...

"This one's for all you students," he sneered before The Clash tore into the song that they wrote about Joe being on the dole for so long that the Department Of Employment (sic) wanted to send him to rehabilitation to give him back the confidence that they assumed the dole must have destroyed, together with Mick's experience working for the Social Security office in West London, and, as the most junior employee, being told to open all the mail during the time of the IRA letter-bombs.

The song is called "*Career Opportunities*": "*Career opportunities/The ones that never knock/Every job they offer you/Is to keep ya out the dock/Career opportunities/They offered me the office/They offered me the shop/They said I'd better take ANYTHING THEY GOT/Do you wanna make tea for the BBC?/Do you wanna be, do you wanna be a cop?/I hate the army and I hate the RAF/You won't get me fighting in the tropical heat/I hate the Civil Service rules/And I ain't gonna open letter bombs for you!*"

"Most bands and writers who talk about the dole DUNNO WHAT THE DOLE IS!" Mick shouts. "They've never been on the dole in their life. But the dole is only hard if you've been conditioned to think you've gotta have a job... then it's sheer degradation.

"The Social Security made me open the letters during the letter bomb time because I looked subversive. Most of the letters the Social Security get are from people who live next door saying their neighbours don't need the money. The whole thing works on spite. One day an Irish guy that they had treated like shit and kept waiting for three hours picked up a wooden bench and put it through the window into Praed Street."

Mick shakes his head in disgust at the memory of the way our great Welfare State treats its subjects.

"Every time I didn't have a job I was down there—waiting. And they degrade the black youth even more. They have to wait even longer. No one can tell me there ain't any prejudice..."

**WE MAKE FOR** Rehearsal Rehearsals, the North London studio of The Clash. An enormous building once used by the British Rail for a warehouse. Only part of it is in use at the moment, a large expanse of property ruled by no lighting, rats and water.

Upstairs, Joe, Mick and Paul look glad to have guitars in their hands again. The walls are covered with posters of Bruce Lee, Patti Smith, the Pistols and The Clash themselves. A large map of the United Kingdom faces the old TV set where Hughie Green is being sincere with the speech turned down. Biro graffiti stains the screen. The television is not treated like the Holy Grail in this place...

I watch Joe playing a battered old guitar with all but two of its strings missing and I think about his comments when I wanted to know how he would cope with financial success when/if it came...

"I ain't gonna fuck myself up like I seen all those other guys fuck themselves up," he said. "Keeping all their money for themselves and getting into their head and thinking they're the greatest. I've planned what I'm gonna do with my money if it happens. Secret plans..."

I could be wrong, but at a guess the development of Rehearsal Rehearsals into anything from a recording studio to a rock venue to a radio/TV station seem like possible Strummer visions for when The Clash get the mass acceptance they deserve.

As we talk about how The Clash have reacted to putting their music down on vinyl, I tell them that the major criticism people not cognisant with their songs have

CHALKIE DAVIES / GETTY

Ladbroke Grove habitués Mick Jones and Joe Strummer on the Circle Line in April 1977





expressed is that the unique Strummer vocal makes understanding their brilliant lyrics almost impossible for the uninitiated.

"The first time we went into a studio with a famous producer he said, 'You better pronounce the words, right?'" Joe remembers with his amused sneer. "So I did it and it sounded like Matt Monroe. So I thought I'm never doing that again... to me our music is like Jamaican stuff – if they can't hear it, they're not supposed to hear it. It's not for them if they can't understand it."

The Clash say that being signed with CBS has had no interference with the preservation of their integrity and, even with the band's attitude of No Compromise, a termination of contract in the manner of the Pistols seems most unlikely.

They believe the sound on the album to be infinitely superior to that of the single because the latter was cut during one of their first sessions in the studio after the decision to let their soundman Micky Foote produce the band, even though he had no previous experience in production.

"We tried the famous ones," Joe grins. "They were all too pissed to work."

"Outside, there ain't no young producers in tune with what's going on," Mick says. "The only way to do it is to learn how to do it yourself."

"You do it yourself because nobody else cares that much," Micky Foote, Boy Wonder Producer tells me, his sentiments totally in keeping with the clan spirit in The Clash camp.

The band talk of their respect for their manager Bernard Rhodes, who has been a major influence on all of them, and who has made enemies because of his obsessive commitment to The Clash. But Joe, Mick and Paul are free spirits, unlike a lot of bands with heavy personality management.

"He really pushes us," Paul says.

"We do respect him," Mick adds.

"He was always helping and giving constructive criticism long before he was our manager," Mick then points at the other members of the band and himself.

"But the heart is there."

I ask them about their political leanings. Do they believe in left and right or is there just up and down?

They reply by telling me about a leftish workshop they used to frequent because they enjoyed the atmosphere – and also because it gave them an opportunity to nick the paints they needed for their artwork.

"It was really exhilarating there," Mick says. "They used to play Chinese revolutionary records and then one day the National Front threw bricks through the window. The place didn't shut, though. So one day they burned the whole joint down and they had to close down..."

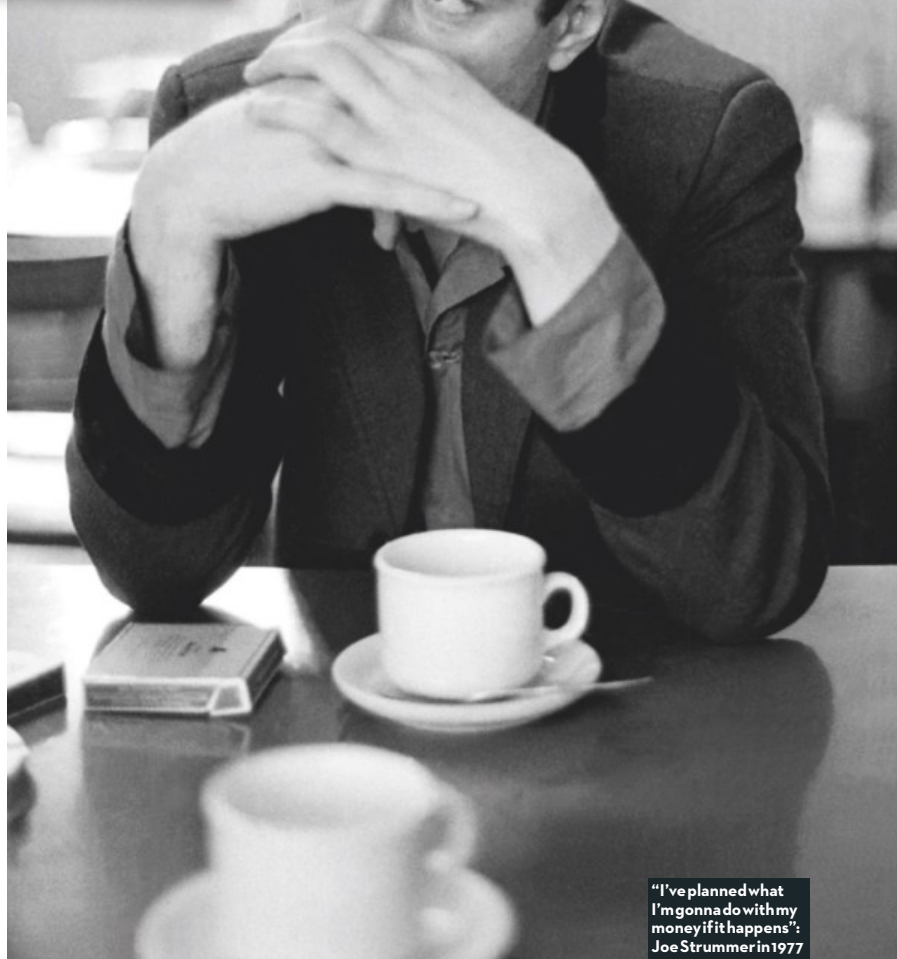
*"In 1977 there's knives in West 11/Ain't so lucky to be rich/Sten guns in Knightsbridge/Danger stranger, you better paint your face/No Elvis, Beatles or the Rolling Stones/In 1977/Sod the Jubilee!"*

"I always thought in terms of survival," Mick says. "And these people are the opposition of free speech and personal liberty. And they're trying to manipulate the rock medium."

Then he repeats something he said earlier, reiterating the importance of The Clash: "And I ain't ashamed to fight..."

**I**T HAS BEEN over a year since Mick Jones, Paul Simonon and their friend Glenn Matlock first met Joe Strummer down the Portobello Road and told him that he was great but his band was shit. Later Joe talked to Bernard Rhodes, and 24 hours after that he showed up on the doorstep of the squat where Mick and Paul were living and told them he wanted in on the band that would be known as The Clash.

And from the top of the monolith tower block where they wrote their celebration of the Westway, you can gaze down through the window of



"I've planned what I'm gonna do with my money if it happens": Joe Strummer in 1977

"Bernie was always helping long before he was our manager"

– as Mick Jones puts it – one of the cages and see that London is still burning...

*"All across the town/All across the night/Everybody's driving with four headlights/Black or white, turn it on, face the new religion/Everybody's drowning in a sea of television/Up and down the Westway/In and out the lights/What a great traffic system/It's so bright/I can't think of a better way to spend the night/Than speeding around underneath the yellow lights/But now I'm in the subway looking for the flat/This one leads to this block and this one leads to that/The wind howls through the empty blocks looking for a home/But I run through the empty stone because I'm all alone/London's burning, baby..."*

"Each of these high-rise estates has got those places where kids wear soldiers' uniforms and get army drill," Mick says quietly. "Indoctrination to keep them off the streets... and they got an artist to paint pictures of happy workers on the side of the Westway. Labour liberates and don't forget your place."

He looks down at the fire hundreds of feet below.

"Can you understand how much I hate this place?" he asks me.

1977 is the year of The Clash.

Tony Parsons •

**Sten-guns  
in Knights-  
bridge??**

1977

APRIL – JUNE

# “Like being in group therapy!”

Break-ups, reconciliations, great music... FLEETWOOD MAC's *Rumours* provides one of the most compelling stories of 1977. “Now we can make jokes,” says Mick Fleetwood, “but it wasn't very funny at the time.”

— NME APRIL 2 —

**S**OME NEWSPAPERS EMPLOY scribes whose sole function is to regularly update the unpublished obituaries of prominent personalities – so as to be in at the kill on their demise. Something of a dead-end job, as it were. However, it would take scores of full-time researchers to keep abreast of the fluctuating fortunes of Fleetwood Mac – the band that continues to exist despite itself.

In the 10 years since they debuted at the National Blues & Jazz Festival in Windsor, Fleetwood Mac have transmogrified from a star-crossed guitar hero-dominated cult blues band into Warner Brothers Records' biggest ever album-selling attraction.

But it has been a career continually fraught with impending disaster. Guitarists have quit under harrowing banner headlines, bogus lineups have laid claim to the name, and those original members who've stuck it out have enacted more melodramas than a whole slew of soap-opera scriptwriters could have conceived in a lifetime. In truth, all aspects of human emotion are to be found in Fleetwood Mac.

Bands have broken up for much less, but Mac stubbornly refuses to roll over and expire. Call it masochistic, but the band appears to thrive on one Big Hurt after another.

Until the middle of last year, Fleetwood Mac had resigned themselves to the fact that they worked to live, lived to work, and weren't in a position to rest up for a year or more to rethink or record. Their albums always got reviewed, made a brief, if not auspicious appearance in the best-sellers and received more air time than that usually afforded albums enjoying much more commercial success on the charts. It may not have been *La Dolce Vita* but it was a fairly comfortable existence. »

SAM EMERSON / POLARIS / FEVERINE



Fleetwood Mac in Los Angeles, 1977: (l-r) Lindsey Buckingham, Stevie Nicks, John McVie, Christine McVie and Mick Fleetwood

1977

APRIL – JUNE

## Craft and precision

**MM APR 9** The latest-lineup Mac score an impressive victory at their first UK concert.

**T**HEIR TECHNICALLY IMPECCABLE performance was rewarded with a series of standing ovations, and by the end of the set half the audience were out of their seats, crowding the stage and dancing in the aisles.

That in itself was something of a triumph since Birmingham audiences have never been noted for enthusiasm on this scale. For Christine McVie it must have been a particularly emotional experience; it marked her first performance in her hometown for seven years.

Fleetwood Mac played for around 90 minutes, dovetailing old and new songs with craftsman-like precision. Only at one stage did they allow their faultless pacing to slip, when they encored with the slow-moving "Hypnotised"; but by then most of the audience would probably have been content to listen to Stevie Nicks read the football results. The band's performance was a pleasant surprise for me because neither of their two recent hit albums, *Fleetwood Mac* and *Rumours*, offered the excitement of earlier work from previous lineups of the band.

On stage, however, they were an entirely different proposition. Lindsey Buckingham

was excellent, both vocally and, more particularly, on guitar; there was a notable solo at the end of "The Chain", while on acoustic guitar he performed a particularly engaging version of "Never Going Back Again".

On the latter he was joined by John McVie, playing a giant-sized acoustic bass guitar. McVie was calmly impressive throughout, his assured work with drummer Mick Fleetwood born of a

decade of playing together. Fleetwood, looking manic with his mouth leering open for most of the night, played one of the nicest drum solos I've heard for a long time on "World Turning". He left his kit, strapped on an African talking drum, and took stage centre to beat out a delightfully novel rhythm.

Christine McVie kept her keyboard work pure and simple most of the time, and her best moments came when she gave full reign to that excellent mellow voice on "Oh Daddy". By comparison Stevie Nicks was much more raucous, but she displayed a tremendous vocal range and an enthusiasm which one rarely sees on stage at the moment. I was less enamoured of her stage movements: she seems to think she is an exponent of modern dance, but her posturing belonged more to a Hammer horror rising-from-the-grave sequence than to the dance theatre of Harlem.

However, her raunchy antics caused a stir among the male section of the audience, some of whom seemed to enjoy her costume changes more than the

music. The warmest responses of the evening were reserved for "Go Your Own Way", "Over My Head" and an exceptional turn by Buckingham

on the old favourite "Oh Well".

I have just two reservations about the new Fleetwood Mac. Firstly, they're not nearly as adventurous as they might be. I reiterate that they belong to the Peter Frampton progressive-MOR school, which is currently lucrative but scarcely stands exposure for any length of time.

Secondly, none of their work sticks in the mind for longer than about 15 minutes after hearing it; that indicates shallowness. However, if they can maintain the sort of technical standard in concert that they attained in Birmingham, their success in Britain is assured. *Brian Harrigan*

BIRMINGHAM ODEON  
**LIVE!**

APRIL 2

Nicks and Buckingham - previously both a musical and romantic pairing - perform on stage with Fleetwood Mac in 1977

**L**ET'S START IN 1975: after a four-year residency, American guitarist Bob Welch became yet another Mac statistic, being unceremoniously replaced by the highly attractive boy/girl team of Lindsey Buckingham and Stevie Nicks. After just 10 days of routing new material, the refurbished lineup of Mick Fleetwood, Christine and John McVie and Buckingham and Nicks were in the studio recording a bunch of originals subsequently released under the unadventurous title Fleetwood Mac.

At first, nothing much happened and a six-month road tour ensued before (professionally) their fortunes were to take a turn for the better. It was during this period that deep cracks began to appear in their personal stability, and almost on cue Fleetwood Mac went into yet another all-too-familiar nosedive.

Christine and John McVie separated mid-tour, adding the cost of an extra hotel room to the band's travel budget; and after six years of being inseparable Buckingham and Nicks ceased cohabiting - and Mick Fleetwood, desperately trying to play piggy-in-the-middle, realised that his own marriage had hit the skids. Bands have broken up for much less. But not Fleetwood Mac.

Contrary to belief, pressure of success wasn't the cause. Fleetwood Mac had yet to take off like an epidemic, sell in excess of four million albums Stateside and hatch three hit singles, "Rhiannon", "Over My Head" and "Say You Love Me". Everyone just fell out of love with one another at precisely the same moment.

So... three broken homes for sale. John and his collection of penguin statuettes moved out of the McVie's Malibu apartment on to a 41-foot schooner, while Christine set up a home overlooking the hustle and bustle of Sunset Strip. Lindsey and Stevie established singles lifestyles, and Mick and Jenny Fleetwood divorced, though they were later to remarry.

To add to their immediate problems, Mac were attempting to record tracks for what would eventually evolve into *Rumours*.

"Being in Fleetwood Mac, is more like being in group therapy!" Who said that?

It was drummer and Mac manager elect Mick Fleetwood. He is trying to fight off a head cold as we sit jawing in the pleasant rustic atmosphere of Seedy Management, situated by the gates of the Columbia movie lot in the very heart of Hollywood Babylon. It's a typical Californian spring morning. Warm, sunny, light to variable. Definitely not the kind of day to be feeling one degree under.

However, with typical British reserve, Mick Fleetwood has mastered the art of coping with any and every situation. And his resilience must be contagious because Lindsey Buckingham - en route to having his wisdom teeth yanked - shows no apparent signs of fear.

Over the last year Fleetwood Mac have supplied America's dirt-diggin' gossip columnists with more copy than the Burton/Taylor divorce-



reconciliation-divorce-marriage-go-round, to the extent that Mac's marital shenanigans have been likened to everything from *Peyton Place* to *Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice*.

As it transpires, it took a whole year to record *Rumours*, the project being near completed long before Fleetwood Mac began to be pressed up in platinum – the latter album having pursued an eccentric pathway towards success. According to Mr Fleetwood it originally reached as high as No 9 and dropped to 40 before it regained its upward curve.

*Fleetwood Mac* – the Californian soundtrack of '76. Even Mick Fleetwood has long since given up trying to evaluate its phenomenal success in the Americas and its apathetic reception in the Old Country. It's happened and he's thankful, but he's not about to go into deep analysis on the subject. Obviously, the introduction of two singer-songwriters had a great deal to do with it, but as Mick points out, Fleetwood Mac has never conformed to one specific, recognisable style.

"Nobody," he suggests between snuffles, "who has ever joined this band has been forced to structure their music to conform. You've only got to flick through our mess of albums to see that." He emphasises the word "mess".

"I can remember when Danny Kirwan joined, Peter [Green] turned round to him and casually said, 'Right, lad, you've got half the album', and *Then Play On* contains

a lot of new things that nobody had ever heard on a Fleetwood Mac album before. Lots of bands wouldn't take that kind of risk. We do. And I think it's healthy."

As to the band's resurgence of popularity, both Fleetwood and Buckingham agree with my theory that primarily the present lineup is a singles band utilising an album formula.

"There's a lot of flexibility and versatility within the current set-up," Buckingham interjects before leaving for his dental appointment. "Even with three separate lead vocalists there's still this cohesive continuity, so it doesn't really matter if either Christine, Stevie or myself are taking the lead.

"As a contributor," he concludes, "I feel that much of Fleetwood Mac's strength is in the fact that only the very best material makes it on to an album. And, as there are three main writers, it makes competition that much keener".

Mick Fleetwood agrees: "This way there's no strain on any particular writer. Nobody is constantly under extreme pressure to write all the material for the next album. So that's no problem".

Yet problems – the kind that floor you – have become an integral part of Mac's very existence.

Why have they always refused to throw in the towel?

"Over the years," says Fleetwood, "we've been so wrapped up in our destiny that, though offers have been forthcoming, the idea of being somewhere else, playing in another band, has never really appealed to either John, Christine or myself. It's as simple as that."

According to the drummer, nobody – with the exception of Danny Kirwan – has ever quit Fleetwood Mac because of

the overall encompassing excuse of "difference of musical policy". From his lofty vantage point of manager-performer and pillar of strength, he opines that being in the band may well bring out the weak points in a person's character, but by the same token it strengthens others. He cites the recording of *Rumours* as testament.

"When the shit hit the fan everybody probably thought that this really was the end of Fleetwood Mac, and that it would be impossible to work under such intense conditions. Theoretically, it was a helluva bad time to try and record a new album, but in retrospect it proved to be the reverse. Because it all came out in the music."

As a result, *Rumours* is an album of strong personal emotions – persistent, soul-searching – and currently America's best-seller. Still, it can't have been easy spending nine weeks incarcerated in the Record Plant's Sausalito studio with everyone falling apart at the seams and a recording desk that all but destroyed the original backing tracks?

"Things never got bitchy," says Fleetwood. "Sure, the atmosphere was confused – to say the least – but it wasn't destructive. It may be difficult for someone outside of the group to understand what I'm saying, but we're a bunch of people before we're a bunch of musicians. What happened was that all five of us were going through exactly the same problem at the very same time. Only in Fleetwood Mac could that ever happen.

"So there we all were, trying to put down the basic backing tracks and all feeling so desperately unhappy with life. But somehow we created a mutual bond. We could all relate to each other's desperation. Despite ourselves, we didn't lose contact. It wasn't as though there wasn't anyone else we could turn to. Strange as it might sound, we had one another – so we went through shit to get to the point where we could still live and communicate as friends.

"I don't think anyone ever turned round and said, 'I don't need this, I'm splitting.' We all understood how we all felt because we were all involved in each other's lives.

"Sure, the atmosphere was confused, but it wasn't destructive"

"Sure we laugh at it now... we even make jokes," – a recent cover of *Rolling Stone* sports an Annie Leibovitz shot of all five in one bed: Christine cuddling Lindsey, Mick with his arm around Stevie and John off in a corner reading. "But believe me, it wasn't funny at the time."

"The thing that happened between Lindsey and Stevie and Christine and John wasn't that they suddenly took a dislike to one another; it was just that they realised they could no longer live together, and so there was no malice when they separated. For instance, the other evening John and I went round to Christine's place to have a drink with her and her boyfriend. So, if

anything, the weird circumstances in which we decided to record *Rumours* helped to make that much stronger than before.

"From start to finish it took one year to complete *Rumours*. We'd recorded the backing tracks in nine anxious weeks, but the emotions that we'd originally put down on the tape in Sausalito were so strong that we didn't want to be immature and insensitive towards those feelings. That's why we took such care in the dubbing and the mixing.

"We just went through our collective traumas head-on and it was then that we all revealed our own true colours. In the past, both John and I have had to handle some really weird situations... Peter Green... Jeremy Spencer, but as far as Lindsey and Stevie were concerned, they didn't go like lambs to the slaughter, they just underwent a crash-course in maturity."

I wonder what these guys do for an encore? *Roy Carr* •



# 1977

APRIL - JUNE

The descendant of every enigma from Monroe to Piaf to Ronnie Spector: Debbie Harry with Blondie at Hammersmith, 1977



## Pop-pulp vs prayers

NME JUN 4 NYC cool crosses the pond as Blondie support Television.

**B** LONDIE'S DEBBIE HARRY frantically shimmies and shakes across the stage limelight, furiously rattling a pair of shiny maracas, and I sigh sadly, wishing they were mine.

You look good in black - fashion notes are an off-the-creamy-shoulder mini-dress, night-nurse tights and stiletto leather ankle boots from which project the silk-clad sparrow legs of the type of non-stop-dancing NOO Yawk City bud that Tom Wolfe eulogised in the Peppermint Lounge Revisited section of his *Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby*.

The World's Greatest Mouth cries "SURF'S UP!" at the start of Blondie's celebration of summer, "In The Sun", a number that's the equal of the type of Golden Old'un that Brian Wilson used to knock out on a lazy afternoon with his piano parked in the sand box. That song's typical - a joyous, updated

synthesis of Beach Boys, Spector, Orlons, Daytonas, early Motown, the very crème de la crème of the most timeless *American Graffiti* pop-pulp that every poured out of a cruising car's radio.

It's exhilarating Americana, and even though the furthest West I've ever been is Ealing Broadway, I could almost taste the back-seat-drive-in love and the ketchup-soaked cheeseburgers sizzling on an open grill...

Debbie looks like a peroxidized 16-year-old ponytailed cheerleader who got a job turning tricks on Times Square during the vacation. The angelic countenance, absorbed in her speeding-sideways dance steps, turns vicious as her painted nails claw the

air for the Patti Smith-inspired "Rip Her To Shreds".

Her Mop Top Muppet band ploughed through "Get Off Of My Cloud" on Saturday and "Louie Louie" the next night for the intro to the opening track on their Private Stock album "X Offender", a child-like paean to a perverted cop who's into rubber boots, if you see what I mean. It's the tragic story of a jailed man and the girl who waits for him.

The notion that the band should stick to small clubs and avoid the larger halls is smashed as the descendant of every enigma from Monroe to Piaf to Ronnie Spector gets bathed in blue lucid spotlight for "Look Good In Blue" done soft and sultry. *West Side Story* derivative finger-snapping choreography with Debbie torching it into the footlights with *Doomed Lover* angst.

"For Iggy!" Debbie cries and they rip through their tribute to The Pop, "Detroit".

"In The Flesh" was only performed on the Sunday, which was bad strategy as they should do it every night. Not a dry eye in the house as Debbie purrs, murmurs and sighs.

It's Blondie's newest single and it would mean a lot to me if you all go out and buy it.

I bite my toenails in anguish as "Man Overboard" is followed by "Rifle Range", with Debbie getting gunned down and dying the Bogart, flat on her back and twitching with the throes of Sudden Death.

But when she bounces back for "I Didn't Have The Nerve To Say No (Dear)", a sort of porno "God Only Knows", I know that everything's gonna be alright.

The band leave the stage (sulky bastards, her musicians; not the type of boys Debbie should mix with at all), then get

brought back for two numbers that display real fire - killer versions of "Heatwave" by Martha Reeves & The Vandellas and The Daytonas' "Little GTO".

The difference between Blondie and Television was the difference between hanging around an amusement arcade and going to church. Honest, I think that the *Marquee Moon* album is great. But the two

weekend gigs that Tom Verlaine's Television played at Hammersmith Odeon were like sitting at the Maharishi's feet or gazing respectfully at the Crown Jewels - or watching Pink Floyd if they had any good songs.

"Prove it, Tommy boy!" an irreverent prole bawled,

HAMMERSMITH ODEON LONDON

LIVE!

MAY 28 / 29

Television played with the technical perfection of a sophisticated computer

and I assumed he was talking about the album track of the same name. But when the song had come and gone and he continued shouting, "Prove it, Tommy boy!" I realised he was challenging Verlaine to live up to the hyperbole of his build-up.

On the album, Verlaine's frighteningly intense music carries some warmth, passion and SOUL. There was a paucity of all those qualities during these two gigs. It was cold, heartless and joyless, and they played with the technical perfection of a sophisticated computer. When they started with the first tracks on the album, "See No Evil" and "Venus", I thought they were gonna run straight through the album because they didn't have the energy to change the tracklisting around.

When a man as talented as Verlaine can write something like "Venus", perhaps the finest love song since Dylan's "Love Minus Zero", there's just no excuse for playing with as much sexuality, love or affection as a necrophiliac.

Between numbers, Verlaine savours the role of distant, cool, patronising Star. Unsmiling, unmoving throughout, he introduces each song in a short slur of words, all indistinguishable except for the title.

Meanwhile, everybody's sitting round watching Television. It made me think that the Television/Blondie tour and the Ramones/Talking Heads tour should swap support acts for everyone's benefit.

While not in the same league as songs on the album like "Friction" or "Prove It", the old Ork single "Little Johnny Jewel" got the best reception simply because it's certainly the most esoteric number the band do.

"Marquee Moon" alone comes across as visually impressive as it is on vinyl, with guitarist Richard Lloyd and Verlaine cutting jagged, incisive structures through the air as TV's transparent axe reflected beams of coloured light that looked like the music FELT.

On that occasion the music touched me inside. The rest of the time it was how I imagine a Grateful Dead concert to be.

"Knockin' On Heaven's Door" is dire, and it's not until the encore of "Satisfaction" that the audience stand up from their chairs and Idiot Dance.

"WALLY!" somebody has the amusing and appropriate audacity to bellow, and then the bouncers start playing Gestapo Warriors and it ain't funny.

As the fishbloods leave the stage I reflect that Television may have 10 times the talent of Blondie, but they ain't half as much fun. I think I'm in love. *Tony Parsons*



Michael Jackson (left) eclipses brothers Marlon (centre) and Jackie at Hammersmith, 1977

## Pirouettes vs outsider shtick

**NME JUN 4** The Jacksons

**I**T HAS BEEN nearly five years since The Jacksons' last visit to Britain, and Michael Jackson, 13 then, is 18 now. Not that that has diminished his appeal one jot – and indeed the fact that these boys have come up with no UK material in that period doesn't seem to matter either. They were still able not only to pack out the Hammersmith Odeon, but also to fill it with fanatical followers.

There had been some changes since last time. Jermaine, torn between family loyalties, opted to remain at Motown, and has been replaced by the largely anonymous Gerald Brown. Also, the band's own instrumentation – guitar, drums, keys – was now supplemented by a small orchestra, no doubt made necessary by the nature of the new material on Epic. Also, there was Randy, now 14, pounding on the bongos like a veteran.

The main change, though, was probably the material. It would now be invidious to suggest that The Jacksons are simply offering teenybop fare when they are vying with The O'Jays for the very best that Gamble-Huff have to offer (not that that's currently that good...).

The other important development was that this was virtually the Michael Jackson Show. Big brothers Tito, Marlon and Jackie were mostly relegated to the roles of back-up singers. This didn't particularly disappoint since Michael's voice has not changed much, and in any case he now has sufficient stage presence to control proceedings himself. Too much, it could be argued. His series of neatly executed pirouettes tantalised and teased the throng at the front of the stalls, and it was no surprise that for the second half of the show Michael was enveloped by kamikaze female fans storming the stage.

The material was reasonably predictable – mostly from the last album, with the obligatory medleys of former glories (their Tamla hits) – as was the assurance with which it was delivered.

Although I don't rate the Epic material too highly, it's obvious that Gamble-Huff have helped arrest the Jacksons' decline. And once the boys have found some material that's actually hot, then things might begin to get very interesting indeed. Meanwhile, don't leave it so long next time. *Bob Woffinden*

**MM MAY 7** Tom Waits

**T**HE OBVIOUS QUESTION about Tom Waits – is he, or is he not, a phoney? – was never quite resolved for me at London's Sound Circus on Sunday. The difficulty stems from his self-made image, which seems so much second nature it's become his whole artistic stance.

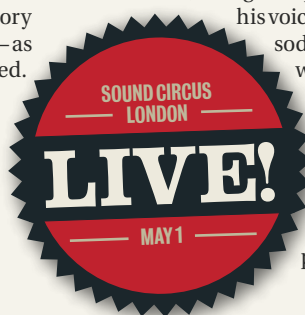
Waits is the coolest cat on the block; in his beat clothes, and with his radical slur of a voice, he contrives both to look and sound as though he were a stew-bum halfway into a meths trip.

It's a romantic idealisation of "the outsider" that he reinforces not just by stage tricks, like the cigarette that droops perpetually about his person, but even by the use of a laconic three-piece group, whose finger-snapping rhythms supported his piano playing and formed the background to his monologues, his "metropolitan doubletalk", as he calls them.

It's all patently shtick, but it's a great image, a hip, existentialist image that appeals to a certain audience's sense of sophistication and implies their familiarity with the artistic San Francisco scene of the '50s from which Waits draws some inspiration. Yet despite the amusement to be had from Waits' absurdist vision of himself and his many jokes – "It was as cold as a Jewish-American princess on her honeymoon," he quipped at one point – the mannerisms not only bring to pall, but they obscure a very real songwriting ability.

He has a good feel for melody and for lyrics, many of which explore with genuine force his self-portrait of the restless loner, bumming the bars and pool halls. It's a quality he evoked in "San Diego Serenade", a wistful song, performed alone and at the piano, which revealed his essential sentimentality. Too many other songs, however, were marred for me by straining to hear him strain, though I'm prepared to believe that

his voice really is that cracked and sodden. The real question, which requires a qualified yes, should be: Is he good? But to arrive at this conclusion one would do better to consult his records, where the pose can be put into truer perspective. *Michael Watts*



# “What the hell – you can’t please everybody”

**For NME’s tape recorder, MUDDY WATERS provides a generous interview. From Charley Patton to Elvis and the Rolling Stones, Muddy tells an extraordinary story of social and musical change. “A black man’s music,” says Muddy, “is not a crime to bring in the house.”**

— NME APRIL 30 —

“THE KIND OF BLUES I play there’s no money in it. You makes a good livin’ when you gets established like I did, but you don’t reach that kind of overnight-million-dollar thing, man... no way.

“If you play nuthin’ but blues, it’s hard to get big off of it. It takes years and years and years, and still kids come in and go, ‘Who he?’”...

The kid with the cancelled eyes and the bombsite face has his eye on my bottle of beer. As we stand at the edge of the club watching Johnny Winter leading Muddy Waters’ band through the first half of the show, he sees I have my eye on his pipe. We come to a wordless agreement and trade implements. As we swap back I ask him if Muddy Waters has been on yet.

He turns those dented-hubcap orbs on me.

“Muddy who?”

In the end, I have to ask four people before I finally find one who says, “No, man, it’s just been Johnny and the band on so far.”

Once that’s been established and I’m assured that I haven’t dragged Joe Stevens, a lady from CBS Records, her two kid brothers and a driver all the way from New York City to Willimantic, Connecticut, on a mere wild blues chase, it’s possible to relax and take stock of the surroundings and the music.

We’re in a sprawling, low-ceilinged wooden building called the Shaboo Inn. Kids from the neighbouring three or four states all converge there – it seems like every under-age drunken driver within a hundred miles is there; damage cases lurching around afterwards slurring, “Hey, whut city we in, man?”, the lot.

It’s crowded, smoky, sweatbox hot despite the noisy airconditioning and there are two small exits – upfront and backstage – which means that if a fire started in there the audience and bands would have to be sent home in canvas bags and the whole process would take maybe 10 or 15 minutes... Imagine all those blurred-round-the-edges »

JOE STEVENS





"I wanted the world to know a lot about me": Muddy Waters in 1977

teenage casualties stomping each other to get at the exits. Jesus, what a mess...

As this horrific fantasy subsides, focus in, if you will, on the band.

Reading from left to right, the first man we come to is Pinetop Perkins, born at Belzoni, Mississippi, in 1913. He's played piano for Muddy since the death of Otis Spann, Muddy's half-brother and the finest blues pianist of his time, in 1970.

Next to him behind the drums is Willie "Big Eyes" Smith - formerly known as "Little Willie Smith" - born 1936 in Helena, Arkansas, a former harmonica player who switched to drums in the late '50s because the blues was in one of its periodic doldrums "...and harps went out. So I had to look for other ways to keep a job and I learned drums." He's played with Muddy since the early '60s, thrashing his kit with perfect power and control.

Next up is Bob Margolin, a young bearded white guitarist who's played rhythm for Muddy for three or four years. He keeps his Stratocaster turned well down and he looks unbelievably nervous, even after all this time. His playing is oddly hesitant, as if he's perpetually waiting for cues from the older men around him - like James Cotton on harp.

Cotton, born in Tunica, Mississippi, in 1935, is one of the guest stars on this tour. Taught by Sonny Boy Williamson II and Muddy's harmonica player for 12 years, he's led his own band for some time, and it's from Cotton's band that Muddy's borrowed bassist Charles Calmese, the youngest man on the stage, snake-eyed and agile, pumping out time-honoured lines embellished with a few contemporary fillips on a fretless Fender.

Up front taking care of business in the absence of The Man is a man who could be 19 or 90, a long thin streak of Texas white lightning perched on a high stool with a Gibson Firebird in his lap, clad in black velvet and a floppy hat of the same fabric, milky hair pushed back and falling to his shoulders, a face so white that it practically vanishes when he leans into the lights... born in 1944 in Leland, Mississippi, Mr Johnny Winter.

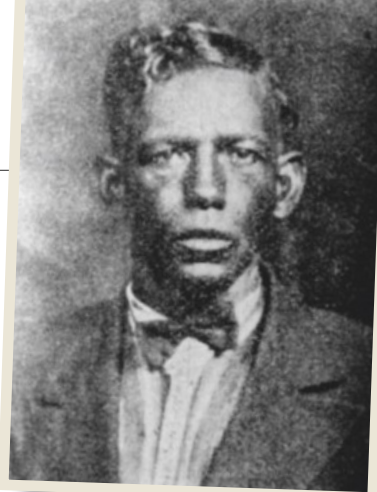
Shorn of his rock-star accoutrements and 2,000-watt monoliths, Winter's put himself back into the College Of Musical Knowledge for a postgraduate PhD course in the blues from the man who personally tutored the likes of Little Walter, Jimmy Rogers, James Cotton, Junior Wells, Buddy Guy, Mike Bloomfield and Paul Butterfield in the intricacies of their craft, and whose home-study course has benefited - among others - Mick Jagger, Keith Richard, Eric Clapton, Brian Jones, Peter Green, Elvis Presley, Carl Perkins, Bo Diddley, Eric Burdon, John Mayall, Stevie Winwood, Jack Bruce, Jimmy Page, Robert Plant, Jimi Hendrix, The Band, Rory Gallagher, the Feelgoods, Paul Rodgers, Lew Lewis, Rod Stewart... let's just say that Muddy's students have, over the years, done him proud.

Like just about every Southern kid, Winter had grown up hearing the seminal rock and country records over the radio and, for him, Muddy was always The Man.

He'd simultaneously paid off a massive musical debt and set himself up for the treat of a lifetime by getting Muddy signed up to Blue Sky records - his manager Steve Paul's label - and producing/kibitzing/guitaring

*Hard Again*, the album which inaugurated Muddy's stay with the company by recapturing the colossal vitality and crispness of Muddy's '50s recordings.

And now he's up front leading a stellar lineup of three generations of Chicago bluesmen, warming up the crowd for The Man. He's shouting



“Charley Patton was such a good clown with the guitar”

John Lee Hooker's "Serve You Right To Suffer" into the mic and playing the sweetest, sharpest, saltiest blues guitar you can imagine, expanding the content of the genre without ever breaking faith with its form.

The audience is grooving on it, but they seem a bit puzzled as to why Johnny isn't wearing his satins and jewellery and playing the ferocious death-before-dishonour power-chord rock'n'roll that's been his major stock-in-trade in the '70s.

A kid who yells for "Rock'n'Roll Hoochie Koo" gets a poised "Fuck ya!" gouged into his face, followed by a galloping, hell-for-leather sword-cane version of Elmore James' Robert Johnson-derived "Dust My Broom".

As he kickstarts his solo, his left hand sneaks to his volume control and he's up off the stool and dancing with it now, his face dreamily and serenely abstracted as he switches his butt across the stage. He doesn't do "guitar moves"; in fact, it's like he's dancing to the music and he's forgotten that he's got a guitar in his hands and that he's playing, or - indeed - that he doesn't realise that he's off his stool.

He looked like a skeleton dancing in moonlight, answering some unearthly

summons. On this up, he ends the set and calls a 15-minute break before The Main Event - and even though sound commercial reasoning dictates whose name is highest and biggest on the posters, there's no question as to whose show it is.

When things reassemble, Perkins, Smith, Margolin, Calmese and Cotton essay an instrumental. Cotton wails his brains out with a succession of devastating solos, but the stiffness and nervousness of Margolin's playing keeps things fairly earthbound until Winter re-enters, plugs in and starts striking sparks off his guitar. The other musicians ignite and things are burning pretty good when Cotton brings on Muddy Waters.

**M**UDDY WATERS WAS born on April 4, 1915, in Rolling Fork, Mississippi; the second son of farmer Ollie Morganfield, who named him McKinley. In 1918 his mother died, and young McKinley Morganfield was sent to live with his grandmother in Clarksdale, some 100 miles away.

"I was raised in the country, and out there they didn't have no concrete, ya know... just muddy country roads, and people used to clean their feet off on our front porch. I'd be playin' around crawlin' in the mud, probably eatin' it... and my grandmother started callin' me her little muddy baby.

"I started to play the harp when I was seven. At nine I was really tryin' to play. At 13 I thought I was good. The kids I used to sing to would call out, 'Hey, Muddy Waters, play us a piece.'

"I didn't like that 'Muddy Water' thing, ya know... I didn't mind my grandmother calling me Muddy, but that whole Muddy Waters thing I didn't like, it just grew on me."

In the latter part of his teens, McKinley Morganfield saw the great Delta bluesman Charley Patton. Patton was nearly 30 years Muddy's senior and impressed him enormously - as he had also impressed a 21-year-old Arkansawan named Chester Burnett, himself later to become a blues legend as Howlin' Wolf.

"I saw Charley Patton in my younger life days - him and Son House, a lot of the older guys. What got to me about Charley Patton was that he was such a good clown man with the guitar. PATTIN' it and BEATIN' on it and PUTTIN' it behind his neck and TURNIN' it over... I loved that, but I loved Son House because he used the bottleneck so beautiful. He was one of the best Mississippi things of the time.

"I think me myself and Robert Johnson got the most out of Son House. Of course Robert he come up so fast, but I had to stay with the Son House single-string kind of thing."

Muddy had formed a duo with a friend of his, a guitarist named Scott Bohannon. Within a year, though, Muddy had traded in his harps for a guitar, and by the time he was 17 he was playing bottleneck leads to Bohannon's rhythm. He'd already known for a long time that he was going to be a professional musician for life.

"I left the home with that when I was a little kid, and ever since I can remember, this is what I wanted to be. Something outstanding.

The blues had a baby ... and they called it rock 'n' roll



Waters talking with NME's Charles Shaar Murray at his home in Chicago

If I couldn't make it in music, I'd be a big preacher, a great ball player. I didn't want to grow up with no one knowin' me but the neighbourhood people. I wanted the world to know a *lot* about me. I thank my God I got it through..."

Throughout his late teens and his twenties, Muddy made his living in much the same way as many other unskilled and semi-educated young Southern blacks: he went to work on neighbouring cotton plantations, but he did better than most thanks to his musical abilities. A night's music earned him \$2.50, as opposed to the \$3.75 paid for five days' work.

Plus a small whisky still out in the bushes.

Son House, the man from whom he learned the finer points of bottleneck guitar and a certain amount of his early repertoire, was a brilliant guitarist who remained in obscurity until tracked down and recorded in 1966. Son House taught Muddy some of the songs – and the essentials of the style – of Robert Johnson, undoubtedly the finest country-blues singer of all.

To say that Robert Johnson was a "mystery" and an "enigma" is to understate. No one seems to know where he was born or when, although he must've been around Muddy's age. Nobody knows what he looked like (though he is frequently described as being "small and dark"), because there are no known photographs of him.

He was a shy young kid who desperately wanted to emulate the older bluesmen and seemed patently unable to do so until he vanished for about six months and then came back the best and most exciting singer/guitarist and composer that anyone had ever heard.

Between 1936 and 1938 he recorded 29 sides for Vocation Records – all of which are now available on a pair of indispensable CBS albums entitled *Robert Johnson, King Of The Delta Blues Singers (Vols I & II)* – a blues more supple, driving and achingly immediate than anything existing at the time.

The blues of Robert Johnson represent the absolute artistic peak of the pre-war rural blues: his guitar playing foreshadowed the future of

the music, with funky bass-string riffing, vibrant, biting slide counterpoints and powerful, choppy chording that formed the basis of the way the electric blues bands – black and white – of the future would balance off lead, rhythm and bass guitars.

He was solidly in the tradition of the Mississippi Delta bluesmen who'd preceded him, but like his spiritual descendants Charlie Parker and Jimi Hendrix, he was just that much further out.

It was his songs, and the way he sang them, that mattered the most, though. Hearing Robert Johnson really drives home why religious folks called the blues "devil music" and why many musicians from religious backgrounds found the decision to play blues an almost Faustian choice.

Johnson opens a window into an almost apocalyptic world in his blues, a world where he and the devil walk side by side ("*Early this morning when you knocked upon my door/I said, 'Hello Satan, I do believe it's time to go'*"), where the blues walks like a man and pours down like hell ("*Hell Hound On My Trail*"), where he's out late at night after redneck curfew ("*Crossroads*"), and even when the devil/blues makes him impotent ("*Phonograph Blues*", "*Stones In My Passway*").

He sings in a voice that sounds like bare trees clutching hopelessly at a grey sky, as if he was running down the road trying not to look at them. Robert Johnson was serving life without parole on Desolation Row before Bob Dylan was even born.

The unnerving suddenness with which he'd acquired his powers and

the subject matter of his songs led many to venture the opinion that Johnson had, indeed, made a Faustian pact with the devil. He died in 1938 – no one quite knows how.

Some say he was stabbed, some poisoned, but everybody agrees that it was in a fight over a girl.

The reason for the mystery is that he was an itinerant musician in a strange town, with none of his friends with him either to prevent or to record the manner of his death. And besides, who cares what happens to a vagrant black in some small Southern town where nobody knows him...? »





January 1967, Tel Mar Studios, Chicago: Chess Records co-founder Leonard Chess (left) supervises as (l-r) Muddy Waters, Little Walter and Bo Diddley record the album *Super Blues*

Muddy Waters knew Johnson principally from his records and from what Son House had taught him, but Johnson influenced him enormously.

“I didn’t know Robert well at all, because I don’t remember meeting him. He was in a little town called Frye’s Point, and he was playing on the corner there. People were crowdin’ round him, and I stopped and peeked over. I got back into the car and left, because he was a dangerous man... and he really was using the git-tar, man. I crawled away and pulled out, because it was too heavy for me...”

The echoes of Robert Johnson in Muddy’s first recordings were overwhelming. Folklorist Alan Lomax recorded him for the Library Of Congress in 1941 and again in 1942, both solo and as a member of the Sons Sims Four, a group he played with occasionally. In his mid-twenties at the time, his voice is considerably lighter and younger than the classic Muddy Waters voice of his ’50s recordings, and the phrasing and intonation are unmistakably derived from Johnson, as is the guitar style.

Muddy’s playing and singing carried a solidity and weight that Johnson’s perhaps lacked, but similarly the realms of metaphysical terror which were Johnson’s prowling grounds were closed to Muddy – perhaps thankfully, because Muddy Waters is still with us in the flesh, whereas Johnson’s presence is ghostly beyond belief.

No mere Johnson imitator was Muddy, though, not even then. His sheer warmth, strength and authority completely polarised and redefined even the most obviously Johnson-derived pieces, and he displays thrilling, tantalising hints of the power that he would unleash on his next foray into recording.

He was absolutely determined that he would record again – and this time see the records released and paid for. (The Library Of Congress, which treats folk musicians as wildlife specimens rather than artists, never paid Muddy for the recordings until a quarter of a century later, when they were finally released by Testament Records as *Down On Stovall’s Plantation*).

**T**HE CENTRE OF blues recording was Chicago, which then – as now – boasted a substantial black population. The industry was undergoing a hiatus at the time, since due to a combination of wartime raw-materials shortages and a massive union dispute, there were no recordings made for several years.

Muddy arrived in Chicago in 1943 – the year after his final session with Lomax – and went to stay with an uncle of his. He got a job in a paper factory, but he soon found himself making more money playing guitar and singing at parties and bars. In 1944 he found that he wasn’t loud

enough and got himself his first electric guitar.

“It wasn’t no name-brand electric guitar, but it was a built-in electric git-tar, no pick-up just stuck on. It gave me so much trouble that that’s probably why I forgot the name; every time I looked round I had to have it fixed.

“Finally it got stoled from me in one of them little neighbourhood clubs, and the next one I got me was a Gretsch, and that’s the one I used on all my early hits.”

In 1946, pianist Albert Luandrew – better known as Sunnyland Slim – needed a guitarist for a session he was cutting for Aristocrat Records, a small label run as a sideline by Leonard and

Phil Chess (proprietors of a bar called the Macambo) and a gentleman named Sammy Goldberg.

Slim knew Muddy from various jams and gigs, and so he brought him along to Goldberg and the Chess brothers, and they and bassist Ernest “Big” Crawford cut four sides. Muddy and Slim each took two lead vocals, and therefore got a single apiece out of it.

On all four of the selections, Slim’s piano is the predominant instrument – after all, he was the veteran and Muddy the novice – but the guitar is taut and inventive. Playing, surprisingly enough, without a slide, Muddy reveals himself as a lead guitarist who’d not only refined his existing tricks in the preceding five years, but had also learned an awful lot of new ones. His voice had developed considerably more power and control, and the Johnson influences had been almost fully absorbed and transcended.

After one single as a sideman, one as a featured artist and a third where he and Slim shared billing, he was ready to step out on his own. In 1948, Sunnyland Slim quit Aristocrat. Muddy, however, was already far more than just Sunnyland Slim’s protégé, a fact which he proved with devastating success when, accompanied only by Big Crawford, he cut a version of a song called “I Be’s Troubled”, which he’d first cut for Alan Lomax back in Mississippi in 1942.

This time it was called “I Can’t Be Satisfied”. By blues standards, it was a smash hit around Chicago and in the South. Almost certainly, it was one of the records that, way over in Memphis, Tennessee, a 13-year-old po’ white boy named Elvis Aaron Presley must have listened to on the black radio station. Big Crawford’s pumping, punching basslines presage those which Bill Black was to play six years later when Presley cut his interpretation of Arthur “Big Boy” Crudup’s “That’s All Right Mama”, an interpretation which owes much to the pacing and phrasing of Muddy’s record.

The record had two major effects. The first was to persuade the Chess brothers that the harsh, electrified Delta blues was the sound. They then dropped the cocktail pop and jazz that they’d been recording and quickly established themselves as a pre-eminent boss blues label. The second

was to make Muddy Waters the undisputed boss of Chicago blues.

He consolidated his success with a series of harder, heavier, more passionate and more electric hits, and began to assemble, member by member, the toughest and most exciting band in town. Muddy Waters’ Blues Band was to become not only the best and most influential band in Chicago, but what was, for all practical purposes, the first electric rock band.

His first ally was Jimmy Rogers (sometimes known as “Chicago Jimmy



Rogers) to distinguish him from the white country singer Jimmie Rodgers), a fine guitarist and singer who, like many of Muddy's sidemen, cut solo recordings at Muddy's sessions with the leader backing them up.

"He was playing harp, I was playing git-tar – that was when I got my guitar stoled. Then he switched over – we went with a guy called Blue Smitty.

"He made a coupla records for Chess, but I don't know if you'd remember him – he played a hell of a good guitar. Me and him played guitar, and Jimmy Rogers played harp: three of us. This lasted almost a year, and then Blue Smitty left us and Jimmy got a job, and this left me by myself.

"I got a guy named Baby Face Leroy [Foster]. He played drums and guitar, but he and I was playing git-tars together. Then Little Walter came to play with Baby Face Leroy, and Jimmy was hangin' round. He was a good musician, and I wanted to cut him in with us and make four. So I put Leroy on the drums, Jimmy on the guitar and Little Walter on the harp."

Marion "Little Walter" Jacobs was born in Marksville, Louisiana, in either 1930 or 1931. He played both harmonica and guitar when, barely 20, he joined up with Muddy's band. He was a more than fair guitarist – as his performances on some of Muddy's records amply testify – but his true turf was mouth harp.

Little Walter is the man against whom all other blues harpists must be measured. Rank him as of equal importance and influence on his instrument and in his field as Robert Johnson, Charlie Parker and Jimi Hendrix were in theirs.

"Before I had him as a harp player he was used to playing on his own. He didn't have very good time, but me and Jimmy taught him that. Plus we taught him how to settle down. He was wild, he had to play fast! He was always a jump boy, had that up-'n'-go power. Lotta energy!

"He could cool down and play a slow blues, but when he go for himself he play sump'n up tempo."

Walter was a renowned hellraiser, and even after his work with Muddy and his solo records – both while he was in the band and after – had made him as big a star as Muddy for a while, his wildness and taste for the booze seriously damaged his career.

"He was a great guy. He had kind of a bad temper, but he was a great guy, man... and if he wanted to love you, he loved you. A lot of peoples give him the wrong thing, 'cause he just didn't want to take no foolishness off nobody. A lot of people don't want to take no jive from peoples, and he was that type.

"But otherwise, man, whatever he did, he did it to himself. He didn't go sticking up nobody or none of that jive, but he was a fast boy. People said he drank, but what the hell, everybody drinks. I drink too.

"I think he was one of the swellest guys that was ever in the business. And he did like me. Awwwww man, he was another Robert Johnson. It's hard to find them kinds of peoples."

Charlie Parker, Jimi Hendrix, Billie Holiday, John Coltrane...

"Yeah man... those guys, you don't run into them too often. They born with that. Walter was born with what he had, and man, you couldn't take it from him. He could do it.

"His mind was so fast, he could think twice to your once; that's how he learned to harp so good. Kids are still trying to play like him, but they not yet up to the point..."

In 1950, the Chess brothers separated themselves from Sammy Goldberg and Aristocrat in order to set up a new operation: Chess Records. They leased a few masters from the South – among them the records Sam Phillips at Sun made with Howlin' Wolf before he too moved to Chicago – but mostly they found all the blues they could handle right there in Chicago.

The Muddy Waters Blues Band ruled the roost, notching up best-sellers not only with Muddy's own records but with solo records from Jimmy Rogers and Little Walter. Muddy and the band also backed up other

artists, notably Sonny Boy Williamson. In contrast to the rockabilly records that Southern whites were to make in a few years' time – in which only the lead guitar and the echo chambers sounded electric – the Waters band was making an almost totally electric music.

Since its music was an extension of country blues, they used a small number of instruments heavily amplified for maximum cut-and-thrust power, in direct contrast to the big bands which used a large number of acoustic instruments in which maybe only the singer and the guitarists used electricity to cut through the horns.

The drummers thrashed away mercilessly to compete with the cranked-up guitar amps used by Waters and Rogers (Rogers alternated bass and lead parts against Muddy's rhythm and slide, since in those pre-electric-bass days, bass was really only practical in the studio).

Walter's harp was closely miked and gave him a volume, sustain and richness of tone that enabled him to fill the air with the huge chording of a four-piece horn section or else soar like a single alto sax, like a slide guitar or like a voice.

And over the top rode Muddy triumphant, slashing the air into thin slices with bare-wire slide and declaiming his witty, observant and poignant songs with magisterial dignity and savage aplomb.

Rock'n'roll proper was still two or three years away, but boisterous, rampaging, remorseless electric street music was developing by leaps and bounds in Chicago. The music's still with us, but sadly, Little Walter isn't. He suffered a massive concussion in a back-alley brawl outside a Chicago club where he'd worked one night in 1967. He complained of a headache, took a couple of aspirins, went to sleep and never woke up.

"I was here when rock'n'roll first came out with Chuck Berry and all of them. I sent him to Chess, told him to tell Leonard Chess that it was me sent him over there. He recorded with the Chicago people: Otis Spann, the drummer Odie Payne, I believe..."

Muddy has always been noted for his willingness to advance other people's careers. He not only let Rogers and Little Walter record on his time, but he played on their records, gave them solo spots on his gigs and gave them the benefits of all his experience, musical and otherwise. Many of his former sidemen who now lead their own bands have benefitted from both his advice and his object lessons on the tricky art of leading a band.

"Was a lot of changes made when we was goin' through the thing... I had a lot of mens in the band. That's why I feels that I did a lot more for blues players than anybody else I know ever lived. I taught a lot of people how to do it, I took 'em into my band and I made good blues stars out of 'em..."

## "The Rolling Stones created a whole wide open space for the music"



Ronnie Wood joins Waters backstage after the latter's show at the Roxy in Los Angeles, 1977

**M**ORE THAN ANY other single event, it was Muddy's visit to England in 1958 that laid the first foundation stone for the Great British R&B boom of the early '60s.

Earthshakingly loud by the standards of the time (even Otis Spann's piano was amplified), at least one major British jazz critic of the time was so freaked out by the volume of the Waters band (he was more accustomed to the acoustic "folk" blues of Big Bill Broonzy and Brownie McGhee) that he reviewed the show from the toilet.

It was that visit that inspired Alexis Korner and Cyril Davies to form Blues Incorporated and provide the environment that produced the Rolling Stones, The Yardbirds, Manfred Mann, The Pretty Things and the rest of the Crawdaddy/Marquee school of young white Brit blues bands.

It was in that same year that Muddy received the first real answering shout from across the colour line. "It was when Elvis Presley made a picture with a song had that 'Hoochie Coochie Man' beat... ba da da da dum... and I thought, 'I better watch out. I believe whitey's pickin' up »

on things that I'm doin'." The song in question was 'Trouble' from the movie *King Creole*. It was probably Presley's last fling as a hardcore rock'n'roller, and also the last fling of hardcore rock'n'roll for a few years.

When the bottom dropped out of hard rock to coincide with Presley's induction into the army, the blues market also contracted sharply. Muddy's coup was to take his band – then consisting of Pat Hare (gtr), James Cotton (harp), Otis Spann (pno), Andrew Stephens (bass) and Francis Clay (drums) – to the Newport Jazz Festival.

From his triumphant performance there, slightly subdued though it was after his experience at the hands of the British jazz critics, came the superb *Muddy Waters At Newport* album, which introduced him to white jazz fans. He also recorded the acoustic Muddy Waters, *Folk Singer* album and the Broonzy tribute *Muddy Sings Big Bill*, both of which gained him a foothold with white folk fans.

But nevertheless, his black public was being eroded by the smoother, jazzier "urban blues" of BB King and Albert King, and by the gospel-influenced pop-soul coming out of Motown in Detroit and Stax in Memphis. Both these forms seemed "classier" to the burgeoning black middle class, who were beginning to find the music of men like Muddy and Howlin' Wolf a little too rough and dirty.

"I'm dead outta Mississippi, the country. I play cotton-patch music, cornfield, fishfry. BB and Albert are a different style; a higher class of people'd see them, more middle-class people – in those days, anyway.

"Now you talkin' direct to black, because white people, if they like you, they don't give a damn. I have doctors and everything who come around: doctors, lawyers, maybe even a judge slip in there sometime.

"But in those days some clubs would rather have BB in there than me, because a more white-collar guy comes in to see him. They'd want to be sophisticated, they'd say they don't dig the deep blues like me and Wolf were playin'... John Lee Hooker, maybe Lightnin' Hopkins.

"What the hell, you can't please everybody.

"What do I care? back when I was playin' for only black I always had my house full, you couldn't even get in. I didn't need no guy in the necktie, y'know wh' mean?"

In 1964, Muddy was to begin to reap the harvest of the seeds he'd planted over in England back in 1958. "Then all at once there was the Rollin' Stones. When they did it, they created a whole wide open space for the music. They said who did it first and how they came by knowin' it. They told the truth about it, and that really put a shot in my arm with the whites. I tip my hat to 'em.

"They took a lot of what I was doin', but who care? The Rolling Stones... it took the people from England to hip my people – my white people – to what they had in their own backyard. That sounds funny, but it's the truth.

"It was the Beatles and the Rolling Stones: The Beatles did a lot of Chuck Berry; the Rolling Stones did some of my stuff. That's what it took to wake up the people in my own country, in my own state where I was born, that a black man's music is not a crime to bring in the house.

"There was a time when a kid couldn't bring that music into a father-and-mother's house. Don't bring that nigger music in here. That's right!

"Those kids didn't give a damn what your colour is; they just want to hear the records. Then the college kids started comin' to see me in places where I was afraid for 'em even to be there, maybe 12 or 14 of them a night. I said, 'Brother, I hope they can handle this, they don't know where they at. I hope don't nothin' happen to 'em. I hope everybody leave 'em alone!'

"This was before Martin Luther King's thing was happening, and even then they was going to the black places... They had more nerve than I woulda had, man... I mean, I'm scared to go in some black places

myself now.

"All the kids got nerve these days; me, I don't got no nerve. I'd just rather stay peaceable, sit around and watch my TV and watch my kids grow up. I been through what they goin' through.

"I been in some *baaad* places in my lifetime, but I went

through sound and safe. I didn't get nobody and didn't nobody get me. I used to pack that thing here..." – he slaps his hip pocket meaningfully – "but you don't need that to live.

"I don't think about that no more. I goes on havin' a good time, man... I get in my car and go to the store... I'm havin' a good time."

**M**UDDY WATERS LIVES today in a small white wooden house on a quiet street in a suburb of Chicago. It's only in the last few years that he finally got enough money together to be able to move out of Chicago's ghetto South Side, but when one considers that Muddy Waters is a colossus of modern popular music and that he's been working his butt off as a star performer and recording artist for more than a quarter of a century, the smallness and modesty of his home comes as something of a shock, despite the expensive comfortable furniture, the electronic kitchen and the small swimming pool in the yard.

Suddenly you realise that over those years Muddy hasn't ever seen much of a financial reward for his work. He has little more than any hard-working man coming up to retirement age would have.

Over the years, he's made several stylistic experiments in the hope of clicking with a wider market in the way that BB and Albert have done, but his reluctance to move too far from the music that is his unquestioned forte has resulted in some less-than-enthusiastic performances on some less-than-worthy projects.

There was *Brass And The Blues*, a lightly swinging album backing him up with jazz horns, and a pair of horrendous "psychedelic" albums, *Electric Mud* and *After The Rain* ("Chess thought they could make some money off of those, and hell, I could use some money too"), neither of which made it either artistically or commercially.

A pair of "team-up" albums – *Super Blues* with Bo Diddley and Little Walter, and *Super Super Blues Band* with Bo and Howlin' Wolf – were better and did better, and in 1969 he teamed up with Otis Spann, Paul Butterfield, Mike Bloomfield, Duck Dunn and Buddy Miles for a superb double album entitled – appropriately enough – *Fathers And Sons*.

(In the '70s, there was a *London Sessions* album with Rory Gallagher, Stevie Winwood, Georgie Fame, Rick Grech and Mitch Mitchell.)

It seemed that that was it, except that the following year Muddy was involved in an almost fatal car accident that laid him low for many months. "I came back good. I came back much better'n I ever thought I would. The public didn't think I'd ever come back as strong as I am now.

"Some thought I'd never play again, because I couldn't even move my fingers, man... but I can't play no hour and a half or two hours no more, man. My age is too old for that, I wouldn't even think about doin' that.

"Forty-five to 50 minutes, man, that's enough for a 62-year-old man. I know the kids would love for me to stay out there more... I could go on for a few minutes longer, but I'm trying to protect this one body. The kids be hollerin' for more all night, but if I did in a coupla weeks I be lyin' on my back in a bed somewhere.

"I'm trying to protect Muddy Waters. You don't get a 62-year-old man out on no stage for no two hours, man... you kiddin'?"

"The band go out there first and then I do my 45, 50 minutes... yeah, cool... but me go out there for an hour and a half? No way."

Last year, Muddy severed his connection with Chess Records, the company which his success helped to build and with which his name had been virtually synonymous for more than 25 years.

His departure coincided with the sale of Chess to the New Jersey-based All Platinum label.

"That be the second time they sold me, and I got tired of being sold to everybody. The first time was when they sold me to a company called GRT, and then they sold me to another record company, and I said, 'This ain't no good for me. I quit.'"

His manager, Scott Cameron, went to CBS records, who suggested that he apply directly to Steve Paul's Blue Sky Records, who CBS distributed.

"They said that this label was the direct one for me, and it was the one that Johnny Winters was connected up with.

"When they said 'Johnny Winter', this was it. I was just thrilled all over, because when I met Johnny a few years ago in Texas, he didn't have the big contract then and he wasn't a big rock'n'roll star. He was playin' so much of the old stuff... all the old blues players like me 'n Jimmy Rogers and a lot more, he was playin' all of our stuff.

"I figured that this was the greatest chance, man, of all my days, to get with someone who's still got it, got that early-'50s sound."





"You don't get a 62-year-old man out on stage for not two hours, man... You kiddin'?: Waters at home in 1977"



Using Muddy's own piano, drums and rhythm guitar plus James Cotton and his bass player and Winter himself, they went ahead to make the album that turned out to be the magnificent *Hard Again*.

"We tried to keep it down in the '50s style, and I think this is one of the best records I've made in a long time... with that really Muddy Waters sound. I thought the *Fathers And Sons* was a heckuva good record, but I think this is the top. I really do.

"We're trying to get as close to the old sound as we can. We talked to Jimmy Rogers, and he's ready, and maybe on the next one we use Walter Horton" – also known as "Shakey Horton" and "Big Walter", another of the great '50s Chicago harps – "he's an old-timer, and he got some good old sound in his body, plus I'm sure ol' Sunnyland Slim got a coupla sides in him. We're just starting to think about it."

But most of all, Muddy yields to no one in his admiration for Johnny Winter, the only one of the young blues guitarists who has mastered the guitar styles which Waters and his contemporaries pioneered.

Most of the noted young white bluesmen of the '60s, like Clapton, Green and Bloomfield, took BB King as their model, but Winter is the only one who can capture Muddy's own style. It takes a very careful listen to *Hard Again* to discern that it's Winter playing those Waters-styled guitar lines and not the old master himself. Waters will hear no criticisms of Winter, not even of his often rather strained blues singing.

"He got a good voice on him for a white boy. How the hell you expect him to be able to sing like me?"

**UPON STAGE** at the Shaboo, Willie Smith sets up that two-fisted Chicago bump and grind, and Winter and Cotton power the band into "Hoochie Man".

Seated centre-stage, plucking casually at a businesslike brown Telecaster, clad in short-sleeved sports shirt and slacks, Muddy declaims the classic braggadocio of Willie Dixon's Chicago anthem with the casual authority of a man who knows that he's not going to be called upon to prove what he sings but is still prepared to back it up every inch of the way.

An all-encompassing boast of mystic, secular and sexual power, he slams home the last chorus with as much zest and vitality and utter

conviction that he must've put into his first performances half a century ago back in Clarksdale, Mississippi:

*"I'm here, everybody knows I'm here / I'm that hoochie coochie man / Let the whole damn world know I'm here."*

And they do. Lord God, they do.

And the one black kid in the club – tall, skinny, afro'ed – is looking at Muddy almost in shock, as if he can't believe that this old man who looks like his grandfather is generating so much power.

When a drunken white boy behind him starts to babble and laugh during the next song, he turns on him savagely: "Shut yo' white mouth, motherfucker. This is the blues."

For Muddy, Winter must be the ideal sideman. Whenever the old master needs to take a breath, Winter can take over the vocal for awhile, be it "Mannish Boy (I'm A Man)" or Muddy's time-honoured hard-charging finale number "Got My Mojo Working". And yet he never risks distracting the audience from Muddy, he stays on his stool until Muddy gets up and then he gets up too to groove around with him.

The programme includes Muddy standards like "Honey Bee" and "I'm A Howlin' Wolf" (an old song of Muddy's that he now sings as a tribute to his old friend, dead this past two years) plus "Way Down In Florida" from the new album.

It's on this song that Muddy takes his only guitar solo of the night. The kids at the Shaboo have by now heard guitar players pull out every trick in the book, but the old man has a surprise or two left for 'em yet.

Every time I see Muddy, I'm always taken aback at the sheer savagery of his soloing. I've never heard anybody this side of Jeff Beck generate so much attack, so much venom with a guitar.


Listening to Muddy soloing is like getting into a razor fight in the middle of a cloud of enraged napalm wasps out for blood and marrowbone jelly. He just kills, and for all his astonishing speed and flair and invention, Winter just can't hit as hard as Muddy.

And that's why we need old masters, 'cuz if younger folks could do what they could do just as well then they'd be superfluous, long overdue for rock'n'roll euthanasia. The reason that Muddy Waters is still a great and not just an honoured ancestor, a museum granddaddy, is that no one can do it like Muddy Waters.

And somehow I don't think anyone ever will. Charles Shaar Murray •

1977

APRIL – JUNE



“We’re the  
black sheep  
of the  
new wave!”

They burn fanzines and rate the Queen. What sort of punks are **THE JAM**? Introducing an urgent new trio and their opinionated leader, Paul Weller. “We’re not totally brainwashed – yet,” he says. “We will be in two years if we don’t do something.”



October 1977: The Jam - (l-r) Bruce Foxton, Rick Buckler and Paul Weller - in San Francisco's Chinatown district. Although scheduled to play 16 dates over 12 days on their first US tour, Weller's dad/manager John cancelled the SF show because of an earthing problem with the microphones

— NME MAY 7 —

**B**YNOW ONLY the staunchest reactionaries amongst the nation's rock people can be of the opinion that the much-touted new wave, despite its several less-than-endearing facets, isn't a good thing. But just in case you still had any doubts, get a load of The Jam.

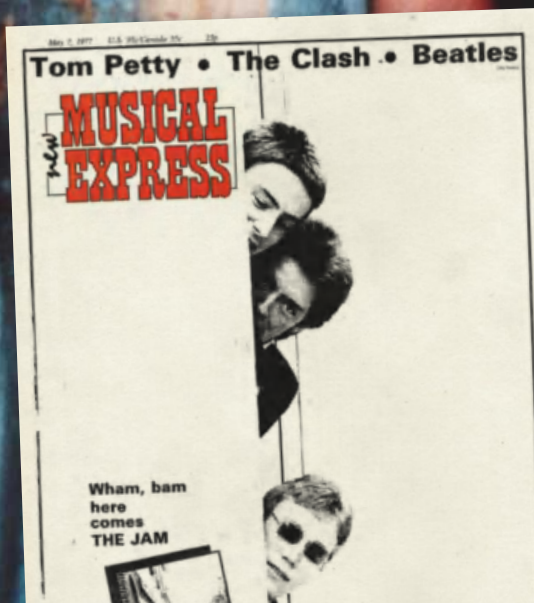
You'll doubt no more. For The Jam, while eulogising the nation's youth - and, come to that, the nation itself - with total commitment, remain the scene's renegades. "We're the black sheep of the new wave," says lynchpin Paul Weller.

The Jam most certainly do not toe the Punk Party Line. Why, they've even been known to commit such sacrilegious acts as burning on stage the Blank Generation's mouthpiece, *Sniffin' Glue*, after said journal had complained of The Jam's being "laidback" and "lacking direction" - not to mention "spending too much time tuning up onstage". Aggro!

With an image straight out of the Scene Club 1964 or some similar mod Mecca, The Jam wouldn't know one end of a safety-pin from another. Unlike the new-wave elite (Damned, Pistols, Stranglers, Clash), they are, sartorially speaking, three very sharp young men - the proud owners (and I mean proud) of customised mohair suits of the kind (say) The Yardbirds wore when they were an R&B band. And, unlike adherents of the new-wave dogma, The Jam don't go for wholesale rejection of their predecessors.

One Otis Redding is Paul Weller's favourite singer. He even attempted to sing like him at one point. Bassist Bruce Foxton admits to copping the odd earful of Bad Company and Thin Lizzy once in a while. And, to top it all, drummer Rick Buckler has owned up to possessing a couple of Genesis albums and liking the band when he saw them at Guildford in 1973.

Such views demonstrate the group's open-mindedness and individuality - something which Weller is keen to emphasise - »



and also their honesty. (It hasn't been unknown for The Damned's whirlwind drummer Rat Scabies to blag a Joni Mitchell album from her record company – but imagine him laying that on an interviewer. Or, come to that, an interviewer printing it...)

Moreover, The Jam have no time for playing the blank moron. Instead of the amphetamine-blitzed expression of vacant aggression copyrighted by new wavers, The Jam come on as sharp as their creases. Wasted they are not – though I can't believe they're quite as clean living as they make out. But perhaps most important of all, they are the best rock'n'roll band I've seen in many a year.

So sweeping a statement begs for qualifications, and not least among these is Paul Weller's flawless rock-star credential. Each of The Jam has an individual onstage persona strong enough to attain stardom in the not-too-distant future, but Weller stands out like a king among princes.

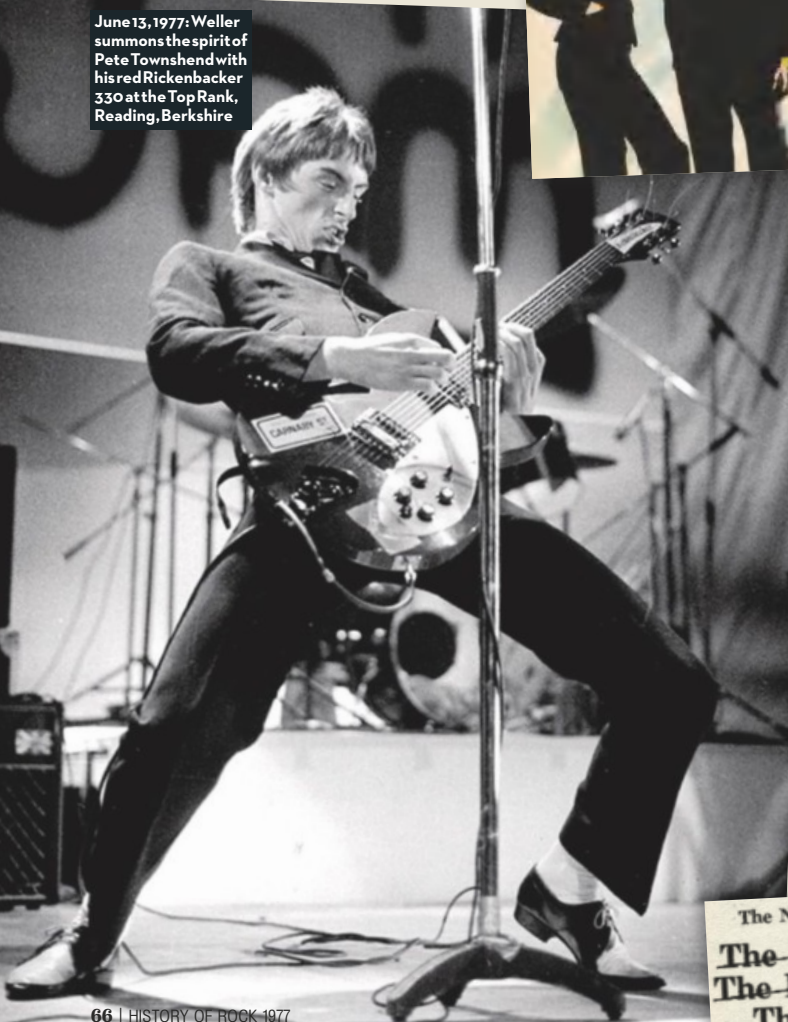
**THESE PAST YEARS**, British rock has failed to come up with any truly high-calibre working-class rock stars, the likes of which were typified in the '60s by Pete Townshend, Steve Marriott and John Lennon. This decade only folk like Lee Brilleaux, Wilko Johnson, Phil Lynott and (I suppose) Noddy Holder have come anywhere near to continuing that tradition, but none of these has even aspired to be – let alone been taken seriously as – a spokesman for their generation.

What's more, there's nothing intrinsically teenage about either the Feelgoods, Thin Lizzy or Slade – which is not true of The Jam, whose Paul Weller will in years to come, if not sooner, be regarded in the same light as those previously mentioned '60s figures.

Weller has Rock Star written all over him – and it's not just the fact that his razor cut and clothes bring back memories of the mod era. On stage and off, Weller, unlike some of his new-wave peers, is taut with positive vibrations – almost as if he's about to explode. Only occasionally does he slow down with the intensity... and then you realise that Weller is after all a guy on the tip of his 19th birthday from Woking in Surrey, on the far reaches of London's hinterland.



June 13, 1977: Weller summons the spirit of Pete Townshend with his red Rickenbacker 330 at the Top Rank, Reading, Berkshire



Remarkably unconfused, his age doesn't strike you, despite the total absence of lines on his face. In one publicity shot of The Jam, Weller, perhaps not coincidentally, looks as if he's trying his darndest to come on like Pete Townshend, eyebrows arched to emphasise his determinedly mean stare. Weller, in his own way, is doing what Townshend did more than a decade ago – writing songs for and about kids and performing them with the exhilaration only a few can muster. And that's where age is an important, if not crucial, factor.

Live, The Who still have more energy than any other band in rock, but it's calculated, polished energy. When The Jam hit the stage the commitment is all but tangible, Weller putting his all, and more besides, into it.

I first stumbled across the band at Islington's Hope & Anchor, where, incredibly enough, The Jam managed to come over visually despite the severe limitations imposed by the venue's tiny stage. The area between band and audience was alive with electric energy, the pogoing kids and The Jam's frontline of Weller and Foxton (another good-looking guy, less tough-looking than Weller, though still possessing a youthful tightness) in total empathy with one another – Weller thrusting himself up and down with youthful abandon, occasionally pushing himself towards Foxton, who simultaneously launched himself backwards in Weller's direction so that the two collided momentarily, a double act with all the markings of a classic Rod-and-Ronnie or Bowie-and-Ronson routine.

Given more room, Weller gets into a few Townshendesque, thighs-tucked-beneath-the-abdomen leaps, the sense of commitment transcending mere plagiarism. Rick Buckler, complete with shades, looks good behind the drums, exuding nonchalant cool.

Musically, The Jam reflect Weller's tightness. There is nothing remotely sloppy about them, and they execute their material with a taut knife-edged intensity – while losing nothing in the way of warmth. As Chris

Parry, the Polydor A&R man who signed them, says, their music is brutal, but it is not without compassion.

Individually they play great too, especially Weller and Foxton. These two have plumped for Rickenbacker guitars, which goes some way to explaining why The Jam's sound is comparable to early Who and on occasions to The Beatles themselves; those with ears will have noticed the similarity between Weller's lead runs on the flipside of the group's "In The City" single, "Takin' My Love", and the way John Lennon used to embellish a rock'n'roll song like "Bad Boy" or "Dizzy Miss Lizzy".

But like Lennon or Townshend – at least early Townshend – Weller is essentially a rhythm guitarist and quite a remarkable one at that, perfectly capable of playing fast, clipped rhythm chords like Wilko Johnson, or coming on with triumphantly ruthless power chords, just like Townshend. You should hear the way Weller plays on Larry Williams' late-'50s rock'n'roll classic "Slow Down". Go, Paul, go.

The Jam's version of "Slow Down", live and on their soon-to-be-released first album, is almost as good as The Beatles', though, as befits the genre, played faster and with more urgency. It's their overall pace which they have in common with our other new-wave bands, but their music is not just about playing fast. Their songs (all of 'em Weller's) are, with the exception of The Stranglers' (hardly a teenage band anyway), easily the best, musically and lyrically, to come out of all this punk hoopla.

True, there are more than a few resemblances between the chord progressions Weller uses and those Townshend laid down in the past, but there is no denying Weller's ability to write a song which rings true. And one which has melody and passion behind it.

Of the 10 originals which grace their album, it's the lengthy (over three minutes), reflective dolefulness of "Away From The Numbers" (great title, eh? Conjuring up all kinds of images) which impresses me most. But every song is memorable, whether it's the pure adrenalin rush of "Art School", the reckless abandon of "I've Changed My Address" or Weller's paean to the fact that for the first time in ages young bands are playing to young audiences, "Sounds From The Street".

Apart from their own songs (and, of late, Foxton has started to write), The Jam include in their set blistering versions of those two mid-'60s soul classics Wilson Pickett's "Midnight Hour" and Arthur Conley's

The Next Big Deal is:  
The PISTOLS  
The DAMNED  
The CLASH ... THE JAM

“Sweet Soul Music” – as well as a version of The Who’s “So Sad About Us”...

In a nutshell, The Jam have taken what they want from the past and fused it with a ’70s street consciousness while totally eschewing the blind negativity which has, until now, been de rigueur among their fellow rebels.

As Weller once told *Sniffin’ Glue*: “I don’t dig hippies, but they achieved something in the ’60s. They brought about a little more liberal thinking. We’re all standing and saying how bored we are and all this shit. But why don’t we go and start an action group, help the community? How many people can you see getting off their arses? Not fucking many.”

**WHEN PAUL WELLER** was a kid in Woking, the son of a labourer (who, incidentally and ironically enough, gave up his job six months ago to manage The Jam), he was absolutely besotted by the Fab Four. He had one of those Beatles souvenir guitars, the red-and-white plastic ones replete with mini-portraits and “autographs” of the Fabs. Paul used to mime to “She Loves You” in front of the TV. Later on he got himself a Hofner violin bass just like McCartney’s.

“I’ve got a Rickenbacker now, so I’m Pete Townshend,” he mocks defensively – for there have been those who contend that The Jam are just pale shadows of the early Who.

At the local comprehensive school he grew his hair long and smoked dope, just like all the other kids did, to rebel. Rick and Bruce were at the same school, but because of the age difference (they’re both 21), the three of them didn’t know one another that well. From the age of 14, Weller was convinced he was going to be a rock star, thereby gaining exemption from the humdrum. “I didn’t want to work,” he says. “I didn’t want to become Mr Normal.” He has no doubt he’ll succeed, either.

Weller left school when he was 16. For a time he worked as a window cleaner and worked “on the building” with his dad, who’d always encouraged him in his musical pursuits. Most of the time, though, he didn’t work, finally falling in with Buckler (who’d stayed on at school in the sixth form with the idea of becoming an architect, but quit before A-levels came round and worked for a time as an electrical inspector) and Foxton (who had got himself an apprenticeship in the printing trade).

Weller might have been a Beatle freak, but the thing which changed his life was hearing The Who’s “My Generation” on the *Stardust* album a couple of years ago. He fell in love with the mod image. And, while he’s unwilling to admit it, Townshend’s influence on Weller can’t be dismissed. It’s apparent when he voices off about what he thinks of The Who these days – over-reacting to the point of scoffing at Roger Daltrey’s beer gut.

“You can’t play rock’n’roll when you’ve got a beer gut.”

Weller is adamant that The Who haven’t produced a worthwhile lick since *Tommy* and expresses no interest in seeing them, despite the fact that he’s never seen them on stage. Opines Weller, “The songs Townshend writes now are so self-martyr shit. He can’t rest on his laurels for the rest of his life. Why doesn’t he give way to some of the younger bands? He’s got a lot of money and so have the Stones, so why doesn’t he put it into some clubs or build a... I don’t know... anything. Just *do* something with it. Some rehearsal studios or a record company.

“I think they owe it to the business, if anything. They’ve got enough out of the music business, so they should put some back. Instead of Keith Moon going round smashing up cars, *use* that money instead of wasting it. That’s what really pisses me off. This is the old order and they’re all wasting their bread. Paul McCartney brings his cats up on a plane and all this sort of shit.

“Lennon is the only one who hasn’t sold out. He’s the only bloke I’ve got confidence in still. He’s quietened down. He’s not so outspoken, but I like him still. It’s like us doing ‘In The City’ when we’re 27. Maybe we’ll be expected to sing it like The Who are expected to sing ‘My Generation’, but I don’t think we’d do it.”

Unsurprisingly, he has little sympathy for tax exiles.

“There’s people that work in factories that pay a lot of tax and they can’t split to the South of France,” he says rather naively. “Why don’t these rich rock stars open up some clothes shops? There’s no personalised clothes these days, which is one minor thing, but...”



“All this change-the-world thing is becoming a bit too trendy”

Buckler butts in. “You walk up this road here and you look in the clothes shops [Oxford Street] and they’re all the same. All the clothes shops are exactly the same.”

Weller points out that such mass production is a sign of the times.

“Really,” Buckler continues, “people are forced into buying that kind of thing because they say this is the thing to wear.”

Surprisingly enough, all the band, particularly Weller, are fiercely patriotic. When The Jam perform, they drape a Union Jack behind them and it’s unusual if one or more garments of Weller’s isn’t decorated with the odd Union Jack or two. They even went to the trouble of having some badges made with Union Jacks on them. Weller believes in the monarchy (and this is the same scene which sired the Pistols) and defends the Queen so: “She’s the best diplomat we’ve got. She works

harder than what you or I do, or the rest of the country.”

Buckler echoes him: “They’re an example to the country.”

So much for “Anarchy In The UK”... Moreover, Weller says he’ll vote Conservative at the next election, and he and Buckler reckon it’s the unions who run the country.

But even if fundamentally Weller supports such pillars of the establishment as the monarchy and the Tory party, his songs do have strong reformist attitudes. “Bricks And Mortar” numbers councils for getting their priorities wrong (“Woking’s like a fucking bomb site,” he says). One of his newer songs describes his fear that Britain is heading towards a police state. And throughout his songs the predominant theme is youth consciousness.

“We don’t love parliament. We’re not in love with Jimmy Callaghan. But I don’t see any point in going against your own country. If there’s such a thing in the world as democracy, then we’ve got it. We’re not totally brain-washed – yet. We will be in two years’ time if we don’t do something about it.

“Everybody goes on about new orders, but no one seems really clear what they are. Chaos is not really a positive thought, is it? You can’t run a country on chaos. Maybe a coalition or something with younger party members. All this change-the-world thing is becoming a bit too trendy. I realise that we’re not going to change anything unless it’s on a nationwide scale.”

Quite rightly, The Jam think they’re a cut above the other new-wave bands, surmising that their songs are better-structured and more subtle lyrically. They have kind words for the Pistols, though.

“They spurred the whole thing off. Not that we’re very much associated with them, but they still did a lot for the music. They brought about a lot of change. They frightened some of the older musicians, which is a good thing.”

So did they influence you at all musically?

“It wasn’t that I saw the Pistols,” says Weller. “It was that for the first time in years I realised there was a younger audience there, young bands playing to young people, which was something we’d been looking for in a long time.”

Most of the new-wave bands are very much into speed...

“We’re not into drugs,” Weller replies very quickly. “We don’t need it. We don’t need that to go on stage with. We don’t need it to get in the mood of playing. We might when we’re 30 or something. We might have to. In that case we’ll give up.”

The Jam have been together for two years. Originally they were a four-piece. They started off playing the usual stuff – Chuck Berry, Elvis Presley – before going through a phase of playing Merseybeat (“Beatles songs were too difficult”), for a time wearing satin suits and adopting a teenybop image. And before hitting the London circuit last year they’d worked in working men’s clubs and cabaret around the Woking area.

Three months ago they signed to Polydor, Chris Parry (the A&R man who’d “almost” signed the Pistols, The Clash and The Damned) offering them a contract as fast as he could so as to ensure a rival company didn’t step in with a larger advance.

Already there’s action on their first single “In The City”, a genuine ’70s teen anthem, and when their album of the same name comes out later this month, don’t be surprised if that follows The Clash and The Damned’s albums up the charts, for The Jam alone justify the emergence of the new wave. *Steve Clarke* ●



May 13, 1977: Bob Marley on stage with the Wailers at Houtrust Hallen in The Hague, Netherlands

## ALBUMS

**Bob Marley**  
*Exodus* ISLAND

**THE MOOD:** If some gunmen had charged into your house and shot you and your manager into a hospital bed, then perhaps you, too, would go into a studio and make a religious album - if you were capable of making music at all.

The fact is that this is a highly charged spiritual record by the reggae musician most capable of articulating the mood of his people. It was conceived by Marley shortly after his brush with disaster at the hands of gunmen, and thus there's precious little joy about it.

Even so, Marley sounds his customarily "up" self - and there are fewer more worthwhile sounds around in contemporary music.

**THE MUSIC:** Only one song, "Waiting In Vain", comes across as a plain love theme. For the rest, there's either the traditional sensuality we've come to expect

from Marley, or the spirituality of the first side. "The Heathen", "Exodus" - an unremittingly powerful track, perhaps the most potent on the LP - and the heavy insinuation of "Guiltiness" are all examples of spiritual conviction, but the endearing aspect of them all is the simplicity with which they're delivered. You don't get the feeling that a sermon is coming at you, or that Marley has suddenly found God.

"One Love", the final song on the record, is pure gospel, and delivered with an astonishing, insistent beat, a deadly combination of old-fashioned blues hollering and 1977 reggae wailing.

"Jamming" would be an instant disco smash if issued as a single; "Turn Your Lights Down Low" is slow and sexy; "Natural Mystic" is light, polite, yet systematically all-enveloping in the Marley tradition.

**THE RESULT:** This is a mesmerising album. While his

last, "Rastaman Vibration", was rather cultish, this is more accessible, melodically richer, delivered with more directness than ever. Let's face it, after an attempt on his life, Marley has a right to celebrate his existence, and that's how the album sounds: a celebration.

Ray Coleman, *MM* May 14

### The Clash *The Clash* CBS

By an odd quirk of fate, this debut album by The Clash came into the *MM* office on the same day as The Beatles' *Live At Hamburg*. Both found their way on to the record player and the somewhat surprising reaction was that The Beatles album induced derisory laughter, while The Clash produced requests for even louder volume.

The lesson from that is not that the *MM* is full of punk-rock freaks - not a safety-pin among us (honest) - nor that we don't like The Beatles, but that in the '70s punk rock has the vitality which many now esteemed

bands had when they were first starting. And it sounds a lot more fun, especially when you're not listening too closely, than triple-album concepts.

It would be ludicrous, of course, to judge The Beatles by what is little more than a bootleg; probably even more ludicrous to expect The Clash to achieve even more than one-tenth of what the Fab Four did. But it at least shows that at one time they - and the Stones, and The Who, and all the other establishment bands - sounded pretty rotten. They weren't adept at their instruments (to say the least; you ought to hear George Harrison on *Hamburg*), they hit bum notes, their harmonies

were flat; all the faults we lay at the punk rockers' door.

Yet they had an energy that overrode all those considerations, and a defiance of the status quo. The attitude was: if you want to hear note-perfect music, go to a classical concert.

The same applies today, except that in many cases you can substitute "rock" for classical. It all boils down, of course, to what exactly you do want. Personally, I care neither for the reverential neo-classical shows of the Pink Floyd, nor for my turntable to be filled all day with the extremely restricted music performed by The Clash and their cohorts.

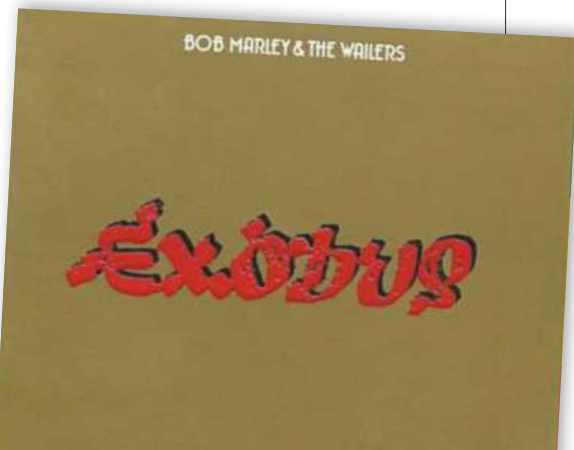
Punk rock strikes me as an experience to be savoured in small doses and, if on record, then at a high volume and preferably while doing something else. A closer examination, I find, leads to headaches, thanks to the tuneless repetition of chords at a breakneck pace.

The Clash, if you can believe it, manage to make the Stooges sound subtle. A shame that the instruments have the upper hand, because lurking beneath the racket are some interesting lyrics, snatches of which it's possible to hear if you listen carefully (not recommended).

It's here that The Clash, and others of their ilk, justify their existence. Just as in the pre-Beatles era lyrics had degenerated into "moon in June" romantic slush, so has the standard of today's pop song lyric gone back into a moronic slump?

By its very definition, "popular" music should not just be for the people, but about them, too. The Clash do exactly this, chronicling the ideas, frustrations and problems of disaffected youth in songs like "Remote Control", "Cheat" and "48 Hours" - these are the kind of themes that ought to be in the chart (if someone could write a tune for them, of course).

Particularly impressive is the sneering denunciation of





business that won't give them a break? Smells more like hype to me. The music on the album confirms that The Stranglers have little or nothing to offer. They're singularly lacking in all of the virtues that new-wave bands like The Clash, The

the employment prospects faced by the young in "Career Opportunities".

Some commentators will no doubt find the most significance in the only non-original on the album, a cover of Junior Marvin's big reggae hit of last year, "Police And Thieves" (you know, rebellious white youth links with angry blacks to create a potent political force, blah, blah, blah), but I shall leave that for the sociologists, except to say that it's a musically creditable version.

As an album, *The Clash* is pretty much what you'd expect: raucous, basic, and should go down a treat with the Blank Generation. Thank God I'm "too old" to have to enjoy it.

Michael Oldfield, *MM Apr 16*

### The Stranglers Strangers IV (Rattus Norvegicus)

UNITED ARTISTS

Just about the only predictable thing about rock is that as soon as something new comes along, there's always someone willing to jump on the bandwagon. Even more predictable is that punk rock/new wave is going to get more than its fair share of these jerks, simply because it is a genre without rules and regulations.

The Stranglers strike me as one such group attempting to cash in. On the face of it, they've got all the punk credentials: the name, the musical incompetence, even a gig supporting Patti Smith. But one look at this album is enough to let you know where The Stranglers are at - or, perhaps, where their record company would like them to be at.

There's a beautifully designed sleeve and inner sleeve, a special label with The Stranglers' rat logo and even - try and hide the groans - a free single. ELP should be so lucky! As a special bonus for us lucky reviewers, there's a bundle of press cuttings, fax, pix and info, a press release that's magnificently mistyped and - here comes the real killer - a card from their press-and-public-relations consultant.

This is the music of disaffected youth, struggling against a hard

Damned and the Pistols have as their saving grace; they're about as energetic as a slug, and their lyrics, far from providing an outlet for the frustrations of today's young, are the same old tripe used by most of the bands the punks love to hate - but with a few naughty swear words thrown in.

Here's an example of the wit and wisdom of The Stranglers from "Peaches": "*Strolling along, minding my own business/Well there goes a girl now, 'hi'/She's got me going up and down/She's got me going up and down/Walking on the beaches looking at the peaches/Well I've got the notion girl that you've got some suntan lotion in that bottle of yours/Spread it all over my peeling skin, baby, that feels real good/All the skirts lapping up the sun/Lap me up.*"

All this is delivered in the usual arrogant tone, as though it were something momentous, and over a stunningly boring keyboard-dominated riff. It has been suggested that The Stranglers resemble The Doors: an insult if I ever heard one. It's true that the opening cut, "Sometimes", sounds like it's based on the "Light My Fire" organ solo; yet they are more akin to a late-'60s Detroit band, SRC, through their use of keyboards, but without half the Americans' style in exploiting doom-laden chords, nor even anything as remotely cheeky as combining "Hall Of The Mountain King" with "Beck's Bolero".

In truth, The Stranglers are no more than a cut-rate version of '60s American punk bands, but with none of the fizz that made that music so enjoyable. About the only thing they do well is write the titles to their songs; "Grip", "Down In The Sewer" and "Ugly" promise something more interesting than a succession of deadening riffs and a noticeable lack of ideas. The only sense in which The Stranglers could be considered new wave is that no one has had the gall to palm off this rubbish before. *Michael Oldfield, MM Apr 23*



Quirks, niceness and charm: (l-r) Johnny, Tommy, Joey and Dee Dee Ramone



## SINGLES

### Sex Pistols God Save The Queen

VIRGIN

Ramalamafa fa fa! Just in case there was any danger of forgetting that the Pistols are a rock band instead of just a media hoax/guaranteed talk-show laff-getter/all-purpose scapegoat or whatever, here's a record which actually managed to squeak its way past the official guardians of our morality and may well be in your shops any minute now. It may even stay there long enough for you to buy it. It comes out on Saturday and it'll probably be banned by Monday, so move f-a-s-t.

The "real" title of this song is "No Future", but it's received so much notoriety as "God Save The Queen" that now it's called "God Save The Queen" so that you can get what you ask for when you ask for it. And what you will get when you ask for it is a remorseless, streamlined crusher of a single that establishes the Pistols' credentials as a real live rock'n'roll band. Up front, star of stage and screen Johnny Rotten (the singer) gets to grips with the already oft-quoted lyric in the inimitably charming manner that has made him the darling of international cafe society. "*We're the future/ You're the future/NO FUTURE!*" he leers, except that there is a future, you're it and if you don't take it, then you've only yerownass to blame...

Anyway, buy it. Buy it whether you like the Sex Pistols or not. If people try that hard to stop you from hearing something, then you owe it to yourself to find out why. Besides, since 1977 marks the Queen's ascent to cult-figure status, maybe the reason that punx dig her so much is that she's a shining

example to all of us. How many of you dole queue cowboys can get that much

bread for posing all year? Gabba gabba hey! Which reminds me...*NME, May 28*

### Ramones Sheena Is A Punk Rocker

SIRE  
For the time being, this is available as a 12-incher with a cute picture sleeve, T-shirt offer, green stamps, chance to win a three-year subscription to *New Society* and all manner of specialised weirdness like that, but I'm reviewing this off a plain old seven-incher and it still sounds sufficiently monstrous.

Monstrously charming, that is. "Sheena Is A Punk Rocker" is a heart-warming love song with references to surfboards and discotheques and it's got harmonies and a chorus and... and... Look, all the Ramones' songs sound like hit singles and then don't sell, but this song is so flat-out delightful that not even the dull-as-bleedin'-ditch-water Brit-public will be able to resist it. The sheer charm and essential niceness of Dolly Ramone's four horrible sons is gonna win out. And even if it doesn't, there's always the double B-side of "Commando" (from the last album) and "I Don't Care" (never previously released) to cop the sympathy vote. Me, I like "I Don't Care" because of the beautifully soulful way in which Joey Ramone lists all the various things he doesn't care about.

"Heart-warming" just isn't the word, though I haven't the faintest idea what it is. *NME, May 28*



1977

APRIL - JUNE



March 1977: Elvis Costello and his natural-finish Fender Jazzmaster during the photoshoot for the cover of his debut album *My Aim Is True*

# “I’m not askin’ anybody for charity”

Introducing, on Stiff Records, ELVIS COSTELLO, a sharp-eyed laureate of the new wave. “I’m not an arbitrator of public taste or opinion,” he says. “I don’t have a following of people waiting for my next word.”

— MELODY MAKER JUNE 25 —

*“Let’s talk about the future now, we’ll put the past away”* Elvis Costello, “Less Than Zero”

**E**LVIS COSTELLO WAS emphatic: he would volunteer no information about his past. “I don’t,” he said, adjusting his shades impatiently, “really think that the past – my past – is all that interesting. I don’t see any point in talking about the past. I don’t want to get into that. I mean, I haven’t just learned the guitar in the last 10 minutes, but I’m not going to get talking about what I’ve done in the past.”

“Nobody showed any interest in me then. If you weren’t there, you missed it and that’s it. It’s gone. The people who were there then either appreciated it or they didn’t. The past would only be relevant to them. As far as I’m concerned, it’s pointless talking about the past. Fuck it. I’d just rather talk about the future, you know.”

There, I told you he was emphatic, didn’t I?

Elvis Costello and I are bickering this sun-drenched Tuesday afternoon in an office above Stiff Records’ London HQ because I had, accidentally, seen and been enthralled by his performance a week earlier at the Nashville Rooms.

Friday, May 27, it was: I’d tubed over to West Kensington to catch the Rumour that night. The presence, at the bar of the Nashville, of Stiff executive Jake Riviera, accompanied by an assorted crew of Stiff hirelings and lackeys, seemed, initially, to be of no profound consequence.

There exist, after all, several connections between Stiff, Graham Parker and the Rumour; and anyway, Jake ain’t the kind of cat who’d miss out on a decent lig should one appear on the horizon as it had that evening.

Jake’s appearance, however, was not on this occasion relegated to the pursuit of hedonistic adventures. He announced casually that one Elvis Costello, a recent Stiff protégé, was to make a previously unscheduled debut as supporting attraction for the Rumour. This information I received with considerable interest. Elvis Costello, though not yet a name on the lips of the nation, had released two singles (“Less Than Zero” and, more recently, “Alison”) of rare distinction. To see this enigmatic charmer in action was,

unquestionably, a proposition not to be overlooked.

Well, I dragged myself away from the bar as a brief whisper of applause signalled El’s appearance. And there he stood, alone on the stage: black cropped hair swept back, the inevitable shades shielding his eyes, slickly cut Harry Fenton jacket, blue jeans and Fender guitar. His attitude and »



KEITH MORRIS / GETTY

performance were both characterised by an aggressive conviction and, as the applause between songs intensified, a clear and thrilling confidence.

Elvis Costello, let me tell you, bowled me out of my breeches that night. Why, I even swore that if a platter containing such Costello meisterwerks as “(The Angels Wanna Wear) My Red Shoes”, “Mystery Dance”, “I’m Not Angry” and “Waiting For The End Of The World” was not in the vicinity of my Dansette turntable by the end of the month I’d be around to Stiff looking for the head of Jake Riviera.

The fact that Jake’s head remains unsevered would suggest that the platter for which I yearned has been delivered; and so it has, to my immense delight. Trouble is that Stiff, after falling out with Island, are without a distribution organisation. El’s album has been temporarily suspended – it was originally due for release this very week, actually. Fear not, however. It will be with you soon. In the meantime, I thought I’d bring you a despatch from the Elvis Costello front...

**H**ERE WE GO: Elvis Costello is 22. He’s been writing songs for eight years. Since he first negotiated three juvenile chords on a battered guitar, in fact. He reluctantly admits to listening to the likes of The Beatles, Cliff Bennett and Georgie Fame as an adolescent: “Standard stuff. Whatever was on the radio.”

Elvis, though he elsewhere proves to be refreshingly honest and forthright in the opinions he expresses, remains defiantly vague about the songs he was composing during this early period of his career. “I’ve written hundreds of songs,” he says. “I write at least a song a week. That doesn’t necessarily mean I keep them all.

“They’re not all classics. I mean, I’ve discarded songs I wrote last month because I thought they were inept or didn’t match up to the best of what I’ve written. I wouldn’t talk about them, let alone songs I wrote eight years ago.”

I had been interested in these earlier songs, I explain, simply because I wanted to form some idea of the pattern and evolution of his writing. The songs collected on his forthcoming album, *My Aim Is True*, for instance, are marked by a precocious maturity. Costello may deal principally with themes familiar in rock – the majority, in fact, are concerned with fiercely detailed accounts of romantic encounters and failures – but he introduces a ruthless honesty to these themes and invests his observations and scenarios with perceptive insights and astonishingly vivid images.

The insecurities and infidelities of relationships, adolescent attempts to attain a personal identity and independence, are examined with sensitive compassion and wit often quite acerbic, but equally as often, as on the classic “Alison”, with an exquisite tenderness.

Always, Costello retains his originality as a lyricist: he avoids conclusively the obvious and tiresome teendream preoccupations of comparative writers like Nils Lofgren (the midget Yank’s recent work, at least), Elliott Murphy and Springsteen. No, Elvis’ songs possess the cutting clarity of the

best of Graham Parker and Van Morrison: indeed, like this latter pair, Costello’s music refers constantly to the classic pop/rock standards of the last decade, each song being sharply defined and full of irresistible hooks and delightful instrumental phrasing (for the verve and incisiveness of the album’s sound, some considerable credit must be attributed to Nick Lowe, Elvis’ producer).

“This influence stuff,” says Costello, when several of the aforementioned musicians are mentioned, “is really irritating, ‘cos people are always trying to pin you down to sounding like somebody else. I appreciate the comparison you drew with Graham Parker. I suppose that it’s because he’s currently maybe the only person that’s doing anything like me.

“If there’s a general musical area that he’s working in, then I accept that I’m working in a similar area and the comparison is validly drawn. And I’d rather be compared to Graham Parker than Tom Jones. If someone came along and said that I sounded like John Denver then I’d fucking worry. It’s better to be compared to somebody good; but it still doesn’t mean that I sit at home trying to think of ways to rewrite songs from *Heat Treatment*.

“Anyway, if I’d had a record out before Graham Parker, it would all be reversed... ‘cos, you know, the people who’re saying that I sound like Graham Parker are the same people who said that Graham Parker sounded like Bruce Springsteen, who are the same people who said that Bruce Springsteen sounded like Van Morrison, who are the same people who said that Van Morrison sounded the same as Bobby Bland or whoever. You know, the people who *never* listen to the fucking music.”

The prospect of being compared to Springsteen, whose panavision scenarios – replete with so much obvious romantic, rock-mythology imagery of a kind quite antithetical to Costello’s writing – fills Elvis with anguish and dread.

“Springsteen is always romanticising the fucking street,” he complains, with no little justification. “I’m bored with people who romanticise the fucking street. The street isn’t fucking attractive. I mean, I don’t pretend to live in the heart of one of the worst areas of the world, right. I live near Hounslow. It’s a very boring area. It’s a terrible place. Awful. Nowhere. Nothing happens. There’s nothing exciting or glamorous or romantic about it.

“There’s nothing glamorous or romantic about the world at the moment. There is no place for glamour or romance. Romance, in the old pop-song sense, has gone right out of the fucking window for the moment. Nobody’s got the time or the money. It’s gone beyond all that. But, please remember, I don’t sit around wondering how people see the world, or how they feel about things.

“I don’t attempt to express their feelings. I only write about the way I feel. I mean, I’m not arbitrator of public taste or opinion. I don’t have a following of people who are waiting for my next word. I hope I never have that kind of following. People should be waiting for their own next word. Not mine.”



**E**LVIS APPROACHED STIFF Records last August: he arrived at their office in West London with a tape of his songs and the response of Jake Riviera and Dave Robinson (also manager of Graham Parker) was immediate and enthusiastic.

They signed him to the label, in fact. “There was no phenomenal advance,” he laughs. “They’ve bought me an amp and a tape recorder. I’m glad that they’re not subsidising me to any greater extent. I don’t want to be put on a retainer and spend my time liggig around record company offices like a lot of other musicians.

“I don’t want any charity. I want to be out gigging, earning money. I don’t want anything for nothing. I’m not askin’ anybody for their fucking charity. I went to a lot of record companies before I came to Stiff. Major record companies. And I never asked them for charity. I didn’t go in with any servile attitude.

“I didn’t go in and say, ‘Look, I’ve got these songs and, well, with a bit of patching up and



November 1977: with producer Nick Lowe at the controls (right), Costello chats with Attractions bassist Bruce Thomas as second album *This Year's Model* is put together at Eden Studios in Chiswick, West London





a good producer I might make a good record.' I went in and said, 'I've got some great fucking songs; record them and release them.' Stiff were the only ones that showed that kind of faith in me.

"They let me do it. I'm still working, right. I'll only give up the job when I start working with a band."

Elvis mentions, mischievously, that none of the musicians that contributed their services to his album are credited on the sleeve (Nick Lowe gets a production credit on the label, though). It transpires that this was El's idea of a caustic comment upon the contemporary state of the music business – an industry for which Elvis has very little admiration or respect.

He had a caption, in fact, prepared for the sleeve of his album, which would have read: "No thanks to anybody." Unfortunately, The Damned got there first when they had printed on the sleeve of their album:

"Thanks to no one." El didn't want anyone to think he'd copped the idea, so it was abandoned.

"The people who were directly involved with the album know who they are," El explains, "and they're not the kind of people who'd be worried about credits and namechecks. Equally, the people who were instrumental in stopping me from recording before know who they were, and I wanted to remind them that I hadn't forgotten them.

"Like, I went around for nearly a year with demo tapes before I came to Stiff, and it was always the same response. 'We can't hear the words.' 'It isn't commercial enough.' 'There aren't any singles.' Idiots. Those tapes were just voice-and-guitar demos. I didn't have enough money to do anything with a band. It was just a lack of imagination on the part of those people at the record companies. I felt as if I was bashing my head against a brick wall, those people just weren't prepared to listen to the songs.

"It's a terrible position to be in. You start thinking you're mad. You listen to the radio and you watch the TV and you hear a lot of fucking rubbish. You very rarely turn on the radio or TV and hear anything exciting, right? And, all the time, you know that you're capable of producing something infinitely better.

"But I never lost faith. I'm convinced in my own talent, yeah. Like I said, I wasn't going up to these people meekly and saying, 'Look, with your help and a bit of polishing up, and with all your expertise and knowledge of the world of music, we might have a moderate success on our hands.'

"I was going in thinking, 'You're a bunch of fucking idiots who don't know what you're doing. I'm bringing you a lot of good songs, why don't you go ahead and fucking well record them.' They didn't seem to understand that kind of approach.

"No, it didn't make me bitter. I was already bitter. I knew what it would be like. I had no illusions. I have no illusions at all about the music business. It was no sudden shock to be confronted by these idiots. I didn't ever think that I was going to walk into a record company to meet all these fat guys smoking big cigars who'd say something like, 'Stick with me son. I'll make you a STAR.'

"I'm not starry-eyed in the slightest. You can tell what all these people are like instinctively. You just have to look at them to tell that they're fucking idiots. But I don't want to come off sounding like I'm obsessed with the music business.

"I couldn't give a shit about the music business. They just don't know anything. That's all you've got to remember. They're irrelevant. I don't give any thought to any of those people. They're not worth my time."

**E**LVIS, WHO BY this time seems to be metamorphosing before my very eyes into the superhuman guise of Captain Verbals, is telling me about his album. It was recorded, he says, on his days off from work (he is a computer analyst in Acton), over a very brief period.

He was fortunate, he readily admits, that Nick Lowe was so sympathetic a producer: their respective ideas were entirely compatible and there were few arguments about the sound and instrumentation employed.

All the songs were written within weeks of the first session; "Less Than Zero", his first single, was written three days before it was recorded, for instance. Elvis just says he felt inspired and excited. The hits just kept on

coming, as it were. (*My Aim Is True*, incidentally, is the first album I've heard for ages that sounds as if it is essentially a collection of Top 10 singles.)

"I just love the sound of the album," Elvis enthuses. "Cos I love things that sound great on the radio. 'Less Than Zero', I thought sounded great on the radio. The record isn't for people with fucking great hi-fis. I'm not

interested in those people, or that kind of mentality. I don't want my records to be used to demonstrate fucking stereos in Laskys. I just want people to listen to the fucking music.

"I don't want to be successful so that I can get a lot of money and retire to a house in the fucking country. I don't want any of that rock'n'roll rubbish. I don't want to go cruising in Hollywood or hang out at all the star parties. I'm not interested in any of that. It's the arse end of rock'n'roll. I'm just interested in playing.

"I want to put a band together as soon as possible and get out on the fucking road. We're auditioning people this week. We're looking for young people. People that want to get out and play. Putting a band together is the most important thing at the moment.

"I think it might be difficult getting the right kind of people and I can imagine us wading through a right bunch of idiots. The group sound I want will be a lot sparser than the album sound. I just want bass, drum, guitar – my guitar – and for keyboards we'll probably go for a Vox or Farfisa sound.

"I want to get away from the conventional group sound. I'd say that I want a kind of pop-group lineup, but people might take that as something lightweight or trivial. But it will be a pop lineup in the sense that it won't be a rock band.

"I hate hard-rock bands. I hate anything with fucking extended solos or bands that are concerned with any kind of instrumental

virtuosity. I can listen to maybe 15 seconds of someone like The Crusaders, say, before I get very bored. I know how good they are because everybody keeps telling me how fucking marvellous they are. But I get bored.

"There are going to be no fucking soloists in my band. The songs are the most important thing. I want the songs to mean something to people. I don't mean by that that I want them to be significant. It's just that too much rock has cut itself off from people. It's become like ballet or something. Ballet is only for people who can afford to go and see it. It's not for anybody else. You don't get ballet going on in your local pub.

"There's a lot of rock music that's become exclusive and it's of no use to anyone. Least of all me. Music has to get to people. In the heart, in the head. I don't care where, as long as it fucking gets them. So much music gets thrown away. It's such a fucking waste.

"That's why I like and write short songs. It's a discipline. There's no disguise. You can't cover up songs like that by dragging in banks of fucking synthesizers and choirs of angels. They have to stand up on their own. With none of that nonsense. Songs are just so fucking effective. People seem to have forgotten that.

"Like, people used to live their lives by songs. They were like calendars or diaries. And they were pop songs. Not elaborate fucking pieces of music. You wouldn't say, like, 'Yeah, that's the time I went out with Janet, we went to see the LSO playing Mozart.' You'd remember you went out with Janet because they were playing 'Summer In The City' on the radio."

You will have gathered by now that Elvis is committed to success; he's not, however, altogether sure when that success will be achieved.

"There are lot of people," he says, "who should be successful. If ability had anything to do with success, then there would be a whole lot of obscure people who'd be famous and there would be a whole lot of famous people who'd be lingering in obscurity."

Was there anyone, I wondered, that he would like to see becoming famous? "Yeah," he replied. "Me."

Allan Jones •

"I hate hard-rock bands. I hate anything with fucking extended solos"



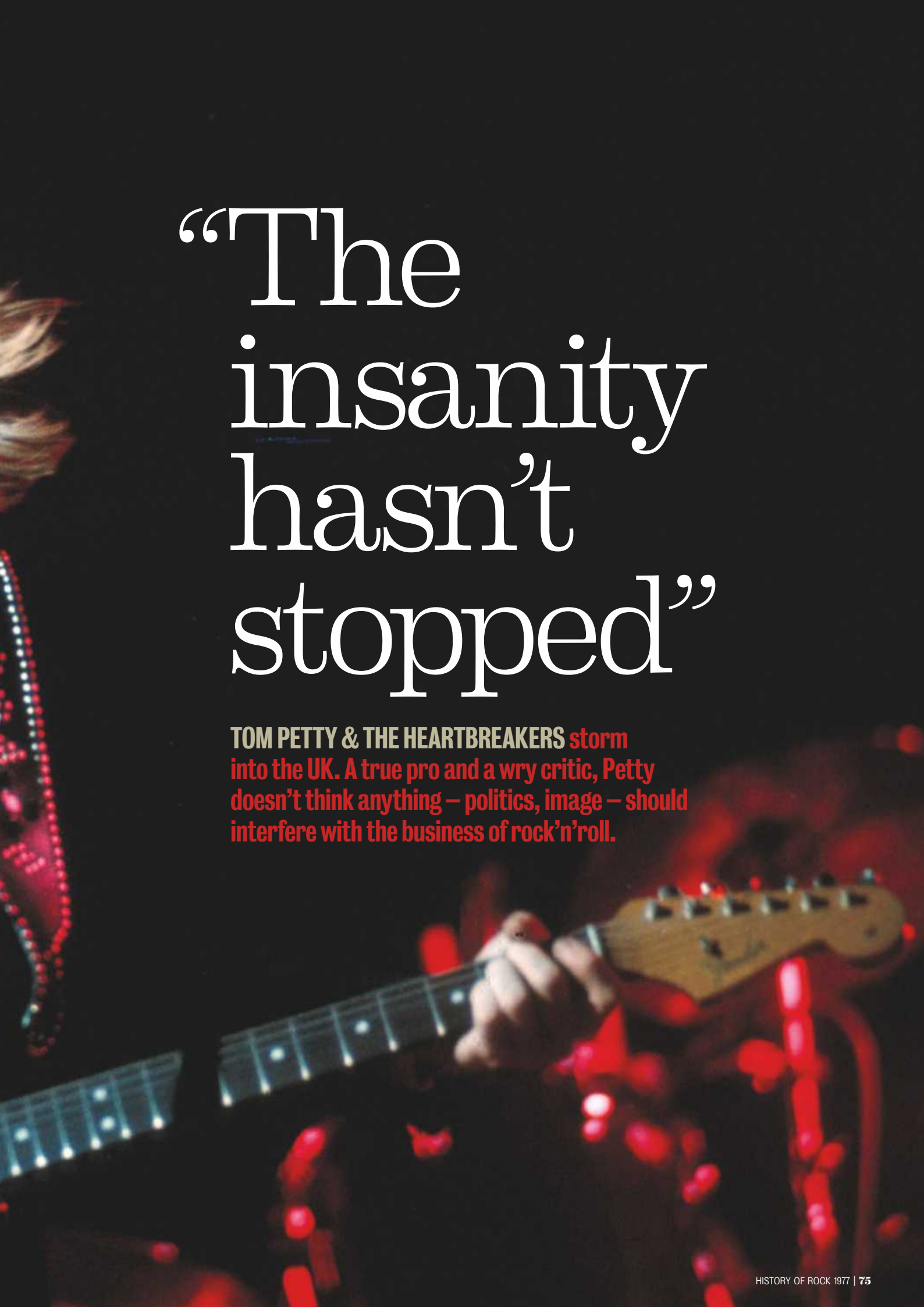
# 1977

APRIL - JUNE



REX FEATURES

"I dig the whole romantic aspect of rock 'n' roll"; Tom Petty onstage with the Heartbreakers in 1977



“The  
insanity  
hasn’t  
stopped”

**TOM PETTY & THE HEARTBREAKERS** storm into the UK. A true pro and a wry critic, Petty doesn't think anything – politics, image – should interfere with the business of rock'n'roll.

## — MELODY MAKER JUNE 25 —

**I**T DIDN'T SEEM right somehow, sandwiching Tom Petty between the Muppets and Kenny Rogers, but stranger things have happened on the set of *Top Of The Pops*.

Petty, pretty exhausted by the time the dress rehearsal is taking place and with no sleep for two days, is bemused by the whole carry-on, but still maintains control. I mean, it is expected that he should be on his knees thanking producer Robin Nash for the exposure. He shouldn't be stopping in the middle of the song, complaining that the backing track isn't loud enough. He does.

Any respectable band, according to Petty's Island Records' press officer, is embarrassed at participating in the *TOTP* charade, though they won't bluntly admit to it. Petty seems a little frustrated about it all, and on returning to the dressing room, immediately heads for the whisky bottle for consolation. When the show is finally recorded, Petty and the Heartbreakers actually look as if they're enjoying it all. Whisky rock'n'rollers.

The appearance on *Top Of The Pops*, important though it is in determining the fate of the single, "Anything That's Rock'n'Roll", seems trivial when placed alongside the catalogue of events that have whisked Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers from being an unknown American band a couple of months ago to one that is on the lips of most people in the music business and quickly winning popularity among the masses.

Backed only by a debut album and very little feedback from their own country, Petty and his band dallied in a couple of months ago to a support spot on the prestigious Nils Lofgren tour. Lofgren's success pattern is similar to Petty's build-up, with minimal American recognition and quite the opposite here.

Petty, history now has it, went down the proverbial storm on the Lofgren tour, and Island Records sussed out that they had a winner on their hands, backing up their optimism with Petty's own headlining tour as soon as his Lofgren commitment had ended. It was, I think, an unprecedented move, a virtually unknown act turning from support to headline literally overnight, but the optimism of the record company and promoter was borne out, with an enthusiastic response from fans who recalled Petty's performance as support to Nils.

Petty and the Heartbreakers got together about 18 months ago in Los Angeles. He had known the band (Stan Lynch, Mike Campbell, Ron Blair and Benmont Tench) from his days back home in Florida, from which they had all departed to seek fame and fortune in greener fields.

Petty had come to LA with a band called Mudcrutch and when they broke up, his time was spent working in the studio, fulfilling his recording contract with Shelter. Petty just had to get out of the South. The legendary "Southern boogie" wasn't quite his bag.

"Nothin' 'gainst it," Petty mutters from behind his sleepy haze. "I thought the Allmans were good, but I didn't dig the imitations. I mean, I lived in the South for years and not everybody played that way. I remember seein' the Allmans when they were playin' Beatles songs and wearin' collarless jackets. They were one of the first bands I ever saw.

"Then they got this new kinda thing and everybody just jumped over to it, and then everybody else naturally assumed that it had been goin' on for years. It was like, 'Hey man, there's a record company opened up in Macon [Capricorn] and all ya gotta do is play like this and you get a contract.' But it just wasn't the kinda thing we were into. We were more English-influenced. I got my first guitar after I heard The Beatles and Stones. I always dug that stuff..."

He goes off on a tangent, as is his wont.

"I dig rock bands that are rock bands that are complete entities. That's one of the things that's



"When I was 14, me and Mike used to play in those topless bars"

"Yeah, I did, I knew we were. This is a good band. We know it's a good band. When we came on the Nils tour, we had a near riot goin' on at the first gig within 15 minutes. I could tell what was happenin' and it happened every night.

"It still hasn't got artificial, but I don't want to stay on the road much longer without havin' a chance to stop and think about all this, get some more songs, keep evolving and keep raising the standards. I don't like the music business and I refuse become a businessman, although I know you've got to deal with it. I just want to entertain. If we all get to be great musicians, we won't all just stand there and say, 'Hey, dig my hands, dig my fingers, or dig my throat.'

"We ain't that way. We're cruisers. I'd rather have a few drinks and dance around, but still play. All the people I always liked did that. They played.

If you went to see the Rolling Stones, you actually saw something. You saw the band play. There was more to it than what your ears got and there was more to it than what your eyes got.

"I've seen instances where the image takes over everything. What we are is a working rock'n'roll band."



"We're professionals": (l-r) Benmont Tench, Mike Campbell, Tom Petty, Ron Blair and Stan Lynch backstage in L.A., August 1977

frustrating me now. I'm not able to control everything that's happenin' around me because we've been so overwhelmed since coming to England. Since I got off the

plane, the insanity hasn't stopped... though I like insanity.

"I mean, I'm insane. This is like goin' to Disneyland, you know. It's an E-coupon ride. Mr Toad's Wild Ride. That's what I think it is: into the bus, into the dressing room, onto the stage, back to the studio.

"After the Rainbow, we're just takin' a week off, to get things together how we want to do 'em. We were just a little band, you know, before this, just trying to rock'n'roll—and now it's a bit more pushy. We're grateful and all that, that people dig it, but I'm just concerned that it stays under control.

"We just wanna get on and play. If you hire this band, you'll get a rock'n'roll show. This is a real thing. I get slightly put off by the theatre groups, or whatever they are. A lot of rock bands try to act like theatre groups, and it just ain't real at all. It's just a big stance. I don't think that you should do anything that you can't back up. A stance shouldn't be taken unless it's determined by the music.

"There's a lot that is 80 percent stance and 20 percent music. It's like, can the music catch up on the stance? I've thought about it a lot and it's not right. The music should determine the stance, know what I mean? You are what you are.

"I wanna be good. We're professionals. I don't think that's a bad word. It's just guaranteeing people their money's worth. You can't say, 'Well, I've been out for 14 nights and this is the 15th, so fuck it.'

"You have to go out and kick it. It's a little bit of a trick stayin' in that frame of mind where you can kick it at will. Really, it's just a matter of stayin' aware of what's goin' on."

Accepting, then, that Petty was aware of the dramatic incidents surrounding him since his British arrival, did he think that he was ready to go out on a headlining tour so soon after supporting Lofgren? The boy is confident.



Reading past interviews with Petty, I learned that he had discovered that chatting about his relationship with girls made good copy, and not being one to interfere with that...

"I mean, what other hobbies can you carry around with you in a hotel room, apart from chicks? What are you gonna do, build aeroplanes, bowl? 'Course not, you're gonna look for some girls," Captain Stud continues.

"I dig it. I dig the whole romantic aspect of rock'n'roll. It's fun. You're a fool, I think. You'd have to be a fool to do this and not enjoy yourself. As much as I can bitch some days, I always enjoy myself... some days I enjoy bitchin'."

Not wishing to hear much more about the frivolity of being Tom Petty, I drag the subject back to the past, from whence the conversation stemmed in the first place. Most of Petty's repertoire early on revolved around Rolling Stones numbers. From that, he took encouragement, calculating that if Jagger and Richards could write songs, there was no reason why he couldn't do the same.

The first song he wrote was probably about some girl that ditched him, he said, adding that he was very fond of good old-fashioned love songs, which set him off on a side-road again.

"At this point in time," he reminisced, "I miss the good old boy/ girl songs because I think those are the ones that the kids especially relate to. I mean, I like all the new bands and I like the fact that there's a lotta new rock bands and that they're young and that they've got energy, because the last few years have been so boring. I think it's great that all these bands are around now, just leapin' through the air and doin' what rock'n'roll does.

"But I get a little distressed when they get all political and there's no kind of basic feeling. I mean, some people take music too seriously. For God's sake, don't take it too seriously. That's a very funny word, 'serious', and it's come up a lot lately. 'Are you serious about this?'"

"I guess I am in one sense of the word, in that I really want to do it. But if you take it seriously every week, you become a bank clerk or whatever and you miss the redemption of rock'n'roll. I'm crazy, you know, and it may be my downfall, but I can't take it that seriously.

"Like, every day somebody says, 'How do you feel about all this success?' and the five of us are just sitting around. What can we say but, 'We dig it.' I haven't really thought about it to any great extent. Nothin's hit me yet, and I hope it don't. I hope I keep acceleratin' rather than tryin' to figure out what all this means to me. How boring. Who the hell wants to read what this means to me?"

"All they want is records. The records and the shows are what it's about. I'm just so knocked out that thousands of kids dig our band. That's a tremendous rush, enough to make you do this every day, because thousands of kids dig it. It's great: I wrote this song and the masses are goin' to hear it - too much. And they like it - even better."

Back once more to the original subject of his early days, which I have been attempting to pin Petty down to for the past hour, and this time we make a bit more headway. After playing around Florida for a couple of years, Petty moved to LA ("We had to choose whether to starve in New York where it was cold or in LA where it was warm.")

In LA, he met the Heartbreakers and the ideas for the future seemed to be mutual. Petty at the time had been doing a lot of recording with Denny Cordell, and when Denny wanted to do some demos Tom brought the Heartbreakers along and it worked out fine. Petty, though, had to be persuaded that he could make a go of it with the band, after being stung through his Mudcrutch experience.

Last summer, Petty and the Heartbreakers set themselves up as guinea pigs to test the new Shelter Studios in Hollywood and after 15 days came out with their first album. The conditions weren't the best, recording in 100 degrees heat and Petty writing songs in the afternoon and recording them at night, but everybody was satisfied with the result. Al Kooper heard the album and insisted that the band should support him on a tour of bars across the States.

It was a weird tour, Petty recalled, in front of beatniks, old Blood, Sweat & Tears freaks and assorted married couples, but it was in line with a policy of having to get out and forcibly win audiences over. It reminded Petty of earlier days back in Florida, when he worked clubs with Mike Campbell.

"Ten years ago, when I was 14, me and Mike used to play in those topless bars, doing five or six sets a night, seven nights a week. We'd get a hundred bucks for this week. To get somebody's attention away from six pairs of tits is a real gig, and we'd do that every night. If I've got to leap out, I'm goin' to leap out to that table and you're gonna watch this. We still have to do that. It's what keeps it so good." *Harry Doherty* •

## "They played adequately"

**MM JUNE 25** An under-amplified Petty and co are upstaged by some hungry young Rats from Dublin.

**O**K, LET'S START with some facts. Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers hit the music scene with a creditably impressive debut album a few months back. Some say it was the best debut they had heard in an age, and while I reckon that is a trifle expansive, it is certainly a neatly produced album with a handful of fine songs.

The band was packed on board the recent Nils Lofgren gravy train, and took the laurels from right under the jaded Lofgren's nose. Good for them. Then came this headline tour, ending up with Tom P and the boys at London's Rainbow on Sunday night.

Given these facts, I just cannot understand the tumultuous reception given to the band. They played adequately enough, doing a very fair cover job of the main songs on the album and letting rip on some older material, but it was nothing to go berserk about.

For a start, it was under-amplified - a rare event - with Tom's soft voice often well below the level of the guitar line. Then came the songs themselves. A good half of the show featured the best tracks from the debut album, with songs like "American Girl" and "Strangered In The Night" showing the band at their full commercial appeal.

They worked well together, Mike

Campbell's lead guitar keeping strictly to the record over the rhythm section of Ron Blair on bass and Stan Lynch on drums. Campbell's guitar was one of the main points of interest. He plays with control and as much subtlety as the fairly limited structure of the music allows, his tone and feedback control colouring his crisp solos.

Keyboard player Benmont Tench is a careful player, using his synthesizer effectively to add atmosphere to the gentler songs and the electric piano to beef up the rockers.

But all this, plus Tom's bounding rhythm work and aforementioned vocals, did little to mask the fact that the other half of the band's material was bland and uninspired, lacking musical excitement or lyrical appeal.

For my money, the evening was made by support band The Boomtown Rats, a bunch of Dublin lads led by Bob Geldof who play with a finely honed combination of attack, pace, energy and crisp musicality.

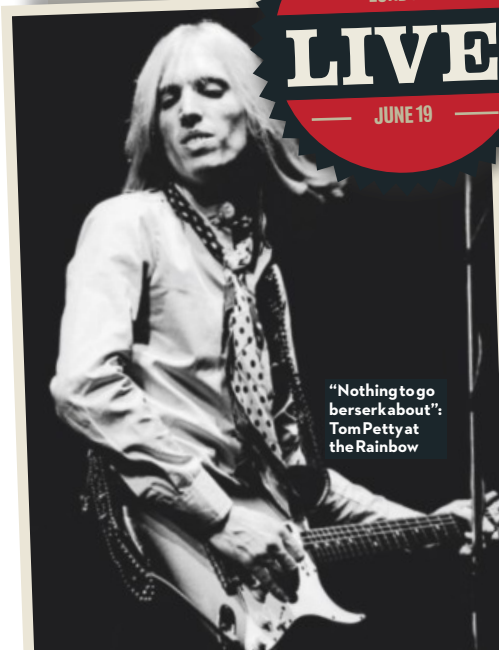
Their music is R&B derived, reminiscent at times of the early Stones, Chuck Berry, the Feelgoods... you get the message. Twin guitars cut and thrust, spitting chords and sneaking out spiky solos while the rhythm section moves like someone is putting the boot in

at a regular four to the bar.

Out in front, Geldof, a tall, strangely animated figure, at times a dead ringer for an arrogant Jagger, kicks, runs, dives and generally hurls himself around the stage, cutting to the mic with split-second precision to deliver his vocals with guts and power.

You may have seen it all somewhere before, but the precision and energy of this band make them a whole new experience.

*John Orme*



"Nothing to go berserk about": Tom Petty at the Rainbow

1977

APRIL - JUNE

# “The dinosaurs are still dancing”

**LED ZEPPELIN** continue an epic US tour. **ROBERT PLANT**, though, has pertinent thoughts on home, recent injury, fame, even punk. “I went to the Roxy and got frightened to death,” says the 28 year-old, “but at the same time, stood my ground.”



June 7-14, 1977: Led Zeppelin play six sold-out shows at Madison Square Garden, NYC

## — MELODY MAKER JUNE 25 —

**T**HE ROBERT PLANT lounging in his hotel suite after a show, playing blues albums by Elmore James, is a far cry from the preening, swaggering stage figure who, half an hour previously, had been the focal point for 20,000 pairs of eyes at Madison Square Garden, New York. Now, with a beer in his hand and with his feet bare, he's what the Americans would call "a regular guy" – normal, almost formal, relaxed, reflective.

Led Zeppelin's public face, 28-year-old Plant has a wry, warm sense of humour, and tonight, in the midst of the band's six-night stint in New York, he's eager to talk about their past, present and future; his very real fears that his foot injury might have spelled doom to his career as a singer; the state of the punk rock industry; his role as a vocalist and relationship with the rest of the band; what can we expect from Zeppelin in the years ahead.

Two years have elapsed since much has been heard of Zeppelin. There was the stultifying boredom of the film *The Song Remains The Same*, but apart from this – silence. Now, they reappear on a long American tour in top gear, and even Plant is forced to comment on the fact that he's smiling almost permanently at the twin joys of being back in harness and finding his foot, injured in a car accident in Greece, to be in decent shape and not too much of a handicap on stage. Despite the lay-off, he says, he has experienced little initial stage fright, because they went through a rigorous two-month rehearsal. They had to. With no new album from which to draw, they had to first get used to playing together and then work out new applications of material from *Physical Graffiti* and older records.

"So I was really at home with the idea of playing. The only thing I didn't know about was whether I was going to be able to pace myself out, with my foot problem. For the first two or three gigs I was really measuring every move I made, to find if I'd gone too far or whatever. The first gig in Dallas, Texas, I was petrified. Since Earls Court in London, all this horrendous physical hoo-ha had taken place and for the 10 minutes before I walked up those steps in Dallas I was cold with fright.

"Supposing I couldn't move around the stage properly, because my right foot is permanently enlarged now? Well, it was killing for the first two gigs. I had to be virtually carried back on one foot. But once I got it used to the concussive knocks of stage work, it was OK and now I've paced myself so I can work without anyone, hopefully, realising that I have this thing to live with. The thing is, I don't really know what I'm doing with my body when I'm playing and I just throw myself around the stage instinctively.

"But Dallas was the worry: I thought about what would happen if the foot wouldn't take it. Yet when I walked up the steps to the stage, all the premonitions and anxieties washed away, and the exhilaration took over. I thought, 'Ah, it's been so long', and I just loved being back up there – and I was loony again!"

And the crowds had been great. To work live was, in Zeppelin's plan for *The Big Return*, a stimulus for any new albums they intended after such a spell of inactivity. But they had difficulties with that programme. No new album meant they were "trading on past glories", as Plant described it. And using material people were familiar with, they had the challenge of giving people something above and beyond what they had already seen, because who wanted a Zeppelin stage re-run of two or three years ago?

This was achieved by bringing back the acoustic set for the first time in America for about seven years, and introducing songs like "The Battle Of Evermore" – previously rejected because Sandy Denny featured on the record, and so they couldn't accurately recreate it on stage – and taking the odd risk.

"To begin with, people were a little bit restless. They didn't know what the hell was going on. Kept looking at us, presumably thinking, 'Are they really *that* old? But because of the way in which we've taken the challenge of reworking our old material and introducing some unlikely aspects of it into stage work, we've gone a stage farther again."

For the first few concerts, they would look sheepishly at each other on stage. No one spoke, but the question each seemed to be asking was: are we getting it right?

"Suddenly it burst through after six gigs, so that by the time we got to places like St Louis, it had taken on another level of control, rather than merely trotting out the old favourites. For example, John Paul Jones is getting far more involved now, he's the sort of man-of-the-match!"

And so, says Plant, he seemed to be finding himself smiling all the time now – "like some grinning goon at the Talk Of The Town" – because they had triumphed with their programme, and most of all because he had been able to overcome something he was never sure he was going to be capable of doing.

"I've won the battle up to now. It's a great feeling, I can tell you."

Zeppelin were well into the American tour by now, and it seemed appropriate to ask Plant about the long-term future of the band, particularly in view of the noisy soundings by lesser breeds who wanted them to move over and make way for youth. Since they had gone so far since their formation in 1968, and since he was talking quite enthusiastically about their future, how did the singer see it shaping?

"We took off with so much invigorating energy in '68, and then we curbed that energy so that the whole dynamics of the band would ebb and flow so that we wouldn't burn ourselves out musically by taking the opportunity to go hair-raisingly mad and fade a whole-lotta-loving into the sunset!" he said. "By sitting down and taking up the challenge and

realising that we were, are, and will be, capable of expanding, that can be the only hope for the future, and that's how we want to make our impression and be remembered... for constantly trying to ride the winds of change.

"And how good we were at it in the end, when it's all over, will be up to the individual to judge. I personally think we've done it all right."

How did Robert see the band's fans today? Were they picking up new ones all along the line, or gaining new ones and losing old ones – what were his own observations of the audiences on this tour? He laughed and replied:

"I'd say we have a lot of people there since the beginning or people who look as if they were! Then again, I looked behind the stage tonight, in the seats that are not readily sought after, and found a whole new breed coming up. Kids who've got a pirate Zeppelin T-shirt on that's much too big for them. And then I smile. And I see our children, and kids a few steps behind them digging it, and in the end I come round to thinking that it's funny it took such a long time to bridge so many gaps, musically, y'know.

"There was, I mean, that period when there was us, alone, with so many other bands of good quality and calibre – the



With an acoustic section back in the set, bassist John Paul Jones plays a triple-necked instrument made by Alan Manson





Robert Plant with  
"freaky but great"  
record producer and  
musician Kim Fowley  
in Los Angeles, 1977

'underground music' thing. Now, it doesn't mean a light, just an old cliché. Now the whole scene's wide open, and it's a matter purely of how good you are, whatever your style."

Take his own tastes, for example. He was currently studying Bulgarian folk music, especially because it was all vocal and very different from what he had listened to before.

"They use quarter-tones, but at the same time, in their harmonies, instead of firsts, thirds, fifths and sevenths and all the conventional European styles of harmony, they use firsts and seconds. And I've never been trained to do anything in my life and I find it difficult to harmonise with myself on records. But I find it very inspiring to listen to stuff like that, on the Nonesuch label from the Elektra catalogue. It comes straight out of the hills – it's what you might call mass singing, like village singing when a village gets together at various times of the year when they hope for this, that and the other to happen... all that we in Britain have almost lost.

"Otherwise, I'm never too far away from Robert Johnson. There's no way on this earth that I could ever find his work tiring. And then there are several things which have come up very nicely – Fleetwood Mac have taken a nice turn. Obviously it's not musically new, but I do like that kick-in-the-air California-sand music when it's played really well. A lot of it went sour, but Fleetwood Mac have brought something good out of it. You can never get too far away from Mick Fleetwood's drums, which is just like it used to be, the way he uses tom-tom.

"Little Feat have always intrigued me. They've never really got their just desserts for what they don't play, rather than for what they do play. I'd like to see which way Mike Heron goes next, because that album was much better. He seemed a little rigid and I think he'll loosen up a little bit.

"Lots of varying styles appeal to me. There's one track over here by a group called Kansas that hasn't even come out in England, which is a big hit single here. If they have a good record company in England you should be hearing it soon, and it's a good 'un – I think they're probably a bit like bands like Boston, who have one good song on every album! And without blowing our own trumpet too much – Dave Edmunds is great [he is signed to Swan Song, Zeppelin's management stable]. Bit of a loony, but really, really good."

**B**ECAUSE HE SEES so much genuine talent around, Plant seems to cast a weary, if not impatient, eye on the new wave-cum-punk movement which has gripped the nation for the past year. First off, he said he did not feel competitive towards any of the established names, no matter what was said. "In the early days, I guess we were in competition a little, when Beck and Ronnie Wood and Rod Stewart and Mickey Waller and Nicky Hopkins were on the road, because Jeff Beck had come out of The Yardbirds and Jimmy had, and there was that interplay. But Jimmy's my mate, and I can tell you none of this competitiveness came from him, even though it seemed to make all the going-out-together-for-pleasure with other musicians an uncomfortable thing.

"But once we started going off, musically, on our own, things settled down and we could mix easily with anyone because there's no competition. I don't mean that to sound how it probably does, big-headed, but with all good individual acts, like say the Stones, we are on our own.

It's only a musical level that we think of ourselves anyway. It's not who can pull the biggest crowds, 'cos we leave that to Elton, God bless him!"

Talking of crowds, Plant continued, what really was the basis of the charge by the punk bands that the dinosaur bands played to such gigantic crowds, the magic communication 'twixt star and fan has been erased? This was sheer nonsense, he argued.

"It was like playing in a living room tonight at Madison Square Garden," he declared. "You could easily walk to the side of the stage, just catch somebody's eye and work to that person, like as in any club. OK, so there were 20,000 people there, but I'm willing to bet that nearly every one of them left that place happy at what they'd seen. It certainly sounded like it to me, anyway, judging from the reception they gave us.

"Let's face it, if Johnny multi-vocabulary Rotten gets his act together he'd have to take it elsewhere, leave Nottingham Boat Club behind, because there'll be too many people to get into

that size of place and he'll have more people being unhappy at his lack of foresight. He'll just have to open it up bigger than that. He'll also have to change his act soon. It's getting a bit tiring, all that, because the dinosaur bands are still dancing."

As a trend, though, he welcomed the new wave and had taken the trouble to visit its London club, the Roxy, several weeks ago. There, he had experienced Johnny Rotten, "who frightened me to death".

Plant said, "Kim Fowley's the closest I've ever seen to him, but Kim Fowley's old enough to be Johnny's dad, and Johnny's as old as me. Kim Fowley's great, one of the great innovators of all time, but he's so permanently weirded out on such a nice level, freaky but great..."

"Anyway, I went to the Roxy and got frightened to death, but at the same time stood my ground for all we dinosaurs, and I saw The Damned. I found them very exciting, thrilling. Rat Scabies is a great drummer. He's no spring chicken either, and when I look at those eyes – well, I know that those leapers do terrible things to your eyes, but I can read the sands of time as well!

"But they're good, The Damned. If they didn't have the paint and clothing or whatever and just came along and did it, they'd probably be twice as big as they are now. But they've had to throw off the robes of the punk thing, and in doing so it's cost them time. They did that T Rex tour, so they've obviously broken out of that melee... but anyway, they were very good.

"Other bands? I saw the group – what's that one with the 15-year-old drummer? Eater! Well, a lot of people need to go home and do their homework. I mean, I play guitar on four tracks on our albums but I wouldn't dare play on stage. When all the shouting's over and it's just down to music and pulling people in who

are going to sit through it, then I'll be there to see it.

"As a basic movement... it's good, but I wish the music was more original and was moving on a stage. The Stranglers, for example, sound like an English Doors pre-LA Woman. So that doesn't do much for me or anyone else, really.

"The intensity and the excitement I do like, because I never forget the first time I saw the Small Faces and The Who, when I was at school. It was that very thing that made me go, 'YEAH' – and I rushed to the barber's and got a French crew or whatever they were called, the right mod haircut.

"So I know what all that's about, rushing around getting a parka and immediately getting chrome side panels for your scooter, and belonging again, 'cos I was just a bit too young for the drape jackets. I understand all that. Everyone needs something to hang on to a little bit, on some level of mass-entertainment 'when-the-work-is-done-what-are-we-gonna-do?' As long as everybody doesn't go overdosing on leapers again, it's fine.

"But I go to a lot of soccer matches [Plant is a rabid Wolves supporter] and I see another element of youth and that really frightens me. We have to make sure that the music doesn't dance hand in hand with the shed boys, because if the two got together, that music could do just as much damage as Chelsea losing 3-1.

"So provided the music really has got some content so that the kids really get off on it, and they wait for certain numbers to come and they really enjoy 'em – then it's worked, and it's the next step. Then it'll be only a matter of time before you're asking them after a nine-year career »

## "I saw The Damned and found them thrilling"



Jimmy Page in the US in 1977, playing a Gibson EDS-1275 double-neck guitar

what they think of this and that. But you'll only be asking these punk-rock bands or new-wave bands or whatever if they vary what they're doing, because there's no staying power in staying the same."

**W**HATEVER THE TAUNTS of Zeppelin as a tasteless macho-rock tank, it's impossible to talk to their singer without forming a real appreciation of his love for the music, which balances the slightly unacceptable doomy image of the band. On stage he comes over with venomous bite and little real heart, and in print he's apt, perhaps, to sound glib. But in person, with the barriers down, he's what you and I describe as "a good chap".

I put it to him that he did not sell sex on stage as did some of his contemporaries in hard-rock singing, but that he relied largely on music instead of posing – surely the antithesis of what was required and expected of a true rock 'n' roll vocalist? "I suppose that when I wear a Wolverhampton Wanderers shirt, that's hardly sexual, but I still read a lot of things saying I'm sexually doing this and sexually looking that on the stage.

"If any of my movements appear sexual, then they are really just accessories to the music at that point in time. I get quite heatedly involved with what's going on musically, and invariably I'm right in front of John Paul's equipment or Jimmy's. I'm concentrating on what I'm listening to and I move accordingly. There are movements I do all the time, regularly, but if I was going to start thinking about how I was going to appear, I might take myself a little too seriously in the wrong direction."

So he did not regard himself as a solo attraction or personality asset to Zeppelin? "Oh God, no. I'm a member of a band. I remember reading once something John Entwistle said about, 'There go Zeppelin again, saying how they're one big happy family and they'll never break up, and we've heard all this before.' But all those critics should realise that I have no vocal accelerations or movements. They are all inspired by the music around me and the knowledge that I can do it anyway and want to push it a bit farther.

"And that can only come by playing with people who surprise you. Like Jimmy's solo tonight in 'No Quarter' – it was just fantastic, very well constructed in such a manner, different from before, so that I can't help but respond differently to that. So that I can never see myself projecting myself as the one who does the vocals while the other three play the music."

His greatest stimulant was the instrumental work of the others.

"I can't see it changing dramatically, either. I'm the guy who puts the words in. No part of my job is to overshadow the music. I'm not a symbol or anything. The only reason that could change it is if, character-wise, we started drifting apart, and then, to keep things together, I'd have to look elsewhere for stimulation."

And was that imminent? "Oh no, no. Bonzo and I are getting on better now than we ever have done. We've only had one fight on this tour!"

Still, he wished he could sing like Steve Marriott. There were many moods to Zeppelin's music, he insisted, and he couldn't think of one single singer who was his inspiration from the same level as the heavier stuff right through to "Stairway To Heaven".

"But I could never be compared with Steve Marriott, because he's too good, unfortunately. He has got the best white voice, for sheer bravado and balls. How he applies it to his career is neither here nor there, but he is the master of white contemporary blues. He came down to some of our rehearsals in London before this tour, and to me, the two of us singing Muddy Waters songs was almost as hair-raising as our first gig.

"That's the dynamism of my vocalism, which I do touch on occasionally. It's only one aspect, although Steve is the best at what he does. On the more mellow side, there are a lot of people who can control their voices in such a way that makes it pleasurable to the ear. At one point, Jesse Colin Young had that ability, when The Youngbloods were at their best, on 'Elephant Mountain' and things like that. Lowell George I do like, and when he sings in a subdued manner he's very good."

Since Plant's musical roots are steeped in his love of the blues, I wondered if he was especially conscious of this debt to the American heritage, and whether, as a result, he thought that the USA saw a different kind of Zeppelin performance from that enjoyed by other countries.

"Right now, America is getting a rebirth from us, like the capital letter of a new paragraph."

But when they return to England later this year with a concert, would they be saying, 'Look, we've been away, but this is the best we can do'?

Earls Court was a peak, Alexandra Palace a disaster, with shocking sound, but right now he felt they were hitting it again. This is probably traceable to the fact that, when working away from home, they concentrated more on intense working.

"Nobody comes up and taps you on the shoulder to involve you in anything that isn't related to work when you're on the road in America. This is solely work. No side effects. Whereas if you're travelling from home to a gig in England, you tend to come out differently on stage, maybe you're more relaxed – but whatever, you're not wound up for work like in America, where you're in a hotel and there's all this security round us and you can feel a kind of tension.

"So you get out on that stage knowing that that's the only release you can possibly have, 'cos you're here to work, and WHOOSH! And after the gig, no jingle jangles or going anywhere, just back to the hotel, put on the Elmore James albums, and unwind that way.

"Whereas in England, working from a set base and doing a gig, going home again, it's different. Of course, if we did just an acoustic set back in England it would probably be our finest hour! Nice and mellow and gentle. But there's a kind of an excitement in an American audience that belongs only to an American audience, and events during the concert which you can pick up on tend to make your reactions to them, through the music, that much more adamant.

"There's a lot of mishandling of kids, for instance, by the authorities, and there are a lot of kids without manners who don't contemplate their neighbour at all – so that there is all this interplay which you're aware of. Whereas at an English concert it goes on the way it starts off. The enthusiasm builds, but it's always retained inside that composure."

Yet he was angry at the stupid behaviour of many of the fans at Zeppelin concerts who chucked dangerous fireworks about as a mark of uncontrolled zeal. Rockets and sparklers and all sorts of other bizarre fireworks might make for a pretty display, but when they're hurtling on to the control panel and get dangerously close to the stage and – who knows? – presumably hurt some innocent fan somewhere, it's a scary sight, and thankfully missing from British rock gigs.

Granted that Zeppelin can't be held totally responsible for the sort of audiences they attract, or for their behaviour, I put it to Plant that these dodgy firecracker scenes, combined with the ever-present, depressing sight of thousands of kids colliding with walls as they walked around during Zep shows – the victims of cheap wine and downers, maybe – was a high price to pay for the kind of excitement he enjoyed. He agreed, but said a heavy-handed appeal to people to cool it wasn't advisable. Yes, the firework scene indoors was worrying to him, because, eventually, it had to result in someone getting hurt. But the best way he knew to deal with the situation was "not to lecture", but to say "sshhhh" and hope...

"In the end, it's got to be a case of reaching out on a personal level to the guy who's sitting there, about to do something silly, and persuading him not to, and that listening to the music is the best way of enjoying the show."

The firework situation in the big arena of America was not so bad as it was, he continued. It was essential to get through on a friendly basis and try to "get people around the idiots to slow down the firework action". This was his only method. It usually worked.

Difficult, I suggested, urging cool logic on to kids zonked out of their skulls on booze and drugs. "Difficult, but one of the responsibilities we have. All these things go with the excitement of the moment, I guess, but why people go around armed with firecrackers is beyond me. I find it disturbing, because obviously somebody is going to come off the worst.

"There are some towns in the Midwest where they have what's called 'festival seating', which means no seating, the first-come-first-served effect. So you get people who've been queuing all afternoon and they're the first in. By the third number, say by the time we reach 'Nobody's Fault But Mine', there's this great milling of people and it's a bit chaotic. I have to spend about 30 minutes trying to convince these folk that it would be much better for us and them if they had some semblance of order."

It usually worked. It was difficult not to sound tactless, because the band was, after all, playing for thousands of people who had been waiting to see them for a long time. It could have an unsettling effect on the music, too.

"Worst of all is the realisation that if the mob scenes continue, and people are milling around in a crush, somebody is going to get hurt and hit the deck. It is a constant worry."

**P**LANT SEEMED AWARE, yet wary, of the special power invested in a rock singer of his stature. He believed it would be dangerous and irresponsible to use his personal strength as a rallying cry for whatever he wanted to be done. Whether he was adopting this attitude because of his previously stated belief that he was "merely a musician doing the words" was difficult to perceive, but anyway I asked how he reconciled not wanting to be the frontman with being the one who did the announcing, and whether he wished he was bereft of power.

"I got over that power thing about seven years ago," he answered carefully. "Everybody goes through that 'Where do I stand in all this?' scene when their

audiences build up from clubs to concerts to gigantic arenas and you wonder how far you should go. My own feeling is that you should play it very cool. A lot hangs on the balance struck, the relationship between the guy at the front of that microphone and 20,000 people, and I've learned to suit pedal very carefully.

"In the beginning you tend to try to channel their enthusiasm and build it the right way, you tend to manipulate the crowd a little bit – but it's a positive manipulation. It's not a case of, 'Let's have a riot, and fuck the cops.' You have to go the reverse, gentle way: try to take it this way, folks, because this is the best way to enjoy it.

"No, the feeling of power is a big NO in the rulebook. Anyway, on stage we rely on each other so much and if that was to come out of any one of us, the other three would jump on the one and say, 'Come on, you might kid two people, but you ain't kidding three!'"

But did Plant concede that as the singer he held the balance of power, in the time-honoured tradition, as against, say, Jimmy Page, who ironically had the vision of Led Zeppelin and formed the band in 1968?

Well, said Robert diplomatically, Zeppelin was not that kind of band. "Mick might be the Stones' leader, so you could ask him that one, but ours is, er... well, more of a co-operative band. Does that answer the question?" Not really.

"Well, that's all you're gonna get! (Smiles) What else shall we discuss?"

How about the danger that Zeppelin were now so pre-eminently successful that they did not need to work hungrily any more? Albums selling by the million and concerts of unprecedented statistics surely blunted their need to work so hard – in every sense, crowds would go bananas whatever they sang.

"I don't accept that at all. On every level, our fans seduce us to bring out the best work we can produce, and as for getting blasé just because we've made money – like the punk-rock people say we have become unreachable – this isn't true, and no genuine musician who began in the clubs could get like that if his origins were pure.

"If you'd felt the magic in my mind when I first got back on that stage in Dallas six weeks back, or the magic I'm gonna feel, and the rest of us will feel, when the next album comes out and it's the best we can do and we like it... No, we haven't got lazy or anything.

"Like I said, the only way we could have problems in this band is if our characters shape differently over the next few years and none of us has total control over directions our individual personalities will take.

"But right from the time Jimmy Page came up to see me in the Midlands and said he was gonna form this band, way back in '67, he and I have known that we're such different characters that we're good for each other. We're totally different individuals. So no, we're not ever gonna take easy ways out."

Did he expect that band to be this big, right from the start? "I didn't know what this big was! I mean, the Band Of Joy was a little baby band and it's way back in the past, but that was

always enjoyable as well. There are so many connotations to being big.

"I don't think I can yet properly relate to the magnitude of the band, although I guess it's nearly as big as sliced bread."

And in the beginning, did he yearn to be famous, to face multi-thousand audiences? "It's been said that these shows are events rather than concerts, and I suppose that is true. But what's the option? I guess we must carry a little bit of a legend with us, and you don't have to over-try, or it will come over clinical, clear-cut and jumpy.

"We have to bring out our very best all the time, because kids have a right to expect that, but we don't have to produce it in a stiff-upper-lip way or it comes out the wrong kind of tight. It's got to be Tight But Loose. That's probably the title of the next album."

When would that appear? "We haven't even started thinking about it constructively yet. We're hoping to do a summer show and make a mark on England, and maybe we'll be working on the album in the autumn. Then again, after this marathon American tour we might all want to go home and lie horizontal for a while, or lean against the apple tree." Ray Coleman •

"I mean, when  
I wear a  
Wolves shirt  
– that's hardly  
sexual"

Zeppelin over America

1977

APRIL - JUNE

# “The only group”

**TELEVISION** arrive with a classic album, *Marquee Moon*, which makes New York the backdrop to a romantic/spiritual quest. “Every performance should attempt to go beyond yourself,” says leader Tom Verlaine. “To enter a new field of experience.”





Television in 1977:  
(l-r) Fred Smith,  
Tom Verlaine,  
Richard Lloyd  
and Billy Ficca

## — MELODY MAKER JUNE 18 —

**T**ELEVISION, WHOSE RECENT tour of Britain established them as one of the most unique and exciting American bands of the '70s, made their public debut in March 1974, at the Townhouse Theatre—a small viewing theatre in New York that had been engaged for the event by the group's manager and patron, Terry Ork (to whom, incidentally, *Marquee Moon* is dedicated).

Richard Lloyd recalls the occasion: "It was hilarious. We rented the theatre and went around asking people we knew to come down to see the band and give us some quotes that we could put in the papers. The place seated maybe 88 people and I guess it was full. I don't know how we managed it.

"I couldn't describe the music. It was just crazy. We were so wacky in those days. We used to fall over a lot on stage... and, like, we didn't have anything. Literally."

Television's lineup at this time was Lloyd (electric guitar), Billy Ficca (drums), Tom Verlaine (electric guitar) and Richard Hell (bass).

Ficca, Verlaine (née Miller) and Hell (née Myers) had attended high school together in Delaware. Verlaine and Hell were, from all accounts, particularly close (though their relationship was to end bitterly and precipitate an extended feud). They shared an interest in literature, art and modern poetry and music, and craved an escape from the stifling parochialism of their environment (in fact, legend has it that they made one abortive run for freedom which ended with their arrest).

Verlaine remains elusive about his musical activities in Delaware, admitting only that he and Ficca played together with various individuals in a series of short-lived, apparently experimental bands.

Verlaine, having decided that New York would be the most conducive environment in which to work and live, finally arrived in that city in August 1968. For three years he merely enjoyed the experience and atmosphere of living in the city, working in the Strand bookstore and hanging out in fashionable artistic circles.

In the early '70s he began composing songs, and by the time he embarked upon a tentative solo career on the New York folk circuit he had already composed several of the songs that have since been recognised as classics in Television's repertoire, including the beautiful, hallucinatory "Venus".

Verlaine vividly remembers his first public performance in New York: "I'd been thinking about it for some time. I had these songs and I had a guitar. I just thought, 'Fuck it, I'll do it.' One Sunday afternoon, I went down to this club and played for 15 minutes. I just wanted to find out what it was really like, and something happened to me and it occurred to me that this was the direction I should follow."

Verlaine decided that his songs could be best expressed in a group context, and with Richard Hell and Billy Ficca he formed the Neon Boys. As Billy Ficca explains elsewhere, the group's existence was prematurely terminated through lack of work and financial support.

Nevertheless, Verlaine and Hell began collecting the material that would form the basic repertoire of the original Television: the material, in fact, that was premiered that night at the Townhouse Theatre and would be heard over the next two years, by fluctuating audiences at CBGB, Max's Kansas City and any other New York haunt where the group could secure a gig.

Among these songs were Verlaine's "Venus", of course, "Friction", an early arrangement of "Marquee Moon" (which, in its original version ran to some 20 verses) and the as-yet-unrecorded "Double Exposure" and "Hard On Love" (mentioned by Richard Williams in his column last January). Hell contributed a brace of his apparently off-the-wall ditties, including

his disappointing single "Blank Generation" (a classic, apparently, in its original form), "Love Comes In Spurts" and "Fuck Rock'n'Roll".

It was this version of Television that was produced by Eno for a tape for Island Records. That company's head of A&R at the time was Richard Williams, who'd been impressed by the group in New York and was interested enough in their future to recommend them to Brian Eno. The sessions, however, were aborted after protracted disagreements between Verlaine and Eno.

"I think Eno was too individual," Verlaine explains. "We heard different things in the music. Maybe what he got on tape was a realistic sound for the band at the time, but his ideas were incompatible with mine. He'd get something down and I'd listen to it and I'd say, 'What's THAT? It shouldn't sound like THAT. Do THIS to it.' And he'd tell me that he'd change it. And he'd go off, but he just wouldn't change it. He's a real clever guy."

If Verlaine was dissatisfied with the recorded sound of Television—even though he suggests it was an accurate reflection of the group as it stood—he might possibly have recognised some of the musical limitations of the group; particularly the shortcomings of Richard Hell's bass playing.

Lloyd recalls that Hell responded reluctantly to Verlaine's suggestion that he play bass in Television (it was Hell, incidentally, who gave the group its name), and he accepted the offer only after displays of great enthusiasm and encouragement. Whatever, it was decided that he was relatively inadequate and he was replaced in 1975 by former Blondie bassist Fred Smith.

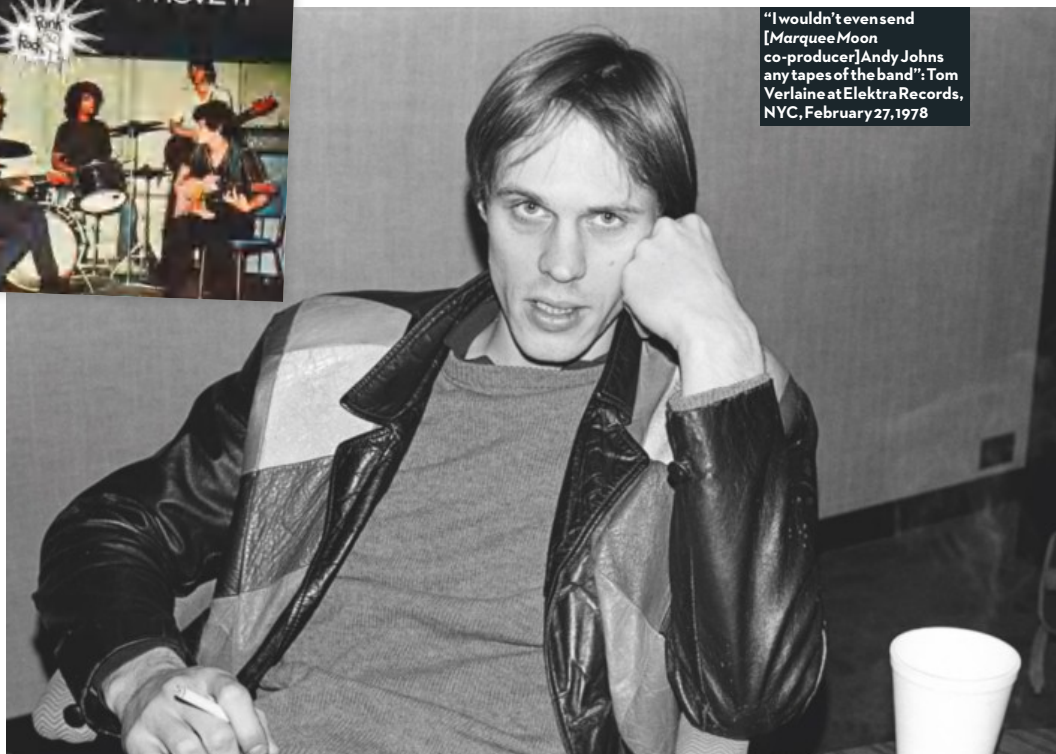
Hell went off to join ex-New York Dolls Johnny Thunders and Jerry Nolan in the original Heartbreakers (now resident, with a different frontline, in London). He now leads his own band the Voidoids.

Television, with Verlaine firmly in command after Hell's departure, continued to play around New York, picking up critical accolades for the music. Their perseverance was rewarded in 1976 with the offer of a contract to Elektra/Asylum, which Verlaine, who had displayed a rare caution previously, accepted.

Andy Johns, whose previous credits include engineering stints with the like of the Stones and Zeppelin, co-produced the group's debut album, *Marquee Moon*, with Tom Verlaine.

"I wanted someone who has no preconceptions about our music, who could be relied upon to get a good sound," says Verlaine. "I wouldn't even send Andy Johns any tapes of the band. He'd never heard us until we went into the studio. I didn't want him to know anything about us. That way, I figured we could avoid arguments. Since he didn't know what exactly we were supposed to sound like, he really responded to what I wanted."

**TOM VERLAINE**, THE enigmatic leader of Television, has been variously described as a potential rock'n'roll genius and the most original and exciting new writer and guitarist to have emerged in American music in this decade. Alternatively, there are those who subscribe to the rather less complimentary opinion that Verlaine is an arrogant and conceited individual, a pretentious and



"I wouldn't even send [Marquee Moon co-producer] Andy Johns any tapes of the band": Tom Verlaine at Elektra Records, NYC, February 27, 1978



May 28, 1977: Verlaine onstage at Hammersmith Odeon, playing an Ampeg guitar made of clear Plexiglas

facile talent and a paranoid egomaniac who's callous and vicious toward those with whom he comes into contact. He's also said to have a megalomaniac streak that would reduce Hitler to the status of a shambling introvert.

"If you believe in yourself, people usually attack you," he says, defending himself against these charges, most of which have been made by his former associate Richard Hell.

"Those are the things Richard said about me when he quit the band," he adds wearily, obviously tired of the feud. "It's spiteful. If it wasn't for me, Richard Hell would never have had his name in the papers. He wasn't about to go start a rock'n'roll group. He just had a friend who played guitar. He couldn't possibly have played in any other band. We let him play with us and we hoped that he'd improve musically as we developed. Eventually we decided that we needed someone better.

"I'm sure that there are other people who share that image of me. The kind of people that hang around CBGB. People that I've never said a word to. And because I don't go over and talk to them, they start to think that you're being aloof and distant. But I'm not the kind of person who enjoys that kind of socialising."

It is, in fact, not difficult to imagine Verlaine's manner antagonising those who might test his tolerance. There is about him, for all his polite calm, an impatient air; talking about his adolescence in Delaware, for instance, he expresses an intolerance of the provincial atmosphere in which he grew up. He missed in that environment the excitement and artistic activities that he imagined would abound in, say, New York. Indeed, such was his impatience and desire to become part of a more exciting world that he decided that he would high-tail it out of Delaware and into New York at the earliest opportunity.

Richard Hell had been living a year in the city when Verlaine, then 17 years old, moved into his apartment. "It was an exciting time. It was a great experience, meeting people who had a certain atmosphere about them that you just didn't find in Delaware."

He had, at the time, vague plans for forming a band, although he had no specific ideas about the style of music he would pursue. "That was the first idea I had," he continues, "but when I got to

New York, the place just excited me so much that I didn't think seriously about doing anything. I was just taking in everything; I didn't start writing for a couple of years after I got there."

Although, as he admits, he was infatuated with New York, he was discriminating enough to recognise the superficiality of much that surrounded him. "There were lots of different cliques," he remembers. "People seem to form schools there very fast. Like all the poets would get together in various groups, and develop similar styles and share the same ideas and the same girlfriends. I don't know if incest is the right word, but it got to the point where everyone was just patting each other on the back and congratulating each other all the time."

He has still a romantic vision, he confesses: it remains for him a city of intrigue, mystery and a strange beauty. Indeed, much of the music on *Marquee Moon* betrays this infatuation with the city: there's a romantic evocation of the

nocturnal underworld filtered through a romantic vision that's at once confused by the potential violence of the environment and yet curiously seduced by the darkness.

In some ways, it seems to me, Verlaine and Television are direct heirs of The Velvet Underground. However, where Lou Reed portrayed New York with a graphic, documentary clarity, Verlaine deals more exclusively with atmosphere, evoking startling images of metropolitan anguish, loneliness and despair allied to a characteristic romantic yearning for spiritual perfection in the face of this darkness.

"That's very much the case," says Verlaine. "Living in New York you somehow become very night-orientated. Especially in the summers, when it gets so hot and the

streets get so dirty... I've always thought of New York as an inspiration. It isn't for many people, but it is for me. Obviously, it was for Lou Reed, too.

"I think we capture different aspects of the city, but there is some sort of connection between Television and The Velvet Underground. It goes beyond any musical connection, although I think we share the same sort of energy. New York is a really concentrated microcosm of emotions, you know, and atmosphere. The songs do deal mostly with atmosphere, yes; I think that's what art is all about...

"Like, on stage, you don't have ideas so much as feelings; a sense of what's happening around you. I think that's an important part of the performance, responding to the atmosphere... and every performance should be some attempt to go beyond yourself, or get in touch with something beyond yourself. To enter a totally new field of experience.

"To me, that's what life is all about, too. An opportunity to enjoy new experiences. And it's all tied together... music, writing, living... It's all about experience, learning, growing.

"I know that as we become more successful we're going to be restricted, but success is something so abstract that I can't really think about it in specific terms. We'll just have to figure out a way of circumventing the restrictions... It's sort of a problem already."

"THERE WAS NOTHING before Television," asserts the modest, quietly humorous Richard Lloyd, who forms, with Tom Verlaine, one of the most exciting electric guitar partnerships ever to hit this planet. "I always had this feeling that there was only going to be one group that I'd get into and the vibe would be right. Television was the only group. Is the only group."

Lloyd would ask us to believe that his musical career began, at the age of two, with the tentative exploration of the sound of a 24-key plastic piano, the property of his parents: "Then, one day, one of the keys broke. So I demolished it. My parents wouldn't replace it."

His interest in music, thereafter, waned considerably. He makes it emphatically clear that he was not particularly enamoured of the white American pop music of the early '60s that daily infiltrated his life, bouncing over the airwaves in his native Pittsburgh, and, later, New Jersey, where his parents moved when he was 17.

"I thought it was all incredibly dull. The radio was full of slush. It was, at least, something to listen to, but I hated most of it."

The American release of the early Beatles and Stones albums excited him rather more, he recalls (his first inclination was toward drums, and he remembers bashing away in a basement to *Meet The Beatles* and the Stones' *12x5*), but it was the first albums by Hendrix, the Floyd and the Dead that inspired him to learn guitar.

"Those records took me for a loop," he says, as if recalling some momentous event. "It was through those records that I first discovered real electric music."

Simultaneously, he was drawn to blues guitarist like Elmore James, Buddy Guy, JB Hutton and Johnny Shines (an associate of Robert Johnson): "When you pick up an instrument, you've got to start someplace," he explains, "and blues licks are some of the easiest places »

"We let Richard Hell play with us and hoped he'd improve"





March 21, 1977: Television perform at New York's Bottom Line club

to start from. But I didn't really concentrate on developing the influence of those people."

Inevitably, he attempted to start a series of bands; every attempt, however, was an abortive failure, he claims. "I was just playing my guitar and waiting for the right group. I'd put together a few bands who'd play maybe one gig and disappear. But I had no plans for any of them, because I knew that they weren't going anywhere."

He drifted to Boston, jamming infrequently with various local bands – he does not care to mention their names – before returning for a short time to New York City. "One day I went out for a sandwich, came back to where I was living and found that my guitar had been stolen. The only clothes I had were in the guitar case, so I had nothing. I figured that, for once in my life, I was unencumbered by any possessions. So I went to California. Just split for a year. I didn't have a guitar for six months, until I raised enough money to buy one in San Francisco."

There he began to practise on his guitar – "all day and all night for months" – perfecting an individual style. He had no specific strategy for discovering compatible musicians and forming a band at this time. As he says, he was carefully biding his time, waiting for the right circumstances in which to commit himself to a band possessed of the vision and originality for which he was searching.

In 1974, Richard was back in New York, living in Chinatown with Terry Ork (later to become patron and manager of Television), who one night persuaded him to trundle down to a club called Reno Sweeney's to see a guitarist called Tom Verlaine, who was then performing as a solo artist following the relative disintegration of the Neon Boys.

Verlaine, Lloyd remembers, played three songs, including early versions of "Venus" and "Double Exposure" (the latter has yet to appear on record, though a demo tape, recorded with Brian Eno, exists).

Lloyd was enthralled by Verlaine, and after a brief conversation it was clear to both that they shared similar ideas and concepts: "I just thought that there was something about what Tom was doing that was right. It struck a responsive chord. We got together and played, and started to work on ideas for Television.

"At that time we didn't have a specific idea of what we'd sound like. It was a madhouse; we'd play and writhe on the floor with our guitars, stand on our heads and laugh hysterically."

Lloyd recalls Television rehearsing for at least six hours a day, five days a week, during this period: "We all realised that we had to improve. If you realise that you are not technically proficient on an instrument, that shouldn't stop you from playing. But you have to be aware of the limitations of not being proficient.

"You have to need to play to spend, like, four or five years learning about your instrument. You have to work at it constantly. You have to be dedicated. Like, there must be a million guitarists and a million bands, and if you're going to be heard as an individual you've got to work and be prepared to spend all that time learning. I mean, it's not the kind of thing you can venture into casually."

The extraordinary empathy that exists between Verlaine and himself, Lloyd asserts, can be attributed to this period of intensive rehearsal, though he emphasises that on stage especially, their musical relationship is by now an intuitive affair.

There are, he says, some songs during which he will take the principal solos as a matter of expediency; then there are others where Verlaine and he will simply realise that one or the other has the momentum to carry through an unscheduled solo, in which case the other guitarist will ease back to a secondary role.

"If we hadn't spent that time together," he says, "we wouldn't know what we were playing. Of course it was an important time. There's never been any ego problems; we both have enough to play to keep us both happy as guitarists."

**F**RED SMITH, WHO contributes the sinuous basslines that underpin the guitar adventures of Tom Verlaine and Richard Lloyd, admits that it was the British bands of the mid-'60s that first inspired him to play rock'n'roll.

Like Lloyd, he confesses to finding little about which to enthuse in American music immediately prior to the transatlantic ascendancy of The Beatles, Rolling Stones, Kinks and The Zombies – who he remembers with particular affection – whose individual styles were a profound influence on the American bands formed in the slipstream of their success.

He recalls, with amusement, his early high-school bands like the Poor Boys and the Auroras, whose respective repertoires consisted of versions, invariably inept, of current chart hits (usually British records, he remembers), and later, psychedelic extravaganzas "and anything we could figure out how to play. We just used to copy everybody. If we could play it, we played it no matter what it was."

He played guitar then – "rhythm guitar. I never played lead. I couldn't play fast enough" – and only turned to bass six years ago after failing an audition for a gig as a guitarist.

"I hadn't been in a group for a while; I'd sort of given up. I couldn't get the guitarist's gig; the group just wanted a bass player. I felt like playing again, so I got a left-handed Japanese bass and turned it upside down and I liked it. It was like learning a whole new instrument.



"It was with a group called Captain Video. I played with them for a while; it was around 1971. Leon Russell was big and we had an organ player, so we did a lot of his numbers. It was nothing special, but I didn't care. We could've played anything and it wouldn't have bothered me because I was just learning how to play. At the time I didn't even think about what I wanted to hear from the bass.

"When I first started playing I wondered if I should sound like the guy from The Byrds or McCartney. I just played what sounded natural and comfortable. If it sounded right I played it. I didn't sit around and study the styles of any other bass players. I didn't want to have their styles crammed into me.

"I'm not the kind of person who puts on a record and listens to the bass player. I listen to the group. I'm more interested in songs than instrumentalists. The bass as an instrument, I find, has its limitations. The bass players I like are subtle and play things that fit the song.

"I don't like to hear bass players that really stick out. Like, someone like Bill Wyman you don't notice at first, but if you suddenly catch what he's playing it'll send a chill up your spine because it's so right."

Before joining Television in 1975 (when he replaced Richard Hell), Smith played with Blondie's Deborah Harry, first in a band called The Stilettoes, then in the original Blondie. The Stilettoes featured three girl singers and Fred found that fun. It was at the time that the New York Dolls, those tragic figures of the New York scene, were being recognised internationally, and NYC was alive with glitter and outrage combos hoping to emulate the Dolls' success.

"It was all glitter bands," Smith recalls, "That's what was happening. It was a lot of fun. It was exciting. There were all these groups forming on the Lower East side. There was CBGB and Club 82 opening. There was something happening. It was more fun than music. The Stilettoes, like most of the other groups, were probably more into presentation than music, but the girls wrote a few good songs. I enjoyed it."

The original Blondie lineup he describes as a sketch of the group that toured here with Television. "It was rougher," he says. "We worked a lot and just hoped that something would develop. It did eventually, but I'd left by that time.

"We were a little erratic, you know. We had this drummer who kept passing out, he'd just collapse. A weak guy. Kept passing out all the time.

"We used to open for Television at a lot of gigs, and I liked them a lot and I knew all their songs, and then Tom asked me to join them because Richard was on his way out. I knew that I had to go on and do something new, and joining Television was something new, a challenge. I had to join, you know."

Television's escalation to prominence and popularity in America and Europe is viewed casually by Smith; having struggled for so long in New York, he is not easily infatuated by the group's present success, and the personal glory that will inevitably attend that success he is less than enamoured of. "I'm just enjoying playing," he says simply. "I'm enjoying touring. The whole thing. I like it. It hasn't been as hard as I had been told it would be. It isn't easy, but hotel rooms are better than my own apartment, you know."

He is modest about his own contributions to Television's unique sound: "Jesus," he says when the question is posed. "I think, more than anything, I contribute to the time of the band. I keep time for the whole band to enable Richard and Tom to go off on solos whenever and wherever they want to go. I keep the bottom together. Yeah, like an anchor. It's important.

"When I heard the record for the first time, I could hear how much the band had 'developed'."

**BILLY FICCA**, A drummer whose individual style is marked by a rare exuberance and, occasionally, by a ferocious intensity, is, off stage, surprisingly nervous, unassuming and more than a little shy. An initial encounter, at least, suggests

as much. Nevertheless, he responds politely, with charm and humour, to questions about his personal and musical history.

A friend of Tom Verlaine since 1965 (they attended the same high school in Delaware), Ficca has been playing drums from the age of 12. Although he played in the inevitable series of high-school rock'n'roll bands, his principal interest was jazz. Pop music he found weak and anaemic. He listened intently to his father's collection of Gene Krupa records. His brother played trumpet and was an admirer of Maynard Ferguson, whose drummer, Rufus Jones, he remembers as an adolescent influence.

"Jazz wasn't a meek music," he asserts. "It was very strong. I got tired of a lot of rock'n'roll. I could never find anything to listen to on the radio, except for one Baltimore station that played a lot of old jazz - Django Reinhardt, King Oliver, some Leadbelly.

"The first bands I played in did mostly Stones numbers - R&B, that kind of thing. Then there was the freak-out period," he laughs. "Everybody took LSD and got stoned and played 27-minute songs in double time. Music was so free then. Everything was swept away and we started from scratch again. Everybody got pretty weird. People mellowed out in the end, though."

It was during this period that he first played with Verlaine. They had been introduced by a mutual friend and discovered that they shared the same musical tastes and infatuations: "We got together," he recalls, "and played some crazy stuff with different people. It was pretty far out. Not at all commercial.

"We couldn't get any work, you know. There weren't too many people in Delaware interested in that kind of crazy music. We just rehearsed, worked out some material and played for ourselves really. Then that disintegrated and I did a couple of gigs with a kind of blues group with horns, you know.

"Played with a couple of bands like that. Soul bands, really. I enjoyed it. We played mostly around Delaware... then Tom invited me to New York. He and Richard Hell were trying to form a band. Yeah, the Neon Boys. Just the three of us. It never really evolved into anything.

"We spent all our time rehearsing. There were no real gigs. Nothing was happening, and a friend of mine from Delaware invited me to join this group. They were a kind of pop/soul/blues/funk group. It seemed that it might be fun, so I went off for maybe a year. I played my final gig with them in Cape Cod. It was at the end of the summer and we decided to take a vacation. We just never got back together again."

By this time Verlaine and Hell had enlisted the talent of Richard Lloyd, and on his return to New York, Ficca completed the original Television lineup: "Tom already had a lot of ideas for the band. I think I'd have to say that what we're doing now is similar to what we were *trying* to do then. The ideas have evolved and been refined. And, of course, we're all more

proficient, individually, than we were then. We understand each other and we're closer now. We can anticipate the direction someone might suddenly follow and we can go after him.

"But the energy is still the same. We never want to lose that energy. We all think it's essential to keep that, because it's something the audience can respond to. Like when you first hear us it might sound, you know... a little different, a little strange. I mean, I listen to a lot of crazy music, so it all sounds natural to me, but I think it might sound a little weird to someone hearing us for the first time. It's not obvious music. It's not straight-ahead rock'n'roll boogie or whatever. At the same time it's still very

physical music. It can shift you. It doesn't just aim for the head.

"The music has everything, I hope: humour, anger, love, beauty and tears. It should combine every emotion. And we, as musicians, should be able to express those emotions. I said that I didn't want us to lose any of the energy of the original band, but I think technique is very important. I mean, I can hear sounds and textures in my head, and it requires technique and skill to get them out." *Allan Jones* •

"When you first hear us it might sound, you know... a little strange"



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**NEED ANY BACK ISSUES?  
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# Readers' letters

MM JAN-JUN A Genesis fan laments, McLaren telegrams and Strummer explains.

## Etymology in the UK

It seems strange that, with the exception of a brief mention by Michael Watts, no one has actually paid much attention to the actual meaning of the word "punk". I have always understood it to mean a young man who would, willingly or unwillingly, submit to anal intercourse.

The word apparently had its origin in prison, where the victim was usually unwilling. Thereafter, owing to society's peculiar double-standard, the "punk" was a despised and unwanted person, similar in status to a female "tramp". Because no pride of any kind could obviously be attached to the term, "punk" is one that the gay community has never wanted. Interesting?

**VALERIE WILMER, Balham, London (MM Jan 1)**



## Genesis: it's no joke

When it was announced that Peter Gabriel was leaving Genesis, the question uppermost in everybody's mind was: "Can they exist without him?" For, indeed, he was the Genesis image with his strange tales, macabre costumes and eccentric behaviour on stage.

Now, two albums later, they have shown that they are capable of producing excellent music and a stage act that stands up without Peter Gabriel. However, in doing so they have lost something that was very important in creating the Genesis "persona" of the first five albums. They've lost their sense of humour.

Compare tracks like "Harold The Barrel" (*Nursery Cryme*), "Supper's Ready" (*Foxtrot*) and "The Battle Of Epping Forest" (*Selling England By The Pound*) with anything from *Trick Of The Tail* and *Wind And Wuthering*. They still use the technique of putting whimsical little stories into song, with beautiful, haunting music, but there is nothing on either album to give any relief from the seriousness, which at times becomes positively agonising.

I agree that, with the departure of Gabriel and their reaching the top of the "first division", they are bound to change and grow more sophisticated. However, with this increasing sophistication they are going to start losing many younger

supporters. Having been a fan ever since they played the Mad Gin Mill at the Angel Hotel, Godalming, in the early days, it saddens me to think that they are losing that certain eccentricity which went a long way to making Genesis what they are today.

**MWREFOD-BUSH, Merrow, Guildford, Surrey (MM Jan 15)**

## Beatles: oldies but goldies?

If EMI are to continue repackaging Beatles material, then why don't they use some initiative and release an EP consisting of the only tracks otherwise unavailable from the *Yellow Submarine* LP - "Hey Bulldog", "Altogether Now", "Only A Northern Song" and "It's All Too Much", which Steve Hillage recently revived? Such a record would be more useful to the fans than haphazard collections such as *Rock And Roll Music*.

**STEVE PARTRIDGE, Chorlton-cum-Hardy, Manchester (MM Jan 1)**

When I read that the ex-Beatles were attempting to stop the release of an album made before their unprecedented rise to fame, I felt I would have to write to express my, and probably many other fans', feelings on the subject.

As I see it, they are trying to stop the disc on the grounds that it would be derogatory to their careers. Well, I can't think of anything more derogatory to their individual careers than *Living In The Material World* (George), *Wings At The Speed Of Sound* (Paul/Wings) and *Ringo's*

*Rotogravure* (Ringo). The reason surely can't be that it would kill sales of the up-and-coming EMI live album, because why should any of them care, as they are no longer signed to EMI!

I am sure Beatle fans everywhere would much rather have previously unreleased songs, (eg, "Falling In Love Again", "I Remember You" and "To Know Her Is To Love Her") than already over-released tracks (eg, "Ticket To Ride", "Can't Buy Me Love" and "She Loves You"), even if they are unreleased versions.

**MICHAEL RINFOUL, Banholm View, Edinburgh (MM Apr 23)**

## The Clash write, right?

Right now you're on a 31 bus with your mate, lighting up a fag. You notice some pink-and-black posters stuck on a wall in Kilburn. You say, "Fuck me, The Clash are playing the Roundhouse Easter weekend." Having sod all better to do, you wander down the Roundhouse, pay your two quid and, blimey, what's this, The Clash and Subway Sect don't turn up.

What happens? You get The Boys, Generation X and hippie John Cale, all on a duff PA. Being a bit of a flash sod yourself, you want to know who's conning you, so here goes: 1) The Clash were never contacted to play the Roundhouse. 2) All posters and ads stating The Clash were to play were crap information.

Stay with us, wise up quick and keep fighting. See you soon, kids.  
**JOESTRUMMER, The Clash (MM, Apr 23)**

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# 1977

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SEX PISTOLS, IAN DURY,  
BOOMTOWN RATS,  
MARC BOLAN AND MORE



August 18, 1977: a white Cadillac hearse carrying Elvis Presley's casket leaves Graceland on its way to Forest Hill Cemetery in Memphis, Tennessee



## Buried near the grave of his mother

**MM AUG 27** Elvis Presley is laid to rest. Celebrities pay their respects.

**E**LVIS WAS BURIED last week in the Presley family vault near the grave of his mother, after dying from heart failure. An estimated 100,000 fans had passed in mourning by his open coffin.

Among those who came to say farewell to a legend were actors Burt Reynolds and John Wayne, a one-time co-star and friend Ann-Margret and Caroline Kennedy, daughter of the late President.

The pallbearers at the funeral included Joe Esposito, Presley's road manager, his doctor Dr George Nichopoulos and his record producer, Felton Jarvis. The service was conducted by a friend of Presley's: Ohio evangelist Rex Humbard.

1977

JULY – SEPTEMBER

# “He won admiration”

**NME SEPT 24** On the brink of a comeback, Marc Bolan is killed in a car accident.

**M**ARC BOLAN'S LADY, Gloria Jones, had still not been told of his death on Tuesday, when his funeral took place at Golders Green. She was still in shock after an operation on her fractured jaw, but was said to be recovering and resting comfortably. The couple's 20-month-old son Ronan was being looked after by Marc's parents.

Bolan died when the Mini in which he was passenger, with Gloria at the wheel, crashed into a tree in Barnes, South-West London, last Friday morning. They were returning home after a late meal at a West End restaurant with Gloria's brother, Richard Jones, who was following behind in his own car. The crash occurred at a notorious accident black spot, on the far side of a hump-back bridge and on a wet surface.

Bolan himself did not drive and had never held a licence. He had also emerged from a self-confessed period of drug taking and hard drinking, sparked by his decline in popularity and his divorce. He gave up both drugs and drink when Gloria came into his life, and was poised – both mentally and professionally – for a major comeback.

The first step in his direction was his own Granada TV series, which he completed filming shortly before his death – screening of the final show, with the full consent of his family, is next Wednesday (28). His TV producer Muriel Young said this week, “He won the admiration of everyone in the studio. He really cared about his show, his colleagues and his music.” And plans were already being laid

for Marc and T Rex to headline a major tour at the end of the year.

EMI Records were planning to release a compilation album titled *Solid Gold T Rex* on October 14, consisting of a dozen of his hit singles which he had chosen himself. The LP will still be coming out, but it's possible that the title may now be changed, and that it will become a commemorative set. Bolan's publicist said there is “a fair amount” of new T Rex material in the can, though there are no immediate plans to issue any singles.

Bolan's peak was in 1971-73 when, after a relatively fruitless period fronting John's Children, he and Steve Took expanded their Tyrannosaurus Rex duo into a quartet – and T Rex was born. They had a string of No 1 hits with “Hot Love”, “Get It On”, “Telegram Sam” and “Metal Guru”; four No 2 successes with “Ride A White Swan”, “Jeepster”, “Children Of The Revolution” and “Solid Gold Easy Action”; and four other Top 10 entries.

## His greatest ambition was to have another No 1

During that period, Bolan was one of the hottest properties on the British scene. But his success took a tumble when he became a tax exile in America, where he was unable to emulate his British achievements. There followed a period in limbo, but as Bolan started his fightback, he once again stood on the threshold of the big time.

He headlined a short tour earlier this year, with The Damned as guest artists, but he was hoping for more substantial developments in the coming months. His greatest ambition was to have another No 1 hit, but tragically it was never to be realised.



The Tom Robinson Band at London's Marquee Club, October 1977

## Boardroom drama

**NME AUG 20** Musician/activist Tom Robinson is signed to EMI.

**T**HE TOM ROBINSON BAND have been signed by EMI Records, and the deal could prove to be as controversial for the company as its relationship with the Sex Pistols was last year. A self-confessed gay, Robinson distributes pamphlets at his concerts, publicising such organisations as Rock Against Racism, *Spare Rib*, the National Abortion Campaign, Gay Switchboard and the Free George Ince Campaign. Because of the causes he openly supports, a number of venues have previously been reluctant to book his band.

Already there is a “minor boardroom drama” at EMI, he claims, because executives are reluctant to release his homosexual anthem “Glad To Be Gay” as a single. But the signing has been interpreted as a political move by the company's record division, who reputedly wish to demonstrate their strength and prevent boardroom intervention in artistic policy – as was the case during the Pistols farrago.

“The Record Division was like a naughty dog who'd got a nice juicy bone with the Sex Pistols,” commented Robinson, “but their master made them drop it. Now they've got another and they're growling.”

EMI's press office refutes such speculation and doesn't anticipate any objections being raised by the board. “We know what they stand for,” said publicist Tom Nolan. “But more importantly, this is a first-rate band. It's a signing completely independent of any other consideration.”

Regarded as one of the finest new talents in rock, Robinson was just about to sign a deal worth £96,000 when EMI “swooped in force” at his recent show at London's Brecknock. Members of the A & R department then bettered the offer made by Jet Records. But the financial size of the deal, and the attention he has attracted from a number of other record companies, has left Robinson unimpressed.

“It just means we can come off the dole and go on 30 quid a week,” he explained.

Robinson formed the band after leaving Café Society last October. Until March he was contracted to Ray Davies' Konk label and only secured a release after publicly condemning The Kinks' leader for refusing to set him free. A term of the release is that he pays Konk 10 per cent of all recording advances and royalties for the next two years.

His first release for EMI is to be a popular stage number, “Motorway”, with Robinson's dedication to Ince, “I Shall be Released”, on the flip. It is expected that the label will release “Glad To Be Gay” within a month of that, but will not publicise the record.



Sandy Denny on stage in autumn 1977, during a UK tour to promote her final album, *Rendezvous*

## “I’ve enjoyed every minute”

**MM JULY 16** Sandy Denny’s pregnancy has provided a break from the ordeal of songwriting. “Why do I have to put myself through it?” she wonders. Why can’t I relax a little bit more?”

**S**ANDY DENNY LOOKED radiant. Yes, one is always supposed to say that about ladies when they’re pregnant, but in this case it was true. She lounged back, relaxed and ebullient, on the over-stuffed sofa of the Northamptonshire cottage where she lives with her husband, Trevor Lucas.

With her baby due barely a month from now, she was already beginning to talk about an autumn tour, and with no sign at all of any frustration at having been off the road for so long – well over a year, in fact, since she and Trevor left Fairport Convention.

“To be honest,” she said, “I’ve enjoyed every minute of it, ’cos in many ways I really needed a break from the business. I’ve been in it up to my eyes for over 10 years, virtually non-stop, though people don’t realise it because I’m not hitting the headlines every day. But when you’re working for ten or 11 years with not much of a break, you can go completely mad without realising it at the time. It’s taken me since last summer to get back to some sort of sanity – something I didn’t even realise I’d lost.

“Now I feel I can renew my old enthusiasm. For instance, last week I just went and played the piano for about three hours, all sorts of stuff, just for my own enjoyment. It really felt fantastic. It’s the first time I’ve done that, just out of sheer enjoyment, not out of necessity – not having to learn something or write something. I tell you what, it feels good for the first time in years.

“I think by the time that I’m ready to go back and work, which will be October or November, I shall be ready to do it. Obviously, there’s a lot to go through before then, with the baby and everything, but this is how I feel now.

“If I continue along the way I feel now about my music, not about the business

but the music itself, I shall be much happier in my work when I do return to it. In general, I feel that I must be satisfied with myself. If I’m not satisfied with the way that I’m doing something, how can I expect anyone else to be? How can I make people feel that I’m as good as I want them to feel if I don’t think I am anyway?”

“Everyone, when they review my records, seems to say the same thing: another load of dirges. The trouble is that one of the reasons I write those dirgey tunes is that I can’t move that fast on the piano. I’m no Fats Waller, and that’s how it comes out, though it’s a real drag, I know.

“I don’t want to write miserable songs. Do you know how I feel after I’ve written a miserable, sad song? Something that’s really hit me and hurt me. I feel terrible. I go and sit down and I’m really upset by it. I always write on my own.

“It’s like a vicious circle, being on my own. I tend to think of sad things and so I write songs that make me feel even sadder. I sit down and I write something and it moves me to tears almost. I’m fed up with feeling like that. Why do I have to put myself through it? Why can’t I think about other things, try and relax a little bit more?”

“I’m not really interested any more in being heavy with people. There’s no point, I’ve just realised, because what can I do? I can’t do anything about anything. What a terribly defeatist attitude, you might say, but if I can’t do anything about the way things are, then surely I can try to make people feel a little better about it.

“You’ve got to let yourself branch out as much as you possibly can, otherwise you can’t appreciate things if you’re bigoted, it’s a pain.”

At long last, at least for a time, the pain seems to have gone out of Sandy’s life, and it’s a pleasure to see it. *Colin Irwin*

“I’m not really interested any more in being heavy with people”



➤ Motorhead’s current UK tour was cancelled last week when drummer Phil Taylor broke his right hand in a brawl. Taylor was injured during a fight with a roadie in a Plymouth hotel, and will be unable to play for at least a month. But the band hope to reschedule the abandoned dates in late September as part of another extensive series of British concerts.

The Count Bishops, who were playing support to Motorhead, will now headline at two venues booked for the tour. **NME AUG 20**

➤ Generation X have abandoned a scheduled gig at Glasgow’s Zhivago club this Thursday (18), and will instead play at the Paisley Silver Thread Hotel. The band’s publicist claims punk gigs have been banned by Glasgow City Council. **NME AUG 20**



➤ Suzi Quatro has been invited to read for the part of Leather, a female rock’n’roll singer in the next *Happy Days* series. Miss Q’s live album, recently recorded in Japan, is to be released in the UK at the end of the year. **NME AUG 20**

➤ Status Quo have started recording their next studio album in Sweden. The sessions were delayed while drummer John Coughlan had an operation for appendicitis. The band return to this country in the autumn for a major tour. **NME AUG 20**

# 1977

JULY – SEPTEMBER

September 7, 1977: backed by Herbie Flowers, Tony Newman and Dino Dines, Bowie and Bolan jam together on the *Marc* show

## “Great fun”

MM **SEPT 17** David Bowie appears on Marc Bolan’s TV show – broadcast 12 days after The T Rex star’s untimely death.

“**O**H THAT’S REALLY Polaroid! You’ve gotta keep the ending!” David Bowie rocked with laughter and Marc Bolan wiped away the tears that had threatened to turn his finest hour into a nightmare. The great day when David and Marc were reunited for a TV show will pass into the history books as one of the funniest episodes never filmed.

Perhaps one should say never video-taped, for the last show in the series *Marc*, put together by Granada TV, turned out to be a drama of such pathos and uproar that it made *Coronation Street* seem dull, if that’s at all possible. There were tears, outbursts of swearing, bitter rows and the breaking of lightbulbs when everything seemed to go wrong when David joined his old chum for rehearsals and recording at Granada’s Manchester studios last Wednesday.

The clash between old wave and new wave was further heightened by the power of trade unions and the congenital inability of rock

people to get it together in anything like a normal, orderly fashion. It was 10 breaks and split-second timing versus artistic temperament and inexperience.

I thought it funny but I’m sure producer Muriel Young didn’t, nor did the manager of Generation X, who turned up three hours late without any equipment, nor Barrie Masters and his famous Rods, who never got to appear on the show after waiting around for two days.

In the event, by the miracle of editing and technical wizardry, the show will go out complete with the Rods, and David making a rare British television appearance, on all ITV regions on Wednesday, September 28 at 4.20pm. But it would have been more exciting if they had videoed the dramas taking place in and around the studio.

Marc was in his element as a television star and part-time artistic director. As one studio boss was forced to ejaculate when Marc was

bellowing instructions, “I don’t know why I’m the floor manager.” Said Marc, “When you’ve got your name up in lights, you’ve gotta take responsibilities.”

The show was born out of Marc’s dream to be a media man, dating back to when he once did some interviews for London Television. Here he could invite his favourite guest artists, do a bit of chat and generally camp it up in time-honoured Bolan fashion. As a cross between Judy Garland and Louis B Mayer, he was brilliant. But one of the lads in the heavy rock combos booked for the show stopped me dead in the gents by demanding, “Is he queer?” “Nah, course not. Straight as a die, our old Marc,” I protested.

A few minutes later, Marc sailed past us in the corridor calling out cooly, “What shall I wear? I know, the green dress with black suspenders.” In fact he turned up wearing a leopardskin creation that even a leopard might have balked at. The whole day was worthy of being



turned into one of those probing documentaries where people bare their souls and the holes in their socks before cameras so discreet that nobody seems aware of their presence.

It was just like *The World About Us*. The cast of characters included: Marc's PR Keith Altham, recently recovered from a nervous collapse that he threatened would be brought on again if Barbara De Witt said another word; Barbara De Witt, David's American PR lady who wanted to know what Keith Altham was doing bringing so many press in her artist's wake; Bob Hart of *The Sun*, anxious to see Keith Altham, buying him a drink ("You're the only publicist I can't afford to have lunch with"); Jeff Dexter, '60s hippie DJ and now partner with Tony Gourvish in Marc's management; the said Mr Gourvish resplendent in genuine 1968 Teddy boy jacket; and Eric Hall the man from EMI.

The whole party descended by train upon Manchester and spent the day being hustled out of the studio by David's bodyguard, a charmingly polite gentleman who kept appearing in front of us saying, "You'll have to leave – now." I half-expected to meet him at the front gate when I got home that night, holding up both hands to bar any further progress.

The main targets of his life's work (sending people in the opposite direction from whence they came) were Marc Bolan's manager, his press officer and various friends hoping to see David after his absence from the scene for many years. "*Ain't it strange what some people will do*" [were] the rather apt [lyrics from the Bay City Rollers' "*Ain't It Strange*"] being danced to by Heart Throb, the show's troupe of girl dancers who had chosen to wear plastic see-through bowler hats for their routine.

On came the Rods – Barrie Masters in jeans and shirt – miming to their backing track on "Do Anything You Wanna Do". "It's a bit Mick Mouse, this show," he said as he came off the rostrum, indicating that he and the boys had been hanging around in the studio all day waiting to do their bit.

Generation X arrived red of hair and pink of cheeks, somewhat breathless from a disastrous day spent on the M1. A broken-down van, no equipment available – the bad news experienced by many a group. But it didn't stop them adopting the aggressive attitude expected of a new-wave combo. As offers were being made to lend them equipment they discussed jokingly whether or not to smash up Marc's guitar, "What will it cost us – 400 quid?" Eventually guitars were lent, including Rod Paul Gray's bass (he told me that if the X-men smashed up his bass guitar, he would smash them up).

Miraculously, amplifiers and instruments were procured and Generation X stormed into their big number "Your Generation", Billy Idol, their pretty lead singer, looking aggressively angelic. In fact they played so well I found myself clapping their performance, lone applause that must have sounded almost insulting in the silence of the studio as the echoes died rapidly away. But Generation X's discomfort was not over. They had to play a number at least five more times, constantly being stopped by the technicians, something all musicians detest.

Marc had to keep repeating the same introduction: "This is Generation X. They have a new singer Billy Idol who is supposed to be as

pretty as me. I ain't so sure. Check it out." Eventually he stumbled over the words by the sixth attempt. "Me brain weren't connected to me leg," he explained with a grin.

**M**EANWHILE, MORE ROWS were breaking out between Generation X's manager and producer Muriel. As Stewart bellowed abuse across the studio floor, Muriel, a very ladylike professional, simply walked away. "It's appalling," said Stewart. "Now they are only going to show half the song or pull it out. We'll do *Top of The Pops* instead. Let's go!" He made a move for the exits, but the band stayed on and later Granada confirmed that X would be in the show.

While the September 28 show was still being recorded, the day's edition was going out featuring Marc singing "Let's Dance", the old Chris Montez hit, which sounded pretty good given the Bolan treatment, as well as his new single "Celebrate Summer".

Now it was time for the studio to be cleared while Marc and David rehearsed their big number. Momentarily eluding the bodyguard, I managed to hide behind a piece of scenery as Bolan and Bowie joined forces with Herbie Flowers, Dino Dines and Tony Newman. It sounded like a bit of a shambles to the uninitiated. In fact the song was only just put together in time and remained untitled, a bit of casual rock jamming. But it was fun to see them together and they sounded pretty funky with Marc blazing enthusiastically on lead guitar.

And to complete the atmosphere of revivalism, Marc launched himself into

"Deborah", a new version which had to be cut when the backing track seemed to go out of sequence. "I don't mind lip-synching, but when it's the *wrong* verse..." complained Marc tartly. Suddenly there came a bellowed announcement:

"Will anybody not on the show please leave the studio!" Once more we were herded outside. "Oh why did we come?" said the Rods, also hustled away.

But a kindly floor manager, keeping remarkably cool, swiftly let the entourage back in again to witness the final historic chapter. David readied himself for his solo number "Heroes" from the album. With his jeans carefully rolled up to reveal lace-up boots, he stood coolly before the microphone, careless of the chatter of the studio.

Ignoring some impudent feedback, he began singing, slowly and lowly at first, with a deep voice that always comes as a surprise from one of such slim build. There were pregnant pauses between bars and then suddenly he bellowed forth, "*I will be king and you will be queen / We can be heroes just for one day / We can be heroes!*" It was a remarkable performance even in a cold TV studio.

Now it was Marc's big moment when he was to join David for the taping of their hastily sketched out number. While David had his face made up, Marc called anxiously to the floor manager: "Do you want me front or back?"

"Just touch your toes, Marc," called out one of the Rods waiting to do their number on the

opposite rostrum. The mighty duo began their number and, said Billy Idol approvingly from the sidelines, "It's got that disco beat all right." "What an old poofah," grumbled a roadie uncharitably.

Suddenly there was competition on stage as the number ground to a halt. "We're getting electric shocks up here" shrieked Marc, pointing towards the mics. Nobody moved. Time was ticking dangerously away. At 7pm the union would pull the plugs out and head for home. Attempts were being made by the production team to stop the band. "We're rehearsing, actually" said Marc, somewhat put out.

David stood quietly to one side smiling and unperturbed, but suddenly he frowned. "That wasn't the actual take, was it?" he asked as the truth began to dawn "What do you mean, not really? Either it was or it wasn't." "One, two, three, four!" and Tony Newman uncertainly set the drums rolling once more. At this point Marc fell off the stage with excitement. "A wooden box for Marc, please," said David. "Look, we've got to do that again, it wasn't finished." But the studio man was calling, "Let's have the Rods, please. The Rods obediently scrambled onto their rostrum to start recording and David and Marc instantly started jamming. At 7pm precisely all the lights went out and the technicians disappeared. "You've got a blackout, mate!" called a voice from the floor.

A furious row broke out between the Rods and the producer when it was realised there was no time for the group to do their number. "This is really unfair," said Barrie Masters. "We've been

waiting here all day to go on, and we came up from London yesterday to do the show. That's two days wasted." The Rods stormed off to their dressing room where a certain amount of swearing went on.

Bolan was allegedly locked in his dressing room in tears,

and Bowie languidly viewed the results of the day's work on the video-tape machine. All was smiles when it was realised they had something of a classic in the can, even if it was a shambles.

If there was any acrimony it evaporated later. On the train going back to London, David sat next to Barrie and the rest of the Rods shared beer, wine and chicken legs. "I want to do a tour of Britain in the New Year" he said. "Starting in Glasgow and working my way down. I really want to play again. Today was great fun."

David also said that he had recorded a Christmas show with Bing Crosby of all people, and had also been recording album tracks with Marc.

But it was good to see him back again, and perhaps next time we see him he'll be hero not just for a day but a whole tour.

Chris Welch •

## Bolan was allegedly in tears, Bowie languidly viewing the videotape



# 1977

JULY - SEPTEMBER



July 13, 1977: in a muslin "Destroy" top designed by Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren, Johnny Rotten fronts the Sex Pistols at Daddy's Dance Hall, Copenhagen

# “Everyone has a beastly side”

**THE SEX PISTOLS** outrage the locals in Stockholm, but a chat with Paul Cook, Johnny Rotten and Sid Vicious reveals hidden depths. Discussed: hippies, imitators, O-levels, even music. “We never sat down and wrote a thesis,” says Rotten. “We just do it.”

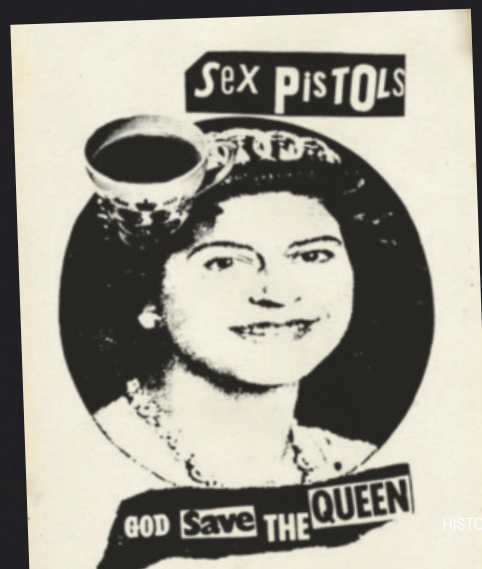
— NME AUGUST 6 —

**T**HE PROSPEROUS CYBORGS at the next table in the back room of this expensive Stockholm eating-place are sloshing down their coffee as fast as they possibly can, with such indecent haste that one plump, middle-aged Swedette disgraces herself in the process. As they vacate the premises, another troupe are ushered in, take a look at the party in the corner and usher themselves out again.

John Rotten—a discordant symphony of spiky crimson hair, grubby white tuxedo embellished with a giant paperclip on the lapel and an absolutely godawful black tie with orange polka dots—looks at the departing Swedish posteriors with no little disdain.

“It must’ve been my aftershave,” he remarks in his fake-out voice, halfway between Kenneth Williams, Sweeney Todd and Peter Cook, and returns to his beefheart fillet, which—much to his disgust—is delicious. He eats nearly all of it and that night he doesn’t even throw up. »

JORGEN ANGEL / GETTY



In Stockholm, the Sex Pistols are a big deal. “God Save The Queen” is in the Top 10, just as it is in Norway, where they also have – for their pains – a monarchy. They’ve been splattered all over the national press in Scandinavia just like over here; more so than any other visiting rock band, or so they tell me, anyway.

It hardly bears thinking about: “The outrageous young superstar of Britain’s controversial punk-rock group the Sex Pistols knocked over an ashtray this morning while having his breakfast. MPs commented, ‘Is this the kind of behaviour that we want our young people to emulate? We must certainly think carefully about allowing this kind of performer on television.’ See editorial: page two.” And all in Swedish, too...

In general, though, Sweden has been less willing to take John Rotten at his word and identify him with the Antichrist than the good ol’ UK. They’ve stayed four nights in the same Stockholm hotel without any complaints from the management, despite Sid Vicious taking a leak in the corridor because two girls had locked themselves in the bathroom of his particular chamber.

When the local equivalent of Teds (a bunch of kustom-kar cruisers/*American Graffiti* freaks known as *raggare*) began harassing the Pistols’ fans as they left the gig and, indeed, followed the band and their admirers back to – and into – the hotel, the police were right there for the protection of the people.

I even saw one Swedish copper at the back of the hall on the second gig doing a restrained but joyful pogo to the lilting strains of “Pretty Vacant”. Can you imagine that at a British Pistols gig – in fact, can you imagine a British Pistols gig at all these days? In Britain, if the police were informed that the Sex Pistols and/or their fans were getting the shit whacked out of them somewhere, the most you could expect would be that they’d show up an hour or two later to count the bodies and bust the survivors (if any) for threatening behaviour.

At home the Sex Pistols are public enemies. In Sweden they’re an important visiting Britpop group. So it goes...

**L**EMME TELL YOU a little bit about Stockholm, just for context and perspective, before we get on to the good bits. They’ve got the highest standard of living in the world over there – weep, Amerika, weep – with an average weekly wage of £120 and prices to match. A bottle of beer will set you back over a quid a throw, and by British standards it ain’t even beer; more like a beer-flavoured soft drink that fills you up and leaves you belching and farting and urinating like an elephant and doesn’t even get you pissed. You can drink 20 quids’ worth of the poxy stuff and still go to bed sober, though the O Henry twist-in-the-tail comes when you wake up with a hangover.

Somehow the idea of a suffering hangover without even having been drunk is peculiarly Swedish.

The natives don’t see it quite that way, though. Through some weirdness or other of the Scandinavian metabolism, they get completely zonko on the stuff, with the result that the authorities think that they have an alcohol problem. You can imagine what effect this would have on a bunch like the Sex Pistols, who are pretty fond of their beer. It got so bad that by the end of the tour John Rotten gave up in disgust and started drinking Coca-Cola.

Swedish television is fun, too. For a start, the two channels only operate for a combined seven hours each night, and the programming seems to consist almost exclusively of obscure documentaries and the occasional mouldy old English B-picture. Radio is impossibly dopey – you can’t even dance to a rock’n’roll station, ‘cuz there’s nuthin’ goin’ on at all. Not at all.

In the discos, they play the same dumb records that they play in UK discos, only six months later, and the girls think you’re weird if you don’t/can’t dance the Bump.

Put it this way: if you think that there’s nothing going on in your particular corner of the UK, then there’s double nothing going on in Sweden. Make that treble nothing. God only knows what the Swedes get up to in the privacy of their own homes to cope with the total lack of decent public entertainment facilities, but it must be pretty bloody extreme.

We thought some kind of oasis had been discovered when we found a late-night cafe that served Guinness.

John Rotten – who is, after all, an Irishman by roots (the rest of the band call him “Paddy” sometimes) and therefore likes his Guinness – was enchanted by this revelation until we discovered that it was – are you beginning to get the picture now? – a special Scanda variety of Guinness even though it’s brewed up in Dublin, and therefore no stronger than the rest of the stuff they have over there.

We ordered up about 10 of the bloody things, swilled them down and discovered to our horror that we were all still sober, so we celebrated the fact by doing a burner on the establishment in question and vamoosing without settling the bill. We’d got as far as the car of our self-appointed guide – a Chris Spedding lookalike who runs a punk boutique called Suicide and who calls himself “the only true punk in Sweden” – before a search party from the cafe catches up with us and hauls The Only True Punk away to face retribution.

At this stage in the proceedings, the Pistols are only three-quarters strong. Sid Vicious is in London, where he has had to appear in court on charges of possessing an offensive weapon of the knifish variety and assaulting a police officer.

That leaves the rest of the party as Rotten, Steve Jones, Paul Cook, roadies Rodent (borrowed from The Clash) and Boogie, and Virgin Records’ international panjandrum Laurie Dunn, an amiable Australian (stop laughing at the back there) whose room seems to function as an assembly point. People at a loss for anything to do seem to end up going to Laurie’s room as a convenient way of running into other people with nothing to do.

Steve Jones plays guitar. He’s been playing the guitar for little more than a year and a half, which would indicate that he’s going to be a monster player by the time he’s been playing for a bit longer. The reason that he sounds far more professional and experienced than he actually is is that he sticks to what is simple and effective and – within the confines of a hard-rock aesthetic – tasteful. He knows what constitutes a good guitar sound, his time and attack are impeccable, and he plays no self-indulgent bullshit whatsoever.

There are a lot of musicians far “better” than Steve Jones (in the technical-ecstasy sense, that is) who could learn a lot from listening to him, could remind themselves of what they were originally looking for when they started out and how they lost it along the way.

Steve Jones is the oldest of the Pistols at 22, and his stolid features and blocky physique make him, visually at least, the most atypical Pistol of ‘em all. On the first evening, he went out to dinner in a Normal Person costume of dark-blue blazer, grey slacks and a neat shirt and tie – camouflage so effective that I nearly didn’t recognise him when he passed me in the corridor. It was only his fluorescent hennaed hair that gave him away as being a rock’n’roller. He’s a friendly, relaxed, good-natured geezer; could be anybody you know and like and drink with; could be you.

Paul Cook plays drums, and has done so for three years now. Like Jones, he plays with an ear for what sounds good, a straight-ahead high-powered no-bullshit approach to what he does and no distance at all between himself and his drums.

Again, he’s an ordinary guy in the best sense of the term; he was in at the roots of the band when a convocation of kids with heisted instruments were jamming around in Shepherds Bush – no formal groups, just a bunch of people playing together.

“I stayed in for about two weeks ‘cos everyone kept calling me Sid”





July 13, 1977: the Pistols play to an audience of about 125 at a disco in the restaurant of the Östra Stranden Hotel, Halmstad, Sweden

The nucleus was Cook and Jones (the latter then singing as well as playing guitar), Glen Matlock on bass and sundry additional guitarists including Mick Jones (now of The Clash), Brian James (now of The Damned) and Nick Kent (now of no fixed abode).

The Sex Pistols had their dark genesis when Jones, Matlock and Cook got together with Johnny Rotten under the Cupid auspices of Malcolm McLaren. Since Glen Matlock got the push and was replaced by Rotten's old college (not "university" – college) buddy and neo-bassist Sid Vicious, the Pistols have consisted of two factions: Cook/Jones and Rotten/Vicious.

These factions are by no means opposed or unfriendly or at cross-purposes; it's just that Paul and Steve get up earlier and go to bed earlier (with all that implies) and John and Sid get up later and go to bed later (with all that implies) – Paul and Steve hanging out together before Sid and John get up and Sid and John hanging out together after Paul and Steve have gone to bed.

John and Sid are the public face of the Sex Pistols: Jagger and Richard to the other two's Watts and Wyman, even though it'd be highly misleading to assume that the creative chores are split that way as well.

Anyway, that's as much background as we've time or need for, so zoom in on the Happy House, a Stockholm club run under the auspices of the local university's Student Union where we're a few minutes early for the soundcheck prior to the first of the band's two nights there.

**ONE THING YOU** have to say for Rodent: it takes a lot of bottle to set up gear while wearing a pair of those dumb bondage pants that strap together at the knees.

Rodent, Boogie and this Swede called Toby (though the band and their own crew call him Bollock-Chops) have just schlepped a massive PA system, three amps, a drum kit and all the rest of the paraphernalia that it takes to put on a rock show up to the second floor of this horrible structure, and Rodent's done it all in bondage pants.

He does it the next night with his sleeves held together with crocodile clips. It's a man's life in the punk-rock business. Join the professionals.

Sid Vicious has caused everybody a massive amount of relief by returning from London with the news that he beat the assault rap

completely and copped a mere (?) £125 fine for the knife.

How'd you dress for court, Sid?

"Oh, I wore this real corny shirt my mum got me about five years ago and me steels. I must've looked a right stropy cunt."

Oh yeah, we haven't really met Sid yet. He got the name "Sid" when he was named after an allegedly really foul-looking albino hamster of that name that he and Rotten used to have.

"I hate the name Sid, it's a right poxy name, it's really vile. I stayed in for about two weeks because everyone kept calling me Sid, but they just wouldn't stop. Rotten started. He's 'orrible like that, he's always picking on me..."

Rotten: "Sid's the philosopher of the band."

Vicious: "I'm an intellectual."

Rotten: "He's also an oaf. He listens to what everybody else says and thinks, 'How can I get in on this?'"

Vicious: "No I don't! I'm a highly original thinker, man; he's just jealous because I'm really the brains of the group. I've written all the songs, even right from the beginning when I wasn't even in the group. They was so useless they had to come to me because of they couldn't think of anything by themselves..."

Thank you, boys. We'll be returning to this conversation later, but meantime there's this soundcheck to do and it sounds terrible.

The stage is acoustically weird and means that by the time Sid's got his bass amp set up so that he can hear himself the bass is thundering around the hall with an echo that bounces like a speed freak playing pinball. The drums and guitar have been utterly swamped and everybody has a headache. Even me – the man who stood 10 feet in front of Black Sabbath yelling, "Louder! Louder!" – I have a headache. Oh, the shame and degradation of it all!

The problem is partially solved by the simple expedient of moving the amp forward until it's beside Sid instead of behind him. It's unorthodox but it works and it means that a semi-reasonable balance can be obtained. The sound still swims in the echoey hall and everybody's brought down something – you should pardon the expression – rotten. »



Friends since schooldays in West London: Paul Cook and (right) Steve Jones

Outside, a youthful horde of Swedish punks decked out in fair facsimiles of Britpunk outfits are milling around looking up at the window behind which the band and their entourage are lurking.

None of these kids are going to get in tonight, however, because Happy House gigs are mostly for over-23s only – a fact which causes bitter amusement because it means that the audience is, officially at least, all older than the band.

When the group make a break for it to go back to the hotel, it's Sid Vicious who stays out in the street listening to what the people have to say and assuring them that the band are on their side. He's out there for more than five minutes before he's virtually pulled into the car.

"I don't think we should be playing for them poxy student hippies. I reckon we should tell 'em that we don't play unless they let the kids in – either that or open up the back doors and let the kids in anyway." In the end, the kids have to wait until the following night when it's 15-and-over, but it's not a situation that the band are particularly happy with.

In the dressing room back at the Happy House a few hours later, John is ostentatiously asleep on a couch, Steve is tuning up his white Les Paul with the aid of a Strobe-Tune (more accurate than the human ear, totally silent so you don't bug the shit out of everybody else in the room by making horrible noises, hours of fun for all the family, get one today!) and Sid is whacking out Dee Dee Ramone basslines on his white Fender Precision bass.

Sid's musicianship (or lack of same) is something of an issue with some people, so let's say right here that he's coming along pretty good. His choice of Dee Dee as his model is a wise one, since that's just the kind of clean, strong and simple playing that the Pistols require.

At present, he's using a kind of flailing-from-the-elbow right-hand action that takes far more effort than the notes require, but he keeps time, doesn't hit more than his share of bum notes (not much more than his share, anyway) and takes his new-found role as A Bass Player as seriously as he takes anything.

Up in the hall, the student audience is milling around ignoring the reggae that's pumping out of the PA system. There are signs of movement from behind the silver curtains and then they're on, revealed in all their scummy glory. Rotten's behind the mic, staring out at the audience through gunmetal pupils, mouth tight, shoulders hunched, one hand clamped around the microphone.

"I'd like to apologise," he says harshly, "for all the people who couldn't get in. It wasn't our fault."

And the band kicks into "Anarchy In The UK", Jones' guitar a saw-toothed snarl teetering on the edge of a feedback holocaust, Sid's bass synched

"We do what we want to do and there's no industry behind us"

If the last few British rock'n'roll years have produced a superstar, Johnny Rotten is it. And let Fleet Street, the BBC and the rock establishment cope with that the best way they know how, because it isn't just happening, it's already happened. And if the definitive British rock band of now feel that they have to go to Europe or Scandinavia or even America just to be able to play in front of people, then there's something worse than anarchy in the UK right now.

"Never are tyrants born of anarchy," wrote celebrated fun person the Marquis de Sade. "You see them flourish only behind the screen of law." And right now in 1977, who's to say he's wrong?

Get up, stand up, stand up for your rights... and segue straight into Marley's "Exodus", pumping out of the soundsystem of a hideously twee rococo disco deep in the heart of Stockholm. It's playing at least twice as loud as anything else that they've played so far tonight, and that's because John and Sid have commandeered the disco DJ's command post and they've found it among his records. They've also found "Pretty Vacant" and that comes up next... even louder.

**THE FOLLOWING AFTERNOON** finds the Pistols' party signing autographs, hanging out, posing and nicking things at The Only True Punk In Sweden's boutique.

The verdict seems to be that everything there is pretty much like SEX was a year or so ago and, in keeping with the celebrated Swedish standard of living, everything is around twice the price that it would be in London.

A photographer is on hand to capture the golden moments. Swelling almost visibly with pride, Sweden's Only True Punk unveils with a flourish a deluxe leather jacket that he's ordered up specially for Sid.

Vicious – charmingly clad in baggy pink pants, a floral blouse and sandals, with a little pink bow in his immaculately spiky coiffure – takes one look at it and declares it poxy, vile, corny and twee.

Sweden's Only True Punk looks deeply hurt.



Over the other side of the shop, Rotten is trying on a pair of repulsive leopardskin-topped shoes.

"They're really 'orrible," he beams. "I must have them. I could start another absurd trend... like safety pins."

The way that previous sartorial quirk of his had caught on with The Youth and become an industry virtually overnight is a source of vast amusement to him – as well it might be.

With the Only True Swedish Punk and his girlfriend are two 12-year-old kids, neighbours of theirs from out in the country, where they live. These two kids immediately latch on to Vicious, and he spends much of his day sitting with them and playing with them and talking to them... generally keeping the kids amused. He's really great with them... if you know anyone who's got a pre-adolescent kid who's into punk rock and needs a babysitter, allow me to recommend you Sid Vicious, Mary Poppins in punk's clothing.

The previous night, the air had been thick with rumours that the raggare had eyes for trashing, and for the second gig – the one open to the teenage punk rockers – the talk is intensified.

The band's limo – shaddup at the back there! – and the attendant dronemobiles are waved through a police cordon and everyone's hustled through a back door *mach schnell*.

"Get that poser inside!" snaps Rotten as Sweden's Only True Punk dawdles to make sure he's noticed in the exalted company. There's less dressing-room lugging than last time and the band are on fast as shit.

The punkette audience tonight is a lot cooler and better behaved than the beer-chucking beardies who made up last night's crew, and the band feel a far greater kinship to the crowd.

"It's our night tonight!" shouts Rotten as the band crash into "Anarchy", and tonight his contempt is not directed at the audience but – on their behalf – at a phantom enemy: the crowds who lurk outside the police cordons in their Dodges, Chevies and Cadillacs.

Tonight everything goes fine. The monitors work, the sound's fine and the band relax and play a better, longer set, graced by a couple of additional numbers that they hadn't bothered to get into the night before, including "Satellite Boy" and "Submission".

Next to me, a girl sits on her boyfriend's shoulders, oblivious to the little bubble of blood welling up around the safety-pin puncture in her cheek. After a while, she switches the safety pin to her other cheek so she can link it up with the chain in her earring. Pretty soon, that begins to bleed too. She doesn't care.

Everybody – band, audience, even the cop at the back – is high as a kite and happy as can be. There's no violence and not a bad vibe in sight; everybody's getting off. And this is the show that our guardians won't let us see?

Listen, all the Pistols do is get up on stage, play some songs and get off again. Shit, officer, t'ain't nothin' but a little rock 'n' roll fun; no chicken-killing, throwing of clothes into the audience, nudity, or any of that dirty stuff. No audience manipulation, no incitement. This is healthy, Jack.

The trouble comes after the audience leave; it ain't the Pistols' fault, and there's nothing at all that the Pistols can do about it. We're all upstairs drinking rats' piss when there's a commotion outside and someone reports in with the news that a bunch of raggare have just chased a couple of young girl fans and ripped the pins right through their faces to prove what big bad tough guys they are.

Sid wants to go out there and lay into them. Someone else suggests ramming them with the limousine like the cat in the South did to the Ku Klux Klan awhile back. Ultimately, there's nothing that can be done except call the Fuzz and feel very, very sick about the whole thing.

**S**O ULTIMATELY, WHY are the various establishments – governmental, media and even rock 'n' roll – more frightened of the Pistols than of any other previous manifestation of rock 'n' roll madness?

"Because they were all to some extent slightly controlled by the industry," says Rotten, ensconced with Vicious and Cook in the relative peace and quiet of a hotel room. "There was always an element of the establishment behind it, but with us it's totally our own. We do what we want to do and there's no industry behind us. That's the difference. That's what frightens them"

"Or rather," interposes Vicious, "the industry is behind us rather than with us."

Hey, if the industry's behind you it's got a knife in its hand...

"Yeah," says Sid, "but we've got a Chieftain tank."

"They can't control us," continues Rotten. "We're uncontrollable. They've predicted all down the line against us, and they've failed. This scares them. They've never been able to do that before. They've always known before that the money would come into it, but they've missed the boat so many times."

**PAUL COOK:** "The thing was that everyone in the beginning was so sure that no way was it going to take off. People like Nicky Horne said that they'd never play punk rock and now he don't play nothing but."

Which is an equally narrow attitude...

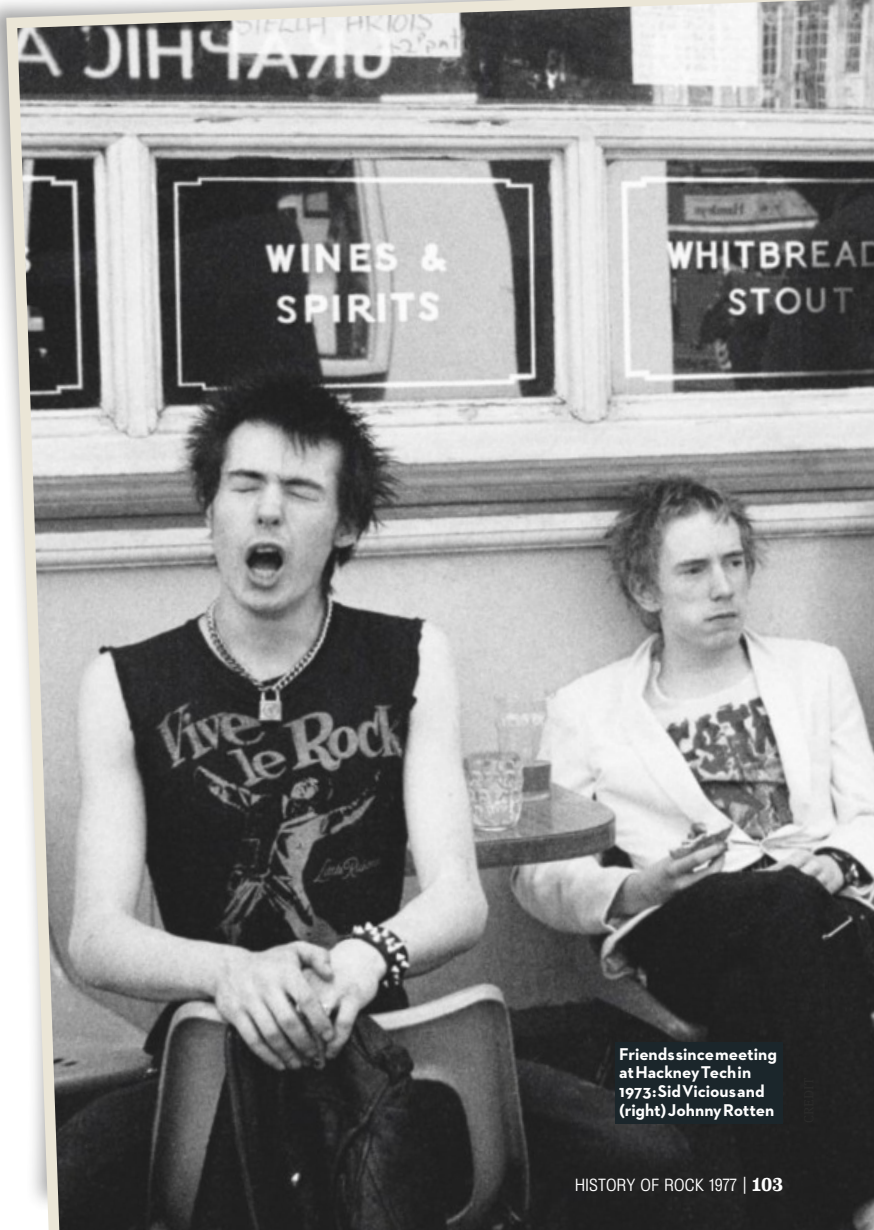
**ROTTEN:** "If not worse. With us it used to be 'They won't catch on because we're going to stop it' and there've been a hell of a lot of organisations out to stop us, and they've all failed."

Me, I don't think the Pistols can be stopped unless the kids are tired of them.

**ROTTEN:** "They're the ones who make all the decisions now. They're the ones that count, and I hope they've got the brains to suss it all out for themselves and not be told by the press, 'This band is finished,' and then think, 'Yes, that's right, they're finished and I'm not going to like them any more. I'm now going to like this.' They've got to decide for themselves."

**COOK:** "I think it's gone beyond the point where people can be told. They wouldn't play 'God Save The Queen' but that went to the top of the charts, and that usually dictates what goes in."

We talk about the Only True Swedish Punk's boutique, and Rotten opines that places like that should only be there to inspire people to create their own look, and be what they are instead of adopting a readymade facade. The same dictum, *natürlich*, applies to moozic: »



Friends since meeting at Hackney Technic 1973: Sid Vicious and (right) Johnny Rotten

“That’s what music should be about,” says Rotten. “I get very sick with the imitations. I despise them. They ruin it. They have no reason to be in it other than wanting money, which shows.”

“You’ve got to have your own point of view. You can have an idol – like you may see a band and think, ‘God, that band are really fucking good, I’d like to be like that.’ So you start up your own band, and then your own ideas come in as well on top of that and you have a foundation.”

“But a lot of those bands don’t leave that foundation and they stay in a rut and they listen to all the other songs in their morbid little circle and they do rewrites of them. Hence fifty thousand songs about how hard it is to be on the dole.”

“Been listening to The Clash, obviously,” says Sid. “The Clash only wrote those songs in the first place ‘cos of me and ‘im [Rotten] moaning about living in a poxy squat in Hampstead. It was probably them coming up there and seeing the squalor we were living in that encouraged them to write all that shit.”

Squalor in Hampstead, the bastion of liberalism?

“Oh no,” says Rotten. “You shoulda seen it.”

Vicious: “It was liberal, all right. It didn’t even have a bathtub.”

Was there any particular plan or strategy in mind right at the start of the Pistols?

**ROTTEN:** “Instinct. It hasn’t really worked out like that. We never sat down and wrote a thesis. There’s no rules, and no order. We just do it, which is more to the point. Do it, and when you can’t do it no more, then don’t do it at all.”

**VICIOUS:** “If it requires any real effort, then there’s no point in doing it. It should just come. If you have to force it, then there’s something wrong.”

**ROTTEN:** “Yeah, if you have to sit down in your room and go, ‘I’ve got to write a song, but what about?’... that’s rubbish. It just comes. It’s there.”

Yeah, I know just what you mean, John. Pure, untainted, burning creativity...

**ROTTEN:** “Oh yeah, man. Far out. It’s very hard not to run into those hippie bullshit phrases, because some of them were good, some of them actually meant something. It’s just a shame that they ruined a lot of ‘em with silly ideas about, ‘Yeah man, I wanna be free’, which meant fuck all.”

**VICIOUS:** “Free from what they never even said.”

‘Course we did, man – free from the same things you want free from: preplanned existences, boring jobs, stifling media...

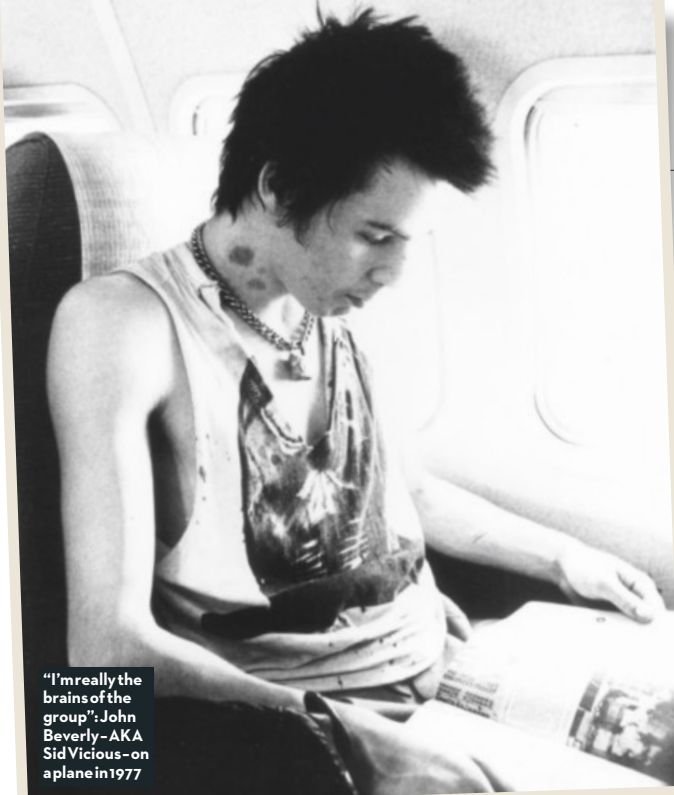
**COOK:** “Yeah, but they were like that themselves, weren’t they?”

**ROTTEN:** “I can remember going to those concerts and seeing all those hippies being far out and together, maaaaaaan, despising me because I was about 20 years younger than they were and having short hair. That’s when I saw through their bullshit. A lot of punks are like that as well, which makes me really sick.”

**COOK:** “The only memory of hippies I have was when I was in a park once when we was skinheads and we was throwin’ conkers at these hippies and they were goin’, ‘Hey, that’s really nice, man, I really love conkers.’”

**ROTTEN:** “Well, that made you a fool then, didn’t it? I think they won hands down, because you were wasting your energy and they were laughing at you.”

**I**T MAY OR MAY NOT seem ironic now, but when Johnny Rotten was 15-year-old John Lydon of Finsbury Park, he was tossed out of school because his hair was too long, the old



“I’m really the brains of the group”: John Beverly – AKA Sid Vicious – on a plane in 1977

find-out-what-the-kids-are-doing-and-make-them-stop trick.

“Yeah, but when they find out it’s always too late,” he says. “In five years’ time they’ll have schoolteachers with safety pins in their ears. It’s so predictable with those oafs.”

**VICIOUS:** “The definition of a grown-up is someone who catches on just as something becomes redundant.”

The kids Rotten went to school with weren’t really into music, “except the geezers I hung around with. It was in skinhead times and they couldn’t understand how a skinhead could like The Velvet Underground. It was quite apt. I went to the Catholic School in Caledonian Road, opposite the prison. What a dungeon!”

Force-feeding you religion along with the lessons?

“Yeah, it was terrible. They really destroy you with what they do to your soul. They try and take away any kind of thought that might in any way be original. You know when caning was banned? In Catholic schools that didn’t apply, because they’re not state-run. They get aid from the state, but they’re not entirely state-run. I don’t know where they get their money from... I’d like to know. It’s probably some Irish mafia.”

“What they try to do is turn you out a robot. When it comes to allocating jobs for a student who’s about to be kicked out into the wild world, it’s always jobs like bank clerk... be a railway attendant or a ticket collector. Even the ones who stayed on for A-levels...”

Were any of the teachers halfway human?

“The ones that were got sacked very quickly. Everything was taught in a very strict style, in the same way that they taught religion: this is the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, and if you don’t like it you’re gonna get caned. But Catholic schools build rebels: a lot went along with it, but a lot didn’t. There was always a riot in religion classes. Nobody liked that subject.”

“I got kicked out when I was nearly 15 – 14 and a half – because I had too long hair. I had really long hair...”

“A balding old hippy with a big pair of platforms on,” sneers Vicious. “That’s what you were. I went to the same college as him...”

“...to get O-levels,” Rotten finishes the sentence for him. “I waited a year and a bit because I went on building sites working, and then I went to get some O-levels because I still had it in me that O-levels were the way to heaven... plus I didn’t want to work no more.”

“I got a grant. It was very easy. For some reason I always liked technical drawing and geography. At college I did maths, English, physics, technical drawing and chemistry...”

**COOK:** “I’ve got an O-level in woodwork.”

**VICIOUS:** “I’ve got two O-levels... English and English Literature... and I’m very intelligent.”

**ROTTEN:** “English Literature was a joke. I passed that with flying colours without even trying. It was stupid fucking Keats poetry, because I did my English in my Catholic school.”

“They kicked me out halfway through the course because they said I’d never pass, but they’d already entered me, so I went and took the exam privately because I was still entitled to sit down at County Hall.”

“And I passed with an A... and I went down there with the certificate and showed it to ‘em.”

**U**NLIKE FELLOW REGGAE freaks in The Clash, there’s no reggae in the Pistols’ repertoire.

“I find that slightly condescending – and that is not a slag-off of The Clash. I’m white, and I’m rock. I don’t

“We’re fighting people who ought to be on our side”





like rock music, but I like what we do with it. How could we sing about 'Jah Rastafari'? Even 'Police And Thieves' is full of innuendo, it's about three in one God on the cross and on each side are the police and the thieves; Rasta in the middle. That's what the song implies. It doesn't need to say more, because a Jamaican will know straight away. Besides, I don't like Junior Murvin's voice."

He's very much like Curtis Mayfield.

"Yeah, very much like Curtis Mayfield."

And you don't like Curtis Mayfield?

"Yeah, I do. I like the music; there's a different feel about it.

Do black kids dig your music? Do they understand it as part of the same thing?

"For sure. Where was that gig where a lot of dreads turned up? That was really shocking. I think it was an early Nashville, years ago. There was a few of them at the back, and I was really shocked that they'd be there. I talked to them afterwards and they said, 'Understand, just understand, man will understand, mon'. You never get any trouble from blacks. They understand it's the same movement."

Yeah, but reggae singers talk about what they love at least as much as they do about what they hate.

"Don't we?"

Only by implication: in the sense that if it's known what you stand against it can then be inferred what you stand for.

"Yeah, but it's the same with reggae. There are so many people who refuse to listen to them: 'No no, it's all a big con. All this terrible Jah and Rasta stuff, it's all a big con to make money.' There's been loads of reviews..."

"That one by Nick Kent was just classic ignorance, comparing reggae with hippies."

**M**ANY PEOPLE LIKE to feel that Malcolm McLaren is in total control of the Sex Pistols: Svengali to Rotten's Trilby. Maybe they feel happier thinking that Rotten's controlled by McLaren than they do feeling that maybe he isn't controlled at all.

"They need to do that because they don't want to think differently than they already do. They like their safe world. They don't like realising the way things actually are."

**COOK:** "They fucking do that with everybody. They don't like admitting that anybody actually is the way they are. They always say, 'They got it from them, they're just like them.'"

**VICIOUS:** "The trouble is that the general public are so contrived themselves that they can't imagine how anybody else could not be contrived. Therefore, if you're not contrived, they have to find some way of justifying their own contrivance..."

Ghost voiceover from the past: Jack Nicholson in *Easy Rider* telling Fonda and Hopper, "They're not scared of you. They're scared of what you represent to them... what you represent to them is freedom. But talking about it and being it—that's two different things.

"I mean, it's real hard to be free when you are bought and sold in the market place. 'Course, don't ever tell anybody that they're not free, 'cos then they're gonna get real busy killin' and maimin' to prove to you that they are. Oh yeah—they're gonna talk to you and talk to you and talk to you about individual freedom, but they see a free individual, it's gonna scare 'em."

But I don't tell 'em what my ghost voice says, because that's hippies, and that's past and gone... and it was bullshit anyway.

Or so they tell me.

A few more things about Johnny Rotten. When he was eight he had meningitis, and it left him with weak eyes, permanent sinus, stunted growth and a hunched back.

The once-decayed teeth which got him his nickname are held together with steel rods.

They only time I saw him throw up was because his dinner had disagreed with his somewhat unstable digestive system... and

then some twisto went into the bog after he'd finished and started taking polaroids of it.

He uses foot powder on his hair because it absorbs all the grease. I never saw him hassle anyone who didn't hassle him, and I never saw him bullshit anyone who didn't bullshit him, and what more can you say for anyone in 1977?

"Turn the other cheek too often and you get a razor through it" — John Rotten, 1977.

Still, 1977 is a prize year for violence, and talking about the Pistols nearly always ends up as talking about violence, so—in the words of Gary Gilmore—let's do it.

"When they push you into a corner like that, what are you to do? You either kill them or give up, which is very sad, because we're fighting people who ought to be on our side... or are on our side but don't know it. They say we're using them, but the real people who are using them they don't even know about."

**VICIOUS:** "We're quite nice friendly chappies, really, but everyone has a beastly side to them, don't they? I can't think of anyone I know who if somebody messed around with them they wouldn't do 'em over."

**ROTTEN:** "People are sick of being used, but they're now attacking the wrong people—eg, us. When I was a skinhead, everyone I know used to go to the football games, and the match had nothing to do with it. What else was there to do? Disco? The youth club? Talkin' 'bout my generation... there was nothing else except alcohol."

Yeah, but having a barney with a bunch of people who're there to have one too is one thing, but random picking-on in the streets—like some skinheads used to do to hippies—is a whole other ballgame.

**ROTTEN:** "Yeah, but to a skinhead it looked like: 'These geezers are having fun doing what they're doing and we're not just because of the way we look, so smash 'em up and stop their fun.' It's just like the Teds in London, 'cos like I said, when I had a crop and I went to a festival, the reaction I had was terrible.

"Violence is always the end result of nothing to do. And it's very easy, and it's very stupid."

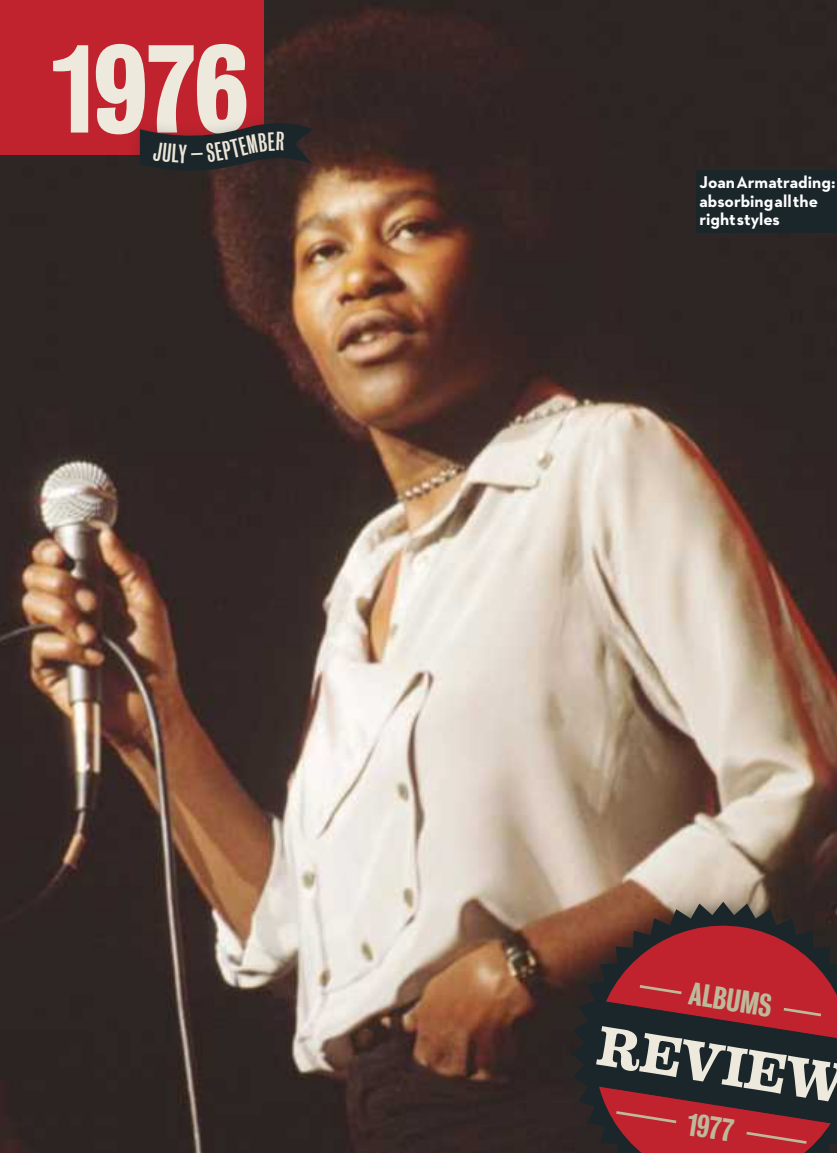
Johnny Rotten is an avid fan of *The Prisoner*, which figures. After all, he's not a number. He's a free man. And no matter what they put him through, he'll always be a freer man than any of the people who've tried to tear him down.

Charles Shaar Murray •



"It just comes, it's there": Johnny Rotten on his songwriting, 1977

Joan Armatrading:  
absorbing all the  
right styles



— ALBUMS —  
**REVIEW**  
— 1977 —

## ALBUMS

### Joan Armatrading *Show Some Emotion* A&M

With her oblique, uniquely structured songs and a voice that swirls so passionately around the words that you just have to listen carefully, Joan Armatrading has quickly become one of our most distinguished artists. When she arrived with her brilliant album *Joan Armatrading*, keen students of the songs knew it would be hard for her to top such a collection. Every one, from "Love And Affection" to "Water And The Wine", had that compelling touch of a truly original artist who had absorbed all the right styles and then transplanted her own urgent stamp.

Here she is, then, long after that crucial breakthrough album... and it's great to be able to herald *Show Some Emotion* as a spectacular follow-up, full of warm songs reflecting the album title and also mirroring Joan's apparent obsession with romantic aspirations which she fears might not be fulfilled.

Her roots lie firmly in the blues, and never has this been more apparent than on "Opportunity", a cleverly conceived song about

committing a crime (a bank raid, perhaps?) which results in misery. Joan's aspirations to this depth of songwriting bode well for the future and her rare plaintive vocal puts her firmly in a line of descent from the great blues singers.

"Woncha Come On Home", which kicks off the record, is as powerful as anything she has performed in the upbeat, while "Show Some Emotion" and "Peace In The Mind" demonstrate again her quirky song construction, which remains such a positive characteristic. There's even a pure ballad, "Get In The Sun", which is kicked so hard in the treatment that it turns into a blend of disco and jazz.

But yes, there is a criticism. Because of the speedy changes in the songs - notably the poignant ballad "Willow", with its carefully written story, along the lines of "Reach Out, I'll Be There" - Joan's diction loses out and the lyrics are difficult to discern. A shame, but careful study is repaid, all the same. The lyrical theme

of the album is a mixture of romantic optimism and experience, exposing a lady of sensitive feeling. The accompaniment, as might be expected from a gathering of such strong players, is spare and at all times correctly in tandem with the moods.

*Show Some Emotion* seems to me an absolutely essential item for the collection of anyone with the remotest interest in today's music, presenting as it does one of our finest singers delivering a searing collection of songs. There would appear to be about half-a-dozen potential hit singles here, too. What an album!

Ray Coleman, MM Sept 10

### The Boomtown Rats

*The Boomtown Rats* ENSIGN

Oh Christ, what will we label them? Rock'n'roll, rhythm and blues, pop, new wave? All tags apply but no one alone totally fits the bill as a true representation of what *The Boomtown Rats* are about. Listen to this excellent debut album once and you'll reel in confusion; spin it again and you will squeal in delight.

I must also emphasise that, while the Rats summon all those styles, with sporadic traces of Dylan, Stones, Beatles, Feelgoods, Springsteen and much more besides, their adaptation is not one that can be called derivative. This band picks the cream and churns it to create their own identity - one that will become clearer with each album, I'm sure.

But what is most heartening about *The Boomtown Rats* is that it shows that the band have left room for real artistic progress in the future, at a time when very few new-wave bands think about where they'll be five minutes from now (an admirable immediacy, but one that leads only to a short-lived existence).

The Rats have been compared heavily to Dr Feelgood when, in fact, they are the time-warped (though great nonetheless)

Feelgoods taken a vital and imaginative step further. The potential for this band is pretty unnerving.

For the present, though, this album encapsulates present (new wave), past ('60s R&B) and future (the scintillating combination of both with well-thought-out lyrical and musical arrangements).

New-wave followers will undoubtedly pick on the '77 pop 'n' energy feel of "Lookin' After Number 1", "Mary Of The Fourth Form", "She's Gonna Do You In" and, with slightly less enthusiasm, "Neon Heart", while staunch R&B fanatics can get their fulfilment out of things like "Kicks", "Close As You'll Ever Be" and "Never Bite The Hand That Feeds", the only duff track on the album.

For the future, we must look to the sharp arrangements of those tunes as well as referring to two beautiful ballads on the album, "Joey's On The Street Again", one in the Morrison/Springsteen/Lynott/Parker/Costello mould, and the even more poignant "I Can Make It If You Can", which seems to be heavily influenced by Dylan vocally. How encouraging it is to see a band tackle two such songs when the river is running, even gushing, in the opposite direction.

Vocalist Bob Geldof is undoubtedly the main man in the Rats. His lyrics, particularly on "Kicks" and "Joey's On The Street Again", display acute awareness of what is happening on the street and in the home. The chauvinism and sheer bloody-mindedness of "Lookin' After Number 1" will no doubt win him a few enemies.

As a singer, his asset is knowing the limitations of his voice rather than stretching and blowing the gaff, so he works well within a set framework, embellishing the top vocal with some nifty harmonies (as on "Neon Heart" and "Mary Of The 4th Form", with its great childish chant outro).

He enjoys a healthy relationship with the rest of his competent band, trading vocal bursts for guitar licks with Cott and Roberts, à la Jagger and Richards. I'd like to see Johnny Fingers' potential exploited more. On this album, he seems a little tied down, playing a fairly predictable role rather than expanding the music to an even broader horizon.

Naturally, with a neo-new-wave band, the rhythm section is solid, with Pete





THE BOOMTOWN RATS

Briquette and Simon Crowe providing the backbone.

This rates as one of the best debut albums in years and The Boomtown Rats will be hailed as one of the best new bands to arrive in ages. I'd bet my Thin Lizzy collection on it.

Harry Doherty, *NME* Aug 27

**BILLY JOEL**  
**Souvenir** CBS

Some artists sit on the precipice of The Major Breakthrough for so long that it becomes an act of real patience, awaiting their arrival. So it is with Billy Joel. Ever since America took a fancy to him with a killer single called "Piano Man", it has been obvious with the release of each album that he has all the vocal, instrumental, and songwriting equipment to match the impact of Elton John.

If anything, he's a more inspired, less predictable writer than Elton, as evinced here by "The Entertainer", "The Ballad Of Billy The Kid" and "I've Loved These Days". Basically, Billy Joel writes songs much closer to the bone than many others. He takes as his basis for writing not love or interdependence by two people, more the loneliness and near-desperation of young Americans. Thus, "New York State Of Mind" and "Los Angelenos" tend to be commentaries on the extremes of these two cities, while "Captain Jack" is a lament on a 21-year-old man morally at sea.

"The Entertainer" parades the empty life on the road of those people, while "Say Goodbye To Hollywood" pinpoints the city's transparent shallowness.

As well as being a fine writer, Joel is a powerful pianist. This record, from a TV recording, presents material from three albums, *Piano Man*, *Streetlife Serenade* and *Turnstiles*, as well as new material. He has not taken an easy route in success, being a commentator on the passing scene more than a flat-out romantic. But if he continues to build on his strength, there is no doubt Joel will eventually clinch it, because his performances of interesting songs are often magnetic. Ray Coleman, *NME* Aug 13

**SINGLES**

**Adverts**  
**Gary Gilmore's Eyes** ANCHOR

Remember all those old horror movies where a sensitive and observant concert pianist, violinist or some such gets a mitt transplant and ends up with the hands of a brutal murderer (or, *après* the brilliant Marty Feldman, the hands of a demented circus clown)? If you do, go line up with Adverts main man TV Smith.

This song is about waking up from an eye transplant and discovering that the donor was Gary ("Let's do it") Gilmore, the American murderer who demanded the death penalty. The performance is, how you say, minimal, but the idea is great and the record carries a genuine chill. If not the performance of the week, "Gary Gilmore's Eyes" is certainly the idea of the week.

Who says you have to be a bearded ginko with a synthesizer to be thought-provoking?

*NME* Aug 20

**The Desperate Bicycles**  
**The Medium Was Tedium/**  
**Don't Back The Front** REFILL

Presumably inspired to make a record by the punk dictum which states that anyone can play, The Desperate Bicycles went ahead and did it. The result is not a little weird. John Peel plays it all the time. And if you ask me, when anyone so obviously has their credentials in all the right places, as these boys do, you can't possibly knock it. Well, not at least until they sign with a major record label. *NME* Jul 16

**Roogalator**  
**Love And The Single Girl** VIRGIN

Hmmmmmm. Old-fashioned blue-beat jump rhythm, electric piano chiming like ice in a tall glass on a hot day, breathy vocals like Colin Blunstone with laryngitis. Must be Roogalator! I'm already tapping my fingers gently on the table and wishing I could go out for a beer.

This record tries abnormally hard to sound cool, but it just sounds wet. Even the attempt at a rave-up B-side transforms James Brown's sweaty, demonic "I Got You" into something long, cool and neat. Roogalator play great and I love the kind of mid-'60s R&B soul that they're drawing on, but hey, a little more humanity, please. *NME* Aug 20



The Adverts: (l-r) Laurie Driver, TV Smith, Gaye Advert and Howard Pickup



**T Rex**  
**Celebrate Summer** EMI

For one golden instant I thought Marc had finally pulled off the unalloyed pop triumph that he needs as a convincing, viable follow-up to "Get It On". This isn't it, but it's certainly the most likeable single he's made for a long time, even though it, ahem, borrows the melody and chord sequence of The Deviants' "Let's Loot The Supermarket". "Summer is heaven in '77", yeah? Depends where you are, Marc. I wouldn't anticipate heavy sales in Lewisham for a week or two.

*NME* Aug 20

**Ian Dury**  
**Sex And Drugs And Rock'n'Roll** STIFF

This ex-pub-rock luminaire deserves infinitely more credit for the late-'70s renaissance of rock culture than all those arteriosclerotic lard-belly "grand pappy of punk" specimens that the gutter-rock press has offered up for instant deity. He was one of the prophets most responsible for kicking music out of the tax-haven rock-Tsar syndrome and restoring it to the rightful acnervaged owners in the sweaty subterranean depths, while also possessing the suss to realise that fashion is there to be led, not followed. He and no other was the instigator of safety-pin chic, wearing the objects in his lugholes when Richard Hell was still wearing them in his Mothercare diapers.

The geezer's music boasted a total Anglo-consciousness somewhat akin to a vicious Syd Barrett, and 1976 finally rolled around

*après Dury le deluge*. And while the majority of punk bands are getting pecky layers of flab around their souls as they get used to the idea of having a press officer tickling their anus from dawn to dusk after making their cross on that six-figure recording contract, Dury's still sharp and sleazy. If the youngsters can't keep up the pace without terminal bland-out, then TOO BAD.

Ian Dury has created a Juke Box Classic around youth cultures' Holy Trinity that would be a Universal No 1 if Eddie Cochran hadn't died in vain and if our national media wasn't controlled by joyless reactionary loonies. It's possibly the ultimate statement in narcissistic, hedonistic London Mod Omnipotence over stunning purity of funk, inducing immediate addiction that intensifies over the subsequent grooves where Our Kid gets understandably choked with emotion as he gets measured up for his new custom-made mohair so he can look like a real Tasty Geezer when he goes in search of the night.

The B-side is "Razzle In My Pocket", about getting nicked tea-leafing in the South Street Romford Shopping Arcade out there in Essex Overspill, and

proves conclusively that Ian Dury is writing the soundtrack for this generation, which thankfully ain't really got sweet FA to do with being Blank. *NME* Sept 3



IAN DICKSON / GETTY



# 1977

OCTOBER – DECEMBER

THE CLASH, STIFF TOUR,  
BUZZCOCKS, ROLLING  
STONES AND MORE

## Three dead, three injured

**NME OCT 29** Southern rock band Lynyrd Skynyrd decimated in a plane crash.

**A**T 9.02PM LOCAL TIME on Thursday, October 20, in remote woodland in south-west Mississippi, Lynyrd Skynyrd ceased to exist. The whole band were involved in an air crash, killing three of their members and critically injuring another three, so adding to the string of recent tragedies.

The band's lead singer Ronnie Van Zant died, along with their newest recruit, guitarist Steve Gaines (who joined last year) and his sister Cassie Gaines, one of the three backing vocalists. Also killed were personal manager Dean Kilpatrick and the two pilots, while two of the road crew died subsequently in hospital.

Gary Rossington (guitar), Leon Wilkeson (bass) and Billy Powell (keyboards) were seriously injured and, on Monday, were still on the critical list. Guitarist Allen Collins and drummer Artimus Pyle were also injured, as well as the other backing singers, but they are said to be recovering.

The plane was on charter to Skynyrd, and was carrying the full band and their road and lighting crew. First reports suggest that it ran out of fuel and clipped some trees as the pilot tried to crash land.

The band's latest album, with the unfortunate title of *Street Survivors*, was officially released here by MCA the day after the crash. And because of this, MCA have no immediate plans for a memorial or compilation album. In America, the LP went gold on the day of release.

Skynyrd had just started a massive four-month tour of the States to promote the album. It opened on October 15 and was due to run until mid-February, and they were on their way to a concert on Friday (21) at Louisiana University in Baton Rouge when the disaster occurred. Their British promoter Harvey Goldsmith had just returned from America, after signing them for a major British tour in March.

They were discovered by Al Kooper, and made their name as support on The Who's 1973 US tour. They first toured Britain as support to Golden Earring, and were so successful that they finished by headlining their own Rainbow concert.

They have since continued to grow in stature: touring here several times – and in the last NME Poll were voted one of the world's Top 10 rock bands.



October 20, 1977: the wreckage of a twin-engine Convair 240 plane that crashed into a wooded swamp near McComb, Mississippi, killing and badly injuring members of Lynyrd Skynyrd and others on board



# CRASH WIPES OUT SKYNYRD

Van Zant died, along with their newest recruit guitarist Steve Gaines (who joined last year)

and clipped some trees as pilot tried to crash land. The band's latest album, the unfortunate title of

# 1977

OCTOBER – DECEMBER



October 6, 1977: Donna Summer high kicking and singing in Saint-Tropez, south-eastern France

## “A woman is still a woman – thank God”

**MM OCT 15** A chaotic trip to meet disco star Donna Summer. The key to her notoriety? “I just sang an erotic song, that’s all.”

**I**T SOUNDED A good idea – a free trip to Rome! A chance to see one of Europe’s most historic cities! A social call on the Pope! And a penetrating interview with the darling of the Plastic Mac Set, Donna Summer.

And so it came to pass the *Melody Maker* and the *Daily Mirror*, in company with two representatives from Pye Records in London, departed in breathless anticipation of meeting Orgasm Rock’s current goddess.

No problems were evident. “Love To Love You Baby” was a fine record that would have made it even without the benefit of a BBC ban, and the quirky “I Feel Love”, which recently occupied the No 1 position for several weeks, was a real oddity, an inspired production job that brilliantly broke away from the standard formula, certainly of disco singles.

So, the interviewer was sympathetic, and the singer would be charming, of that I had no doubt. Why, an American press release on the lady said as much: “When all the major publications wanted to talk to her, she handled the intense pressure with grace. Even the ordeal of 18 interviews in one day – after which she lost her voice for a day – didn’t faze her.”

Remember that quote – not without irony in the events that are to follow. Now you may be baffled by the logic, even the ethics, involved in record companies spending vast amounts of money on taking journalists overseas in

order to write something about their artists. It comes from a budget set aside for promotion... some call it hype.

This particular junket was making a fair dent in Pye’s budget, Pye having only just acquired the British rights to Donna Summer. Return air fare to Rome is £211 each for the *Daily Mirror* and *Melody Maker*, plus hotel expenses for all four. No record company’s gonna lay out that sort of bread without

a perfect certainty that a smooth path is guaranteed for the reporter to get his story, from artist and manager downwards.

Donna Summer shortly comes to Britain, for two dates at the Rainbow Theatre in London, an ambitious concert debut based on a handful of disco-orientated hit singles; pre-tour publicity, you might consider, is at a premium. Meanwhile in Rome, the plot thickens.

Contact is made and interview requested, but Donna is off shopping now. See you at the press conference at three, says Christy Hill, the gangly American lady from Casablanca, her American record company. Yeah, but

what about our interview? “There’s no interview, there’s just a press conference. A PRESS CONFERENCE! OK, is that clear enough?” demands Hill ferociously.

The superior calm of the Hilton is disturbed as a fierce argument breaks out. The Pye representation from England are naturally furious, and the press baffled – the *Daily Mirror* had scheduled a whole page for their next issue on the revelations of Ms Summer.

A couple of hours later Donna’s manager Ron De Blasio is traced, but is totally uncompromising. He doesn’t care how far we’ve come, Donna’s doing a press conference, but no interviews. What’s more, her concert in Rome tonight is sold out and there’s no way we can be wangled in to see it. “I detect a distinct note of hostility,” said Ms Hill. No, dear, whatever gives you that idea?

Donna arrives for the press conference 20 minutes late, as befits a big star, for that is evidently what she is. A determined lady from Boston, she made her mark on showbusiness in Europe appearing in the German production of *Hair*.

She knew she wanted to be a singer ever since hearing Mahalia Jackson when she was a kid and finally got there three years ago via various theatrical projects and modelling, when she met Pete Bellotte and Giorgio Moroder.

There were a couple of hits in Europe before Bellotte and Moroder came up with “Love To Love You Baby” and Donna breathed and grunted her way to international stardom in the styles that Jane Birkin had achieved such notoriety with a few years before.

Press conferences are usually totally useless affairs at the best of times, but I’ve never seen anything like this. Flanked by De Blasio and an interpreter, Donna, looking pretty and demure, signals she’s ready and the chaos that follows suggests Benito Mussolini has just risen from the dead.

Ken Jenour (*Mirror*) and I had hatched an evil plot to register our protest with some embarrassing questions, but this was obviously out as any semblance of order was immediately lost in the babble of excitable

Italians fighting to get their point across to Donna.

“Every woman likes to be considered sexy,” she says, in answer to the obvious question about being a sex bomb. “That’s a nice feeling, but it’s not the only way I like people to think of me. I would like to be known

as a good singer and a good performer to the end of my life.”

And to the next inevitable question, her attitude to feminism, she responds, “I think that all people should be treated the same for the work they do. A man is still a man, thank God, and a woman is still a woman...thank God.” Cheers and more babble greet this profundity.

**“If everyone had my telephone number... I can only give so much”**

# Summer in the city



Sniggers drift round the room as the next question is unveiled, even the translator allowing herself a grin. It's from a gentleman, apparently Israeli, who wants to know why she had to surround herself by so many people and isn't more accessible to the media. Right on.

She stumbles a bit on that one...

"The problem is people don't realise that an artist, well, I don't get very much sleep and... if everyone had my telephone number... well, I can only give so much."

And then, more belligerently: "In American we were selling before the radio and the television and everyone knew about me - it proves the market is sometimes stronger than the media."

What was that about treating the press with grace? The questioner persists.

"I'm gonna punch you, sir," says Donna, laughing dismissively. The conference rapidly disintegrates. By sheer volume, eventually we get through. Jenour quotes her own headlines back at her... first lady of love... the biggest cock-teaser of all time.

"I never said that, I don't talk that way," snaps Donna, although nobody suggested she had. "Every person has a different expectation of me; it doesn't bear any relevance to me."

Jenour and I battle our way to the front and plant ourselves in front of Donna, now signing autographs and shutting her ears off from the babble. She looks across in surprise at our presumptuousness, and, I believe, some fear. I ask her if she was surprised by the storm "Love To Love You Baby" caused in Britain. "Yeah, I mean some of the lyrics these rock bands sing... I just sang an erotic song, that's all. I didn't expect a reaction like that, not in England of all places."

She raises her eyes skywards as the Italian hubbub intensifies and there's a battery of photographers enclosing us. "I can't handle this," she mutters. Let's go to another room and continue the interview in peace, I say.

She hesitates. I see De Blasio watching from the end of the room. "I'm sorry, there's nowhere to go." Well, there's the bar, or the hotel foyer. "I'm sorry, I'd like to, but I haven't the time. I've got to go straight to a rehearsal and then to the concert. Really, I'm sorry."

The girl they're trying to mould into a superstar was then hustled away.

Ken Jenour calls the *Mirror* in London. The space allocated to Donna Summer goes instead to Mud. *Colin Irwin*

# LENNON SPEAKS

-but only just!

## "We really have nothing to say"

**MM OCT 15** John Lennon is retiring - sort of. "We've decided to be with our baby as much as we can."

**J**OHNN LENNON IS officially semi-retired, and will not perform or record for at least another year. He told a press conference at the Hotel Okura in Tokyo last Tuesday that he and Yoko Ono wanted to devote their time to their son, Sean Ono Lennon.

"We've basically decided, without a great decision, to be with our baby as much as we can until we feel we can take the time off to indulge ourselves in creating things outside the family," Lennon announced. "Maybe when he's three, four or five, then we'll think about creating something else other than the child."

The Lennons have been in Japan since May, and one of the purposes of their visit was to show the child, now about two years old, to his in-laws. Lennon took his stay so seriously that he enrolled in a Japanese language course in New York before he went.

The press conference, at which the *Melody Maker* was the only western paper present, was called just before their return to New York, which will continue to be their main home.

Lennon later told me that their only motive was to thank the Japanese people for respecting their privacy while there.

Although perceptibly nervous, he looked in tremendous physical shape. Wearing an expensive black, two-piece suit, with a white shirt and pearl-grey tie, and with his hair in a smart, conventional cut, he sat beside Yoko, who translated and did most of the talking. Incense burned, and an incongruous note was struck by a radio somewhere in the penthouse suite playing "You Are My Sunshine".

I was forbidden to ask direct questions, and after the conference Lennon remained friendly but noncommittal. "We really have nothing to say," he explained.

The Japanese questions were hardly penetrating, however. Many of them concerned the death of Elvis Presley.

"Elvis died when he went into the army," Lennon replied. "Up until he joined the army I thought it was beautiful music, and Elvis was for me and my generation what The Beatles were to the '60s. I basically became a musician because of Elvis Presley."

"I never did concerts to influence people," he answered one questioner. "I did them for many reasons. And since 1966 I have not performed for money, only for charity."

Responding, therefore, to a question about The Beatles reviving, he replied, "I doubt it very much."

Lennon was also asked about punk rock, and seemed very out of touch with music of the past year. After almost 45 tentative minutes, Lennon and Yoko closed the shop, and all that Lennon would add later was

that he would be coming to Britain "at some point". He appeared unconcerned both about returning and about recording again. His last album, *Rock 'n' Roll*, was released a couple of years ago. Nor would he comment on the fact that his contract has now ended with EMI.

The birth of the couple's child and the atmosphere of Japan seem to have made him remarkably contented. "Basically, I'm now a Zen pagan," he said. Perhaps that explains it. *Michael Watts*

### "I became a musician because of Elvis Presley"

John Lennon outside the Dakota building in New York City, 1977



## Entirely amicable **MM NOV 12** There's a split in Black Sabbath.

**O**ZZIE [SIC] OSBOURNE, singer with Black Sabbath since the band formed nine years ago in Birmingham, has quit. His decision came after a meeting with the band last week, and he said his departure is entirely amicable. He has left the band to follow some form of solo career, but exactly what is planned has not yet been announced.

Black Sabbath are now looking for a replacement singer, and a vocalist with a fairly well-known band flew in from America this week for an audition. The band was planning an album when Osbourne decided to quit, and as soon as a singer has been found, rehearsals will go ahead. The record will be recorded in Toronto before Christmas, and is due for release in the spring to coincide with a British tour.

# Ozzie quits Sabbath



The Fall at The Ranch, Manchester's first punk club, on August 18, 1977; (l-r) Una Baines, Martin Bramah, Karl Burns (drums), Mark E. Smith and Tony Friel

# “People tell me we’re political”

MM DEC 31 Introducing, from Manchester, The Fall. They are, insists their frontman Mark Smith, far more multi-faceted than The Clash.

**A**UTUMN - THE WORLD a copper-gold shade of dying? Nuclear omni-destruction - the shrieking tumble of the Bomb before the fallout? Woman and man's expulsion from Paradise in the Christian fairytale? Or the toppling of capitalism by revolution?

As The Fall say, their name is so evocative that it'd be almost criminal to select any one meaning and evict all others. The new bands certainly seem to choose better names than the old - I mean, The Beatles, the Rolling Stones? The Fourmost? What kind of names are those?

The Fall hit hard. Not with the sledgehammer superficiality of the sub-Ramones clones/drones, but ingeniously - intellectually, I suppose. Their attack is more cerebral on all fronts than is usual within these street-gut shores. Their lyrics (nearly all indiscernible in concert) are oblique, and occasionally esoteric enough to necessitate explanation; they all look very sharp, yet cool and detached, especially the blond axis of vocalist/lyricist Mark Smith and organist Una Baines; and their music is probably clever before it's powerful.

That “cleverness” isn't meant to suggest a link with art rock, that brightly contrived fringe, though The Fall have intelligence and a readiness to experiment with form in common with that genre.

Even their formal adventurousness, though, is of an entirely different order from, say, Talking Heads' clinical variation - The Fall take the repetition and the monotonous vocals which have flooded the country in the past year and develop them into something positive and exciting.

They even have a song called “Repetition”, perhaps their finest, which is ambitious despite revolving entirely around an omnipotent two-chord core-thread, Martin Bramah's guitar twanging trebly in a calculatedly tacky radio-signal sound - the closest reference point is probably Buzzcocks' “Boredom”, though I'm not exactly sure why. Like Buzzcocks with “Spiral Scratch”, The Fall

are making their first recorded foray with an EP on Manchester's New Hormones label, which will probably appear next month and feature “Repetition”, “Frightened” (a slower, more thoughtful, menacing number, which relentlessly grinds out its evocation of paranoia), “Bingo-Master's Break-Out!”, and “Psycho Mafia” - the last being the song which has haunted me most in the two months since I first saw them.

Mark Smith's intonation is always intensely cynical (if that's possible) and usually deliberately tuneless, and both those traits come into their own in this fragmented warning about the Thought Police of the present. “Psycho Mafia” was probably one of the songs that led to them being branded an exclusively political band - the first time they ever appeared in print it was as a totally committed socialist band who, like Henry Cow, would have trouble coming to terms with a commercial art form.

They were grossly misrepresented, they say, though tales of Una furiously berating other Manchester musicians backstage over their sexism, as well as exchanges like the following, show that they come from quite a long way left. I'd mentioned to them that I'd heard they used to refuse all college gigs, and to sing “Oh Student!” instead of “Hey Fascist!”. Una: “I didn't think we'd been going long enough to have a history,” (it's only eight months since Una and drummer Karl Burns joined and the band's life began in earnest).

Mark: “One of the reasons we changed that was that it's become very trendy to bash students. The sentiment's still there maybe, but the main reason we changed it to “Hey Fascist!” was that we thought it more relevant.”

So what does the song say now? “It's an anti-fascist song,” said Una, “what else is there to say?” She glared at me with a challenging

glint in her eye, as she did till at least halfway through the interview, when we finally decided we liked each other. I was glad she didn't know that only a few months before I'd been one of the reviled student breed.

But do all of you stand on the left?

Martin: “Yeah, well none of us are fascists.”

Not everyone outside the left is a fascist...

“Yes, they are,” retorted Una in her laconic monotone, “They're just watered-down fascists. We're talking about the same mentality.”

You reckon? I don't at all...

Mark: “They've got no mentality.”

That exchange makes them seem very confident, both in themselves and in their views, and that's just how they appear on stage - they all implicitly express a distance from punk by wearing nondescript casual gear (when's the last time you saw a new waver wearing a sweater?).

Una looks icily uninterested, a fully paid-up member of the Tina Weymouth detachment school; and Mark reminds me visually of a committed but cynical street-level activist.

Yet when Mark sent me the lyrics to “Hey Fascist!” later on, he didn't seem at all confident of the worth of his work, heading it with “Pretentious Garbage Inc 1977”.

Martin, Karl and Tony (Friel, their bassist, who's on the brink of leaving) agree that they're less politically

committed than the other two and are in it more for the music. “Well what d'you think we're in it for?” said Una, on the attack again.

I dunno - to communicate a political belief?

Una: “No way - the music's very important.”

Martin: “People try to tie us down too much - we've got other things besides the political angle. We're not in this band to put over the beliefs of any political party or even our own political ideas exclusively - though in our political songs we mean what we

**“The Clash set up things and knock 'em down - like the police, employers”**



say, we didn't form as a political band."

Una: "But if you sing about life, you're singing politically. Politics is life and society in its perversity has made it into something else. But God, we've covered it enough - let's talk about something else."

But Mark carried on anyway: "This is typical, getting bogged down in politics. People come up to me and say, 'You're the only political band,' and I reply, 'What about Tom Robinson?' Then they say, 'Yeah, but you're really political,' but it's not true."

"They're pushing us into the political syndrome that The Clash have fallen into and will never get out of - their credibility will diminish as they go on. The Clash set up things and knock 'em down, like the police, employers - we do that too, but that's all The Clash are doing."

"Those people who tell me we're political, I think, 'You mean in the fucking Clash way, don't you, and we're not. I mean, something like "Bingo-Master's Break-Out!" is nothing to do with conventional politics. It's about a bloke cracking up, partly funny and partly not. And I think, 'You've fucking ignored that, haven't you?'"

"You're not a very good songwriter if you can only write about one dimension of life," added Mark. "You have to write what you feel. One day you might be particularly angry at fascism, have a real gut-reaction like you do when you go on pickets like we do."

"But there again, it's difficult to feel things when you're away from the original situation, it feels a little forced. Like "Race Hatred", another of our songs - this lot want to rehearse it but I can't sing about racial hatred again and again till I get it right because I'd lose all feeling for it. And as lyrics they don't stand up on their own; the song only works when it's full of live feeling."

As yet no major company has expressed interest in The Fall, which must be largely to do with their refusal (like Buzzcocks) to leave Manchester for the brightest lights and the biggest cheques. Again, there's some kind of split between Mark and Una and the others on the question of commercial success. Martin, Karl and Tony come out with the same old guarded new-wave phrases about success like "We won't change our style, we'll stay like us - if people like us, then we won't turn them away and we'll plough the money back into cheaper tickets and albums if we make it."

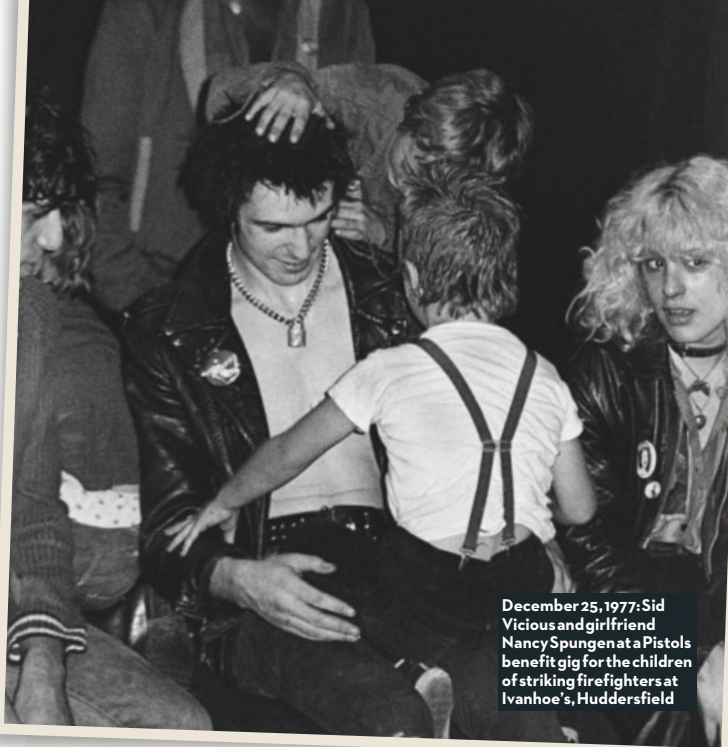
They mean it now - so does just about every young band I talk to - but success sucks you in so smoothly and completely that you hardly notice you're keeping all the money you make.

The only way to escape corruption is to avoid commercial success from the first, and Mark reckons the way the band play might act as a commercial self-destruct unit: "I really don't see us getting into that kind of position anyway. If we did there'd be something wrong, because our musical approach now could never win us massive popularity - something would have detracted if we did."

Una: "Huge commercial success doesn't interest me personally at all. Apart from anything else, I can't imagine enjoying an audience response if it was so predictable."

Tony: "Hey, could we talk about music?"

What on earth for? *Chris Brazier*



December 25, 1977: Sid Vicious and girlfriend Nancy Spungen at a Pistols benefit gig for the children of striking firefighters at Ivanhoe's, Huddersfield

## "Only advertised locally"

**MM DEC 17** The Sex Pistols plan to tour. Discreetly, to keep "local objections down to a minimum".

**ON FRIDAY THIS** week the Sex Pistols kick off on their first official British tour since their debut *Anarchy In The UK* dates. The band will be playing a straight run of 10 dates, finishing on Christmas Day, but there is the possibility of a further show being added for London audiences on Boxing Day.

While the concerts have been officially confirmed by Cowbell, the band's booking agency, and booked openly in the Sex Pistols' name, there is still some secrecy about the exact location of the venues and the final bookings will only be advertised locally within a few days of the shows.

Cowbell's John Jackson said that the details of the venues and concert dates are being kept a last-minute secret, even from Virgin Records, the band's record company, and from the group themselves. Despite the secrecy, Jackson still fears problems from local authorities, but he has worked out a complex strategy involving two alternative "tours" if local authorities or police revoke licences at the last minute.

"The shows will be advertised locally as the Sex Pistols, but the advertising will be very close to the date to keep the possibility of local objections down to a minimum and to ensure a fair distribution of tickets. The tickets for the first show will go on sale the day before the concert."

Jackson confirmed that the 10 shows will be played in the following areas of Britain: North London, East Anglia, the West Country, Merseyside, two in North Yorkshire, East Midlands, two in the West Midlands, and one south of London outside the GLC area. One show that has already been advertised and sold well is at Bristol's Bamboo Club on December 21.

Tickets for the shows cost £1.75, although one promoter has been offering them at £2.50. Jackson said that anyone who has paid more than £1.75 for a legitimate ticket will get the balance refunded when they go to the show.

**Pistols set off on 'secret' U.K. tour**



➤ The Radiators From Space, currently touring with Thin Lizzy, release their third single on Chiswick on Friday week. "Prison Bars" is in mono and taken from their *TV Tube Heart* LP. **MM NOV 12**

➤ Julie Covington, who came to fame with *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Evita*, releases her version of Alice Cooper's "Only Women Bleed" on Friday. The Virgin single features orchestral arrangements by John Cale, who appears on keyboards. **MM NOV 12**

➤ Charles Mingus, the influential jazz bass player and composer, has had to cancel a one-off concert at London's Hammersmith Odeon on Nov 30. **MM NOV 12**



➤ Rock'n'roll singer Shakin' Stevens has been selected to play the part of young Elvis Presley in Jack Good's musical *Elvis*, which opens at London's Astoria Theatre on November 28. Sixties singer PJ Proby will play Presley after the age of 40 in the musical. Good, the man responsible for the famous *Oh Boy!* TV show of the late 1950s, is producing and directing the stage show, and music is provided by Fumble. Stevens' band the Sunsets will play their planned dates without him, with vocals taken by drummer Rocker Louie and pianist Ace. **MM NOV 12**

# “What’s a normal person?”

**Keith’s drug bust, vomiting journalists, punk rock... MICK JAGGER floats effortlessly above it all. “Bad circumstances develop,” says Mick, “and once you get a bad reputation it’s very hard to shake it off.”**

— MELODY MAKER OCTOBER 15 —

**W**HEAR, MICHAEL, THAT Robert Plant is going to join the Rolling Stones if Keith is sent down for 100 years. “Robert Plant! What’s ee going to play?” Jagger’s face, that eternal face, that has grinned—nay, leered—at us for what seems like a lifetime of rock’n’roll, broke into an expression of such amused derision that the Devil himself might reel back in confusion.

Mick fends off the buffets of the world with a sense of humour that has scarcely altered since the days when the Stones were the apple of Andrew Oldham’s eye. Whatever storms break about his head, as the world’s press steams on with headlines about the future of the Stones, or Mick and Bianca, or Keith And His Latest Bust, whatever the current furore about rude album covers or snipes at punk rock, Mick sails through it all with a grunt of mock despair, or just the hint of anger in his expressive eyes.

What astounds me about Jagger in ’77 is his tolerance, his patience and concern for others. For a man constantly called an egotist, he is remarkable self-effacing and mindful of his fellow man. For example, when I was suddenly and quite violently sick during the course of our interview, he leapt to his feet and pointed out the quickest route to the gentleman’s convenience.

I had looked forward to swilling a few cans of beer with Mick as he hit a bottle of brandy and we talked of the great days of rhythm and blues. But unfortunately, while he stood up to the effects of alcohol with all the panache of an experienced trooper, I began to keel over and collapsed on the sofa. »

GISBERT HANERKOOT / GETTY





"When I go on the road, I become a total monster": Mick Jagger in London, 1977

“Didn’t you eat?” inquired Mick with surprising solicitude (some rock stars would merely ring for a secretary and ask that the interviewer be hurled from the premises). “You shouldn’t drink on an empty stomach. I ate. Two of those things...” and he pointed to the battered remains of a pair of hamburgers.

I stumbled away from the unedifying spectacle, but after a few difficult moments was able to return and continue a cross-examination of one of the Living Legends Of Our Time.

**M**ICK MADE A surprise appearance in London Town last week, having jetted in from New York for business meetings. It has been suggested in some quarters that he was primarily interested in helping, by publicity, to promote the last album for Warner Brothers, the double *Love You Live*. This is a practice not entirely without precedent in the rock business, but Mick did not seem over-worried about *Love*’s evolution, contents or fate. He has, after all, made quite a few records in his career and one more Stones album is not exactly a cause for bouts of ecstasy.

Master Jagger arrived in our midst wearing white trousers and a pink shirt. “I came in from New York last night,” he revealed. “I’d been there a few days hustling the album, doing radio and TV.” He was a bit indistinct as he was still munching a hamburger at the time.

Had Mick been listening to the exciting new music that was going to change the rock world as we know it?

“Well... (*munch munch*)... you have to listen to a lot of bad stuff before you find anything good.” And he indicated a great pile of new-wave singles on his desk by Chelsea, Electric Chairs, etc. “I went to a few clubs in New York, all those ones on the same street. I dunno. It was all like the night before last. Another world. It’s starting to happen in London at Covent Garden. You bin to the Rock Garden? They have some very good bands there. Some are good, some are quite awful.

“It’s like listening to reggae records. You hear 20 singles and find one good one. It’s a lotta work listening to bands. Sure, I always go out. That’s what I wanna do when I go out, listen to bands. Sure, I see more bands than movies. I like to check out the ones that are supposed to be good.

“I like to go to clubs that have six bands on in one night, and you see ‘em all and can’t remember their names! But I go to concerts and clubs all the time. I don’t get excited about records, I’d rather see the bands live. A lot of the new bands don’t record well anyway. I’ve got some here... the Squeeze... ‘Right To Work’ by Chelsea, that’s terrible.”

What will happen next in the great Stones saga?

“We’re going into the studio and we’re going to start recording our next album in Europe.”

Keith will be able to play on that one?

“Yeah, no problems. He can leave the States, go back and forward, they seem to be very sweet about it. I don’t know what’s going to happen to him in Canada, though. I’ve no idea. Something will happen eventually, but I don’t know what. The trial is on December 2nd unless they put it back again. This seems to be a tough one. We’ll see. Yeah, I’ve been worrying about it, but it’s much more worrying for Keith than it is for me.”

Had he made any contingency plans?

“No, I can’t make plans until I know what’s going to happen. Because anything can happen and we’ll just have to meet it as it comes.”

There had been many wild suggestions as to who might replace Keith Richard in the Stones if he was sent to prison in Canada.

“Well, I’ve just said I can’t say what is going to happen. They might put him on probation. He might have to report to Canada every week. They could make him live in Toronto, or go into hospital. They can do anything they want. I can’t make any plans for all those possibilities. We just hope they are going to be fair about it.”

Did you have a row with Keith about the problem he had caused the Stones?

“No.”

Was he annoyed at him getting into dire straits?

“Well... I never like it when he gets into trouble. We don’t trow about it” But it places the Stones in jeopardy, surely?

“If he gets put away for a long time, it certainly does,” said Mick irritably. “He does get into trouble a lot, right? But he’s been very good lately,” and Mick almost whispered this last comment as he busied himself with the remnants of the hamburger. “So I just hope everything goes well for him and that we don’t have to worry about all these things one reads about.

“Yeah, of course I want the band to continue. We’re supposed to be touring next year. I just keep thinking about it very positively. We want to make a new album. A single. Go on the road in the spring, so I’m just going ahead and planning it. I mean, really? The thing is, I don’t know any more than anybody else.”

You’ll be at the trial, I guess?

“Yeah, I guess. I’m not even looking forward to going back to Toronto, let me tell you. And the press haven’t been very happy with me. They keep on and on at me, and I tell them, ‘I don’t know any more, I promise.’ And they keep asking if Jimmy Page is going to join the Stones.”

Wasn’t it Robert Plant?

“Robert Plant!” Mick burst into laughter. “What’s ‘ee going to play? Tambourine?”

So what was going to be the future policy of the Stones, so far as he could say?

“The band has never really had a policy, even when Brian was in charge of it and he wrote it down on bits of paper. So we have been policy-less. But every year we change. This is like a different band now. The last album we did in the studio was very mixed. We had three or four different guitar players, so it was difficult to make. This one is going to be more tight. It’s difficult to say before we get started. It might turn out to be rubbish.

“Next year we’ll be working really hard,” insisted Mick. “This year the touring part was really screwed up by Keith’s thing. When you are under that kind of pressure, it’s no fun to be on the road. In all these different countries, you have endless customs checks. In every country you feel you are going to be busted. If anybody is on bail, they certainly do watch you.

“They go through you at the customs, and that applies to everyone with you. It’s a hassle. I was on bail once when we were on the road and it was a nightmare. I was at the airport for six hours. I was on bail in England and I was going to Switzerland from America, at the end of 1969. I had the trial in 1970. That was for marijuana.”

You did spend a few hours in prison?

“More than hours. Days!” Mick shook with suppressed mirth. “It was about four or five. That was enough. Enough to put me off wanting to go, I can tell you. It was ‘orrible. It was really weird. A strange existence. You just don’t want to get involved if you can avoid it. I remember asking the guy if I could go out for exercise, ‘cos it was the exercise period. And the guy said, ‘You don’t want to go out there with all those criminals, do you?’”

“I had to get a job. Because in prison everyone had a job.

I was going to be put down for a librarian, but I never did get to see what the scope was. Before you are convicted they treat you differently. You can keep your own clothes and everything. Then you have to wear the prison clothes.

I wasn’t there long enough for that. A guy threw a newspaper into my cell. It was *The Times* with an editorial piece on me. I got out by the afternoon. Of course I didn’t want to go back, but I’ve been in prison since, in Rhode Island near Boston. I was in prison there in 1975 [sic—1972] for a little while. Got arrested for trying to stop Keith being arrested. Obstructing the course of justice.

“I think I said, ‘Ere, don’t do that, we’ve got a concert to do.’

“OK, you too.” Keith had hit somebody and was arrested. It was probably a journalist, like you. Oh, it was too awful. But nothing happened in the case.”

Some people would say the Stones were just plain irresponsible.

“Yeah, I guess. It’s just an accumulation of different events and people. Bad circumstances develop, and once you get a bad reputation it’s very hard to shake it off. Some bands around now get a bad reputation and that’s it. It’s the same in a bar. A guy has a bad reputation and he always gets picked on. One tends to get drawn into these things. From my own experience, once you’ve got it, you’re stuck with it. This country has got to be the worst place for that.



“He gets in trouble a lot, right?”: Keith Richards in April 1977, a few weeks after he was arrested in Toronto and charged with trafficking in heroin



"Other countries are ready to accept you may be different but take you at face value. Here they never forget anything you may have done in the past. I don't see how our image is ever going to change here. They don't want it to change – do they?"

"I was violent when I was younger, but most people are violent for a while when they're young, aren't they? You have a punch-up once, but you don't want a punch-up all the time, do you? I met a guy the other day I really wanted to throttle.

It was at a party and I was sitting there shaking. I managed to control myself but I told him I was going to thump him. I gave him one minute to get out and he said, 'Why?'"

What had he done to upset Jagger?"

"He was a journalist."

Oh, it wasn't Anthony Scaduto by any chance?"

"No, it wasn't Scaduto. Bad luck! Yeah, I saw his piece on me in the *Daily Mirror*. What's wrong with him?"

Scaduto, an American, had written a biography of Jagger that Mick detested and recently wrote a *Mirror* piece about Mick's marriage to Bianca.

"He's a sick person," said Mick vehemently.

"I wouldn't give him 60 seconds. I've never met him. He wrote me an insulting letter, a threatening letter saying that if I didn't work with him on his book he was going to write terrible things about me, and I don't like to be threatened. The book was awful, it really was. Just rubbish. He's a very bad biographer and I have no respect for him."

He talked about "Jagger watchers" in his *Mirror* piece.

"It's all so far removed from reality. All that stuff you read in the papers about me and Bianca, it's like a page out of someone else's life. It has no relation to me at all. It's completely made up."

What about the dramatic events on the yacht in the Mediterranean, where Mick was supposed to be making a last-ditch rescue attempt on his marriage? He looked amazed.

"That was completely made up. How could they know what was going on? It's all so crazy. The summer is the worst time 'cos they have so little to write about. It used to be the silly season. Now it's called the sick season. I think they really must have run out of news. They think you're fair game, but it's a bit annoying. Thank God I don't live here all the time now. If I did it would be a nightmare. England, Germany and Italy are the worst countries for gossip. Here they just write pages. But there's nothing new about it. It used to be movie stars. They dished the dirt on everyone in Hollywood.

"Have you ever read *Hollywood Babylon*? They dished everyone and a lot of those scandals were made up. And it affected their careers in those days a lot more than it does now. Big movie companies would drop people if they got into trouble. They would protect them to a certain point and then if there was real trouble they'd drop them and their career would be finished.

"I know in certain instances record companies aren't keen to take on a band because of their image, like EMI and the Sex Pistols. Because the group behaved in a certain way, the company just kicked them out."

Did Decca ever threaten to drop the Stones because of their behaviour in the early days?

"No, they were more sanguine about us. I think EMI were a bit short-sighted about the Pistols. I've already told them that! [The Stones are now signed to EMI for their next album.] I told them I could go on television and say even worse things than the Pistols did! I said, 'Are you gonna fire us?' They said 'No.' They'd better not! Maybe I'll try them out.

"What did the Pistols do at A&M? They wrecked the office? We wrecked several offices at WEA – but after we signed."

Mick laughed and began pacing about the room. I thought he was looking for items of furniture to smash, but in fact he was in search of more brandy.

Why did he sign to EMI?

"I got severely criticised because I wouldn't tell somebody else. It's not really anything to do with you or anybody else. I could put it in a few

## "I think EMI were a bit short-sighted about the Pistols"

"I do try and hang out with different kinds of people, but I'm usually around music-business people. You find yourself going to studios on a busman's holiday singing back-up vocals.

"I was going back to college for a while, but I never made it. I'm a real drop-out. I wanted to do comparative religion and history, but just couldn't take three months off and go every day. I found myself having to work, and I'm just too lazy.

"I need three months off from music, but I can never get them. The Stones just roll on, by their own volition. Not by anybody else's volition. We've not had a manager for years. Can't bear them.

"So don't you fucking start," he glowered suddenly. "I'm so sorry – why do I put on this terrible act? Everybody gets so scared. I went to this most peculiar club in London which was full of kids and old men. And I told this old man to get out of my seat. I said, 'Fuck off.' And this guy was, like, trembling. The place was full of old men with young girls."

It wasn't the Marquee?

"The Marquee! No, 'course not." Mick began to muse on the meaning of life, his role in rock 'n' roll and the strange forces at work upon us all.

"I'm afraid most rock 'n' roll stars are just interested in themselves. You go on a stage... you get egotistical, of course you do. You think you are really important... and you're not. I don't think anyone in rock 'n' roll is important. We're all full of shit. As a performer you do need an ego, but that doesn't mean it's any good."

You've been called egotistical.

"But I am sometimes. You have to be."

Does Mick meet enough normal people?

"Is there such a thing as a normal person? What's a normal person?"

I think I'm normal. But most people think I'm not. I don't like to mix with sycophants, but most bands do. They want to hear people tell them how great they are. It's a constant massaging of the ego. But everybody needs that, at least for a few minutes a day! It keeps you sane.

"But I think I'm going through a sane period. I'm really well adjusted. But that's just because I haven't been on the road. When I go on the road, I just go CRAZY. I become a total monster. I don't recognise anybody; I don't even see them. 'Who are you? Forget it. Go away. Who are you? From the *MM*? Forget it. Get out. I don't want to see you. I'll give you two minutes! I'm doing my makeup, get out!'"

"What a terrible monster I am. I feel guilty about it afterwards, then I laugh, because the whole thing is a joke. But Keith is worse than I am. Is he a prima donna? Oh yeah!"

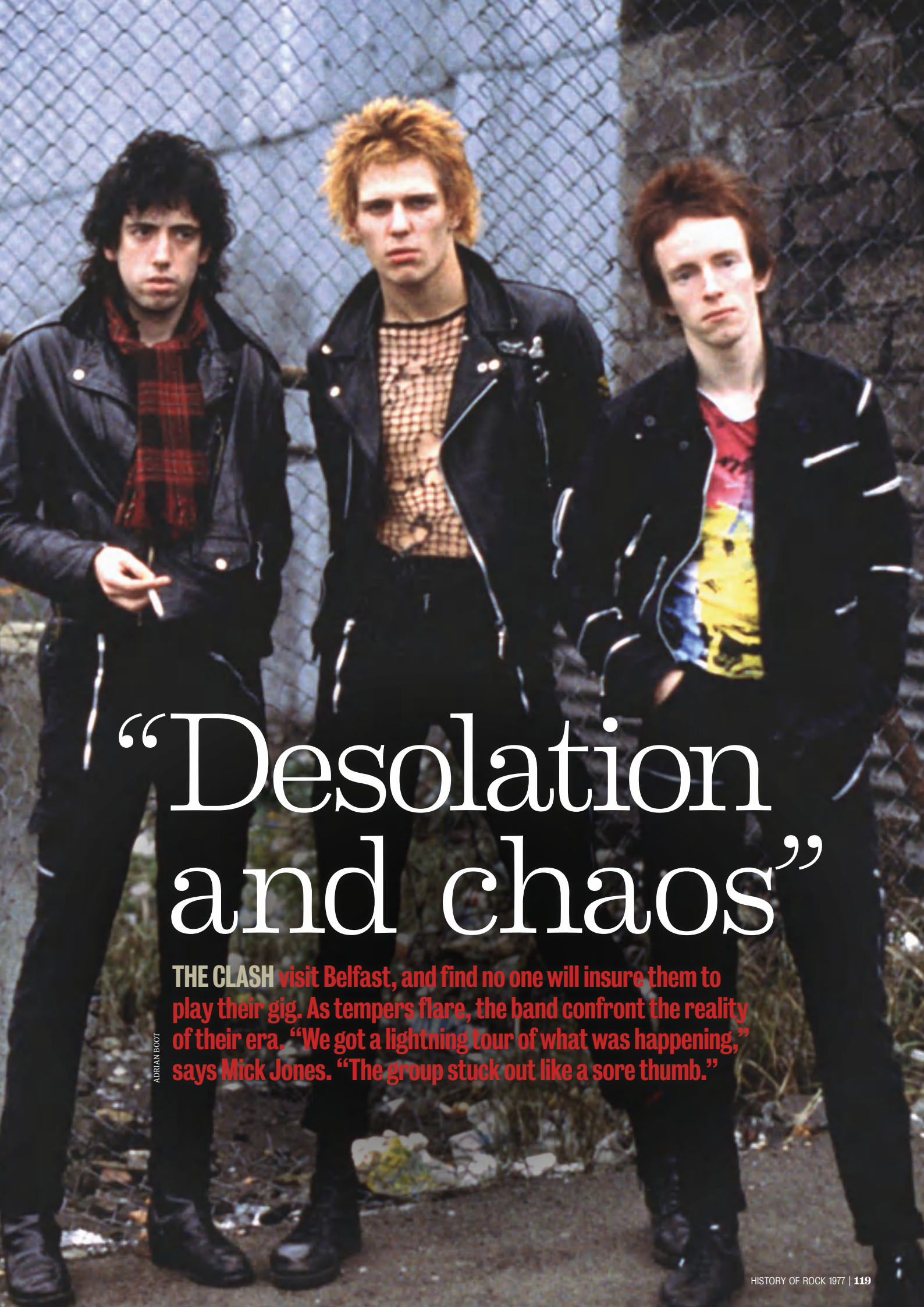
Monsters or not, the Stones *will* be back again on the road soon. And if Keith can't make it, well there's always the *MM* small ads. *Chris Welch* •

1977

OCTOBER—DECEMBER



The Clash in Belfast, October 1977: (l-r) Joe Strummer, Mick Jones, Paul Simonon and Topper Headon



# “Desolation and chaos”

**THE CLASH** visit Belfast, and find no one will insure them to play their gig. As tempers flare, the band confront the reality of their era. “We got a lightning tour of what was happening,” says Mick Jones. “The group stuck out like a sore thumb.”

ADRIAN BOOT



Leaving the fortified Europa Hotel, The Clash and their photographer take a taxi and venture beyond Belfast city centre

## — MELODY MAKER OCTOBER 29 —

**I**MPOTENCE MIGHT BE described as having to apologise for something that wasn't your fault. When complete control becomes remote control. Last Thursday in Belfast, The Clash were confronted with such a freeze-out.

The date not only marked the opening of their current UK tour, but also the first time a major British punk/new wave/now band had played in the strife-racked city. Joe Strummer remarked that they had wanted to play the venue ever since the group formed last year, and consequently were itching for the stage of the Ulster Hall, where the event was supposed to take place. But once again the Faceless Ones who transform people into puppets stepped in at the 11th hour and refused permission...

However, let's start at the beginning of the invidious fiasco. Perhaps the minor irritants that happened in the morning could now be interpreted as omens for the later catastrophe.

We all arrived at the airport to find that the tuner had been left in the cab and the carnet (the official document for transporting equipment from Northern Ireland to Eire) forgotten. Soundman Micky Foote was dispatched to gather up the missing links and so had to catch a later

plane. Plus the plane itself was delayed because of the air traffic controller's industrial dispute.

Then through security (the guard jokingly described his Evil Presence detector as a Dan Dare gun) and onto the plane, where conversation turned unnervingly to talk of the recent Baader-Meinhof hijacking. Not, you can understand, the most comforting of topics at 8.30am on a plane to Belfast. Spirits picked up as Paul Simonon leaned over to announce that his word for the day was "synopsis". Eh?

We were about to land and the stewardess made the customary announcement that anyone carrying foods or livestock should report to the Ministry Of Agriculture. Mick Jones shouted out, "That includes me! I'm a chicken!"

Another cab ride followed and initiation into Belfast began. Scenes of endless devastation, urban wasteland, rows or terraced houses that had been reduced to (and by) shells, the windows boarded up with grey breezeblock slabs.

The driver was like a surreal tourist guide. Passing yet another gutted pub, his meticulous memory threw out a brief history of the events behind the attack. How many people were killed when it happened, what the backlash had been. If you look up that street on the left, two men were killed last month in a firebomb raid, etc. One building he singled out was what remained of the Youth Employment Exchange, now enmeshed in a wire cage. Joe and Mick understandably gave it a lingering glance.

Late that day Mick mused, "Black is the predominant colour here. The first thing I saw in Belfast was hundreds of blackbirds."

He added in a lighter tone, "Joe thought they were crows, but they weren't crows because crows

have dark glasses and saxophones." The movie *Fritz The Cat* takes on a different meaning in Belfast.

We arrived at the hotel, the Europa, similarly fenced off by a wire boundary and security outpost, to find out that it has the dubious claim to fame of being the most bombed hotel in Europe. Everything seemed to be going well until about 4pm, when yours truly was in the pub awaiting the band for a pre-soundcheck Guinness or two.

Suddenly drummer Nicky Headon rushed in: "You've got to come back to the hotel. The gig has been cancelled." Whaaaaat????

**O**NE OF THE promoters was waiting with the story so far. The gig had been organised by the Northern Ireland Polytechnic and they had genuinely believed that all aspects had been accounted for. All but one, as it transpired: the insurance.

To secure the Ulster Hall (which is run by the Belfast City Council and not officially connected with the Polytechnic) what is known as an insurance "cover note" is needed to underwrite any unforeseen mishaps that might occur. It is a stipulation made by the Hall. Three weeks previously, the Medical And Professional Insurance, who handle the Polytechnic's affairs in this respect, apparently assured the Polytechnic's entertainment's committee that the cover note would not pose any



problems. It would simply be an extension of their existing cover for the Student's Union.

However, come Thursday morning, the committee were informed that the offer of insurance had been withdrawn – allegedly because there were outstanding claims arising out of previous Clash concerts. This the band later refuted as entirely untrue. Anyway, the committee feverishly tried to find an insurance broker, both in Ireland and on the mainland, who would be prepared to underwrite the concert. No one was forthcoming – even after they themselves had offered a premium of £500. So an alternative plan was suggested: switch the venue to Queen's University. But that also proved fruitless as they couldn't accept the responsibility, not having the requisite insurance.

Since the event looked doomed, the Polytechnic promoters asked the local radio and TV to announce that the gig had been cancelled. By this time the fans had started to congregate outside the doors of Ulster Hall. The police turned up and told them the news. In despair, frustration and anger they stormed round to the Europa Hotel, pulling at the wire fence and demanding to see The Clash. An official from Queen's Student Body arrived and said they could play in a smaller hall in the university – the bar, in fact, as opposed to the originally mooted main concert arena.

Nicky and Paul explained this to the fans, who duly rushed towards the seat of learning. The site wasn't ideal by any means, but it was better than nothing. The Ulster Hall has a capacity of 1,600, while the bar holds only around 400 and, due to the liquor licence, was barred to those under 18. Just to compound the seriousness of the situation, news was also coming in that several of the hotels that the band had secured for the tour had cancelled the bookings.

Nicky was horrified: "Sometimes I think I might just slash my wrists and maybe then they'd see what they're doing to us."

The last time The Clash had tried to play in Britain was at the Birmingham Rag Market festival in July, virtually subtitled "The last big event before we all go to jail", and that had collapsed under a torrent of bans.

The next move was to dismantle all the gear that had been so far erected in the Ulster Hall and to move to Queen's. The kids were amassing outside the university entrance (800 advance tickets had been already sold and obviously many more punters were emerging on the night itself). It was both an odd and potentially hysterical situation.

The police and army were there in force, but looked confused, to say the least, by the spectacle. They weren't acclimatised to such a congregation. Instead, the mayhem gathered momentum. The old obstacles were rearing their oppressive faces again. A white riot was feared and insurance cover stayed as inaccessible as it had been all day. In addition, the roadies were unhappy with the stage. It didn't boast the most reliable structure.

In the dressing room, the band smouldered. But there was nothing they could do without incurring massive repercussions from almost every legal side. Unfortunately, the only course of action was to leave. They were trapped in contracts that cared zilch about providing entertainment for rock 'n' roll-starved kids.

First Joe and Mick left, followed quickly by Nicky and Paul. I was in the second batch, and as we came out by a side entrance a bunch of about 40 kids were waiting. They pleaded with Nicky and Paul to play, and in return the two band members attempted to explain the trail of absurd events. But the words were drowned out, and all the kids could see was that the group they had, in many cases, travelled long distances to enjoy were abandoning them.

Nothing could have been further from the truth. The group and manager Bernie Rhodes had done virtually everything they could to alleviate the 11th-hour chaos. The kids became furious. Nicky and Paul left in the car, and as it drove off the fans hurled abuse, beer cans and whatever was available at the departing vehicle.

When such an iron clampdown occurs, it must have its counter-reaction. A few windows in the Ulster Hall were smashed, five

punks (three male and two female) were arrested and a pack of about 100 formed a human chain across Bedford Street.

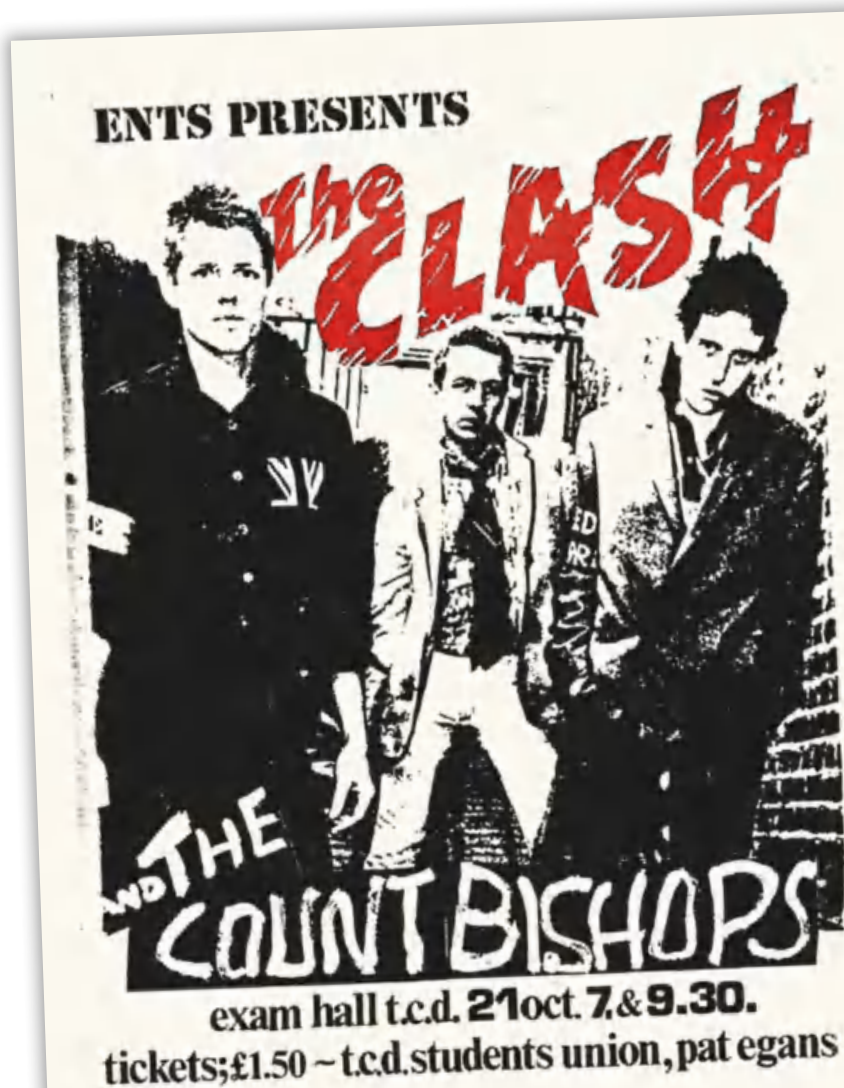
**J**UST REMEMBER, THEY mean it, maaaaan. Back in the hotel the atmosphere was one of terminal depression intercut with pure anger. Three fans who were on the verge of forming their own band had collared Joe, whose external belligerence belies an incredibly sympathetic and understanding nature. The three blokes were bitterly hurt, and Joe spent several hours clarifying the debacle and offering advice about getting a group together. Two were Protestant and one was Catholic, and in order to practise together they ran the daily risk of all that such religious intermingling implies. Now that makes the ludicrous struggles of the more pampered mainland would-be stars look a trifle silly, don't you think?

The late-night news came on the TV. The first item was – surprise, surprise – The Clash, the pared-down information giving no clear picture of what ACTUALLY HAPPENED, Mick sneered.

"The most horrible thing was the way the kids were treated – the way they were pushed around. They didn't have a chance to understand what was happening, so they were disappointed in us. Obviously, it wasn't our fault, but you can't explain that to 800 people personally. The way they've been pushed around by the army and the police, they obviously thought, 'What the fuck's going on here?' They reacted accordingly. Everyone acted the monkey they thought they would.

"Like, it's almost a night of freedom and they can see it slipping through their hands while policemen are crushing them. You don't look for sane reasons. You just see the object, and »

"The horrible thing was the way the kids were pushed around"





Royal Ulster Constabulary policemen pat down the band, who at one point were thought to be members of the Ulster Defence Association (UDA)

the object is The Clash and you aim for that. You want to be assured that it's going on and it didn't. In two weeks' time the insurance will probably be worked out and The Stranglers [set to play then] will come in and clean up, and they'll reassure them. Meanwhile, for us the kids were lining the street in front of armoured cars. It was a scene of desolation and chaos.

"I thought it was great that they lay down in the road in front of those armoured cars because they wanted the concert so badly. The trouble is that it's our first time here we and don't know the situation and we can't go down the police station and check it out, because we don't know if we can walk down the block. I'm like a complete alien.

"It was very self-conscious. It was a self-conscious way of getting your own way in a situation which is so out of our control. No way are we going to call the shots with guys with Bren guns standing outside and beating on kids. In no way was it also giving up. We ain't an army, we're a rock 'n' roll band. It's like a band against the army and the Ulster constabulary, who were only there in case of trouble, and the only trouble was produced by the fact that this company wouldn't insure us. The threat of half a million pounds meant nothing to me. They said, 'Do you want to pay it yourself?' so I said, 'I'll pay it myself.' I meant it.

"They couldn't get it off me, so throw me in jail. It's just a joke. I think they had a lot more trouble here because of the fact that the concert was cancelled than if they had let the concert go on. It was a complete red herring."

"The soldiers crouching in cubbyholes thought we were dicks"

**T**HAT AFTERNOON, OTHER bizarre events had taken place. Mick and Joe had gone to do an interview with the local radio station, Downtown Radio. As they stepped out of the car by the station, the security had mistaken them for members of the UDA. The reason was evidently their clothes – black zippered outfits, Doctor Marten's footwear, leather jackets, which highlights the fine line between the (excuse the possible pomposity) symbol and reality.

Again, what is de rigueur down the Vortex takes on provocative implications in the authentic war zone. In addition, during the afternoon, we had all piled into a mini-bus for

a round-the-town photo session. The band were ill at ease at the prospect and its ramifications. At suitably evocative landmarks, like an army barracks, or devastated rubble, the camera would whirr. How had Mick felt?

"Like Paddy McGinty's goat. I just felt like a dick. The best time was when all the kids were in the photos with us. That was the only time when it was human and real. I should imagine they'll lap it up in London, though. The soldiers crouching in their cubbyholes thought we were dicks. The kids thought we were dicks. Like, we asked some, 'Do you want to be in the photograph?' and they said 'bollocks' on the Ballymurphy estate.

"But I think it was important, because we got a lightning tour of what was actually happening, and so we were really in touch during those moments. I was more aware of what was going on around me than the camera. If I had known people in Belfast I would have hung out with them



Simon and Jones by an army Saracen vehicle on Royal Avenue, Belfast's main shopping street, secured at either end by the "ring of steel"

and become part of the background. Instead, I thought the group stuck out like a sore thumb."

Another raw nerve was the backdrop The Clash play against. It features a photographic blow-up of a violent Belfast street scene, replete with armoured cars and hunched civilians.

Mick: "I didn't think we should put it up here because they aren't going to particularly want to be reminded of it and they are going to say what the fuck do they know about it. Obviously we're sympathetic and have an empathy for the place, but I also feel we might be rubbing their faces in it. In Bournemouth it's great because everyone is fucking asleep and it's really heavy because everyone is confronted by this stuff, but in Belfast they don't need to be reminded. You just have to walk down the street and be reminded of it every day.

"How many times have we been searched? Must be about 20 times. I really felt this concert was going to be a rock'n'roll show and the audience was going to be one

of the best we'd ever encountered. But, of course, the bureaucrats and arseholes put their foot in it. But listen – you can be a Catholic or a Protestant kid – you can come along and all be bouncing together.

"Now the authorities gotta see something wrong in that. It's a cruel irony. The live backdrop being associated with our group and then the authorities stamping on our concert."

**A**T LEAST THE following night in Dublin the promised rock'n'roll took place. On the train down, Joe handed me a Combat Picture Library cartoon strip booklet, called *Jack Wouldn't Dare*.

"That's for you and *Melody Maker*," he quipped. It told the engrossing saga of one reporter Jack Roberts (who looked not unlike Elvis Costello and had PRESS emblazoned on his helmet). The time was the Second World War, and Jack The Hack was sent out with an army platoon on a search-and-destroy mission to a Japanese arms dump. Jack was SCARED

"How many times have we been searched? Must be about 20 times"

but, as in all good stories, ended up being the hero, destroying the hideaway single-handed. However, when he returned to his editor with the explosive copy, it was summarily rejected because it was – you might say – too real. As a result he quit the journalistic department and joined the platoon.

The last line read: "It's easier blowing up Japanese magazines (geddit?) than getting one of my articles on the war accepted, sir." Do you think Joe was making a point to me?

There were two shows in Dublin at yet another bastion of learning. Trinity College, in an astonishingly ornate hall, Joe shouted out, "Ain't this posh?" and he was right.

Portraits of past academic luminaries decorated the walls – bewigged gents in languidly pensive poses, a sculpture of two almost intertwined figures and a gigantic organ in the gallery, which looked as if it came out of Hollywood in its most fantastic phase. Set all this alongside the kids and the finally erected backdrop and the ironies were extreme.

Many of the fans who were disappointed in Belfast had come down, and Joe dedicated "Hate And War" to them. Despite there not being time for a proper soundcheck, the band, first time around, were astonishing, soaring through "London's Burning", "Capital", "City Of The Dead" (which, as Mick said, is the opposite of what was happening in Belfast), "Janie Jones" and "Garageland". After half a dozen or so numbers, Joe announced, "Listen – shut up. I can't play with

these guys here," motioning towards the security guards.

Instantly they upped and went, and suddenly the kids poured onto the stage, creating a scene of delirious confusion. No, they didn't prevent the band from playing, but exulted in the fact that this was their night, their victory. Strangely, the audience numbered few fashionably attired punks. Most were longhairs or the curious brigade who transform themselves from sports jacketed bystanders (one couple were actually smooching to "Cheat") to frenetic dervishes.

If the first set was good, the second one was superlative. On "Remote Control", Mick's voice (he's now taking charge of more vocal parts than ever) rang out in spine-chilling, splintered shards.

Nicky looked deceptively loose-limbed as he thrashed out a titanic drum underlay, while Paul, with India-rubber intensity, attacked the bass with a venom that would have split the atom. Joe was also superb as he circled the stage in those juddering, quickfire movements. Equally intense was the version of Junior Marvin's "Police And Thieves", whose significance grew uncannily after the previous day's events. Words like intense, powerful, unavoidable, magnetic just spun through my head. I love The Clash because they are one of the most honest and exciting rock'n'roll bands we have.

So, on leaving the hotel on Saturday morning to catch my various planes and trains back to London, a small incident irked considerably. Getting into the lift were two chambermaids who worriedly confided in me, "Watch out. There are punk rockers on this floor. Mind you don't get beaten up."

I replied that they didn't want to beat anyone up.

"They do," the girls rushed back at me. "Are you one?"

Do I look like one?

"You can't tell by the looks. They're a terrible lot. They put safety pins through their cheeks and even babies' cheeks."

Who is at fault for such an attitude? Girls, this band is more on your side than your manager is. He was toying with the idea of throwing them out of the hotel because of their so-called "bad language". See this band. They are very, very special. *Ian Birch* •

# Clash lose control...

far. The gig had been organised by the Northern Ireland Polytechnic and they had respectively believed that all

Polytechnic's entertainment's committee that the cover note would not pose any problems. It would simply be an extension of their existing cover for the

mum themselves of £500. So an alternative plan was suggested: switch the venue to Queen's University. But that also proved fruitless as they

ing outside the university entrance (800 advance tickets had been already sold and obviously many more punters were emerging on the night itself)

was available at the departing vehicle. When such an iron clampdown occurs, it must have its counter-reaction. A few windows in the Ulster Hall were smashed, five punks (three

The three blokes were bitterly hurt, and Joe spent several hours clarifying the debacle and offering advice about being a group together. Two were Protestant and one was Catholic, and an order to be



Johnny Rotten:  
marked by his  
Catholic schooling?

# NEVER MIND THE BOLLOCKS

HERE'S THE

## SEX PISTOLS

### ALBUMS

# REVIEW

1977

## ALBUMS

### Sex Pistols *Never Mind The Bollocks, Here's The Sex Pistols* VIRGIN

What are you waiting for? True love, school to end, third world/civil war, more wars in the third world, a leader, the commandos to storm the next aeroplane, next week's *NME*, The Revolution?

The Sex Pistols album!

Hail, hail, rock'n'roll, deliver them from evil but lead them not into temptation. Keep them quiet/off the street/content.

Hey punk! You wanna elpee-sized "Anarchy" single? You wanna original "Anarchy" black bag? You wanna bootleg album? You wanna collect butterflies?

Very fulfilling, collecting things... very satisfying. Keep you satisfied, make you satiated, make you fat and old, queueing for the rock'n'roll show.

The Sex Pistols. They could have dreamed up the name and died. The hysterical equation society makes of love/a gun = power/crime shoved down its own throat, rubbed in its own face. See, I'm just as repressed and contaminated as the next guy. And I like the Sex Pistols. Aesthetically, apart from anything else. Three of them are very good-looking. And the sound of the band goes...

"I don't wanna holiday in the sun/I wanna go in the city/ There's a thousand things I wanna say to you..."

All very Weller, but is this a Jagger I see before me? No, it's the singles, all four of them – "Anarchy In The UK", "God Save The Queen", "Pretty Vacant" and "Holidays In The Sun" – constituting one third (weigh it) of the vinyl. Of course, there are other great songs.

This is no first-round knockout. This is no Clash attending the CBS Convention; no Jam voting Conservative; no Damned fucking an American girl with a Fender bass; no Stranglers distorting Trotsky and Lenin for their own cunt-hating, bully-boy ends. No, this is the Sex Pistols. The band which (so I'm told – I wasn't there in the beginning) started it all.

Great songs like "Submission", a numb-nostrilled "Venus In Furs"/"Penetration"/"I Wanna Be Your Dog", in form hypnotic, in content writhing. Pain through a dull, passive haze. Is that a whip in your hand or are you abnormal? "Submission/Going down, down, dragging her down/ Submission/I can't tell you what I've found." Smack?

Geeks? What a mystery and who grew up on the New York Dolls? Dogs yelp as the drill continues. Most unhealthy and ya like it like that? Well, it grows on you. A bit like cancer.

Great songs like "No Feelings": "I got no emotion for anybody else/You better understand I'm in love with myself/My self, my beautiful self." Ah, solipsism

rules, as Tony Parsons used to say before he got wise. Good dance tune, anyway, while "Problems" says it all: "Bet you thought you knew what I was about/ Bet you thought you'd solved all your problems/But YOU are the problem." Whatcha gonna do? Vegetate? Listen to the Sex Pistols album? Great songs gone, ineffectual flicks

of the wrist like "New York", which probably has David Johansen quaking in his heels, and "EMI" – you guessed it, they're bitching.

"You're only 29/You gotta lot to learn." In spite of this inspired opening, "Seventeen" rambles a little and the guitars do go on a bit. "I just speed/That's all I need."

Whaddya think so far?

Well, I've saved the best bit for you to linger over. You've already heard two songs the band co-wrote with Sid Vicious (as opposed to Glen Matlock, The True Pop Kid): "EMI" and "Holidays In The Sun". Here's the third. It's called "Bodies".

"She was a girl from Birmingham/She had just had an abortion/She was a case of insanity/Her name was Pauline, she lived in a tree/She was a no one who killed her baby/She sent her letters from the country/She was an animal/She was a bloody disgrace/Bodies/I'm not an animal/Dragged on a table in a factory/Illegitimate place to be/In a packet in a lavatory/Die little baby screaming/Bodies/Screaming fucking bloody mess/ Not an animal/It's an abortion/ Mummy/I'm not an abortion/ Throbbing squirm/Gurgling bloody mess..."

What? Good God. Was I shocked! Did I jump! Is that what they wanted, to shock people? Smart boys. Do they mean it? Is it satire of the most dubious kind? Did John's Catholic schooling

leave its mark? I don't know where "Bodies" is coming from and it scares me. It's obviously a gutter view of sex/dirt/blood/reproduction and if the song is an attack on such a mentality it's admirable.

But, as with "Holidays In The Sun", Rotten never allows himself to make a moral judgement and, going by things he's said, he seems refreshingly capable of making them. I wish he

would. I wish he would say that East Germany is presently organising itself better than West Germany – or vice versa, if that's what he believes. I wish the Sex Pistols had said in "Bodies" that women should not be forced to undergo such savagery, especially within a "welfare" state.

I'm sick of unlimited tolerance and objectivity, because it leads to annihilation. I wish everyone would quit sitting on the fence in the middle of the road. I think "Bodies" will be open to much misinterpretation and that to issue it was grossly irresponsible.

Many of these songs (under new names) also crop up on their bootleg album – plus "Satellite", in which the Pistols give the finger to the provinces, and "Just Me", which has a non-existent tune and frightening words: "You wanna be me/Didn't I fool you?" The singing is done with much less expertise. Rotten sounding sick to death. It's a much better record.

I don't really know anything about music, but the Sex Pistols seem to play as well as anyone I've heard, and I've heard Jimi Hendrix and Pete Townshend records. I never knew what was meant by "guitar hero" – it sounds like the kind of phrase a mental retard might mouth. "Guitar hero" – you mean as in "war hero", that kind of thing?

Why should anyone wish to play more usefully than Steve Jones, or drum more elaborately than Paul Cook, or play better bass than Sid Vicious? What purpose could it serve to outdo them?

So what are the Sex Pistols?

For the tabloids a welcome rest from nubile (sex and violence in their name alone and drugs too, if you count Rotten's speed dalliance); for the dilettantes, a new diversion (*Ritz* has a monthly punk column); for the promoters, a new product to push; for the parents, a new excuse; for the kids, a new way (in the tradition of the Boy Scouts, the terraces and one-upmanship) in which to dissipate their precious energy.

Johnny Rotten, Oliver Twist of this generation. "I wanna some MORE, Malcolm!" *Julie Burchill, NME Nov 5*

**Allman And Woman**  
*Two The Hard Way* WARNERS

When The Clash cut "I'm So Bored With The USA" they couldn't have heard this album, yet it's eminently applicable. And it could only have happened in the States; it's hard to think of a British couple who would have the arrogance to come up with this collection of mediocrity.

The bad news starts with the grossly sexist title Gregg and Cher Allman have chosen for their duo status, Allman And Woman, which reduces one of the most outstanding female singers of the last decade or so to the role of a mere chattel of an average Southern rocker.

Perhaps, however, Cher consented to be relegated to worse than second best in an attempt to keep her own name off the album, in which case she's taken a wise step. Her subservient role continues through into the music, where she's forced to sing far too low to get down to the level of hubby. Even when she's singing on her own, on "Island", she barely sparks, but her unrestrained sexuality comes through. By contrast, Gregg's solo spot, "Shadow Dream Song", is grotesque, as he groans out the ballad, bum notes and all.

As a duo they seem to have started out with the intention of becoming a white Marvin Gaye and Tammi Terrell and get off to a good start with "Move Me", a lively '60s-style song on which they give a fair impersonation of the Motown pair. They keep up the momentum through "I Found You, Love", bright and breezy and not unlike "It Takes Two", then start to go downhill with "Can You Fool". They meet their Waterloo on the fourth track, an unspeakable version of Smokey Robinson's "You've Really Got A Hold On Me" which they manage to turn into a dirge. There's no way that anyone can match the Miracles' definitive original, of course, but there's plenty of scope for a good reading of this song, as Eddie Money has proved on his debut album.

From here, Gregg's singing gets worse, Cher loses enthusiasm and the songs mostly become maudlin ballads. If it didn't represent such a waste of talent, this album would be a joke. Perhaps they should have called it *Funny And Cher*.

*Michael Oldfield, MM Nov 26*

**Sad Café Fanx Ta-Ra** RCA

A remarkable debut album that augers well not only for the group but for all music makers working within the framework of British rock. Sad Café are one of the best bands to emerge in some time, and side two, in particular, of this engrossing programme represents a sustained peak of achievement rare on albums. It is literally a performance, with each piece, song or instrumental, slotting into the next one, with barely a pause for breath.

Although all the compositions are richly varied they seem to follow a logical path, as the moods and tempos switch around. Side one tends to be more patchy. The opener, "Babylon", is certainly a good introduction to their music, for it features their key ingredients. These are distinctive lead vocals from Paul Young, plenty of back-up vocal harmonies, violent lead guitar from the passionate Ashley Mulford, an orchestral approach to arrangements, and the sophisticated keyboard work of the man largely responsible for those arrangements, Vic Emerson.

"Black Rose", their single, concludes the first side and is rather too obviously influenced by Hall & Oates, but the band are still finding their feet, so doubtless more of their own personality will emerge, as indeed it does on the second segment. Opening with an instrumental by Emerson entitled "The Further Adventures Of Mad Alan", it is nice to hear him consciously get away from rock clichés and employ strange chordal devices to create a mood of menace and mystery. The guitar cuts across the organ chords like a psychotic killer advancing on his victim. The piece finally resolves into "Fanx Ta-Ra", which is a song about the aftermath of love, hence the cover picture.

The band's music makes its impact immediately, and the best way to enjoy this album is to start at the beginning and let it build rather than extract odd tracks. I have a feeling that this time next year we may be toasting them as our Brightest Hope. They are certainly one of mine. *Chris Welch, MM Oct 8*



SINGLES  
**REVIEW**  
1977

June 1977: Talking Heads take their "fey funk" to Amsterdam

**SINGLES**

**Wire Mannequin** HARVEST

Magnificent "Sweet Jane" riff repetition, ludicrous surfing back-up vocals, heavy petting in the middle of a fire fight from veterans of the Roxy era overcoming the age barrier with a shambling punkathised pop-consciousness and one for suitable vinyl fodder for a K-Tel Presents Punky Waver Explosion. Aimed at the position which will soon be held by The Rich Kids. *NME Nov 26*



**Bill Withers**  
*Lovely Day* CBS

Just one look at you, he knows it's gonna be a lovely day. And the world's all right with him, he knows it's gonna be a lovely day. Gentle soul-jog with "dah-dah-dee" Beach Boys harmonies over soothing strings-and-ribbon section, content platonic eternity fraternity pin wallpaper music suitable for the re-runs of *Lassky And Crutch*. *NME Nov 26*

**Talking Heads**  
*Uh-Oh, Love*  
*Comes To Town* SIRE

Fey funk for passive intellectuals with added ingredients of hesitant steel band backing David Byrne's contrived flitty yelp. Their unfulfilled promise disappoints while hardly causing long winter nights of insomnia. *NME Nov 26*

**Wings Mull Of Kintyre** CAPITOL

Nice cover pic of the Isle Of Davaar on the west coast of Scotland. This is a tribute-in-song to the area in Argyllshire where Friendly Macca has his twee little hideaway. The Campbeltown pipe band, with whom Wings posed for the cover of *The Campbeltown Courier*, all sound good, especially Johnny Sinclair, but the song sucks on ice. *NME Nov 19*



**Bob Marley & The Wailers**  
*Jamming/Punky Reggae Party* ISLAND

"Punky Reggae Party" was celebrated before it was even released because of all those references to The Clash, The Jam, The Slits, The Damned, Dr Feelgood, etc, etc... but it's more of a vague goodwill gesture to the punks than anything else. It's best to regard this Lee Perry/Bob Marley collaboration effort as just a welcome, worthwhile B-side to the excellent "Jamming" (from the *Exodus* album, natch) than any kind of cosmic statement. *NME Nov 19*

GIJSBERT HANEKROOT/GETTY

1977

OCTOBER–DECEMBER

# “Who’s the greatest?”

Benign anarchy reigns on the STIFF RECORDS tour with ELVIS COSTELLO, IAN DURY and NICK LOWE — and team spirit prevails. “Ian Dury shows those whining little brats what it’s all about,” says Costello.



GETTY

October 28, 1977, Lyceum Ballroom, London: artists and crew on stage for the nightly finale of the Live Stiffs Tour, "Sex & Drugs & Rock & Roll & Chaos": (l-r) Dave Edmunds, Wreckless Eric, Ian Dury, Elvis Costello, BP Fallon and Nick Lowe



Champness Hall

No 136

# THE BUNCH OF STIFFS

On MONDAY, 24th OCTOBER, 1977  
at 7.30 p.m.

Tickets £1.25 in advance    £1.50 at the door  
Tickets not returnable or refundable

— NME NOVEMBER 5 —

“SEX AND DRUGS and rock and roll... sex and drugs and rock and roll... sex and drugs and rock and roll...” Hot damn, m’man, Leicester University is jumpin’ tonight. The hall is ass-to-ass jam-packed with sweaty people going boingggg-boingggg-boingggg to the deranged rhythm of Ian Dury’s 77 anthem to the joys of the Good Things In Life, all of them chanting maniacally along to Himself’s almost mantric invocation. “SEX!!! and DRUGS!!! and ROCK!!! and ROLL!!! SEX!!! and DRUGS!!! and ROCK!!! and ROLL!!! SEX!!! and DRUGS!!! and...”

Meanwhile, the stage is also full of sweaty people jumping up and down and yelling “Sex And Drugs And Rock And Roll!” The only difference is that most of them are playing instruments. There are three drummers, three keyboard players, two bassists and only God and Jake Riviera know how many singers and guitarists. Both Jake Riviera and God are in Leicester, but only Jake is buying drinks.

It’s Stiff’s Greatest Stiffs dumping music on the people tonight, ladeez ’n’ gemmun, the hardest workin’ coach party in showbiz. A demented army of drunken hippies with short hair surfing on the new wave: five featured performers and an all-star cast of fahsands, mate: sex, drugs, rock’n’roll, violence, intrigue, comedy, romance, suspense, thrills, chills, spills, bills. It’s an instant smash, a silk-sash bash, a crystal shipload of mutants and crazies cunningly disguised as a coachload of hungover, blitzed-out musicians.

Coast-to-coast weirdness. C’mon along and join the crew.

FRIDAY MORNING, SHORTLY before 10 in the am. God is shedding his gentle grace in the form of a torrential downpour suitable only for Noah The Ark and Howard The Duck over a somewhat ungrateful Bayswater. Your reporter, having packed his Ramones T-shirt and copy of *The Best Science Fiction Of JG Ballard* (if you don’t have it now you can git it) decabs and wanders into the offices of Stiff Records to link up with his travelling companions.

The first person he sees is Dave Edmunds, who is lending his maestro’s touch on guitar and drums to The Nick Lowe All-Stars. He looks disgusted (though he tries to be amused) at the horrific idea of being awake and functioning (all terms used in their loosest possible sense) at such an odd and ungodly hour.

He is wearing a pink-and-black velvet jacket that looks as if Cliff Richard used to wear it on *Oh Boy!* back in ’58.

“Dave, your girlfriend’s on four,” announces Stiff’s unnaturally cheerful and efficient office-person. Edmunds picks up the phone and begins to issue instructions for the videotaping of Lowe’s appearance on *So It Goes* the

following night. “Be careful not to erase Elvis, though,” he admonishes as—bang on cue—enter (fanfare, please) Elvis Costello.

A potato face carved out of granite and surmounted by the now-legendary pair of massive hornrims, clasping a carton of orange juice in a grip of iron, Costello looks like Clark Kent the day after he decides to stop coming on like a wimp just to protect his secret identity. It’s a bird, it’s a plane, it’s... Elvis!

There’s just time to scan the memo pinned to the wall that announces that Stiff is not responsible for anything charged to any of the hotel rooms apart from breakfast and say hello to Larry Wallis, who looks as early-morning groggy as anyone but at least has a pair of impenetrable shades and 18 inches of hair to hide behind. Then it’s time to get on the bus and aim for Manchester.

The bus driver’s name is Trevor—wonder of wonders!—and inevitably he’s dubbed Clevor Trever in honour of the Ian Dury song of the same name. Fortified by the fruits of a raid on the off-licence conveniently located a couple of doors down the road from Stiff—or is it the other way round?—and cassette tapes prepared by Wallis and Costello, everyone prepares to meet the day.

The first block of seats on the coach are the undisputed staked-out

territory of The 24-Hour Club—a self-explanatory designation. This crew of hardcore crazies is made up of Larry Wallis (formerly of Motorhead, the Pink Fairies and UFO), Pete Thomas (one-time Chilli Willi & The Red Hot Peppers drummer and now-time drummer with Elvis Costello & The Attractions—not to mention drumming and rhythm guitar duties with Nick Lowe), Terry Williams (arch-exponent of Swansea cool, currently stoking the engine room of Dave Edmunds’ Rockpile but on this tour pounding it out for Nick Lowe) plus Lowe and Edmunds themselves.

The final lynchpin of the 24-Hour Club (AKA The Pound-A-Minute Club) is Elvis’ bass player, who used to be Bruce Thomas of The Sutherland Brothers & Quiver. Then there’s a lady named Penny Tobin, who plays keyboards for Nick Lowe, and in the successive tiers we find Ian Dury & The Blockheads—that’s the ineffable Dury himself plus Chas Jankel (guitar, keyboards), Norman Watt-Roy (bass), John Turnbull (guitar), Davey Payne (saxes), Charlie Charles (drums) and Mickey Gallagher (keyboards).

“Here’s a scoop for you,” Jake Riviera is to announce gleefully the following evening. “Mickey used to play for Peter Frampton and he co-wrote ‘Show Me The Way’, which sold millions, right? So what’s he doing grovelling for peanuts on a Stiff tour?”

Well, it ain’t exactly peanuts, Jake. Everybody gets 50 quid a week cash money, but at least one Stiff fowed so much money to his cohorts—don’t ask me what he spent it on, but it’s probably what you’d’ve spent your bread on if you’d been him—that he ended up with a measly four quid in his pocket on payday after he’d paid back his debts. God, it’s tough on the road.

Behind his copy of *Jack The Ripper: The Final Solution*, tight-buttoned, high-pocketed “Basher” Lowe appears taciturn and truculent, occasionally taking a meditative swig on his

## It’s a silk-sash bash, a crystal shipload of mutants and crazies



Photo session for the *Live Stiffs Live* album: (l-r) Elvis Costello, Nick Lowe, Ian Dury, Larry Wallis, Wreckless Eric



bottle of cider. Edmunds appears likewise behind *Elvis: What Happened?* and then turns the book over to Terry Williams and gets into a heavy-duty poker game which lasts until the coach reaches the first motorway services. Williams gets stuck into the book and then nods out. Towards the back of the coach, Costello ploughs eagerly through *The Essential Lenny Bruce*.

There's a film crew in tow, and in order to get the full cinéma vérité number and capture the –uh–gestalt of the tour in all its awful glory they film the Stiffs leaving the coach to run through the rain into the grease-pit, and even scan them queueing up for the horrorshow neogrub. Worst of all, they film everyone eating.

Larry Wallis groans elaborately. "Listen," he instructs me and Stiff's resident genie, an ebullient yobbo known as Kosmo Vinyl, "let's eat as boringly as we possibly can."

We chomp as mechanistically as is (in)humanly possible until Penebaker's heirs pack up to try and get some visual out of Ian and Elvis. Wallis cracks up. "I don't think I've ever seen anyone eat as boringly as you just did," he tells Kosmo.

The major event of that particular stop was the discovery of numerous pots of green Slime on sale in the media shop. I don't know if you've seen the stuff, but it's pure Blecccch City: a nasty green goo that looks quite unspeakably vile, like a cross between King Kong's bogies and Linda Blair's puke in *The Exorcist*. I don't know why they sell it in motorway shops, because it's not exactly the ideal stuff for bored toddlers to smear around in a car on a long drive, but it's great for nasty-minded rock musicians in a coach. Kos and Elvis' keyboard player Steve Nieve get really obsessed with the stuff, and it's thrown and smeared all over the place by the time we get to the hotel.

Most of the tour personnel kill the hour between check-in and going to the gig by getting pissed or unpacking (me, I take three aspirin, have a cup of coffee and read a bit of JG Ballard), but Elvis has different ideas. As soon as we're back on the coach, Costello is grinning like a chimp who's just poured all the PG Tips down the director's trousers.

"Who's on the case then?" he gloats. "Who's the greatest scorer of records that ever lived? I've just been down to Woolworths and I got two copies of 'Anarchy In The UK' on EMI for 32p each!!!"

Kosmo and Wallis are awestruck, as well they might be. To go straight off the coach and slog for 15 minutes down to Woolworths just on the off chance that there might be something good in the deletions rack and then come up with a find worth anywhere from five to 15 quid in the London vinyl Shylock emporia... Listen, anyone out there still sceptical about the sheer, blinding, transcendent genius of Elvis Costello?

Outside the Manchester Apollo, the sign says "Live on stage at 7.30 ELVIS COSTELLO". Clearly, they haven't gotten the message about the five-way democracy on this tour. Or rather four-way: the fifth Greatest Stiff, Wreckless Eric, is back home under doctor's orders. It is explained that, lacking the staying power of the veterans – the collective number of gigs under these guys' belts is astronomical – he threw himself into the touring lifestyle with such enthusiasm that he contracted chronic laryngitis. This means that a firm set order has to be adhered to.

See, Pete Thomas is playing with both Elvis and Basher and Ian Dury plays with Wreckless as well as doing his own set. Therefore, neither of these two gents can do two consecutive sets, which means that the order can be either Wreckless-Lowe-Dury-Costello or Lowe-Wreckless-Costello-Dury (Costello and Dury being the only ones with enough rehearsed material to do the last set). Without Wreckless, the order is therefore Lowe-Dury-Costello. Got it?

At the backstage buffet, Elvis is loading up his plate with a fairly stunning assortment of cheese, cold meats, salad items and whatnot.

IF IT AIN'T  
**STIFF**  
it ain't worth  
a fuck.



October 7, 1977: (l-r) Dave Edmunds, Nick Lowe and former Pink Fairies and Motörhead member Larry Wallis onstage at Bath University, Somerset

Seeing my bemused stare, he adds reassuringly, "It's not all for me. Some of it's for Day. We used to get so *hungry* when we were recording 'The Long And Winding Road'." He pauses. His spectacles flash evilly. "There's a very interesting story behind all of that..."

He raises his eyebrows invitingly. I say, "Yeah?"

"...which shall remain secret." He wends his way to the tune-up room. I've got just enough time to murmur, 'That's what you think, buster,' at his recently vacated airspace when it's time to rush out front for curtain-up on The Nick Lowe All-Stars.

**WHATEVER YOU DO**, don't ever let anybody tell you that Nick Lowe doesn't know how to put a band together. At the back of the stage there's Terry Williams and Dave Edmunds hammering it out on twin drum kits, and strung out behind Our Hero are Penny Tobin (keyboards), Pete Thomas (rhythm guitar) and Larry Wallis (lead), all laying it down deep and crisp while Basher guns the motor of a mouth-watering vintage Gibson six-string-and-bass double-necker into "So It Goes". The tautness of Lowe's sound seems vaguely incongruous against his studiously casual manner. Still, he can play dynamite bass even in a semi-slouch, and sing real good like a pop star should despite the wad of gum he keeps molaring.

Basher keeps socking it to the people – notably with "Let's Eat" – until it's time for Larry Wallis to strut his stuff. Unlike Lowe, Dury, Costello and Edmunds – who are known and respected by Anglophiliac Yanks even if not by the mass USA public – Wallis doesn't exactly have the credentials that would make a *Rolling Stone* critic roll over to have his tummy tickled: I mean, the Pink Fairies, UFO and the unlamented Mark I of Motörhead?

Wallis' mission in life seems to be to prove to the current crop of young 'uns that he's still mean and nasty even though he's got a foot and a half of hair. Judging by the way he performs "On Parole" and "I'm A Police Car" »

(his new Stiff single, natch) I'd say he succeeds admirably. His slicing guitar and angry, sneering vocals are about as wimpy and mellow as a ton of gelignite.

His moment of glory over, Wallis takes his bow as Lowe announces in a nicely offhand way, "One of our drummers, Dave Edmunds, is gonna come up and play some guitar." Pete Thomas stashes his borrowed red Strat and slides in behind the kit as a jubilant, juiced-up Edmunds straps on his Gibson ES 335 and bellows into the mic, "Nick Lowe wrote it, I recorded it and I hope you bought it! It's called 'I Knew The Bride'!"

The band storm into the song with a crackling energy that provides the most dynamic piece of ear massage thus far: Thomas and Williams hammering their kits through the floor with a flood of power that keeps right up until the band makes its exit on Lowe's superb "Heart Of The City". The keener-eared voyeurs backstage note that Lowe is actually singing "Aardvark Of The City" on the song's ride-out.

Backstage, all is Welsh jubilation as Phil Ryan and Martin Ace (formerly of the Man band) and George Ace (all three now with The Flying Aces) show up to hang out with Terry and Dai Edmunds to help celebrate Phil's birthday, but it's too late to stop now because Ian Dury & The Blockheads are due up on stage...

In one sense, Dury is the tour's major revelation. It's his return to the public stage following the collapse of The Kilburns some 18 months ago and it all comes right on top of an album that was as exhilarating as the Kilburns' album was universally judged to be disappointing. (It's called *New Boots And Panties!!*, just in case you don't know.) The Dury album alone would be a justification – if one were needed – for the existence of Stiff, because I can't think of a single straight record company in England who would have had the vision to commission and release it.

The sound has improved between Lowe's set and Dury's, which means that it's gone from appalling to mediocre. The audience have warmed up as well, as is demonstrated by the fact that a couple of them actually brave the security golems roaming the hall and attempt to get up and dance. Mind you, they're stiff-armed right back into their seats within seconds, but it's the thought that counts, and by the time Dury winds up his set with the anthemic "Sex And Drugs And Rock And Roll", everybody's up at once. The golems snarl and frown as threateningly as they can, but there are just too damn many people standing up and dancing at once for them to have any effect at all. There's a moral in that, kidz. Bear it in mind next time you wanna dance at a concert.

Dury's set consisted of the material from his new album, played about one trillion times harder than it was in the studio. The whole set was sublime, but especial standouts were the moving "My Old Man", the hilariously accurate character sketches "Clevor Trever" and "Billericay Dickie", the rocking, spat-out "Sweet Gene Vincent" with a zonked but still dangerous Edmunds laying on some extra guitar muscle, "Plaistow Patricia" with its jaw-dropping intro... If I carry on much longer, I'll have listed the whole damn set under "highlights", but that's the kind of set it was.

Dury's stage presence is as remarkable as everything else about him. In his battered bowler hat and stained jacket, he seems to have lurched leering straight out of Dickens, a manic and macabre costermonger, a Greek Chorus for the rejects and losers. If I had to name Dury's most outstanding



## Dury's stage presence is as remarkable as everything else about him

quality, it would have to be compassion; if only because of the way he refrains from training upon his characters the scorn that many would say they deserve. His music is also witty, savage, perceptive, highly original, very musical and you can dance to it. What more can I say? Enjoy.

Finally, there's the king and his elite guard. Elvis Costello & The Attractions look like the kind of kids at my school who hated rock'n'roll, got to be prefects before anybody else, served as school librarians and were astonishingly officious if you returned a book late or did anything freaky in the library. (This may tell you something about the school I went to. Bang goes the last shred of my street credibility. Oh well.) Keep those kids in their school uniforms till their mid-20s, drag 'em through a hedge backwards and you've got Elvis Costello & The Attractions.

Except that, woweewee, they got it tight and they're rockin' here tonight. They're the hottest little teen combo that ever got the kids sobbing while they frugged at the end-of-term dance, and for writing teenage pop songs about adult situations – and playing monster guitar and singing like a bitch while he's doing it – Elvis Costello can't be beat.

As the live tracks on the back of "Watching The Detectives" demonstrate, the live Elvis experience is about as laid back as Godzilla on speed. Put this boy into the Hip MOR bracket at your own peril, son!

The set consists of Elvis classics old and new, and as a special tribute to the missing Wreckless Eric, he does "(I'd Go) The Whole Wide World" – minus, unfortunately, the life-size cardboard cut-out of Wreckless that he originally intended to bring on. Bruce Thomas slides behind Terry Williams' drum kit, and the band are augmented by Blockheads saxist and ex-Kilburn Davey Payne, plus Denise Roudette on bass.

Denise is (a) a fine bass player who works with Wreckless' band, (b) an all-round fine human being, (c) Ian Dury's girlfriend and (d) one of the most beautiful women I've met all year.

For the first encore, Dave Edmunds – by now semi-legless but not giving an inch – comes on to add his guitar sorcery to "Mystery Dance", and for the second the entire cast assembles for – you guessed – "SEX!!! and DRUGS!!! and ROCK!!! and ROLL!!!"

**B**ACK AT THE hotel, there's an impromptu party going on, as The Kursaal Flyers and The Cortinas are in town. A California peach named Farrah – "Farrah Fawcett-Minor", is how she introduces herself – who does the tour newsletter is dressed up in a nurse's



uniform and is asking various people if they require medical attention. Basher is drinking Bloody Mary from a pint mug, and Dave Edmunds is discussing a song lyric with Will Birch from the Kursaals.

Edmunds is preoccupied with two things: thing the first being the fact that he is somewhat unhappy – to say, the least – with the state of his relationship with his record/management company Swan Song, and thing the second the strength and energy that he derives from working with guitarist Billy Bremner, drummer Terry Williams and bassist-vocalist-songwriter-genius Nick Lowe in his band Rockpile. He's also upset by being described as "dumpy and matted" by Tony Parsons in *NME* a couple of week's back.

"I know I've got a little bit of a pot, but the axe hides that. As for matted..." he scratches worriedly at his dishevelled but undeniably clean and shiny barnet and then waves his fist with a gesture so extravagant that he nearly knocks a triple Scotch all over Terry Williams.

The 24-Hour Club is in full swing when I decide to crash out around half-three, but the first person I meet in the lift on Saturday morning is Edmunds, face white and jaw clenched. "I'm leaving the tour," he announces.

Downstairs, the air's so thick it's like drowning in molasses. During the night, there'd been an altercation, a bit of midnight raving that had gotten out of hand, a prank escalated into a full-scale accident during one of those moments when perceptions and perspectives are eroded by booze. Though Edmunds was not the main protagonist, he and one other had been fired off the tour by Nick Lowe as soon as the latter found out in the morning (it had all happened in his room, but he'd slept right through it).

The Main Culprit had been reinstated by Lowe because he apologised, but Edmunds refused to do likewise, and unrepentantly hopped a cab to the station to go back to London, leaving his guitar and amp in the truck. Lowe and Williams attempt to follow him to the station but all their love's in vain since the train has left 10 minutes before they get there.

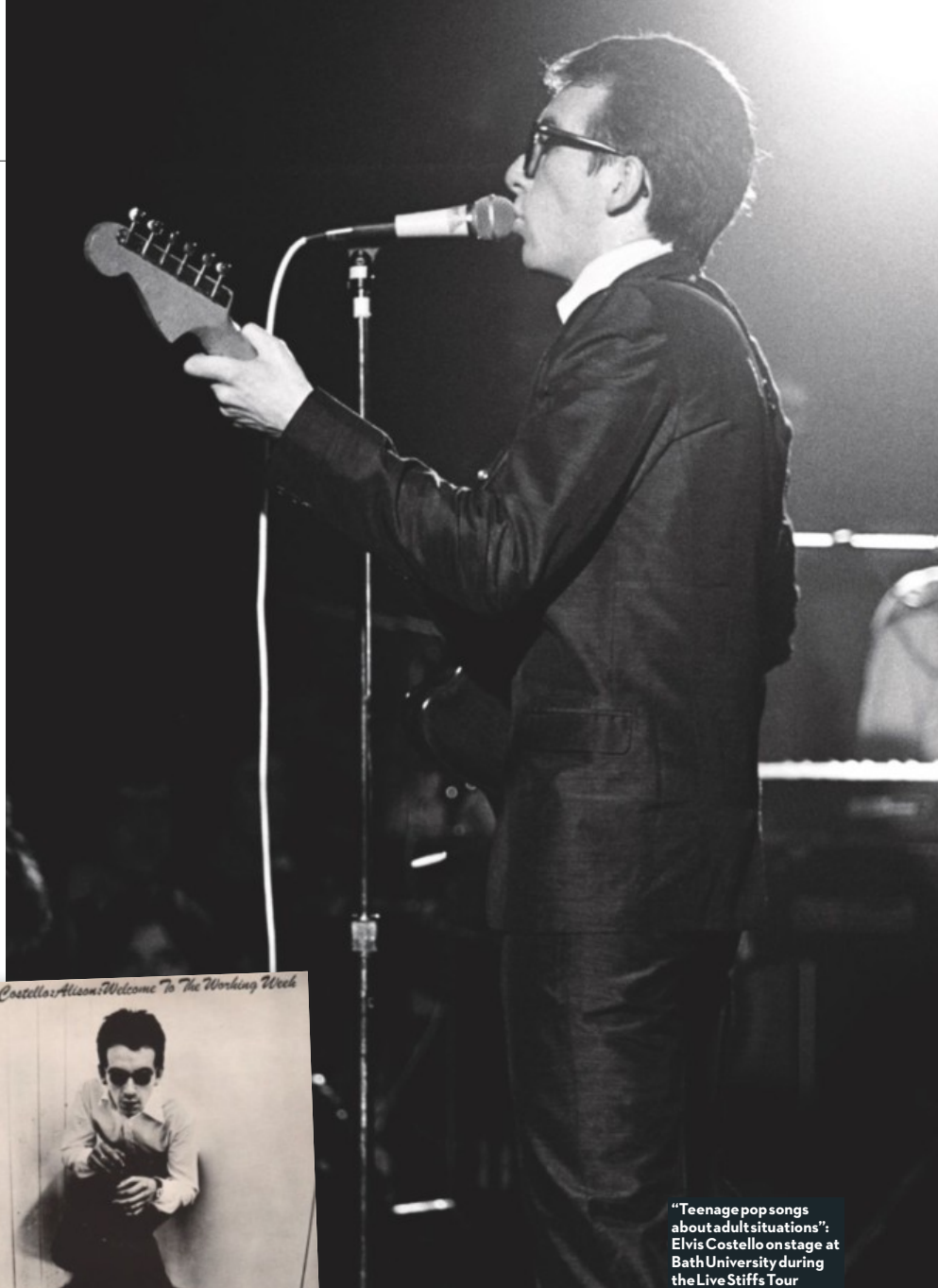
Saylarvie. Williams drums the first part of Lowe's set by himself. "I Knew The Bride" is dropped from the set and Elvis Costello weighs in on second guitar on "Heart Of The City". And like the cavalry charging over the ridge in the last reel, Wallis delivers a solo on the Saturday-night version of "City" that's as good as anyone – even Dai Edmunds – could have played on that song. Watch this boy – life begins at 30, Larry.

**EN ROUTE TO** Leicester, the party stops in the charming little tourist-trap village of Bakewell – where, as various members of the party are not slow to point out, the tarts come from. Ian Dury buys up one chemist's shop's entire stock of Interdens – medicated toothpicks, lamebrain! – and ceremoniously distributes them to the assembled company.

After various eating places have been dismissed as "too expensive", I-man ends up having lunch with Costello, Davey Payne, Farrah and photographer Fran at a tiny little caff where the strain of providing five simultaneous orders proves almost too much for the facilities.

After the purchase of throat pastilles, apples, and ice-cream, me and Costello settle down to rap our way to Leicester. Various people are opining that Edmunds will show up in Leicester. Me, I reckon it seems unlikely and sure enough there he doesn't, but by Monday he's back – "Hello boys" – and All Is Well.

Elvis Costello reckons that the current albums by Richard Hell, Talking Heads and Ian Dury are among the finest music of the last decade, and that the biggest pain in the musical ass these days are punkwagon jumpers. He loves the Sex Pistols and The Clash, but has nothing but withering



"Teenage pop songs about adult situations": Elvis Costello on stage at Bath University during the Live Stiffs Tour

contempt for the third-div punk bands. "Ian Dury's 'Blackmail Man' really shows those whining little brats what it's all about."

There's been talk of Richard Hell becoming an honorary Stiff for the occasion in Leicester, and as it turns out he's there at the gig, but in a non-playing capacity. He's in the wings for the Dury and Costello sets, chugging on a can of beer and staring in bemusement at the slightly absurd spectacle of me and Costello singing along to "My Old Man". His eyes widen – if that's possible – in delight as Dury croaks "Arse-holes-bas-tards-fuck-ing-cunts-and-PRICKS!!!" at the beginning of "Plastow Patricia". In his honour, Costello opens his set with Hell's "Love Comes In Spurts".

As soon as we'd trooped into the hall, Pete Thomas had turned round and announced, "Now this, my friends, is what I call a gig", and in terms of sound quality and general vibe, Leicester beats Manchester all hollow, even despite the absence of Dave Edmunds. The audience is up and grooving right from the start, which proves that college gigs are OK, buster, even though they do play an endlessendlessendless eight-track of *Sgt Pepper* in the bar.

Which is where we came in, with Ian Dury's joyous innocent mantra "SEX!!!! and DRUGS!!!! and ROCK!!!! and ROLL!!!!" chanted by a berserk hallful of kids high on good vibes and rock'n'roll music and anything that they happened to have brought along with them.

Listen, everyone's a billtopper on this tour, everyone's a star, and I'd recommend you go see any of these acts, singly and together, in the future: Dave Edmunds' Rockpile with Nick Lowe, Ian Dury's Blockheads, Elvis Costello & The Attractions and whatever Larry Wallis gets up to next, not to mention poor ol' Wrecked Wreckless Eric. You know it makes sense, bruvvers 'n' sistuhs, and you best believe it's gonna do ya good.

Charles Shaar Murray •

1977

OCTOBER–DECEMBER

# “A new musical language”

DAVID BOWIE delivers “*Heroes*” – made while holed up in Berlin with BRIAN ENO and the “amusing” ROBERT FRIPP. On his return to the UK, he discusses his recent strategies. “I’m completely open,” he says. “I’m so eclectic that complete vulnerability is involved.”

— NME NOVEMBER 12 —

**H**E’S UP OUT of his armchair and onto the balls of his feet as the door closes behind me. “Christ, how long has it been?” Four years, man, and I set up the tape machine – Bowie attempting to balance the microphone on top of a Carlsberg bottle – and no time to swap small talk because interview time is severely circumscribed, so by the time we’ve both sat down and Bowie’s lit a Gauloise there’s nothing to do but pull the pin and get straight on it.

“Where can we start after four years?” he asks.

Hell we can start anywhere; we both know where it will go.

Why does *Heroes* – or more accurately “*Heroes*” – come in quotes? Are the inverted commas actually part of the title?

“Yeah. Firstly – it was quite a silly point really – I thought I’d pick on the only narrative song to use as the title. It was arbitrary, really, because there’s no concept to the album.”

I’d felt that the use of quotes indicate a dimension of irony about the word “*Heroes*” or about the whole concept of heroism.

“Well, in that example they were, on that title track. The situation that sparked off the whole thing was – I thought – highly ironic. There’s a wall by the studio [the album having been recorded at Hansa By The Wall in West Berlin] about there. It’s about 20 or 30 meters away from the studio and the control room looks out onto it. There’s a turret on top of the wall where the guards sit, and during the course of lunch break every day, a boy and girl would meet out there and carry on.

“They were obviously having an affair. And I thought of all the places to meet in Berlin, why pick a bench underneath a guard turret on the wall? They’d come from different directions and always meet there... Oh, they were both from the west, but they would always meet right there. And I – using licence – presumed that they were feeling somewhat guilty about this affair and so they had imposed this restriction on themselves, thereby giving themselves an excuse for their heroic act. I used this as a basis...” »





"The intention was to go in and play around with method and process": David Bowie on the creation of *Low* and *"Heroes"* in 1977

Therefore it is ironic.

“Yes it is. You’re perfectly right about that, but there was no reason why the album should have been called “*Heroes*”. It could have been called “*The Sons Of The Silent Age*”. It was just a collection of stuff that I and Eno and Fripp had put together. Some of the stuff that was left off was very amusing, but this was the best of the batch, the stuff that knocked us out.”

Do you find that recording in a studio that’s right by the Berlin Wall gives you a sense of being on the edge of something?

“That’s exactly right. I find that I have to put myself in those situations to produce any reasonable good writing. I’ve still got that same thing about when I get to a country or a situation and I have to put myself on a dangerous level, whether emotionally or mentally or physically, and it resolves in things like that: living in Berlin leading what is quite a spartan life for a person of my means, and in forcing myself to live according to the restrictions of that city.”

So it’s time to move now that other persons are writing songs about the Berlin Wall.

Bowie chuckles into his Special Brew. “Yes, I have noticed that, actually. I haven’t yet made up my mind, but I have the choice of two places that I’m thinking of going to. One’s Japan and the other is Israel, and I don’t know which one’s going to win.”

The sight of the Thin White Duke in a kibbutz strikes one as being too good a visual to pass up, plus Bowie went through a Japanese phase in ’73.

“Yes, and I keep wanting to go back there. I think I’ll plump for Kyoto, because I want something very serene around me for a few months to see if that produces anything. It is also important to my private life that I go to Kyoto.”

We talk about the Japanese mime/dance/theatre troupe Ondekoza, who’d just completed a run at Sadlers Wells and who Bowie had missed by a day in Amsterdam. “It sounds like a token show for us lot to have a gander at,” Bowie comments after I’ve described the show. “But in Japan – when I was travelling though it – there was an awful lot, particularly in the outlying villages and provinces, of very strange ritual performances that I hadn’t seen before. And still, because my knowledge of Japanese is limited – to say the least! – I never really found out from what school it came from, or what its origins were.”

Since the purpose of all ritual must be invocation, what were the rituals designed to invoke?

“Well, a lot of them were from Shintoism, and they talk very liberally about being one of the few countries in the world that tolerate all religions, but you’ll only find about three Christians in the whole of Japan. They’re tolerated...” he laughs harshly, “...but everybody else is a Shintoist, mate! So most of their art forms derive from either that or the imperial sources. It’s very sophisticated but a bit suspicious sometimes.”

Yeah, but so’s Bowie himself. I think of the koto Bowie plays on “Moss Garden” from side two of “*Heroes*” and his berserk scream of “*I’m under Japanese influence and my honour’s at stake*” from “Blackout” on the same album, and reflect that the kibbutzim probably won’t see DB for a while yet.

So what about China? After all, back in ’71, Bowie was something of a Maoist.

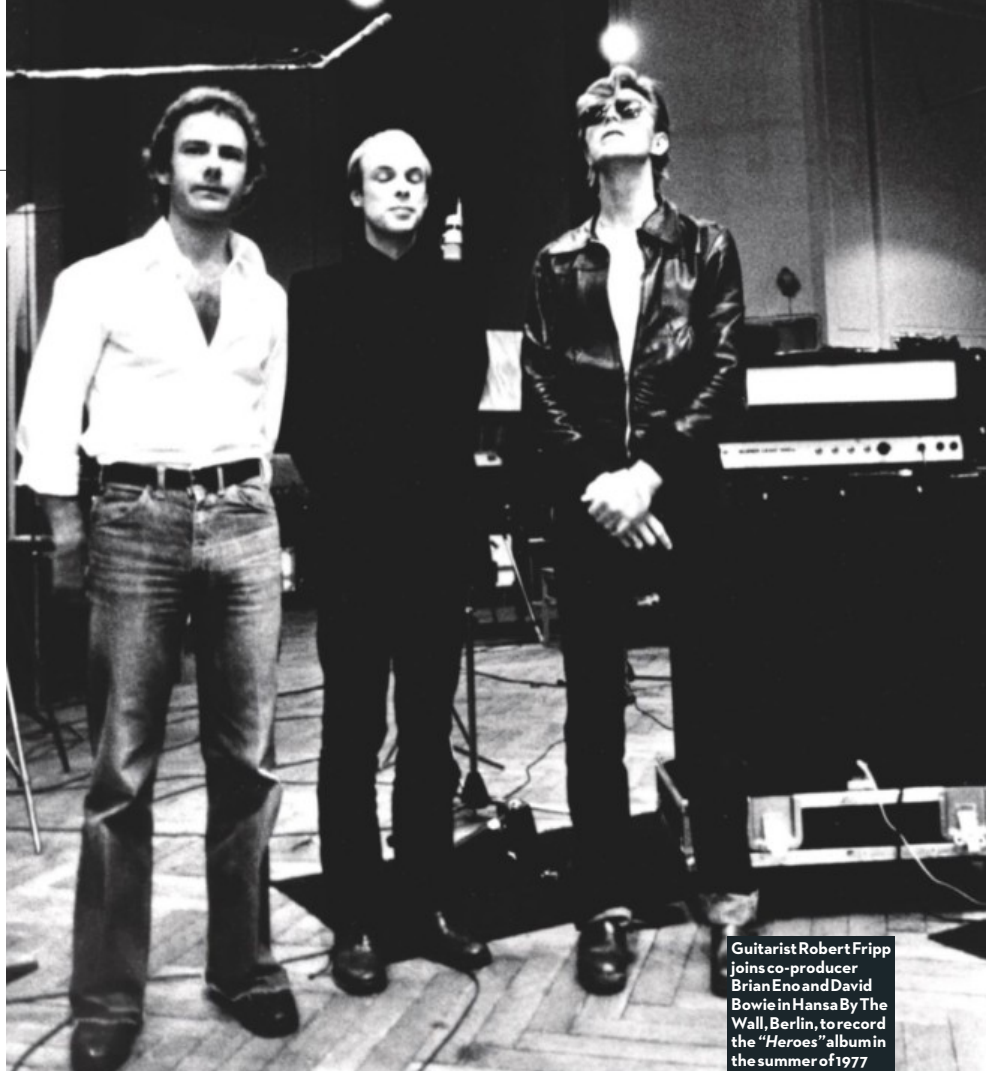
“Ahhh, that’s still there. That place continues to intoxicate me. I got a glimpse of it when I was in Hong Kong... it’s strange. There’s no wall there, you see. When you move out of Hong Kong into China, you can just walk over, and often you won’t get shot at. It’s quite feasible to sort of wander into China and just look around, wander around all those villages right near the border.”

Hey, living dangerously is one thing, but recording an album in a situation where one of your musicians was actually liable to get shot...

(A sharp chuckle) “I never travel with musicians. I only travel on my own these days.”

A far cry from the times he wouldn’t budge an inch without bodyguard, secretary, personal assistant, travelling companion, hairdresser, PR...

“All my travelling is done on the basis of wanting to get my ideas for writing from real events rather than from going back to a system from whence it came. I am very wary of listening to much music.”



Guitarist Robert Fripp joins co-producer Brian Eno and David Bowie in Hansa By The Wall, Berlin, to record the “*Heroes*” album in the summer of 1977

He gestures at the massive stereo set enthroned on the table by the sofa. “RCA sent all this stuff over and I forgot to ask them for some records, but by the time they deliver any I’ll be gone. It doesn’t really follow me around much. Imagine trying to plug in one of those in Bangkok! My drummer insists in carrying one around with massive headphones and wires sticking out everywhere. I don’t travel like that. I only have a tape machine to use as a notebook.

“No, *Event, Character, Situation*: they’re my preference for the basis of writing. But at the moment, I’m not even really interested in that. I mean, the last two things have made for a complete re-evaluation of my writing style. It had a lot to do with being bored with the traditional things I’d been writing, and with wanting to put myself in the position of having to come up with a new musical language for myself.”

I mention that *Low* missed me completely.

“Well I’m not surprised,” he says, “a lot of it missed me as well. I don’t understand it. I don’t understand “*Heroes*” either. It’s something that’s derived through process and method, with absolutely no idea of the consequences and no preconceptions of any kind.”

*Low* had seemed to me an album presenting – in an attractive light – withdrawal from the world almost to the point of catatonic schizophrenia.

Bowie grimaces and clears his throat a trifle ostentatiously. “There is more than an element of truth in what you say. For me it was very... I wanted to do that,” he interrupts defiantly. “What you’ve read from the experience of that album is absolutely accurate. I *did* achieve something, because there’s very few albums that I haven’t experienced at first hand. You can even tell what city I’ve been in by listening to the albums.

“I’m *completely* open. I’m so eclectic that complete vulnerability is involved.” You’ve got no shields, then. “I’ve never developed them, and I’m not to sure that I want to any more, because I’m becoming far more satisfied with life... my private life. I’m becoming incredibly straight, level, assertive, moderate... very different from, say, two years ago.”

Two years ago you were an uptight game player with a sore nose.

“Out there on the wall! No, listen, I’d been *exposed* (he gives the last syllable of the word a savage, ironic twist) to a general LA-ism which, quite frankly, I can’t cope with. It’s the most vile piss-pot in the world.”

LA, I say, is like being trapped in the set of a movie you didn’t want to see in the first place.

“Absolutely! It’s worse than that. It transcends that. It’s a movie that is so corrupt, with a script that is so devious and insidious. It’s the scariest

movie ever written. You feel a total victim there, and you know someone's got the strings on you."

So, why do people build themselves mansions out there? It must be like voluntary self-imprisonment.

"Oh, it is. It's like going to live in Switzerland to look after your tax money, which is the most incredible thing I ever did. I don't live there but I stayed there. I don't live anywhere. I have never got around to getting myself a piece of land, putting up a house on it and saying, 'This is mine, this is home.' If I did that, that would just about ruin everything. I don't think I'd ever write anything again. I must have complete freedom from bases. If I ever had anything that resembled a base – like a flat on a long lease or anything – I felt so incredibly trapped.

"Even if I go away I know that it's waiting for me – more than that, it's like it has me on a string, and it's dragging me back. I don't foresee that I could *live* comfortably in any of the cities I go to. Unlike my managerial predecessor, I'm not investment-minded. I still like the idea of making records next to the wall. I think that is what one should do, in my case anyway."

Returning to the subject of the recent waxings, it seems that "*Heroes*" is an attempt to fight back against the state of mind that *Low* wallows in.

"Do you know something? The hardest thing for me to do is to help you in solving those problems, because all I know is the input of the album. I have as much idea of the – Outback?" he laughs, "about what comes back off that album as what you do. Eno is the same. Neither of us understand on a linear level what the thing's about, but we get a damned good impression of information coming off those two albums that seems very strong, and that was not very intentional. The intention was to go in and play around with method and process, but when we'd finished *Low* and "*Heroes*" what we had in our hands was something that actually does give information.

"If it seems obvious to you, then you've described my state of mind at the time of making those two albums very accurately. That's exactly – on both albums – what I've gone through. *Low* was a reaction to having gone through that peculiar... that dull greeny-grey limelight of America and its repercussions; pulling myself out of it and getting to Europe and saying, 'For God's sake re-evaluate why you wanted to get into this in the first place? Did you really do it just to clown around in LA? Retire. What you need is to look at yourself a bit more accurately. Find some people you don't understand and a place you don't want to be and just put yourself into it. Force yourself to buy your own groceries.'

"And that's exactly what I do. I have an apartment on top of an auto shop in an area of the town which is quite heavily populated by Turks, and I did that for a bit..."

Two relevant quotes: the novelist Elizabeth Bowen once wrote: "Anywhere, at any time, with anyone, one may be seized by the suspicion of being alien – ease is therefore to be found in a place which nominally is foreign: this shifts the weight," which is as good a thumbnail sketch of the obsessive traveller as any I've encountered.

And then there's the character of Herbert Stencil in Thomas Pynchon's *V: Herbert Stencil*, like small children at a certain age and Henry Adams in *The Education*, as well as certain autocrats since time out of mind, always referred to himself in the third person.

"This helped 'Stencil' appear as only one personality among a repertoire of identities. 'Forcible dissolution of personality' was what he called the general technique, which is not exactly the same as 'seeing the other person's point of view'; for it involved, say, wearing clothes that Stencil wouldn't be caught dead in, eating foods that would have made Stencil gag, living in unfamiliar digs, frequenting bars or cafes of a non-Stencilian character; all this for weeks on end; and why? To keep Stencil in his place: that is, in the third person.

"Ooh, aren't you well read!" mocks Bowie, but his eyes show a flash of recognition. "I understand that completely! I completely sympathise with the man! I know exactly why he did that, I think! So that initial period in Berlin produced *Low*, which is 'Isn't it great to be on your own, let's just pull down the blinds and fuck 'em all.' The first side of *Low* was all about me: 'Always Crashing In The Same Car' and all that self-pitying crap, but side two was more an observation in musical terms: my reaction to seeing the East Bloc,

how West Berlin survive in the midst of it, which was something I couldn't express in words. Rather it required textures, and of all the people that I've heard write textures, Brian's always appealed to me the most."

Yeah, but they lack *context*.

"Brian isn't interested in context. He's a man with peculiar notions, some of which I can come to terms with very easily and are most accessible, and some of it way above my head, mate, in terms of his analytical studies of cybernetics and his application of those things to music and his general fine arts approach. It's something that I've known from way back as a general characteristic of a kind of person that I used to know when I was a lot younger.

"I find that very simpatico. All those crazies. But I can't really talk on his behalf. We spend most of our time joking. Laughing and falling on the floor. I think out of all the time we spent recording, 40 minutes out of every hour was spent just crying with laughter.

"Do you know Fripp? Have you ever spent time with him in a humorous state? He is incredibly funny. Unbelievable sense of humour. Having the two of them in one studio produces so much random humour – incredible stuff. So anyway, what I'm doing, in this wonderful new world of discovery and experimentation, is a refocus about what I'm trying to do."

We talked a little bit about (you should pardon the expression) punk rock and Bowie opined that the worst thing about punk was the way so many bands were diving gleefully into the

category instead of striving to be assessed outside of it.

"None of them are fighting it; none of them are saying, 'We are us.' They're saying, 'Yeah, we are punk', and in so doing they're putting a boundary on their writing scope, which is a shame because they could be a movement of sorts. But you have to let a movement remain as a subculture for a little while and gain some – I'm wary of using the word 'maturity' – gain some recognition of its own relationship with the environment that it lives in. That's Eno's Rate Of Change – one of his cybernetics things – and it's very interesting.

"People are more interested in the technical innovations as they happen rather than the rate of change within where they happen."

Hence gadget obsession?

"Oh, that's not so bad. I welcome any new relationship between man and his machine. I think that's very optimistic and very good. The average man... see, what you have got is a situation where a hundred years ago the average man could fix anything that went wrong in his home. If it went wrong he could fix it. But how many things does a man have now that are out of the area of his knowledge? If his television goes, he has to get a specialist to fix it. He doesn't know his immediate environment. This is because we are put under the impression that we are to accept every new technological achievement that is pushed upon us before we readily understand the last lot."

What's the last technological innovation that you understood?

"Me! I think the fountain pen. I'm the perfect example of the victim of technology. I think it's disastrous."

Change of subject. Did Bowie consider he was being misrepresented when he was tied with fascism last year? "What I thought was that I'd made some very trite theatrical observations which in fact backfired. I can't blame the press for that."

Did you consider it to be a mistake? "Oh God, yes, but I thrive on mistakes. If I haven't made three good mistakes a week, then I'm not worth anything. You only learn from mistakes."

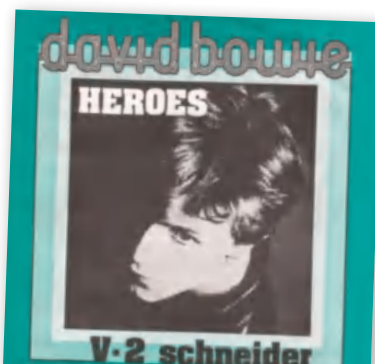
So what exactly were you trying to say with all that? "It was an immediate reaction to England, having not seen it for so long. What I said on the Continent was based on anticipation, and when I got here I thought

I'd got it right. I seem to have a knack for putting myself in those kind of dangerous positions. I'd just dried up and I couldn't write anything."

Do you think that, once again, London would be a place that would stimulate your writing?

"It is a very different London, and that is worth consideration. It's been on my mind the longer I've been here, and I've been coming back for a couple of days at a time just taking tentative looks, but there's so many places that I haven't been to get a vibe from." Charles Shaar Murray •

## "I'm becoming incredibly straight, level, moderate..."



1977

OCTOBER—DECEMBER

# “We don’t regret mistakes”

The BUZZCOCKS have grown up away from London’s punk hype — they’ve even stopped getting bottled. “I write songs that don’t exclude anyone,” says Pete Shelley. “The only people they exclude are people who don’t know anything about love.”

— NME DECEMBER 3 —

**T**HE PIZZA PARLOUR muzak is a never-ending, damned-for-all-eternity loop-tape of ageing session men bleating out sanitised versions of 1977 smash hits for swinging teens, etcetera.

Crown Topper, false-teeth, wrinkled interpretations of The Rods’ “Do Anything You Wanna Do”, of The Modern Lovers’ “Roadrunner”, even (forgive them, Lord, they know not what they do) of the Sex Pistols’ “Pretty Vacant”, as well as arteriosclerotic carbon copies of The Jam, Clash, Damned, Stranglers, Vibrators and just about every other name in the coterie of punky-waver elite that has ever been reverently gobbed on by the UK’s enlightened hordes of safety-pin-heads... except for Buzzcocks.

With mixed feeling of relief and slack-jaw shock, I gaze at my Pizza Putrido reflectively. Surely the high-calibre credentials of the Mancunian innovators would put them amongst the first in line for the dubious honour of having a bastardised representation of their work included on any punk-pizza-rock-muzak loop-tape???

Buzzcocks were one of the very first set of collective talents to band together back in June 1976 in the wake of the cataclysmic aural upheaval instigated by Malcolm McLaren’s Rude Boys. They played their debut gig the following month supporting the Sex Pistols at Manchester’s Free Trade Hall. Buzzcocks terminated their set when their 16-summers drummer boy, the gangling John Maher, deserted his skins to flee in tail-flying terror through the crowd and out into the night.

From there Buzzcocks went on to play support to the Pistols at the first Screen On The Green gig in Islington; to play Day One of the 100 Club Festival with the Pistols and Clash; to replace the expelled Damned on the Pistols’ Anarchy Tour coach; and to support The Clash at the Harlesden Cinema gig on their White Riot Tour.

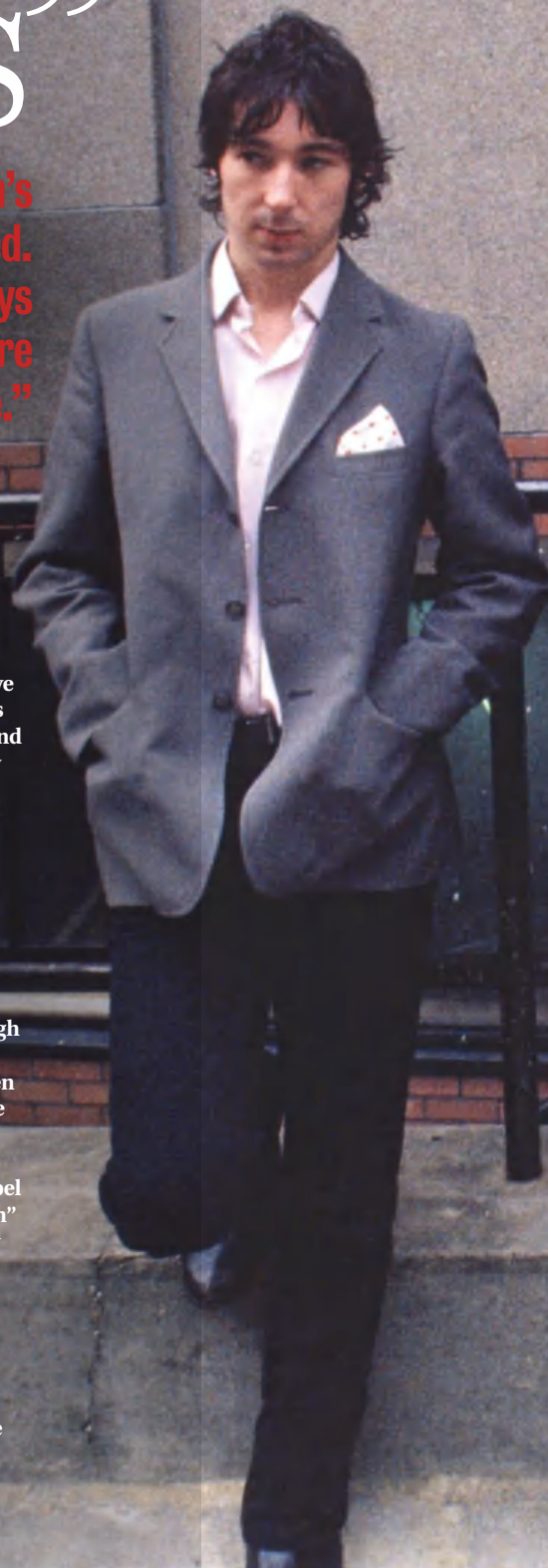
The last was just after they became the first band to form their own independent record label in the dawning of this year when they released the classic, precious, priceless “Spiral Scratch” EP on their New Hormones label. “Spiral Scratch” was arguably the finest 45 since “Anarchy In The UK”. No fewer than 16,000 of the little black beauties were bagged and posted by Buzzcocks themselves from the front room of manager Richard Boon’s Manchester home. Buzzcocks vinyl even occupied the last two tracks on the *Live At The Roxy* album.

All that... and what do they get, oh-oh, what do they get?

In sleepy London Town there’s just no place on a Pizzaland punk-muzak loop-tape for a bunch of ridiculously underrated Northern cults.

“Oh, they’ll get around to ‘Orgasm Addict’,” comments Pete Shelley dryly as he pops a piece of pizza into his mouth. “It’s this commercial world we live in...” »

SHEILA ROCK / REX FEATURES





Buzzcocks in November 1977: (l-r) Steve Diggle, Pete Shelley, Steve Garvey and John Maher



Not that Buzzcocks give a toss about Babylon, despite their impeccable punky-waver credentials. Coming out of Manchester may have blinkered the record corporations when it came to snapping up this combo for the dotted line of a recording contract, but this minor disadvantage has been more than compensated for by the beneficial aspects of their geographical location; Buzzcocks were never under pressure to follow a punk party line like some of their contemporaries in London.

In Manchester, fashion as exclusive dictatorship of a silver-spoon elite just doesn't exist. Buzzcocks have evolved at their own pace. They're very special and they know it; if the rest of the world doesn't... well, they'll catch up sooner or later, and if they don't that's strictly their own loss.

"If we'd been from London we would have been signed up a year ago, but we wouldn't be in the position we are now," Shelley asserts. "The music industry is centralised, which is more to its detriment than ours..."

"I hate London, it's just another city. We know—fairly certain—the things that we want to do and how we want to do them. If we'd been caught up in the rush in the beginning we wouldn't have been given the breathing space to work on the direction we want to take. We were in no rush to sign."

Shelley smiles, wryly. "Until United Artists came along, all the interest was fairly low profile anyhow."

**PETE SHELLEY** IS short, sharp and slyly urbane; dapper, diminutive and quietly defiant in his unfashionably conservative taste for sartorial elegance—a two-piece three-button electric-blue angora-goat's-hair suit worn with a bright-yellow rollneck, the same two-tone colour combination that dominates on both the label and cover of Buzzcocks' first United Artists single, "Orgasm Addict" b/w "Whatever Happened To?"

"It hasn't been banned," asserts the trenchant Shelley. "It just hasn't been played."

John Maher is elsewhere noshing Anglo egg and chips, so only two other Buzzcocks are present in the pizza house—the Pinocchio-featured, painfully shy Steve Diggle (back-up vocals and staccato rhythm guitar to Shelley's lead) and their latest recruit, watchful, silent bassist Steve Garvey, who resembles Bruce Foxton's kid brother and was drafted in to replace the ejected, difficult man-mountain, Big Garth, kicked out because Buzzcocks believe that a group cannot be a therapeutic vehicle for the problems of one member.

"It was getting to the point where if he'd been in much longer and didn't do some drastic changing—which we didn't think he'd be able to do—then there wouldn't be a Buzzcocks at all, we'd all just freak out," opines Shelley, who is basically a shy person but with growing self-confidence.

Shelley co-founded Buzzcocks with that enigmatic, natty-baldhead Howard Devoto when the latter stuck up a notice at their college requesting contact with like-minded souls interested in forming a band. Shelley was the only person who replied. The two spent a few days in London checking out the capital's fast-evolving seminal punk scene, and got the band's moniker from a *Time Out* review of *Rock Follies* which contained the phrase "Getting a buzz, cocks!"

They were introduced to Steve Diggle in June '76 by Malcolm McLaren at the first Pistols gig in Manchester. They found John Maher through an ad in *Melody Maker* and at the beginning of this year, as interest grew in the band after the release of "Spiral Scratch", Devoto left Buzzcocks to stretch his talents in other directions, feeling a growing distaste for performing live and extreme reluctance to commit himself to anything as drastic as a recording contract.

"Howard thought he would be unable to experiment if he remained in the band," Shelley comments, stifling a yawn. "I get bored with people asking about Howard. Tonight is the 63rd Buzzcocks gig (the second of the Marquee Buzzcocks brace) and Howard only played the first 11—he was only there at the very beginning."

Their disdain for Babylon's streets of chic has meant a disappointing paucity of Buzzcocks' gigs in the capital; before the two Marquee dates they'd played London only four times in 1977.

"It's the only place we get gobbled on," Shelley smirks. "Only in London and other liberated places... It used to piss me off, but now I understand that it's a mark of respect..."

His eyes are wide with mock-awe.

"If someone out there can gob right into your mouth... well, it's the nearest you can get to a French kiss from 30 yards."

But it would appear that the cocky cockney sparrers are catching on fast. "The last time we played London, there was nowhere near as many chairs and glasses thrown at us as the time before."

**B**UZZCOCKS SING LOVE songs. The love may be betrayed, bitter, vitriolic and vengeful, but its love nevertheless. Shelley's incisive lyrics are the work of a neoteric Smokey Robinson bearing a grudge. The direction of the band altered after the Devoto departure, Buzzcocks featuring Shelley out front after he took charge of limelight chores seeming more of a quintessentially pop-oriented band and less the vehicle for a tortured, angst-ridden artist with a widow's peak.

The Marquee has got the House Full sign up outside. Inside the Establishment Punk, vertical gyration and long-distance French Kissing is reaching perspiration point as Shelley and Diggle fret-thrash the juddering, abruptly staccato opening chords to Buzzcocks' ode to a shot-nerved unrequited lust habit, "Breakdown".

"Well-if-I-seem-a-little-jittery/I-can't-restrain-myself..."

Shelley controls the crowd with a polite deceptive grace, a natural performer with sufficient confidence in his ability to perform live not to feel the need to assault the audience with mandatory punky-waver contrived belligerence.

John Maher is continually head-bowed and relentlessly solid on skins, his work at the back of the stage meshing with Steve Garvey's voluble basslines, the neophyte Buzzcock's playing obviously still feeling its way (Lancashire's answer to Sid Vicious?), while his studied cool visual is infinitely more commercially viable in the teen-appeal stakes than that of the rotund, revolving Garth. And I couldn't help wondering if the expulsion of the Gentle Giant at this crucial stage of the Buzzcocks' scaling of the heights was perhaps made with a more ruthless calculation than Shelley would have you imagine.

But that's conjecture; Buzzcocks are now more of a live band than they've ever been before, including the early Devoto days. As always, Diggle looks mildly surprised to find himself on stage, his guitar emanating a juddering, Wilkoesque stutter as a base for Shelley to cut short, sharp, savage flicks of the plectrum, giving Buzzcocks the sound of a humming, brachiariate circular saw that incorporates the concision and rock-action speed of *la mode punkais* while exercising a refreshing control of dynamics that only the best of the new bands have been able to master.

It's rich, rhythmic and addictively repetitive, perhaps reaching its most perfect expression on the adventurous instrumental recitation "Pulsebeat". Maher repeats a drum roll of devastating brevity while the

other three Buzzcocks dance, eyes closed with their instruments silent, then as one man cutting rich, full, abrupt slices of sound that build to the contagious, intelligent magic with which they climax the show.

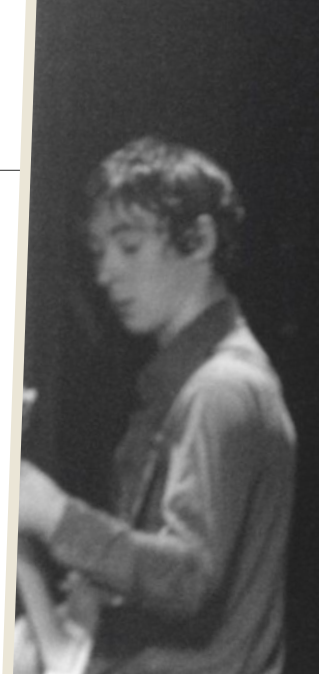
Doing "Pulsebeat" as the last number shows in Buzzcocks a willingness to experiment that no other band in the UK can match, together with the panache, aplomb, self-possession and ability to pull it off. At the bar The Clash's Mick Jones reels with stunned admiration. "They're the only band in the country who'd dare finish with that," he gasps. "Fucking brilliant."

"Thank you, goodnight!" Shelley shouts into the mic as they stumble off, brought back for an encore of the *Spiral Scratch* track "Time's Up", the story of the disintegration of a teenage couple's relationship when the intention's unjust and the commitment's unequal.

*I've been waiting at the supermarket, standing in line with beans*  
(CASH UP)

*I've been waiting at the post office for sticky pictures of the Queen*  
(STICK UP)

"I try to keep  
the lyrics  
I write  
ambisexual"





A deranged night out at punk nightspots in the company of **KEITH MOON**, newly returned from LA. Drink is taken, and bands are witnessed, but it's a nostalgic and strangely moving evening. "I've been into the abyss," Moon confides.

# "I like the rape and pillage"

— **MELODY MAKER** DECEMBER 3 —

**A** **HUGE WHITE ROLLS-ROYCE** slid the length of Wardour Street like a skateboard, Jan & Dean blasting from its hidden speakers, the owner bellowing along to "Dead Man's Curve" like a man possessed.

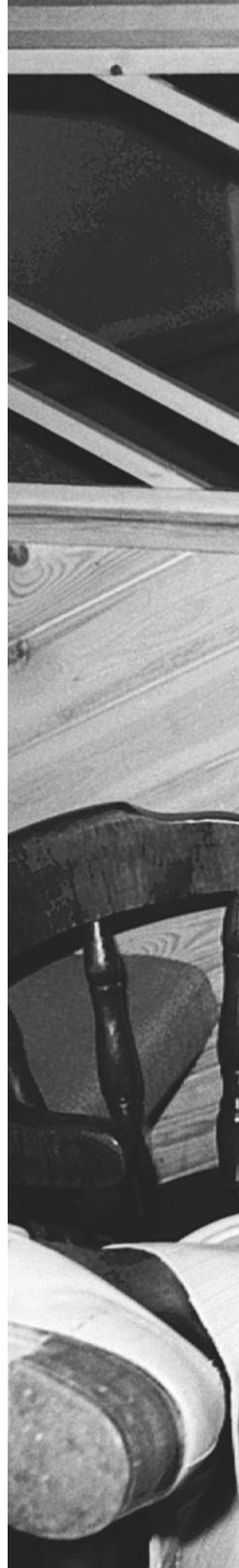
From Marquee to the Vortex in five seconds—can man live at such speeds? A queue of sullen punks stands freezing in the cold, awaiting remission. Up draws the Rolls, Jan & Dean now spilling out into the street, the battle cry of a Lost Generation. The punks, all black leather and shivering knees, gaze in wonderment.

Keith Moon strides out onto the pavement, clad in a huge buffalo coat smothered in fur, and strikes a dramatic pose like a Shakespearean actor haranguing the plebeians of Rome. "This is privilege," he shouts brazenly, "I don't fucking queue, I go straight in, first class." And he tossed back his head in an arrogant gesture and swept into the club past fans, bouncers and anybody else who might dare impede his progress.

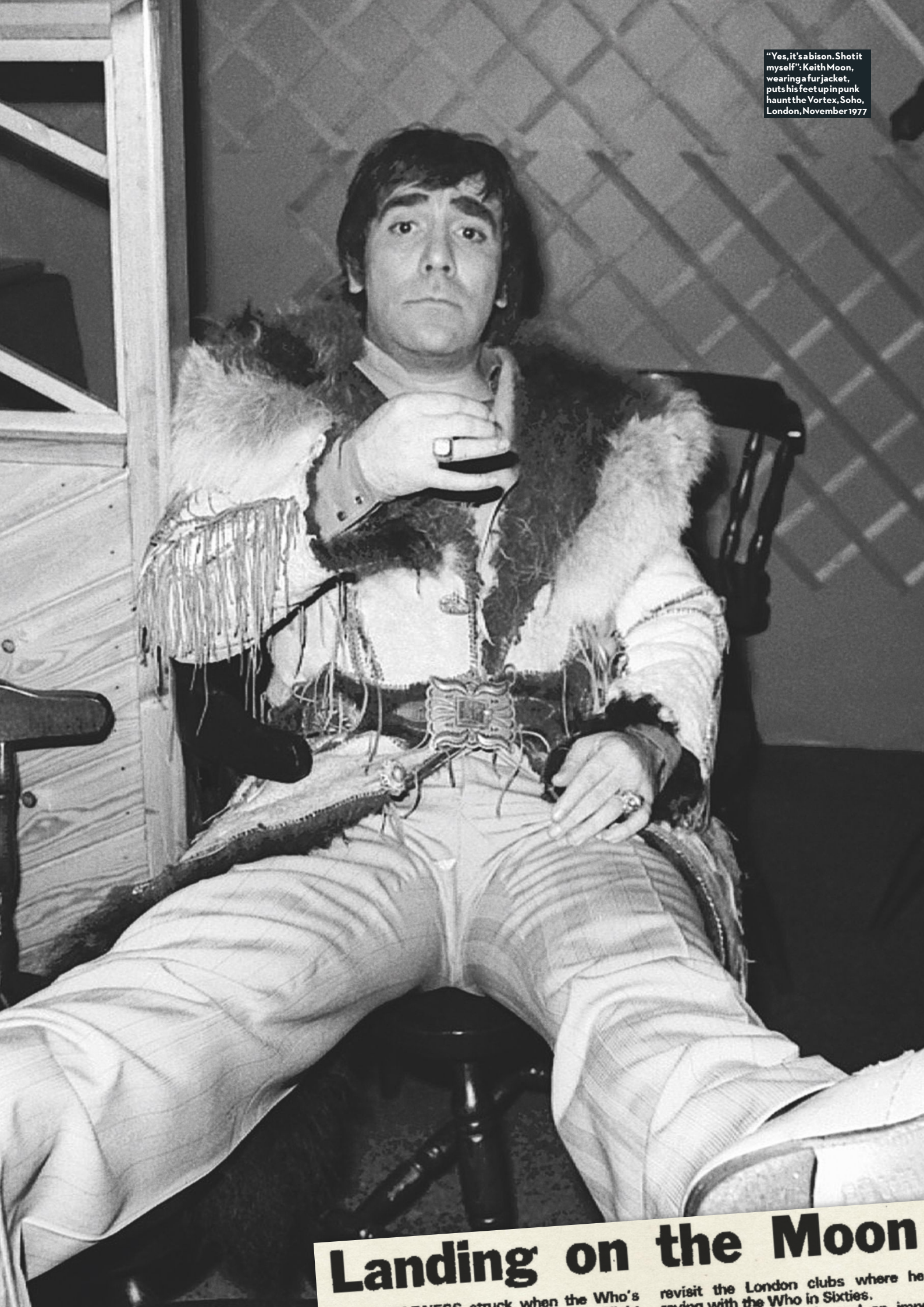
It was the grandest entry since Napoleon paraded down the Champs Élysée, and instead of provoking the mob into a fury they responded with cheers and laughter. It was certainly a hilarious moment, one of many the night Keith Moon went on a Punk Crawl.

Why should Moon go in among the punks, do I hear the cry? Was it to be patronising, to be provocative or simply to be a tourist? The answers are slightly more complex than the questions. It is certain that of the older generation of rock statesmen, Keith Moon is more likely to be accepted than most. While most punk bands and musicians seem positively hostile to all other life forms on the planet, they have a certain grudging respect for The Who, it seems. The myth »

DENIS O'REGAN



"Yes, it's a bison. Shot it myself": Keith Moon, wearing a fur jacket, puts his feet up in punk haunt the Vortex, Soho, London, November 1977



# Landing on the Moon

...struck when the Who's revisit the London clubs where he ... with the Who in Sixties.

has somehow arisen that the new-wave bands are “only doing what The Who did 10 years ago”.

Actually, it was nearer 13 years ago that The Who were playing every Tuesday night at the Marquee, and speaking as an eyewitness, to suggest that any one of the new-wave/punk bands playing today had a fraction of the originality or excitement of the original Who is a calumny scarcely worth refuting.

But that does not mean the new wave does not have a right to exist. They exist for today just as The Who existed for a few brief seconds (on the scale of history) in their day. The Who were explosive, riotous, aggressive, violent and undoubtedly prone to fits of madness.

As far as Keith Moon is concerned, nothing much has changed. His good looks have long since gone, dissipated in a thousand nights of excess, with no Dorian Gray-style portrait in the attic to haunt him, except, perhaps, in the faded scrapbooks of past triumphs. Today good looks are the preserve of Billy Idol and his pals in Generation X, one of the few bands that do have some of the magic of the old Who and even sound a bit like them.

Keith retains his Marty Feldman eyes, his expressive face and maniacal grin that sets off warning bells among the wary. He retains his restless energy and almost physical impatience. For all his laughter and wild exploits, there is something infinitely sad about Keith at times, a man haunted by tragedy and fearful of the future.

But as soon as a dark shadow casts across his mind and flickers across his face, he shrugs it off and returns to the world he loves best—the world of endless pranks, outrageous poses and verbal onslaughts.

Although the journey from the Marquee to the Vortex is only a few hundred yards, for me it was like travelling down a time tunnel, aeons of space and time apart. I'd travelled the self-same route with Keith before, but this time, as we emerged from the tunnel mouth into the Vortex, the young Keith—a frantic blurred figure in a white T-shirt, flailing sticks and stuffing pills down his mouth—instead became a fur-clad apparition, a distortion of that figure locked away in the memory, surrounded once more by young faces, no longer fans, but distant characters in a new twist to the rock'n'roll plot.

For Keith the journey was a nostalgic homecoming. He has spent long years in the rather unreal beach-house life of Los Angeles, a giant Jaywick Sands on the Pacific. To be back in London seemed like a return to his roots.

He actually looked thoroughly at home among the new kids and new bands that have inherited what was once his kingdom. That was once the kingdom of the mods, of Maximum R&B, of pills and posters, slogans and T-shirts.

Things have/haven't changed a lot. The noise is still there; only the names on the T-shirts have changed, along with the attitudes. Twelve years ago, kids resented outsiders, clung together in groups, identified with their bands, dressed alike and adopted an aggressive, defensive collective stance. Today... well, let's start at the beginning.

**B**ACK IN 1966, Keith Moon collapsed after playing a particularly furious version of “My Generation” at the Manor House, a pub in North London. Roadies carried him head-first into the fresh air and I drove him in my shiny black Consul (£200, MOT, radio) to the Scotch Of St James and bought him a drink.

So I was delighted to be invited out for a return drink by Keith last week, although when he proposed a visit to various dens of iniquity and what have been described as the lowest-class rhythm cellars in all London, I must admit my heart began alarming palpitations.

Hailing a hansom cab, I journeyed through the swirling fog to the notorious red-light district of Soho, where prostitutes in fox furs lean indolently against gas lamps, Chinese men flit to and fro making significant gestures, and where Bobbies cast the light of their bull's-eye lanterns into dark alleyways to discern the mutilated remains of gang warfare.

Keith and I were supposed to meet up in La Chasse Club in Wardour Street, a once famous watering hole where the elite of the rock business once stumbled up and down its steep stairs in search of companionship.

I hadn't been to La Chasse for six years and suspected it was closed. It was. As I beat on the door on a tiny landing two flights up, a Chinese man



flitted down from the floor above and made a significant gesture. There then followed an inane conversation, which set the hallmark for the rest of the evening. Is the Chasse open?

“What do you want?”

Have you seen Keith?

“No, I haven't seen Keith, I'm looking for Richard. We want to buy some drink.”

Yes, but I want to buy a drink too... And so on.

It was established that the bar was closed and seemed unlikely to open for several hours yet, and I repaired hastily to The Ship, the pub just along the street from the Marquee, which has long been a haunt of musos.

In the early '60s ('64-67), the place would be packed with musicians only, from Jeff Beck to Peter Frampton, from The Animals to Jimi Hendrix, from The Yardbirds to John Mayall's Bluesbreakers. It was a happy place until one night a certain drummer with a certain famous group exploded a smoke grenade on the premises, and cleared the bar.

Keith appeared shocked when I related the story to him, when I finally tracked him down. Arms outstretched in greeting, he launched into his “dear boy” routine, a cross between Jack Hawkins, Viv Stanshall and Noel Coward. It's one of his favourite roles, tinged with a choleric colonel and retired empire builder. “Delighted to see you, what will you have?” He could be greeting an old army chum at some far-flung trading post.

He is immediately pounced upon by a charming foreign lady, a stranger to both of us, who wants to discuss his buffalo coat. “Yes, it's a bison, shot it myself,” said Keith, launching into a tissue of lies, which the lady seemed to accept without question.

“Which tribe did that Red Indian belong to?” inquires the woman at length. Everyone is baffled but began reeling off names of Indian tribes...

“Sioux, Black Foot, Apache?”

“No, no, none of them. He was the Red Indian with the Faces... Tetsu?”

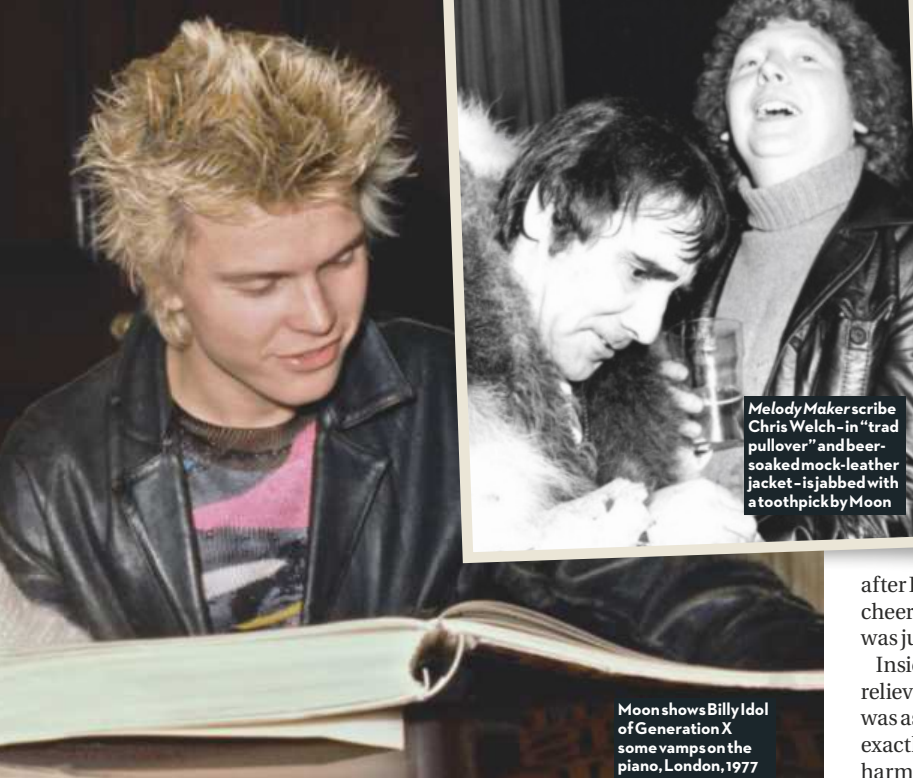
“Oh,” says Keith, “he was JAPANESE! Funny sort of Red Indian, what?” The woman stared deadpan at Keith in disbelief and then withdrew from the conversation. At this point, there was a commotion in the bar and a raising of heads. Keith emitted a piercing yell and dashed down the bar to greet the arrival of Generation X. I stayed with Bill Curbishley, The Who's manager, a remarkably sane gentleman, and Keith's chauffeur-cum-minder, Richard, who is well over six feet tall and known as Little Richard.

The party began to grow larger. John D'Arcy, a new Who press officer, arrived, celebrating his first day on the job. The mumble of conversation became louder. It transpired that the publican would not service Billy and Tony of Generation

X. Nothing against the group, he'd never heard of them. But if you serve one punk rocker, you serve 'em all. That seemed to be the philosophy.

“Right then, if they don't get served, we all leave,” said Keith, and there was a mass exodus to the Marquee as the team, now eight-handed,

“All this feels like an early Who gig. But they're not as talented”



Melody Makerscribe Chris Welch—in “trad pullover” and beer-soaked mock-leather jacket—is jabbed with a toothpick by Moon

Moon shows Billy Idol of Generation X some vamps on the piano, London, 1977

marched along Wardour Street in a southerly direction. It was an all-punk night at the Marquee and the place was packed to the walls, although not quite as frantic as when the Tom Robinson Band were on a while back.

We meet The Depressions, who will be playing at the Vortex later. Already the flow of alcohol is beginning to take effect, and as Keith shouts in my ear above the noise of The Worst (a group from Manchester) it becomes harder to discern exactly what he is talking about.

“I’ve been into the abyss,” Keith revealed suddenly. I knew he didn’t mean another punk rock club, but that he was probably referring to some dark period in his life. “I’ve looked over the edge of the abyss, but I haven’t actually been inside,” I tried to say helpfully. Through a haze of brandy and lager, both remarks seemed suitably profound.

We now seemed to be talking to the chaps from The Depressions, including Mr Crowbar, the drummer, who is a great fan of Keith. But music calls and we fight our way into the sweltering crowd to hear The Worst. They are. But they are also tremendous fun. Two, maybe three of them altogether. A singer with a guitar around his neck is shouting, “Rats, you’re all rats!” at us. I’m told they make up the numbers as they go along.

A drummer leapt from the audience, took over the kit, bashed away furiously for some minutes and then departed by the stage door to wild applause. The singer continued unabated, until another drummer appeared and repeated the performance. I believe there was a third, but events became somewhat blurred. A fan told me later that The Worst were the best band he had ever seen.

Meanwhile, Keith was back in the bar and being accosted by suspicious youths in black leather jackets, aged about 14, or so it seemed. “Don’t you get bored wiv’ smashing things up?” asked one of them superciliously. “Nah,” said Keith, “I smash up something different every day.”

“What do you do when you’re touring?”

“Fuck like hell,” said our host.

The next group billed were The Flies, described by Keith as “Pre-Raphaelite scum”. But once they started playing he nodded approvingly. “Ah yes, The Flies. They zip along at a furious pace.”

But did he think they were as good as The Who when they used to play on the very same stage, so many months ago?

“No, but they’re good. I feel like getting up and playing with them. I never sat in the audience in the old days, so I can’t tell, but all this feels like an early Who gig. But they’re not as talented. They have the same feeling that we had, but there’s nothing new there. I’ve been to these clubs lots of times, and I like it all, all the clothes, all the rape and pillage.”

Keith, at that moment, caught sight of The Who’s new publicist, hovering uncertainly. “You look like a pillar,” roared Keith suddenly. We presume he meant a pillar of society. At any rate the drummer dropped to his knees and hurled a pint beaker of brandy all over the unfortunate man’s trousers, leaving him somewhat nonplussed.

The following day, Mr D’Arcy reported that he had to burn all his clothes after our night out and was planning to write a book. As he wrung out his trousers I felt a raining sensation round the ankles and discovered that my (imitation) leather jacket was draining off a pint of beer that seemed to have been tipped down my back. I gave a light laugh and felt one of the

through, a true initiate into the wonderful world of punkery. And when somebody shouted out “Wanker!”, I knew the true bliss of the newly converted.

It was considered a good time to quit the Marquee for the Vortex, and we left Billy Idol at the bar, while Keith and remnants of the entourage piled into the Rolls-Royce, miraculously intact in the street outside, and rolled towards the Vortex. I mused that I have once been thrown out of the Vortex, or at least refused entry when it was called Crackers, and I was wearing denim jeans, which weren’t allowed in such a fashionable disco. If you weren’t wearing denim jeans now, you might be thrown out for being a social deviant. Keith staged his dramatic entry, and I fully expected the revolution to start. But

after Keith’s provocative speech-making, the only comment from a cheerful bouncer was, “Is he in a good mood tonight?” Perhaps this was just one performance in a long-running show.

Inside, the Vortex all was safety pins and dyed hair, but I was relieved to note there was no spitting, as on my last visit. Everybody was as peaceful as the hippies in the old Middle Earth. It wasn’t exactly Tolkien Lives, but they seemed to be enjoying themselves in harmless fashion. There was even a gay punk who observed a reunion waltz by Mr Moon and the celebrated American singer PJ Proby with a shocked, “There’s some amazing lowlife in tonight. But it’s made my night, dear, seeing Keith Moon. I mean, I go out and buy posters of him.”

I must admit it was stunning to meet Mr Proby in such a setting. He was strolling about in his cowboy stetson, looking even younger than in the days when I last saw him at the height of his fame. We almost expected him to give us a burst of “Somewhere”. And indeed, Mr Proby was in fine vocal form as it transpired. Meanwhile, Keith was engaged in heated conversation with a young student who gave just as good as he got in the verbal stakes. He did tell me his name, but the shock of finding the Vortex charges 52p for a shot of brandy drove it from an already shattered brain.

At any rate, Keith’s new-found friend grinned from ear to ear, shouted his philosophy above the barrage of the band and accused us of ripping off the punks. Quite how I couldn’t completely understand, but it had something to do with just being there. Eventually we received some grudging acknowledgment. “At least you’ve got the bottle to come down here.”

“What’s to bottle?” snapped Keith.

“Well, a lot of people were afraid to come here when it first opened.”

Keith responded to this by burning holes in the kid’s jacket.

“I can take anything you can throw at me,” he said with remarkably good humour. Keith threw a glass of brandy at him.

“I’m 30,” said Keith suddenly.

“I’m 18.”

They looked at each other and both burst into laughter. The younger of the two lunatics told Keith that rock-star status was of no interest to him. “You mean nothing to me,” he announced aloofly.

“Poof!” rejoined Keith smartly. Not the most brilliant repartee, but not bad after several beakers of Remy Vortex. Keith then began to turn his attention to me, sticking what I thought was a hypodermic syringe into my wrist (it turned out to be a toothpick, mercifully), complaining about my “trad pullover” and insisting that I was a fool and knave not to spend more time with real people like the punks. Apparently he was berating me in quite violent terms, according to later reports, but I must confess that by this time I was totally immunised, and don’t remember a word of it. All I vaguely remember was singing, or rather howling like a dog, along with PJ Proby and Keith to the music of The Depressions in the world’s first punk version of The Hedley Ward Trio.

Keith and PJ split to Tramp club to cause some real damage among the debs. The Who’s senior PR consultant left the Vortex to find his charge, only to be refused re-entry to the club by the previously friendly bouncers (“Fuck off,” they said). I stumbled into the night air, emerging from the far end of the time tunnel, my trad jersey soaked in beer, wines and spirits, plastered with Depressions stickers and convinced there is life after death.

But Keith did not escape from the Vortex without one parting shot. This time a punk was less enamoured to see the star of The Who and began berating him loudly for daring to possess a Rolls-Royce (that cunning example of the Derbyshire work people’s arts and crafts which helps keep our economy alive). “Capitalist pig... you shouldn’t have a Rolls-Royce, you should have a people’s car!”

Keith waited for the tirade to stop. “This is a people’s car... Get in!”

Chris Welch •

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# Readers' letters

**MM/NME JUL-DEC** Presley deposed, *Quark...* atomised and campaigns criticised.

## The King (until the next one)

Without trying to diminish the contribution Elvis made to rock music, it is ridiculous to say he invented rock'n'roll. Like any invention, there is always more than one person on the advent of breakthrough, but Elvis happened to be the first in his mould. If it hadn't been him, it would have been somebody else. So all that rubbish about there being no Cliff Richard or Beatles without Elvis is pure drivel.

It is also ridiculous comparing the record sales of Elvis with those of The Beatles. He released three or four times the quantity of discs that The Beatles released (91 singles to 21 [sic]); the only comparison that can be made is the quality of their respective songs, and in that field The Beatles will never be equalled, let alone beaten. The Beatles could have had 100 No 1 hits, but quality not quantity was their trademark.

Unfortunately for Elvis, he was not a composer or a gifted speaker, and it is music that lives on, not people. In future the names of Lennon/McCartney will ring out as composers, and I doubt if Elvis or The Beatles will be mentioned in name, apart from the odd book or film.



As for the behaviour of the Elvis fans, they have not acted in a way befitting the King of Rock'n'Roll. It is a shame that any person dies, but I would have been old enough to act in a responsible manner, and not go crying all over the place. I don't think Beatles fans would act in this way, and we are closer to them and their music here in Britain.

It is funny how people who have slagged Elvis off for years are now singing his praises in print. The real truth is that Elvis reigned until about 1963, but since then he has been about as important to music as flypaper. Every era has

a King, but since The Beatles we haven't had any.

So the King is dead, long live the next King. RIP, Elvis. **JOHN HALL, Manchester (MM Sept 10)**

## Hawk-eyed

Thanks to Brian Harrigan for actually listening to the lyrics on our new album *Quark, Strangeness And Charm*, which few reviewers have bothered to do in the past. But I'd like to take him up on his remarks about song structure.

As a lyricist and songwriter, structure is something I take very seriously, as does my colleague and co-writer Dave Brock. Now the current fashion in song structure is the old verse-chorus-verse-chorus, instrumental break, chorus, fade, or bomp. Finito. As exemplified with almost clone-like conservative adherence by the so-called "new wave".

Rock'n'roll as a musical genre is pretty conservative anyway, and anyone who tries to depart from the accepted structure is bound to be accused of heresy. The long intros and fade-outs Mr Harrigan refers to are, in fact, passages of musical texture and effects essential to and expressive of the lyrics that he seems to regard as the only requirement of a song. No doubt along with melody (which serious composers have been leaving to the writers of TV commercial jingles for nearly a century now).

It is significant that the track he prefers is the one that has the most conventional structure (which is not, in my opinion, synonymous with the best). If there is ever going to be a genuine new wave in rock music, instead of all this hyped-up rehash of Iggy Pop impersonations and pseudo-anarchistic posturing, it is not going to be spear-heading any new ideas and attitudes unless they are accompanied by new concepts of structure to express them. Form and content are the same thing, and cannot be divorced.

If you look back at the history of authentic artistic (and social) revolution – dada, surrealism, expressionism, psychedelicism, etc – you'll notice that structure was the first thing to be exploded. And redefined. Which is exactly what modern physicists have done with the atomic theory since the discovery of the quark. The

"strangeness" that defies analysis. And the mysterious "charm" that appears to hold it all together.

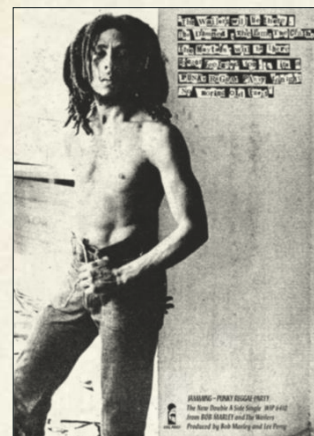
**ROBERT CALVERT, Hawkwind (MM Jul 9)**

## Protest note

*NME* stands for *New MUSICAL Express*, ie, concerned with music. Today I bought my copy of *NME* from my friendly neighbourhood paper shop. I noticed that for the second week you had had trouble with your printers, and the paper was down to 44 pages. Not your fault, I thought, can't be helped. But when in Thrills I found one-and-a-quarter pages on another one of your causes, namely blood sports, I got annoyed. You would have thought that with such little space you would have filled it up with musical articles. And no singles column! Where are we supposed to find that, in *Gardeners' World*, *Exchange & Mart*, *Financial Times*? Get your priorities right: music reviews before all your causes, whether anti-NF, nuclear power, or blood sports. Much as I basically agree with your views, I buy a music paper for music, not this kind of writing. So tighten up, Olde Campaigners. (Can I have a job?) **EDGAR ALLAN POSEUR, Amersham, Bucks (NME Nov 12)**

Explanation is as follows: we started the week with a balanced 52-page issue, having pulled out some advertising to provide optimum editorial space. This being so, we had no hesitation scheduling the blood sports piece, which was designated for some of the earlier pages in our printer's schedule. On the day before press day, however, the problems at our printers (Why's it always me, God?) took a turn for the worse and we were forced to cut back to 44 pages, dropping some editorial and some ads.

Editorial cuts had to be made from material not yet processed at the printers, and that's why the singles column (which was late copy), for instance, went out and blood sports (which was early) stayed in. We didn't have no choice – though Godnose we tried, Godnose we suffer Hell here every week at the World's Most Beleaguered Rock Weekly, Godnose yes sirree. (No, you can't. Get back in the Pit.) **Nick Logan**



# 1977

MONTH BY MONTH



## Coming next... in 1978!

**S**O THAT WAS 1977. We meant it, man.

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, 1978!

### **KATE BUSH**

**A PHENOMENAL NEW** arrival on the scene. The singer from South-East London brings a completely theatrical avant-garde pop, all delivered in an unprecedented voice. Is it contrived? "I just opened my mouth and it came out," she says. "Honest."

### **BOB DYLAN**

**BACK WITH A** huge band, and an engaging line in stage banter, Dylan even finds time for an informal chat with the *MM*. "I turned round in Japan and saw a pair of breasts on stage," he says of his newly "sexy" show. "I thought then that something's gotta be done about this."

### **THE JAM**

**PAUL WELLER AND** band visit America. A support slot with Blue Öyster Cult isn't rapturously received by band or audience, while Weller feels stung by the fate of The Jam's first album. "In a few years' time," asserts Weller, "people will realise how good it was."

### **PLUS...**

**DAVID BOWIE!**

**SUICIDE!**

**ROLLING STONES!**



| FROM THE MAKERS OF **UNCUT** |

# THE HISTORY OF **ROCK**

Every month, we revisit long-lost *NME* and *Melody Maker* interviews and piece together *The History Of Rock*. This month: 1977.  
*"In 1977 I hope I get to heaven! 'Cos I been too long on the dole..."*



*Relive the year...*

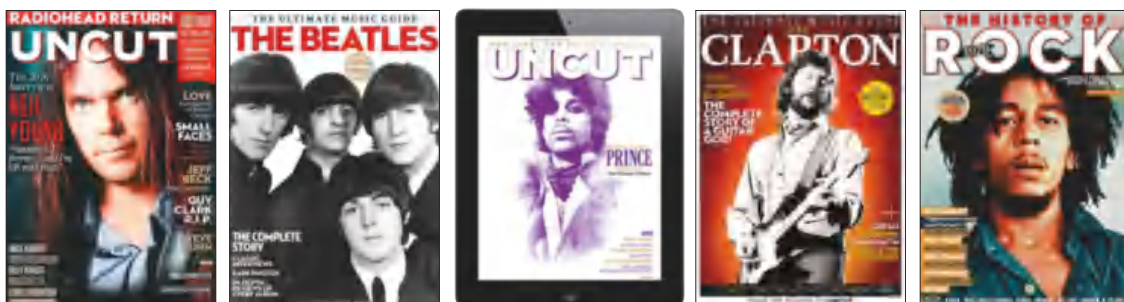
**THE CLASH SAW LONDON BURNING**

**DAVID BOWIE MADE *LOW* AND "HEROES"**

**THE SEX PISTOLS BROUGHT ANARCHY TO EUROPE**

...and KEITH MOON, LED ZEPPELIN, BUZZCOCKS,  
ELVIS COSTELLO, MUDDY WATERS and many more  
shared everything with *NME* and *MELODY MAKER*

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