THE HISTORY OF ROCK

1976

A MONTHLY TRIP THROUGH MUSIC'S GOLDEN YEARS

THIS ISSUE: 1976

FROM THE ARCHIVES OF NME & MELODY MAKER

STARRING...

BOB MARLEY

"Righteousness must cover the earth"

DAVID BOWIE

TOM WAITS

SEX PISTOLS

NEIL YOUNG

PATTI SMITH

STRANGLERS

LED ZEPPELIN

QUEEN

PLUS! ABBA | ROLLING STONES | KISS | WINGS | AC/DC | DEREK & CLIVE

1976

MONTH BY MONTH

Welcome to 1976

"PUNK" – AS A NAME for rowdy, grassroots rock – has been floating around for the past 18 months. It is only towards the end of 1976, though, that a bright *NME* staffer called Tony Parsons grasps the nettle of a scene which has as yet no major record releases, and attempt to explain what it all might mean.

He nails the history and the context of this growing phenomenon, and also the heart of the matter: the distance between music listener and band. The issue for the kids is ownership. "They are hungry for music that they can identify with," Parsons says. "*Their* music, not product."

Established giants – Bowie, Zep – still dominate the charts and the press, but with his radical stance, his passionate convictions and startling music, our cover star Bob Marley is the artist of the year. He – and the reggae music being explored seriously in his wake – resonates strongly with disaffected punks, and a wider public, too.

This is the world of *The History Of Rock*, a monthly magazine which 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.

In the pages of this 12th issue, dedicated to 1976, you will find verbatim articles from frontline staffers, compiled into long and illuminating reads. Missed an issue? You can find out how to rectify that on page 144.

Rock in 1976 has become a two-speed economy, with its celebrity action and street-level reaction. Reporters from the music press are where it matters, chasing the story wherever it appears. Fighting Parisian stallholders with Patti Smith. Receiving cryptic messages from the Rolling Stones. Exchanging profanity with Derek & Clive.

"This bloke comes up to me and he says…"

It's not a year for the easily offended.

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THE HISTORY OF ROCK

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REX FEATURES, CHRIS MORPHET / GETTY

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1976 15p weekly USA 75 cents
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MM solid d!
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1976

JANUARY – MARCH

DAVID BOWIE, WINGS, ABBA, LED ZEPPELIN, RONNIE LANE AND MORE

"We're into chaos"

NME FEB 21 The Sex Pistols play their first public date at the Marquee Club in Soho.

"HURRY UP, THEY'RE having an orgy on stage," said the bloke on the door as he tore the tickets up. I waded to the front and straightaway sighted a chair arcing gracefully through the air, skidding across the stage and thudding contentedly into the PA system, to the obvious nonchalance of the bass, drums and guitar. Well, I didn't think they sounded that bad on first earful – then I saw it was the singer who'd done the throwing.

He was stalking round the front rows, apparently scuffing over the litter on the floor between baring his teeth at the audience and stopping to chat to members of the group's retinue. He's called Johnny Rotten and the moniker fits.

Sex Pistols? Seems I'd missed the cavortings with two scantily clad (plastic thigh boots and bodices) pieces dancing up front. In fact, I only caught the last few numbers; enough, as it happens, to get the idea. Which is… a quartet of spiky teenage misfits from the wrong end of various London roads, playing '60s-styled white punk rock as unselfconsciously as it's possible to play these days – ie, self-consciously.

Punks? Springsteen Bruce and the rest of 'em would get shredded if they went up against these boys. They've played less than a dozen gigs as yet, have a small but fanatic following, and don't get asked back. Next month they play the Institute Of Contemporary Arts if that's a clue.

I'm told the Pistols repertoire includes lesser-known Dave Berry and Small Faces numbers (check out early Kinks' B-sides leads), besides an Iggy and the Stooges item and several self-penned numbers like the moronic "I'm Pretty Vacant", a meandering power-chord job that produced the chair-throwing incident.

No one asked for an encore but they did one anyway: "We're going to play 'Substitute'."

"You can't play," heckled an irate French punter.

"So what?" countered the bassman, jutting his chin in the direction of the bewildered Frog.

That's how it is with the Pistols – a musical experience with the emphasis on Experience.

"Actually, we're not into music," one of the Pistols confided afterwards.

Wot then?

"We're into chaos." *Neil Spencer*

RAY STEVENSON

The Sex Pistols – (l–r) Johnny Rotten, Steve Jones, Paul Cook and Glen Matlock – outside the Marquee at 90 Wardour Street, London. They will be banned after just one gig there, playing support to Eddie & The Hot Rods on February 12, 1976

Don't look over your shoulder, but the Sex Pistols are coming

Sex Pistols

MARQUEE

and bodices) pieces dancing up
front. In fact, I only caught the
last few numbers; enough, as it

1976

JANUARY—MARCH

Nov 26, 1976: Ozzy Osbourne backstage at Cobo Hall, Detroit, Michigan

Contested by all

MM MAR 27 Black Sabbath are sued.

BLACK SABBATH'S FORMER manager, Jim Simpson, is to be paid £35,000 in settlement of a High Court legal dispute last week. The band will pay £7,500 to Simpson and the remaining £27,500 is to be paid by manager-agent, Patrick Meehan, who denied "filching" the band away from Simpson.

When the case began, Simpson claimed he had steered Sabbath from obscurity to stardom. He sued the four members of the band for breach of contract, alleging that the benefit of his work had been taken away from him. He also claimed damages from two manager-agents, Meehan and Wilfred Pine. The case was contested by all defendants. No order, however, was made against Pine under the terms of the settlement. The band were said to have made $14 million (£7m) during their career.

Simpson said the money was in respect of commission he would have received from managing the band over the past few years. Since the split, Simpson has given up management and now heads Birmingham-based record company Big Bear.

Prime influence

MM JAN 17 RIP, Howlin' Wolf.

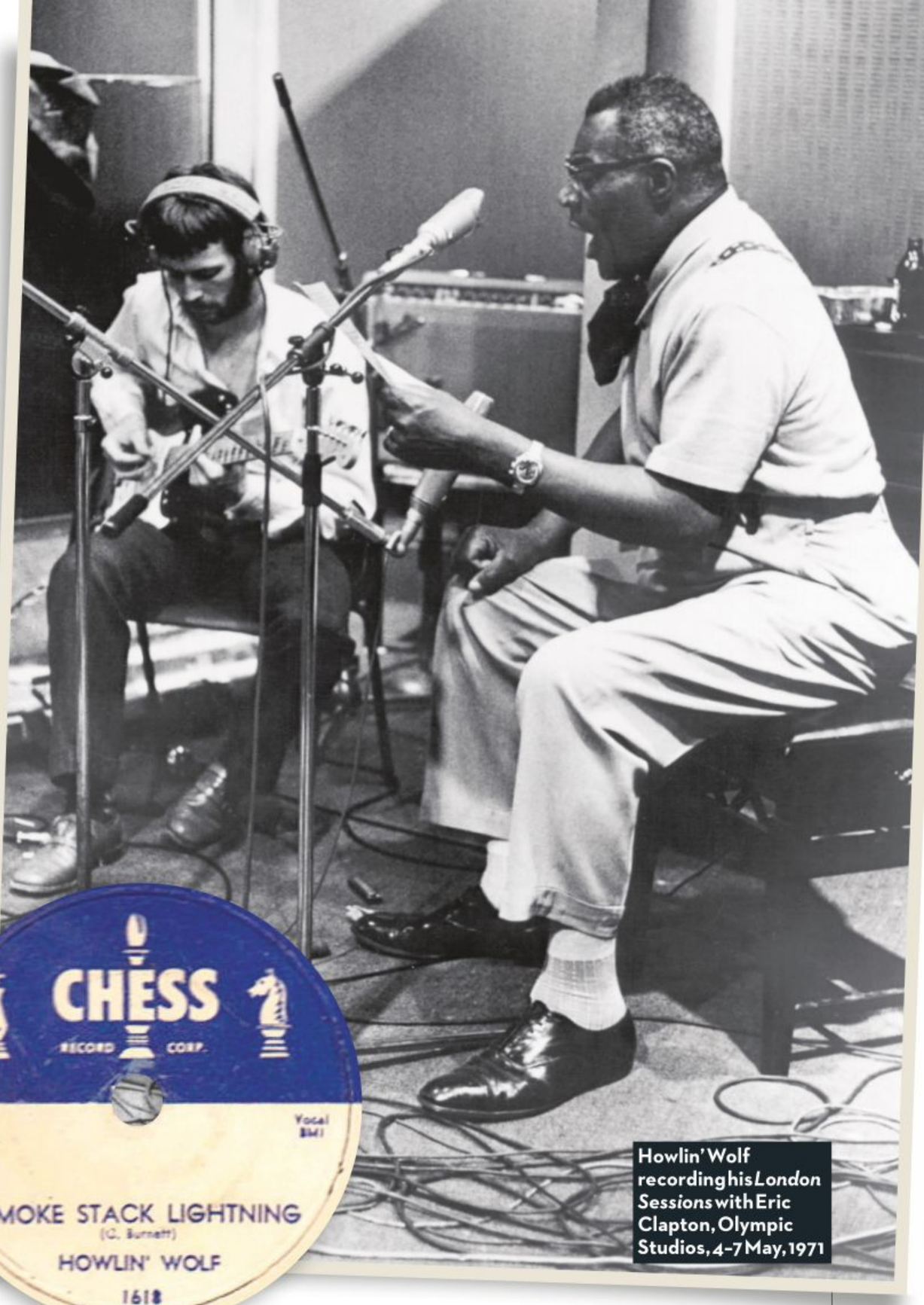
HOWLIN' WOLF, ONE of the great names of traditional blues, died on Saturday in a Chicago hospital. He had been in poor health for many months.

Wolf was a seminal blues artist whose work was one of the prime influences behind the British R&B boom of the early '60s. His best-known song, "Smokestack Lightning", was in the repertoire of most British bands of the period, and his influence was acknowledged in 1971 when Wolf recorded *London Sessions*, an album that also featured such luminaries as Eric Clapton, Bill Wyman, Stevie Winwood, Charlie Watts and Ringo Starr.

Chester Burnett – Wolf's real name – was born in Aberdeen, Mississippi, on June 10, 1910. His down-home Delta blues style was learned from the example of guitarist-singer Charley Patton.

During the early part of Wolf's career he moved to North Arkansas, where he played alongside such legends as Robert Johnson and Sonny Boy Williamson, picking up some of the latter's ideas on harmonica.

He was leading his own group by 1948, and stated broadcasting in the South the following year. And about this time he began recording in Memphis.



Howlin' Wolf recording his *London Sessions* with Eric Clapton, Olympic Studios, 4–7 May, 1971

"His down-home Delta blues style was learned from Charley Patton"

In August 1951, he cut "Moanin' At Midnight" and "How Many More Years", both classic Wolf tracks. He left the South in 1952 when he was signed by Chess Records in Chicago, one of America's pioneering blues labels.

Wolf finally came to Britain in 1964, at the height of the R&B boom. By that time, such songs as "Natchez Burning", "Spoonful" and "Smokestack Lightning" had established him as one of the heroes of a new generation of bluesmen, and his concerts in this country made a tremendous impact on fans and musicians.

His recordings are admired for the band's heavy beat, the raw power of his voice, the simple funkiness of his harp playing and the often arresting quality of his themes and lyrics.

"They're doing it for fun"

MM JAN 24 Small Faces to reconvene for summer dates.

THE SMALL FACES' reunion is on. This follows a one-night stand at Essex University, Colchester, on Saturday night when Steve Marriott joined Ronnie Lane, playing with his own band, Slim Chance, for an encore. After a meeting on Monday, it was announced that the Small Faces – Steve Marriott, lead guitar, Ronnie Lane, bass, Ian McLagan, keys, and Kenney Jones, drums – will play at least two gigs this summer, probably at football stadia. The first project by the reunited band will be a promotional film, to be screened on *Top Of The Pops* this Thursday to accompany the re-released hit "Itchycoo Park", at No 10 in this week's *MM* singles chart.

GETTY (2)

The Small Faces will not record any new material, but following the summer gigs the four members will pursue their individual directions – Lane with Slim Chance and Marriott with Steve Marriott's All Stars. Jones and McLagan have not yet decided where their future lies.

The reunion was activated by Marriott's appearance with Lane on Saturday night. It was known that he would be joining his former colleague for one number, the old Small Faces classic "All Or Nothing". He stayed on and handled lead vocals and lead guitar for "Honky Tonk Women", "Whatcha Gonna Do About It" and "Going Down Down".

Lane, who played rhythm on "All Or Nothing", reverted to his old role as bassist for the three other songs. It is felt that Lane would be the stumbling block in plans for a permanent reunion. "They're doing it for fun, basically," a spokesman said. "They've always got on well together."

"A pitiful situation"

MM FEB 14 Robert Plant blames Zeppelin's tax exile on "an outrageous state of affairs".

NOBODY REALLY EXPECTS Robert Plant has become the first rock superstar to hit out against the British tax system. In an outspoken interview with the *Melody Maker*, Plant said this week: "You can't just sit down and write a song that you're prepared to put out, because you'll be taxed to the hilt. Why the hell should you put out something and come out of it with tuppence?"

Plant, with the rest of Led Zeppelin, is among the ever-growing community of Britain's tax exiles allowed into their own country for only a limited number of days each year. Never before, however, has a rock star so strongly condemned the British tax laws.

Talking to the *MM*'s Chris Charlesworth in New York, Plant claimed: "It aggravates me that people have worked for something for a long time and they've had to leave because of these tax laws.

"New York, grey as it may be, is full of some of the finest English talent, not just music but sports personalities and actors, and anybody who has a flair for something.

"We all want to go home, but there's an outrageous state of affairs taking place in England, an outrageous mishandling of the country's affairs in general.

"It's a very pitiful situation when a lot of the more established musicians have to flee. You only have to go from here, and four skyscrapers down the street there's Mick Jagger. He'd echo the same thing. We're all holed up in little boxes here, looking over Central Park. It's very, very sad. Now, I can just imagine the letters to Mailbag saying, 'Fuck the money and come home', but you have to live with reality.

"It's one thing to forget the money, but there's a moral aspect which is ludicrous. Rock'n'roll is a very lucrative form of making money easily, and just because the government has loused up all the way round, they shouldn't just turn to music or any form of entertainment.

"If it wasn't for this tax, we'd be doing an English tour at least once a year for sure, but even when we did Earls Court we didn't come out with anything."

Chris Charlesworth

"We all want to go home": Robert Plant in *The Song Remains The Same*

A true character of the '60s pop scene: Mal Evans photographed in 1971

A huge man

MM JAN 10 Former Beatles road manager is killed by LA cops.

MAL EVANS, THE one-time road manager of The Beatles, has been killed by police in Los Angeles. The incident happened, claimed the police, when they were called to a house owned by Evans' girlfriend. They found Evans armed with a rifle which he refused to drop. The police then shot him.

Evans, 40, was one of the central figures in the rise of The Beatles. He was the band's road manager from the start of their career, staying with the group until they eventually split.

Ray Coleman writes: Mal Evans was much more than The Beatles' roadie; even though that was the official title he shared with Neil Aspinall during the group's rise from the Liverpool Cavern. Under Epstein's management, Evans and Aspinall physically got the group on the road and sorted out their problems.

He believed The Beatles were second only to his idol, Elvis Presley

A huge and strong man, Mal was rarely argued with by promoters and he developed a warm and winning way for getting precisely what The Beatles wanted. He had a passionate belief that roadies were badly written off and once formed a road managers' association which guaranteed that roadies would not be "sat on".

He believed The Beatles were second only to his idol, Elvis Presley, whose every record and piece of paraphernalia he possessed and about whom Mal had made a life's academic study.

When I met Mal about a year ago in Los Angeles, after many years, he said: "I've met him now, y'know. The King! I want him to record one of my songs." A true character of the '60s pop scene, full of gruff and bluff, yet a Beatle fan at heart forever; Mal will be missed.

KEITH MORRIS / GETTY, REX FEATURES

July 16, 1975: Bob Dylan with members of his Rolling Thunder Revue, including musician and poet Bobby Neuwirth (with arm raised), T-Bone Burnett (with guitar) and theatre director Jacques Levy (bottom right) at the Other End in New York City

"Right out of the blue"

MM JAN 24 How a chance meeting with Bob Dylan led theatre director Jacques Levy to co-write much of the *Desire* LP.

THOSE WHO HAVE already acquired a copy of Dylan's new album, *Desire*, will have noticed at least one difference between this and other Dylan records – on seven of the nine tracks Dylan has collaborated with another writer, Jacques Levy.

It is not the first time Dylan has worked on songs with another writer – in the past he's collaborated with The Band's Richard Manuel, George Harrison and, I believe, Johnny Cash, but it's the first time a definite partnership has developed for so many tracks.

Jacques Levy is not a musician and neither is he attracted to the life of a full-time lyricist, even though he has clocked up a success or two in the past. In fact, he's better known in New York as a theatrical director, having worked on about 30 stage productions, including *Oh! Calcutta!*.

His friendship with Dylan came about through Roger McGuinn, with whom he collaborated on both "Chestnut Mare" and "Lover Of The Bayou", two latterday Byrds hits, and also on several tracks on the subsequent solo albums by McGuinn. Apart from a few contributions to the lyrics of his stage productions, this seems to be his only experience as a songwriter.

WARING ABBOTT / GETTY

Jacques Levy lives in La Guardia Place, Greenwich Village, and was mentioned in dispatches while Dylan trotted around the folk clubs there last summer. They were often in each other's company, and when the Rolling Thunder Revue hit the road it was Levy who suggested the sequence of songs and a running order for the various combinations of musicians. He directed the tour in much the same way he directs theatre productions.

He lives in a sprawling but elegant loft, a habitation common to New York but hardly seen in England. In effect, it's open-plan living, whose absence of walls creates a huge feeling of space. A PhD in psychology, Levy practised for two years before entering the theatre and now, in his late thirties, exudes the air of a man to whom life has generally been good.

Levy settled down with a Scotch on ice and a packet of Lucky Strikes and talked openly about writing with Dylan. He was vague on only one subject – whether or not the Rolling Thunder Revue would roll again and whether it could thunder across the Atlantic. There was a chance, he admitted, but he honestly didn't know, no more than he knew whether he and Dylan would collaborate again, or whether the rumoured West Coast Thunder dates would take place.

> **"It was just that thing with us sitting here and obviously connecting"**

We began by talking about the events leading up to writing *Desire* and going on the road. "Bob and McGuinn have known each other for years, of course," he began, "and Bob knew all the things I'd written for McGuinn.

"Two years ago we met for the first time on the street here. He was walking one way and I was walking the other, and we both knew who each other was, so we stopped and talked. We spent the evening together, agreed to meet again and maybe work together, and left it at that. We didn't see each other for a long time until last summer when, again, he was walking around the corner and so was I. We chatted and he came up to the apartment and then, right out of the blue, he suggested I wrote some material for him as he'd liked the things I'd written for Roger."

The first song to come from the partnership was "Isis", though Dylan had already put together the first verse: "He had the general feeling of the song when he came around here but he hadn't got further. We started to work on it at night and by the following morning it was finished. We did it together, going back and forth and trying things out on each other to see what would work and what wouldn't.

"We were having a great time here during July. Bob would write a song, then pick up a guitar and rush around to the Other End and get up on stage and sing it, but it wasn't the right atmosphere to write too seriously, and by this time we both knew we wanted to be serious about writing together."

In August, Levy and Dylan went out to a house on Long Island for three weeks and put together the rest of the songs. The song "Joey" was an old idea of Levy's which Dylan picked up on, motivated especially by conversation during dinner one evening with Marta Aurbach, a New York authoress who is currently working on a book about Joey Gallo, the New York Mafia figure who was gunned down in 1970.

"She and her husband knew Joey well and I knew Joey through them," said Levy. "I spent a lot of time with Joey in that last year he was

alive, and Bob became very interested in it all. We were telling stories about Joey, and when we left their house we came back here and started to work on it."

"One More Cup Of Coffee" was purely Dylan's creation, though. It came, according to Levy, while he was living with gypsies in Corsica. "Sara", too, was written by Dylan alone, but again, the idea of the song had been in Dylan's mind for some time: "Bob had been fooling with 'Sara' for a long time. He'd got the choruses down, but the verses were actually written out at this place on Long Island where we stayed. Out there are the dunes and beach and all that stuff mentioned in the song. He would try things out on me, but it was a very personal song for him to write."

Levy is hard-pressed to explain why Dylan should want to take on a songwriting partner at this stage in his career. "I don't think he ever made up this mind that he wanted to collaborate with someone, and then went ahead and looked for somebody," he said.

"It was just that thing with us sitting here and obviously connecting with each other and throwing suggestions at each other."

When the Rolling Thunder Revue was first mooted. Levy played a prominent role in the planning. He was present at the discussions last summer: "We were taking it seriously, right at the beginning, but we realised that it would be an extraordinary thing to do.

"It seemed like a good idea but a very hard thing to pull off. It was one thing talking about it but another thing actually going out and doing it. Just before Bob left New York at the end of the summer, after we'd done the recording, we sat down and talked about what kind of show it would be and who would be in it.

"I did a loose version of the outline of the show, putting down ideas on paper, things like who would open and who would go next, and what kind of a song would be appropriate at what time, and the big point of how exactly we'd get to the point where Bob came on, and when to play his new material. I sort of switched gears from being a songwriter to a director. I built in the possibility of flexibility, so there were open choices, so it could be varied from night to night.

"I think the secrecy angle was really well handled. There was word around because quite a few people were involved, but the general information wasn't out and the public weren't officially informed that it was going to happen until right before each show.

"There was a deal made with the promoters and they were told that if any word got out about this the show would be cancelled. There was, of course, a schedule for the whole tour, but it was only known by a few people."

And the chances of Rolling Thunder reappearing this year? "I don't know. I don't see why it won't. Everybody had a great time, and it's hard for me to imagine that it won't happen again, but I don't know anything for sure at this point.

Or going to England? "Wouldn't that be nice? Sure, there's a chance. There's a chance they could play in Peking."

Levy's first tentative steps into songwriting came when he had the idea of directing a country & western musical for the stage. He enlisted the help of Roger McGuinn, but although they came up with a load of songs, the music never got further than the planning stage. McGuinn did, however, record most of the material and these included "Chestnut Mare" and "Lover Of The Bayou". From then on, Levy and McGuinn met annually to prepare material together.

Levy also wrote a song for *Oh! Calcutta!* and has dabbled with songs for other proposed musicals, but he will not be turning to songwriting full-time despite taking on such an illustrious partner as Bob Dylan. "I like my work in the theatre and I don't want to give that up, and it's hard to imagine people coming to me now asking me to write songs for them.

"I think I'll do some more work with Bob in the future, but it's hard to tell. We'd both like to, and I know that during the tour we were talking about new possibilities for songs, new ideas that came to us." *Chris Charlesworth*

Rod Stewart on stage in Los Angeles, November 1976

"Unforseen recording problems"

MM JAN 31 Rod Stewart pulls his British tour dates.

ROD STEWART HAS cancelled his giant Wembley Stadium concert scheduled for July 3. And he has also pulled out of an eight-date British tour before it was even announced.

Stewart was set to play four concerts at the Glasgow Apollo, two at Manchester's Belle Vue and one each in Newcastle and Sheffield.

According to Gaff Music, Stewart's management, he cancelled because of "unforeseen recording problems which would not allow sufficient time for him to form and rehearse a new band".

They add that the concert series may be rescheduled for later this year.

Stewart is currently working on a follow-up album to *Atlantic Crossing*, which is set for worldwide release in May.

Tickets for the Wembley concert went on sale last week but, said promoter Roger Forrester, all money will be refunded and the rest of the tickets have been withdrawn.

Meanwhile, Forrester is left with his July 3 booking of the stadium, plus another two dates – July 31 and August 21 – which preclude Gaff Music's suggestion that the Stewart concert might be rescheduled for late August.

Forrester said this week: "I will certainly be promoting at least two out of three possible concerts at Wembley, and at the moment I'm negotiating for a headliner for the original Stewart date."

The Stax Records building, Memphis, Tennessee, in 1967

"I'm at a loss"

MM JAN 31 Stax Records is closed down.

STAX RECORDS, THE company which attained semi-legendary status with artists such as Otis Redding, Isaac Hayes, Sam & Dave and Carla Thomas, has been shut down.

After a six-hour Memphis hearing, called by the Union Planters National Bank – which is suing Stax for more than $10 million – the company was ordered to cease operations.

Stax president Jim Stewart, company founder in 1960, said of the decision: "I'm at a loss. One minute you're producing records and the next minute you're shut down. I don't know what to say."

During the hearing, Stax was described as "dishevelled, confused, mixed up, failing and defunct" by the attorney representing the bank. Stewart and Stax now have to wait for a jury trial which will decide if the company is insolvent. At its height Stax rivalled Tamla Motown in its influence over black music.

GETTY (2)

“A self-invented man”

DAVID BOWIE continues to elude definition. His career is diversifying (he wants to “become a nuisance everywhere”), and his appetite for new ideas helps him escape the prison of rock’n’roll. “Unless you make big mistakes,” he says, during a brief lull, “you are never going to grow.”

— MELODY MAKER FEBRUARY 6 —

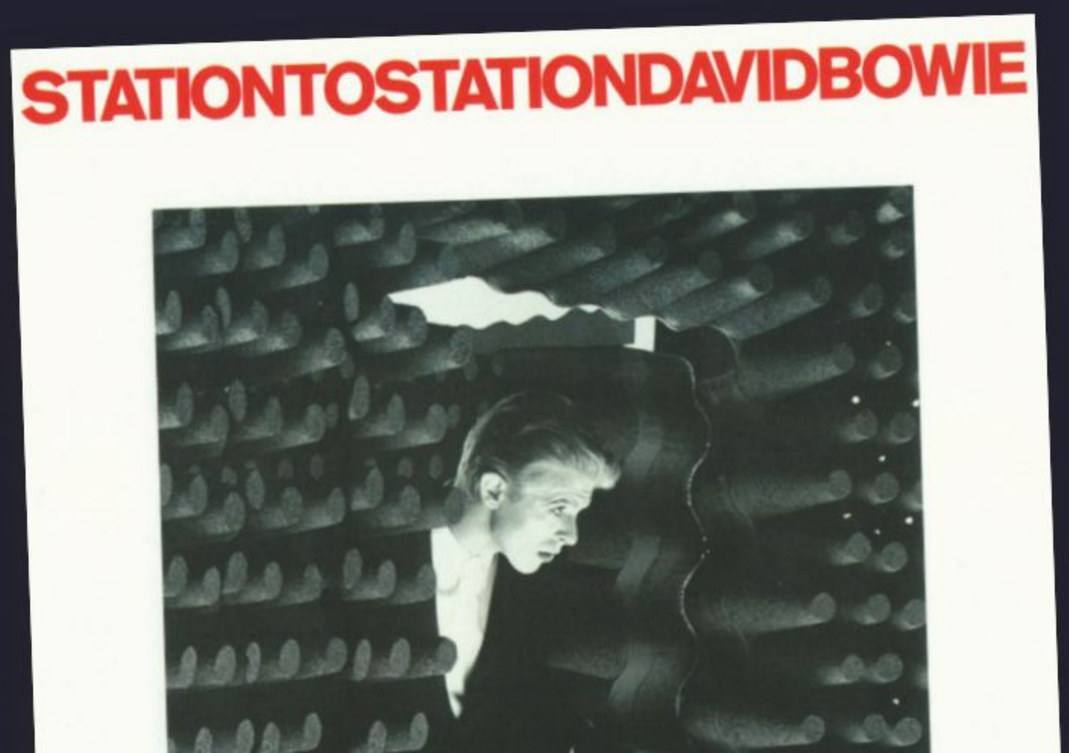
“I’M JUST DOING this tour for the money. I never earned any money before, but this time I’m going to make some. I think I deserve it, don’t you?”

David Bowie is balanced delicately in an armchair in suite 1604 in the Pontchartrain Hotel in Detroit, his legs bent and hunched up, gazing absently at his bare feet, which, like the rest of him, look remarkably clean. In his blue tracksuit he looks healthy and, although he could add a few pounds in weight, his brain is as trim as his figure.

His hair, blond at the front and red at the back, has been groomed by his personal hairdresser. It is swept up in a quiff and held in place with water. His classic, Aryan features alternate between expressions of genuine warmth and cold contempt whenever he senses troubled waters.

His left eye is still strangely immobile, a legacy from the childhood injury he received, and it adds an incongruous touch to a rather aristocratic appearance. Even if David Bowie never opened his mouth, he would have found some niche in life purely on the strength of his looks.

With the possible exception of Bryan Ferry, no other contemporary musician is as much preoccupied with his image as Bowie. But, while Ferry remains the same, Bowie changes his with regularity, not only from tour to tour, but from month to month. One can never really tell, either, whether his replies to any interviewer are »



RICHARD E AARON / GETTY

March 26, 1976: Bowie adopts his Thin White Duke persona at NYC's Madison Square Garden, the last date on the North American leg of the Isolar Tour

fact or fiction; his views on various subjects change according to whim.

A few months ago he was widely quoted as saying he never wanted to tour again, yet his current US tour is now in its third week and, according to the star of the show, things are going very nicely, thank you. Other interviews suggested that Bowie was becoming interested in radical right-wing politics, statements that he now shrugs off by explaining that he made them up to satisfy the interviewer's need for a sensational story.

Shock value, I guess. Perhaps he intended to jolt me by making the point that he was only touring for the money, a point he reiterated more than once during a 45-minute conversation in his hotel suite.

So let's get one thing straight from the very start. The views and opinions of David Bowie as quoted below represent his statements made between 6.45pm and 7.30pm US Eastern Standard time on Monday, March 1, 1976. What he's said before that date, and what he might say afterwards, may vary considerably.

WE BEGAN BY talking about the current tour, the staging of which is a massive departure from the elaborate Diamond Dogs presentation two years ago. Simplicity is the keynote this time around, right down to the "white lights" effect designed by Scottish tour manager Eric Barrett. As I saw for myself later the same evening, it is wonderfully effective; quite stunning in fact.

"It's more theatrical than Diamond Dogs ever was," said Bowie, toying with an unlit Gitane and a glass of Heineken. "It's by suggestion rather than by over-propping. It relies on modern 20th-century theatre concepts of lighting, and I think it comes over as being very theatrical. Whether the audiences are aware of it, I don't know. It doesn't look like a theatrical production, but it certainly is."

Was it getting out of hand before? "No, it was just boring after a while. Once I got to Los Angeles and did the shows in the Amphitheatre there, I'd already done 30 of them and it was terrible. There's nothing more boring than a stylised show, because there was no spontaneity and no freedom of movement. Everything was totally choreographed and it was very stiff. It didn't look it if you went and saw the show once. The first time it was probably a gas, but there's nothing much in it if you are doing it every night. It just becomes repetition. I can't speak as an audience, but certainly as a performer, it was hard to keep it up, trekking all over the country doing the same thing night after night.

"This one changes almost every night. It's a lot looser. The only thing we have is a running order, but I even change that around. The lighting guys have lighting cues, but that's on spec as well."

It seems he has changed his onstage image yet again. "So I hear. I've heard I look like a cabaret performer, but I've never seen a cabaret performer, so I wouldn't know. The reaction is a lot better, and I guess that is because I'm still giving them theatre, but whether they want that or not I don't know and I don't really care. The audiences are about a tour behind me, but then they always are. I'd get worried if they turned up in outfits I'd never seen before. I'd think I was a tour behind."

For the Diamond Dogs Tour Bowie relegated his musicians to a position of scant importance, never even acknowledging their presence on stage. This time around the musicians stand behind him, and towards the end of the show are introduced. For the record they are: guitarist Carlos Alomar, who worked on *Station To Station*; Stacey Heydon, who came in at the last minute to replace Earl Slick; bassist George Murray and drummer Dennis Davis, both from the *Station To Station* sessions; and keyboard player Tony Kaye, late of Badger and Yes, another last-minute addition.

"There are three blacks and three whites, including myself, and that's a good mixture," said Bowie. "They're all good musicians. Carlos and Dennis have been with me for two years, but the rest we assembled in eight days of rehearsal before the tour. The band will stay with me for the duration of the tour, but I won't need them when we've finished. I haven't kept a band together since the Spiders, and I don't want the responsibility of keeping one. It's too much money, anyway, to keep a band together, a lot of problems that I don't need."

Musically, Bowie has veered towards black music over the past two years, especially with *Young Americans*. He readily admits he has been copying what he's heard on the radio in a deliberate attempt to be commercial.

"I don't listen to it very much now, though," he said. "I don't like it very much now. It was a phase. I don't like very much music at all now, actually. I like performing with a band, but listening… not really. I've listened to a lot of Kraftwerk and any kind of, er, cute music like that, but there's very little happening musically that interests me now.

"My own recent music has been good, plastic soul, I think. It's not very complex, but it's enjoyable to write. I did most of it in the studio. It doesn't take very long to write… about 10, 15 minutes a song. I mean, with *Young Americans* I thought I'd better make a hit album to cement myself over here, so I went in and did it. It wasn't too hard, really."

Was John Lennon an important contributor to "Fame"?

"No, not really. I think he appreciates that. It was more the influence of having him in the studio that helped. There's always a lot of adrenalin flowing when John is around, but his chief addition to it all was the high-pitched singing of 'Fame'. The riff came from Carlos, and the melody and most of the lyrics came from me, but it wouldn't have happened if John hadn't been there. He was the energy, and that's why he's got a credit for writing it; he was the inspiration."

Roy Bittan, Bruce Springsteen's pianist, played on *Station To Station*. How did that come about?

"It was Eric Barrett, my road manager, who saw him and recommended him. I needed a pianist because Tony wasn't around and Mike Garson was off being a Scientologist somewhere, so I needed him. He impressed me a lot, but I've never seen him with Springsteen. I once saw Springsteen when he was just forming everything, at Max's in New York, and I was impressed

February, 1976: in Los Angeles, Bowie and wife Angie are interviewed by Rona Barrett on *Good Morning America*

GETTY

by him but I didn't like the band. That was when I recorded three of his songs, but they were never released. At the time I was intending to do an album of songs by New York people that I liked, but I never finished it."

In three years Bowie hasn't set foot in England. Any particular reason?

"I just haven't got around to it," he confessed. "Most of my affairs have been messed up so badly that I just hadn't time. There were plans at one time to take the Diamond Dogs Tour to England, but I doubt if ever that show will see the light of day again. I've still got the scenery stored away in New York, so there's always a chance."

That tour must have been extraordinarily expensive to stage.

"Apparently so. I never saw any money from that tour. I'm only making money now. That's why I wanted to simplify things this time around, to make money. I'm managing myself now, simply because I've got fed up with managers that I've known."

How were relations between himself and Tony Defries?

"I haven't seen him since the day I left him. I wouldn't know. Is the still in the business? I honestly don't know."

Bowie seemed a little reluctant to enlarge on this point, so I mentioned that Defries was still managing Mick Ronson and asked whether Bowie had any opinions on Ronson's role in Bob Dylan's Rolling Thunder Revue.

He seemed disinterested. "Yeah, I heard all about that. I don't have any opinions. I honestly can't remember Mick that well nowadays. It's a long time ago. He's just like any other band member that I've had. Maybe I should react more than I should react. Anyway, I'm not a great Dylan fan. I think he's a prick, so I'm not that interested."

As his own manager, Bowie has honed his entourage down to three key people: Pat Gibbons (acting manager), Corinne Schwab (secretary) and Barbara DeWitt (press relations). "My office is a suitcase that stays in my room. It's far better than before when I never knew what was going on, and this is how I used to do it back in England before. My last manager was Michael Lippman and he didn't cope very well. I think it was an experience for him, though. You'd better ask Michael Lippman why Earl Slick left me on the eve of this tour. He's managing him now."

Talk turned to films and Bowie brightened up considerably, Bowie no longer sees himself as only a rock star, so I asked him whether movies would become his prime interest. "No. Making a bit of money is my prime interest. I'm an artist and anything that makes money is OK. I don't know whether I'm an actor or not, and I won't know until I see the movie (*The Man Who Fell To Earth*) in a cinema with people around me. That'll be the test. I want to watch myself in that context. I acted or non-acted as best as I could in that film. It required non-acting because the character of Newton that I played is a very cold, unexpressive person. The thing he learns on Earth is emotion, which comes hard to him and reduces him to an alcoholic.

"I'd been offered a lot of scripts but I chose this one because it was the only one where I didn't have to sing or look like David Bowie. Now I think David Bowie looks like Newton. One thing that Nick Roeg [the film's director] is good at doing is seducing people into a role, and he seduced me completely.

"He told me after we'd finished it would take me a long time to get out of the role and he was dead right. After four months playing the role I was Newton for six months afterwards, and now I'm gradually becoming Max Radl for the next one."

Bowie's next movie, in fact, as exclusively reported in *MM*, is likely to be based on Jack Higgins' best-selling novel *The Eagle Has Landed*, which is based on a fictitious plot to kidnap Winston Churchill during the last war. Bowie is cast as Max Radl, a German officer who organises the kidnap attempt from inside Germany.

"I'm getting into my Nazi bit for this one," he continued. "I have an inert left hand and a patch over my left eye for the part. Michael Caine and Donald Sutherland are in it, too, so it'll be one hell of a film. Sutherland is the reason that I chose to do it – Sutherland has the money.

"If it wasn't for Sutherland and the money I wouldn't be interested. As it is, I'm more interested in a Bergman film called *The Serpent's Egg* which is coming up, and I'd do that for nothing, just to work with Bergman."

Would he drop music in favour of acting if his career blossomed?

"Er, no, I don't think so. I just do anything as it comes up. I've learned to find a much calmer level of intensity these days. I don't push for much, but I seem to move a lot faster when I do things this way. I think I've done the bit that I needed to do in rock'n'roll. I've made my contribution to rock'n'roll, and the only thing I can do now, if I stay in rock'n'roll, is to have a rock'n'roll career. Not being very career-minded, I don't want a career in rock'n'roll.

"I couldn't do anything but survive now. Once you've made that initial boom, what else do you have to do? So I'm just resting around and picking up on all the things that have fascinated me. I've become interested in art over the last two years and I've done several silk screens and lithographs."

Was it that he was frightened of repeating himself in rock?

"It's not that so much. I didn't want my enthusiasm for rock'n'roll being mixed up with my own dissatisfaction with becoming a rock'n'roll careerist. In rock'n'roll the artist quickly becomes an archetype, and as soon as he becomes an archetype he has served his purpose.

"I don't believe it's possible for an artist to say more than two new things in rock'n'roll. One artist has one thing to say and it's such an ephemeral sort of culture that after he's said it, it's just a question of staying around. If you do strive to say something new, it gets interpreted as just another way of staying around. They're doing it to Dylan at the moment, and poor old Bruce Springsteen has hardly started before they're saying it to him. And whether Patti Smith will ever get there, they're saying it about her. It's not that interesting after a certain point, anyway.

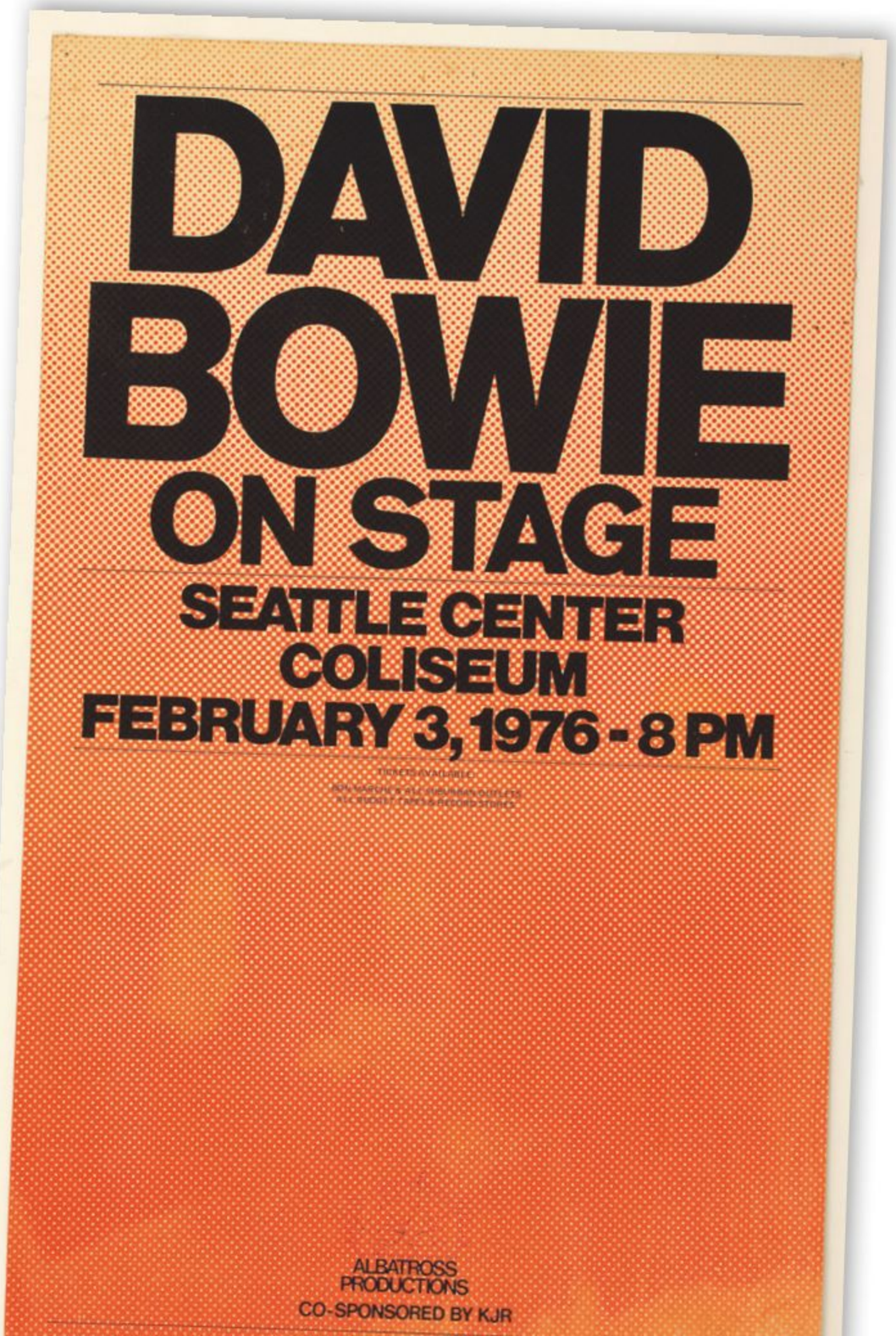
"I'm not disenchanted, because I always believed when I started that Ziggy, for me, was what it was all about. I said it with Ziggy five years ago and I believe that you can go up or come down or be carried along by the tide for a few years. The only thing to do, if you want to contribute to culture, or politics, or music, or whatever, is to utilise your own persona rather than just music. The best way to do this is to diversify and become a nuisance everywhere."

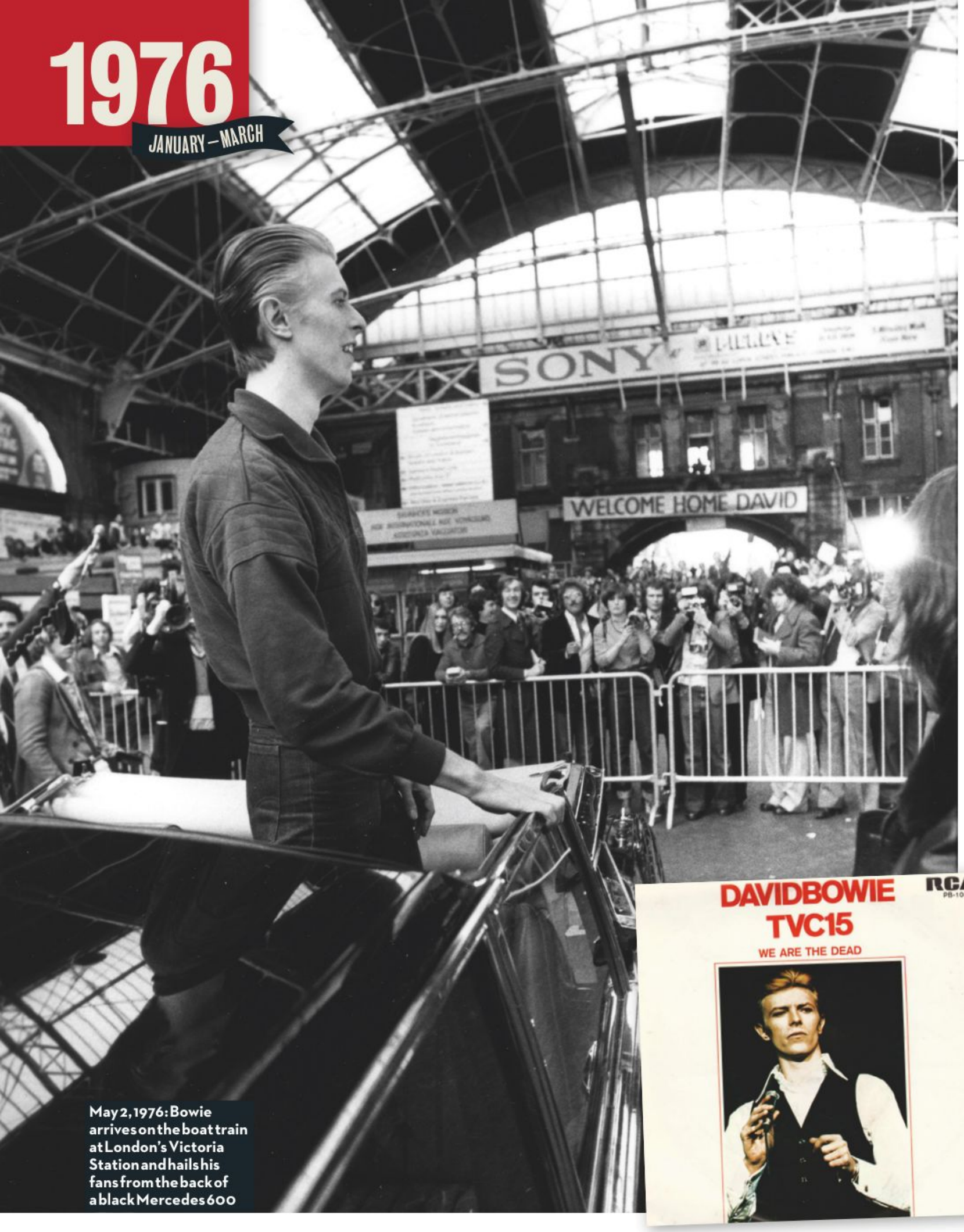
But it must have been satisfying to have a massive US hit with "Fame"?

"Well, it kind of put the cap on things. It told me I could finish now, pack it all in now. That meant I had done the two things I was supposed to do, which is to conquer this market and conquer the British market. Once you've done that you can pretend to rest on your laurels and all the other cliches you can do when you hit the top. You can forget longevity and all the things that make you stay there, as far as I'm concerned. All that staying at the top is just a heartache for me.

"I just want to do what I want to do, and first, that's make some money »

> "With *Young Americans*, I thought I'd better make a hit album"





May 2, 1976: Bowie arrives on the boat train at London's Victoria Station and hails his fans from the back of a black Mercedes 600

with this tour and enjoy making it at the same time. I wanted to use a new kind of staging, and I think this staging will become one of the most important ever. It will affect every kind of rock'n'roll act from now on, because it's the most stabilised move that I've ever seen in rock'n'roll.

"I've reverted to pure Brechtian theatre, and I've never seen Brechtian theatre used like this since Morrison and The Doors, and even then Morrison never used white light like I do.

"I think it looks like a corrupted version of the '30s German theatre, what with the waistcoat, which has always been a favourite with me. I should have had a watch-chain to make it perfect. I'm trying to put over the idea of the European movement with the Dalí film [before he arrives on stage, the Dalí-Luis Buñuel film, *Un Chien Andalou*, is shown] and playing Kraftwerk over the speakers. I'd like to get my hands on the new Eno album to play, actually. I think side one is absolutely fabulous."

His sets change from night to night but all the songs from *Station To Station* are played, along with half a dozen songs from Bowie's past. Bowie says he's never been as loose on stage since the early days of the Spiders, and he's enjoying the experience. Despite his appearance on stage – severe and formal – he denies he's the "*Thin White Duke*" referred to on the album. It's someone else and he won't say who.

I asked which of the old songs he still liked to sing. "I think 'Jean Genie' is a gas. I like that one. I still love 'Changes'. All the songs I still do I still like, but I'm not doing 'Golden Years' or 'Space Oddity'. I've really been very radical for this show and I won't do any hits for the sake of doing hits. I think people look on the show as an honest appearance, and that's why they develop such a strong empathy for it. For the first few minutes they are absolutely alarmed at what they are seeing, they don't understand it, but there's one point when it breaks out and people realise what it is all about.

"It's not honest, really, but then I've never been a let-it-all-hang-out entertainer. One thing I do is fabricate a personality for a stage. I was never a rock'n'roll singer. I was clumsy as a rock'n'roll singer, but I do have a certain penchant for fabricating a character and portraying a cold, unemotional feeling.

"I'm still giving them a persona, but that persona out there is possibly an exaggeration of all the things I feel about me. Maybe it's some aspect of me as a person blown-up to lifesize. A lot of the other characters were blow-ups of other rock'n'rollers that I saw around. I'm more approachable onstage this time around, unlike the last time when the character I played was a paranoid refugee of New York City. That was about the collapse of a major city and I think I was right to be remote, don't you?"

I agreed. But was it necessary not even to acknowledge the presence of the audience or his group?

"Oh yes. That character was in a world of his own. This time I at least say 'good evening' to the people. Now you know that I'm not the warmest performer on stage, and I never have been, but that's because I feel too shy about talking to people onstage. I've never felt comfortable talking on stage. With Diamond Dogs I even wanted to have the band in an orchestra pit.

"If ever I have the audacity to do a Diamond Dogs Tour again, I think I know how I would do it, and I will do it properly because of everything I've learned over the past few years. You know, unless you make some big mistakes you are never going to grow, you've got to make mistakes. I've made one a week, and if you don't make them then you won't become a self-invented man. I've got to learn to make mistakes to understand the character that I am clawing the air for. People like watching people who make mistakes, but they prefer watching a man who survives his mistakes. To make a mistake in life, and survive it, is the biggest kick of all.

"The so-called rebel figures are not popular because they're rebels, but because they've made mistakes and got over them. I think audiences go to rock concerts to obtain information and the artist is the one who provides that information. I don't know what the information is, but it is something to do with survival. I'm sure that a rock'n'roll singer has something to do with survival, and that survival instinct transcends the music, the words and everything else."

It wasn't long ago, I mentioned, that Bowie stated he wasn't going to tour again. He shrugged. "Oh yes, I did, but I don't feel that way now. I love it. The other tours were misery, so painful. I had amazing amounts of people on the road with me. I had a management system that had no idea what it was doing and was totally self-interested and pompous. They never dealt with the people on the road, so I was getting all those problems.

"I was getting all the problems every night. Ten or 15 people would be coming to see me and laying their problems on me because the management couldn't or wouldn't deal with it. For me touring was no fun, no fun at all. They were little problems, but to each individual

MARK & COLLEEN HAYWARD / GETTY

they were important. I understood all their problems but I couldn't cope with them all, so the two major tours I did were horrendous experiences. I hated every minute of them, so I used to say I'd never tour again. Then I would be talked into doing it again to make somebody some money.

"This time, though, I will be touring again. We've got it down to a sensible number and it works. It's the most efficient tour I've been on, and I can truthfully say it's the most efficient tour I've seen. Everybody on this tour is in a wonderful mood, and we're well through half the tour. This time no one comes to me with problems, so we get together as people instead, and I actually find I'm spending time with the band, which is rare. I've actually written on the road this time. The band and I have written three things and I've never been able to do that before.

"If I'm in charge I'll tour again, whereas before I always thought there was somebody better at doing this kind of thing. It wasn't until Lennon pointed it out to me that I realised maybe the artist is as good at managing as anybody else. It was John that sorted me out all the way down the line. He took me on one side, sat down, and told me what it was all about, and I realised I was very naive. I still thought you had to have somebody else who dealt with these things called contracts, but now I have a better understanding of showbusiness business."

And the right-wing politics I had read about? "Oh, that was just bullshit, something I said off the cuff. Some paper wanted me to say something and I didn't have much to say, so I made things up. They took it all in."

Why had he chosen to live in the US for the past three years?

"Because I didn't have any money to get out. I was told I couldn't go back to England because I had tax problems there and didn't have the money to pay them, but now I do, so I'm going back. Unfortunately, I'm going to have to live in Switzerland, because I want to keep my money. I'd like to live in England because I don't like America at all as a place to live, except maybe New Mexico. I haven't lived properly in America. I've been here but I haven't lived. I've been in Los Angeles, coping with a town that I consider to be the most repulsive wart on the backside of humanity. I'd rather live here in Detroit than in Los Angeles."

Bowie has formed his own film production company, Bewlay Brothers Ltd, which will handle his movie business in the future and, he hopes, produce films of its own, especially films of artistic, rather than commercial, merit. He plans on sinking his money earned in rock into the film company. "I've been trained in a career as a rock'n'roll singer and I now see that I do that very well. Therefore, like any good chap who has a career, I should utilise my talents and the training that I've got and make some money out of it. You have to own up to that after while.

"It's all very well being number-one protest kid for a while, but you have to consider whether you are just protesting to stay around or whether you really mean to protest. If that's the case you won't be at the top of the hit parade all the time, but if you think your protest lies elsewhere you'll change horses and quickly earn some money out of the business you are good at. That's what I'm doing now, but I'll only do it if I'm enjoying the stuff that I'm doing.

"I'm enjoying this tour, so I'll do some more tours. Albums? I'll make some commercial albums and I'll make some albums that possibly aren't as commercial. I'll probably keep alternating, providing myself with a hit album to make the money to do the next album, which probably won't sell as well."

At that point Bowie wanted to finish, but some quick probing revealed that he has completed an electronic album ("without vocals that you'd recognise"). Also, he still has plans to produce a record with Iggy Pop, who was at the hotel and seemed in much better health than usual ("I'm a good lad. I look after him" – Bowie). And exactly the same show will be coming to London, though probably with some additional numbers.

> "A lot of people suggest all kinds of things to say, and I do"

AS A PARTING shot I asked David whether he still professed to be bisexual. Momentary shock. "Oh Lord, no. Positively not. That was just a lie. They gave me that image, so I stuck to it pretty well for a few years. I never adopted that stance. It was given to me. I've never done a bisexual action in my life, onstage, record or anywhere else. I don't think I even had a gay following much. A few glitter queens, maybe.

"You know the funniest thing of all," he continued, talking like a conspirator, "I'd never heard of Lou Reed until somebody said my stuff was influenced by him. So when I heard that, I started saying it myself, that my songs were influenced by Lou Reed. It seemed the obvious thing to say, and that's when I started getting interested in Lou. The same with Iggy. It wasn't until people told me my music was very sort of Detroity that I happened to discover Iggy Pop and the Stooges. I thought, 'What a great name', and although I'd never heard them, I used to tell everybody who asked that I liked them a lot. Then I got around to meeting Iggy, but it wasn't until months later that I actually heard anything he'd written.

"It's marvellous. A lot of people provide me with quotes. They suggest all kinds of things to say and I do, because, really, I'm not very hip at all. Then I go away and spout it all out and that makes it easier for people to classify me. People dissect the songs and say that's influenced by someone or other, but I don't know whether I'm influenced. All I know is I'm drinking a beer and enjoying myself."

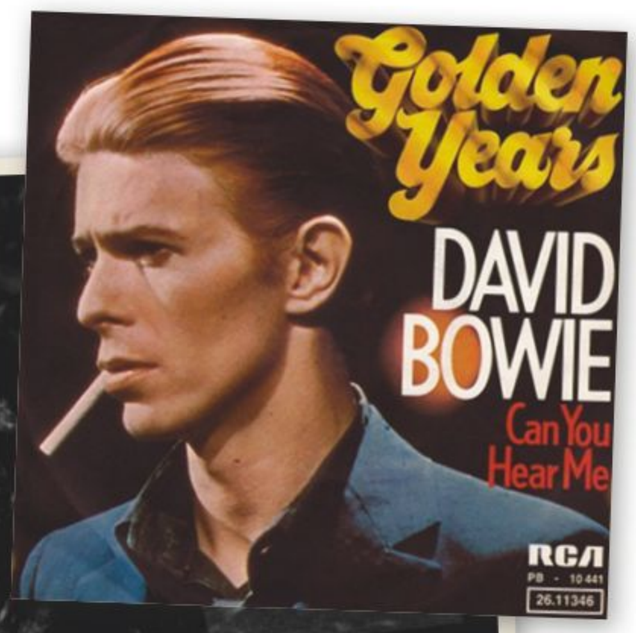
With that Bowie retired to be made-up for the evening's concert – just a light dab of eyeliner to accentuate his features, and plenty of water to keep the hair in place.

The concert was a huge success, capped with a couple of encores, and pretty much the same as has been described in detail in previous issues of *MM*. All the material from *Station To Station* was aired, along with choice selections like "Changes", "Fame", "Jean Genie", "Diamond Dogs" and, most appropriately, "Panic In Detroit". The highlight was definitely "Five Years", though, which soared to a climax as the band poured on layers of power chords behind Bowie's agonised vocals.

Dressed in black pants, waistcoat and a crisp white shirt, Bowie still seemed cold and formal, but towards the end he loosened up, grinning and flashing asides, casually smoking Gitanes, and playing deliberately to the front rows which, because of the abundance of bright white lights, were as illuminated as the stage.

A picture of health and happiness. It's hard to believe. *Chris Charlesworth* •

May 18, 1976: after a show at the Pavillon De Paris, Bowie and Dutch cabaret star Romy Haag celebrate the end of the Isolar world tour at L'Alcazar Club



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"Just a hobby"

ABBA, a pop cottage industry from Sweden, have triumphed at Eurovision, but Britain is initially hostile. "Normally a group like us doesn't make good albums," reckons Björn Ulvaeus, "and that's probably what frightens people off."

— MELODY MAKER JANUARY 31 —

THINGS WERE SO bad in Scandinavia, an *MM* reader there informed us some months ago, that ABBA were regarded as a progressive rock band. ABBA, the pride of the Continent, can afford to scoff at such cynicism, for while they have no pretensions about being a rock band, world reaction to their music during the past year has earned them an aura of respectability from many hitherto sceptical quarters.

They've been in the *MM* singles chart twice in the past four months, first with "SOS" and currently with "Mamma Mia", two magnificent pop tunes; they've had four hit singles in the States' charts, two of them Top 10-ers; they've had hit after hit across the Continent; and down under in Australia, three of their singles are in the Top 10: "Mamma Mia" at No 1, "SOS" at No 2 and "I Do, I Do, I Do..." at No 6.

ABBA, you will recall, first came to prominence during April 1974, when they won the Eurovision Song Contest with the self-penned "Waterloo". Since then, their stature in the rest of Europe has grown phenomenally, but Britain has lagged behind, rejecting their product with a vengeance. Until last year, when the breakthrough was made.

While we were humming and hawing over how ABBA should be approached, the band played it cool, »

REX FEATURES

ABBA: (l–r) Björn Alvaeus, Agnetha Fältskog, Anni-Frid Lyngstad, Benny Andersson

October 19, 1976 (aired February 4, 1977): ABBA appear on *The Midnight Special*, NBC's late-night musical variety show, California, USA

ignored our disregard and stayed home in Sweden, confident that, sooner or later, Britain would come alive to their talent.

And at home they're their own bosses, have their own record label, write, produce and play their own material and make a little fortune. The two male members of the band, Benny Andersson and Björn Ulvaeus, produce six of the artists on their Polar Music label, while the girls, Anni-Frid Lyngstad and Agnetha Fältskog, pass the time away from ABBA by supervising dancing and singing lessons.

"In a lot of ways, ABBA is just a hobby for us," said Benny. "We've had to spend more and more time with the group as it has become so successful. We're our own bosses. Our existence doesn't depend on ABBA being a success, which is lucky. Most groups have to travel to make a living. We don't have that pressure on us, so we can do what we want to do.

"The thing is that England has been a most difficult market for us. We've had hits in Europe, America and Australia, but only Britain has been reluctant. I don't know why. I think the problem was to get rid of the Eurovision reputation, and at last we seem to have done that."

Despite all the hits, though, ABBA are desperate now to get recognised as an albums band, and can't understand why they have not yet achieved that ambition – especially when one considers that many of their recent singles were taken from one album, their second, *ABBA*.

"The singles aren't really representative of everything we do," Benny added. "What I wish is that we could become an albums band. The albums have a lot more to give than just a single. We agree that we write quite simple songs, but they're catchy and there's a lot of effort put into the arrangements. The only thing to get exposure is a single. You see, normally a group like us doesn't make good albums, and that's probably what frightens people off. But we go in and try to record 10 very good singles for an album. People don't notice that.

"It's not really important to us that we have a No 1 single. What is important is that people sit and listen to the music we play and like what they hear." *Harry Doherty*

— MELODY MAKER MAY 22 —

AS IT WAS Stockholm, and as the ever-witty 10cc were playing there, Eric Stewart thought it'd be nice to pay a little tribute to a Swedish group and hammered out a few bars of "Mamma Mia". The audience, fearing that it would be beneath their dignity to acknowledge publicly the importance of this home-grown sound and group, whistled and howled at the gesture.

"C'mon," Stewart pleaded, "you should be proud of this." The audience, for some strange reason, weren't. ABBA are the current kings of Euro-pop, but their involvement with the Eurovision Song Contest has made many loath to accept that they have something positive to offer.

Without Eurovision, the world might never have heard of ABBA, though it is generally accepted that there is genuine talent within their ranks: a talent for writing good pop songs and recording and performing them, always maintaining an incredibly high standard.

There are a thousand other pop groups on the Continent that we're never going to hear of, but recently Euro-pop has been playing a more important part in music. Suddenly, bands and artists are starting to creep into American and British charts. ABBA, though they do not attach any significance to the fact that they are Continental, would seem to have opened the door that gives other European acts a platform to the world.

From Germany, the music of Silver Convention owes as much to British and American music as ABBA does. Unlike ABBA, who rely on the pop influences, Silver Convention look to the disco-soul sound, and it's with that they've achieved a success that is almost equalling ABBA's.

They've had hit albums and singles in the States and Britain, the most recent being the infectious chugalong "Get Up And Boogie". The group was formed by producer Michael Kunze at the end of '74, comprising of Ramona Wulf, Linda G Thompson and Jackie Carter. Soon afterwards, Penny McLean took the place of Carter and after an appearance the following year at the Midem Festival, the group's success took off internationally.

Their first single, "Save Me", a minor hit in Britain, scored in 43 other countries, including the lucrative American market. The second single reinforced this breakthrough. "Fly Robin Fly" went to the top of the US charts but again merely scratched the British surface. "Get Up And Boogie" brought down all the barriers.

Then there's Demis Roussos, who has just recently been acclaimed in Britain. In four years, Roussos, an Egyptian born of Greek parents who has spent most of his life in Greece, has sold more than six million albums. A former member of Aphrodite's Child, he has reached the stage now where he could comfortably play a string of concerts in the Royal Albert Hall and not worry about filling them.

"Moviestar", by Harpo, also from Sweden, was released on the Continent almost a year ago. A massive hit which Britain rejected, but which Dick James Music, his record company here, were confident would eventually make it and the record came awake about a month ago, DJs picking up on the song and playing it to death. As usually happens when the Beeb picks up on a record, it was a hit. Harpo, too, struck a blow for Europe.

GETTY

From Holland, the George Baker Selection were set to follow suit until man-about-pop Jonathan King decided that he'd record a version of their Continental hit, "Paloma Blanca". Jonathan called it "Una Paloma Blanca", put it out on his own UK label, and, presto, had a hit. After an interesting struggle between the two versions early on, the George Baker Selection's original conceded defeat.

But "Paloma Blanca" was the group's 16th single. Written by the guitarist, singer and producer, Jans Bouwens, it was No 1 in Germany for 14 weeks and also went to the top in Austria, Switzerland, South Africa and Italy, positions the group has become accustomed to hitting. Britain would have been a nice addition but for our Jonathan.

And there are thousands of other Continental artists who are massive there and totally anonymous here. Throughout the turmoil surrounding their current worldwide success, ABBA remain quaintly unaffected and stay in the comfort of their suburban Stockholm homes. They refuse to pursue the glamour that such success inevitably brings, and remember, their success ranges from America to Australia to Japan. Explains Björn Ulvaeus: "There are a lot of groups who tour the whole year round. I don't know how they do it. We couldn't. We couldn't live from hotel to hotel. That would kill us. We couldn't write songs in hotel rooms."

"This lifestyle suits us perfectly. We can do what we want to do and occasionally we'll go out and tour and show people that we're real and that we're not another factory group. That is one thing we're not."

"This lifestyle" is what makes Abba so special. If there is such a thing as "the perfect situation" for a pop/rock band to be in, Abba are close to it. They don't have to tour to earn success, having reached that magical state where records sell themselves. They've got their own independent organisation in Sweden. Polar Music is ABBA's own record, publishing and promotion company ("The only record company in the world that doesn't release records," boasted Benny). From there, they plot their strategy, record their songs and generally take care of business.

With the help of manager Stig Anderson, ABBA have become their own bosses, working under their own pressure. Polar gives them invaluable freedom.

There's more to ABBA than "that band that won the Eurovision". Björn and Benny had been writing songs for many years before they teamed up with girlfriends Frida (Anni-Frid) Lynstad and Anna Fältskog, two Scandinavian beauties who were also successful solo artists. They agreed to help their boys out in the plans for world domination.

Björn and Benny had taken a conscious decision that they would write only in English and desert, for the most part, their native tongue. After working for a time as Björn & Benny, Agnetha & Anni-Frid, and appearing in the Eurovision Song Contest as such in 1973 singing "Ring Ring" (they finished third), the name was changed to the snappier ABBA (their initials) for the competition in Brighton the following year.

Their song was "Waterloo"; and while our own Olivia Newton-John was crying about not liking her song, "Long Live Love", ABBA marched to victory. "We were aware that 'Waterloo' was not a typical Eurovision song," Björn recalled. "A lot of people considered that it was too rocky for the contest, but it was the song we wanted to sing. We wanted it to be different from the rest."

What Abba didn't realise was that there was an inbuilt scepticism in the minds of the British to anything Eurovision, that anything on Eurovision, no matter how good or original, was regarded as superficial, to be forgotten with Sunday lunch the next day.

"There seemed to be this thing in England," said Ulvaeus, "that anything from the Eurovision lacked credibility. But that's one of the things we're after. We believe that we're a credible group and that what we do is worthwhile."

"It wasn't frustrating trying to overcome the problem. I knew that if we just kept putting out good singles we'd make it in England sooner or later. We had to. The English are always on the look-out for something new, which is good."

"I think we're contributing something positive to music. There is a lack of strong melody, that's what I think. If you look at the English chart, a month ago there were so many oldies."

"I suppose that is part of the Continental tradition that we have. In places like France and Italy, they love that. It has to be a strong melody to get into the charts. And this is maybe something we can contribute to English pop." *Harry Doherty* •

ALBUMS

REVIEW

1976

An ideal Christmas present

MM DEC 4 ABBA's third keeps it short and sweet.

ABBA Arrival EPIC

There is no doubt that ABBA are the classiest pop outfit around Europe at the moment. Björn Ulvaeus and Benny Andersson write snappy commercial tunes. ABBA, and in particular vocalists Frida and Anna, strengthen the identity with tight vocal interpretations, backed by a cool Continental instrumental sound.

That is the base from which ABBA operate, rarely venturing outside strictly defined terms of reference. A toe-tapping tune, a simple, sing-along lyric. Short and direct. That is the ABBA sound. That is *Arrival*.

Ironically, although the album is initially impressive by its forthright and innocent out-and-out pop, after a while the clinical aspect of the construction of an ABBA song becomes annoying.

After a while, the clinical aspect of the construction of an ABBA song becomes annoying

I've had this album for a few weeks, and it's only now that the coldness of the structure is beginning to rub me the wrong way. There are 10 tracks on the LP. The longest is 4 minutes 20 seconds; the shortest, 2.53. The first side is 16.77 long and the second 14.95. Consider that the ideal length, for the best sound quality, is around 18 minutes, and you wonder whether ABBA have freaked and cut the playing time drastically in an effort to go for the perfect recorded sound, or as is more likely, the sum total of a year's writing from the group's writers was a mere 32 minutes of song.

Despite those reservations, it is an album that epitomises the ABBA phenomenon, the first set showcasing the Eurovision victory with "Waterloo" a couple of years ago and then the string of hit singles, "SOS", "Mamma Mia", "Fernando" and the others, all on the Greatest Hits album, which has been in the *MM* albums chart for nearly a year now.

Whether or not Ulvaeus and Andersson insist that they do not work to a formula, *Arrival* has joined its compilation predecessor in the Top 10 because they stick close to the proven mixture. It's obvious that the major ingredient is the melody. The lyrics, which border between the naive and bland ("Dum Dum Diddle" joins "Mamma Mia" in the corniest words of all time stakes) are of secondary importance to ABBA, probably because they haven't mastered the finer arts of the English language in song. It's down to the tune and the nuance of the distinctive vocals to carry the message.

Most of the songs are standard ABBA stuff, and consistently good at that. "Dancing Queen" was a hit single, and I'm sure other tracks will keep ABBA in those charts for the next year, principally "Knowing Me, Knowing You", "Tiger", "That's Me" and possibly "Why Did It Have To Be Me", on which the band uncharacteristically rock a little. "Money, Money, Money", which sounds as if it should be one of the songs in *Fiddler On The Roof*, is the current hit.

But the best track of all for me is the beautiful "My Love, My Life", which would have been an ideal Christmas single, full of sentimentality and soppiness. The title track, an instrumental, is the most Continental-sounding of all, drawing from the band's Scandinavian roots.

An ideal Christmas present for mums, dads, aunts, uncles, son, daughters, nephews, nieces. But who said "once more with feeling"? *Harry Doherty*

1976

JANUARY – MARCH

"We've done a lot of constructive stuff": Jimmy Page reflects on Led Zeppelin's progress since Robert Plant's car crash the previous summer

“A bit of a gamble”

Circumstances dictated LED ZEPPELIN’S new album be recorded in a hurry. JIMMY PAGE discusses *Presence*, “attack” and the band’s future. “As far as the playing side of it,” he says, “I know that we can have a go at anything.”

— MELODY MAKER MARCH 20 —

JIMMY ENTERED A whole hour late. But Abe, who was accompanying him, was not in the least embarrassed by the delay. He muttered an obligatory apology, something about missing the train. People have waited longer for less.

Jimmy is Jimmy Page, guitarist, writer and creator of Led Zeppelin. Abe is Abe Hoch (pronounced hock), a mainman down at Swan Song. Swan Song is Led Zeppelin’s own record company, which also houses Bad Company (in the States), The Pretty Things and Maggie Bell.

Swan Song is situated in London’s fashionable King’s Road – in the unfashionable end. You’ll notice that it’s opposite the World’s End pub. If you don’t, you’ll never find it. There’s no sign that says “Swan Song, home of the world’s greatest rock band, Led Zeppelin”. There’s no grand building. No clue at all to what goes on behind those grim walls.

There is a grubby front that’s showing the worse for wear. Dirty paint, once a cream colour, flakes easily. There is a sign that says “Chelsea And Kensington Branch Of The British Legion”. There is also a plaque on a wall that proclaims: “This plaque is dedicated to the memory of Aileen Collen, MBE, who devoted so much of her life to the welfare of ex-servicemen and their families.”

It’s almost funny. A crummy building fronting a rock empire. But there is a sign in reception saying: “If you can’t dazzle them with brilliance, baffle them with bullshit.”

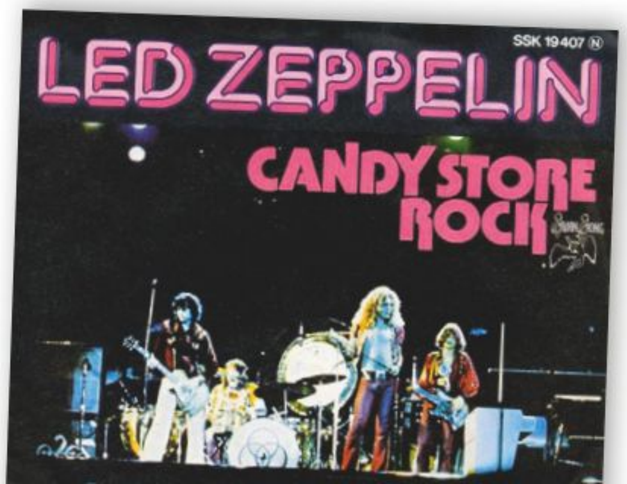
As he sat down, Page rested a bunch of American compilation albums on the table, a collection of old rock’n’roll numbers. “I really love listening to these,” he enthused. “All those guys were looking for something new among all the shit.”

Just like today?

“There are a lot of pessimists about,” he said. “But I’m really very optimistic. I can see something good coming out of it eventually.” More about that later.

Page’s conversation is allusive. Initially he appears awkward and indecisive about some matters, or he’ll refuse point-blank to talk. Then he hints that he does know something but doesn’t care to explicate. Press him a little more and another titbit of information emerges before the drawbridge is finally brought down.

Robert Plant, for instance. Plant was seriously injured in a car crash last August on the Greek island of Rhodes. He has made, by all accounts, a miraculous recovery. First, of all, Page evaded the Plant injury issue completely. “We don’t make a big »



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thing of it, 'cos it's not in order, really."

When the subject comes up again, he divulged a little more information.

"I don't want to make too much of a hoo-hah about that, about the mending process. No, I wouldn't really. I've got very superstitious after that. It was just strange that it happened within a week of rehearsals. It was just like something saying, 'No, you're not gonna do it.' It's personal. That's why I don't wanna talk about it."

Avoiding the issue of the injury, you see.

"Well, it was bloody unpleasant. I know you're going to bloody print it or I'd tell you the truth. It was just touch and go. I don't think those things should come out in print. Far be it from me, or you, to start delving into that. It's a very personal thing. It really was touch and go."

There the matter rested.

Then there's the sleeve of the new album, *Presence*. Page's attitude to this one reveals another side of his personality. First he says that the title has nothing to do with the music and is connected with the sleeve's artwork. Then he says: "Well, it does in a way. There is a link between the artwork and the music. The artwork is such that you could look at it and put your own interpretation to it. It's one of those."

What's your interpretation?

A pause. "I'd rather that people saw it for themselves and see what they make of it, because it's not a cut-and-dried situation. You can put a number of interpretations on it, so it's best to leave it as an open-book situation as far as people seeing it goes.

"It could either be viewed as past or present. If you look at it, it could be the '40s and it could also be the '70s. It's got to be viewed in its entirety, otherwise the whole point would be lost."

What is the whole point?

"Well, I'm sorry to be elusive on it, but I don't think I should say that it's this, that and the other, because it's an ambiguous thing. Photographically, it's an ambitious statement, so it's not the right thing to lay down my impression, because somebody might have a more illuminating one."

"We never seem to be at a loss for coming up with new stuff"

IT'S THAT SAME sleeve that's holding up the release of *Presence*. No pressing of the album can be done – for fear of bootlegging – until the sleeves are completed, and the printers are having a little trouble in matching up the colours. Page is most annoyed that an album finished before Christmas has been held back because of printing problems.

Presence was recorded ultra-fast. It took only three weeks, and was recorded in Europe – the Musicland Studios in Munich – so that the band could be close to their wives and families in Britain. Originally, a month had been set aside to record, but one of the band – Page wasn't squealing on the guilty party – turned up a week late. He commented eagerly on the speed of its production.

"It was a bit of a gamble, really, to just set down an amount of time and say that it was going to be finished by such and such. We had kicked over the tracks, so we had – what would you call it? – a starting ground. Robert was still working on lyrics, and I hadn't thought about too many of the overdubs, but one was pretty confident that we could do it. It was just a sort of a test, really. We could have come dreadfully unstuck."

It was a gamble?

"A gamble to see whether we could meet the deadline or not. Fortunately, we did. We worked practically every minute of the day. It was really great to be able to do it like that. At no other time, apart from the first LP [Page always calls them LPs], have we had that stretch in the studio. We usually recorded on the road, and it was spread over such a long time."

I wondered if the immediacy of working so intensely had been captured and reflected in the music. Was there an urgency that had been lacking in any of the other albums?

"There is a lot of urgency about it. There's a lot of attack to the music. I think that's reflecting a state of mind of actually being constantly on the move. You know, no base, because of the situation then. That definitely is reflected. I know it's talking in a pretty nebulous fashion, but I think people will know what I mean when they hear it.

"No, I don't think it was missing in any of the earlier ones, because I think that each LP has an identity of its own and it's different from the previous one. I wouldn't say it was better or worse than any of the other records.

"It was very sort of uplifting to actually tackle a situation like on the new LP and find that things were really coming out and being fresh all the time, as opposed to being sort of cliched, because you were just concentrating on one particular period of time."

Were Zeppelin in danger of becoming cliched? Page thought about that before giving a positive reply.

"The only way you can get cliched is if you just follow a particular pattern to what you know is successful along your particular line, but I don't think…" he stopped before quickly resuming… "Well, I know that we haven't done that." Another pause, and just to push the point home: "We've been quite the opposite without consciously doing it."

I suggested to Page that after *Houses Of The Holy*, the fourth album, and with the release of the follow-up, *Physical Graffiti*, fans were relieved to see that it was "the old Zeppelin". The band had returned to their hard-rock framework from which they had strayed. Page snapped to attention and asked for an explanation. I explained that *Houses Of The Holy*, to a lot of people, presented too much variety outside, and not inside, the rock structure of the music.

"Well, what about… well, I don't know." He was hesitant. "You see, let me put it this way. When the third LP came out after, for instance, the second one… ahm…" He stopped to sort out strategy.

"I should really explain how the things are done. The first LP really had material that had been played on stage before it was recorded. Then we felt at home. The second LP was recorded basically on the road when everybody could get in the studio, so that's got that very sort of rock'n'roll orientation.

"Now, following that, you had got the third LP, where a lot of that was written in the cottage, Bron-Yr-Aur [in Wales], and it's got, you know, the writing is far more narrow in approach. But there was an outcry about doing this, that and the other acoustic. In fact, there were acoustic numbers on the first LP. It's just that the mood was different. It was more dramatic and more laidback.

"I would say about this particular LP that we're playing as a group. It's very controlled, you know. There's no… yeah, that's it! It's very controlled. There's no blowing out or whatever. There's a great level of control on the new one, and sympathy within the four."

How did he see the music on *Presence* developing from the other albums?

"A bit subjective this. Well, as far as laying down, I suppose the word is orchestration, guitar harmonies and stuff. I've usually immersed myself in it, laid down things and there'd be room to amplify it with extra harmonies or whatever. With this one, it came straight up. There's a hell of a lot of spontaneity about it. I think that's the element, really. That aspect of it has to be taken into account when you start talking about the actual development of it, because that's the whole key to the theme of it, the level of spontaneity."

There was more spontaneity on this album than the others?

"Well, yes, I think so. You see, in the past when it came to the point where we were getting an album together, there were always a number of frameworks that you would toy with at home. At this particular point in time there were no sort of complete frameworks, just little bits kicking

around. There have been sort of phrases, melodies, rhythms that have been picked up on the travels through Morocco and places like that, which all get consumed. You take it all in and it comes out in the music."

Page has spent much of the past year driving through deserts, visiting the more exotic cities on our planet. Did he attach that much importance to the influence his travels had on his music?

"Oh, dead right, sure. One is always open to new influences and different concepts and approaches. I couldn't say that there was a number built around a Moroccan rhythm on the new LP, but I definitely learned a lot from Morocco which I can relate to on songs. The whole thing that goes on in Morocco is incredible. It's trance music, basically, and when you see the sort of things that are done by the power of music as such, one couldn't help but sort of reassess what one thought one knew already."

But are there really that many ways that Zeppelin's music can progress? Don't people expect a certain kind of music from the band?

"There's an unmistakable identity about the music and, whatever the piece is, you naturally say 'that's them'. I don't mean cliched writing by that, but certainly, as far as development goes, there's more intense writing, unusual chord patterns. One wants to improve, and the only way that you can feel satisfied is by setting up certain milestones along the way as far as writing goes. A lot of that has to do with the construction of songs.

"All I know is that we're really critical of our own stuff, probably over-critical as far as writing goes. If something starts to sound similar to something we've done before, it immediately gets rubbed out. It doesn't get used. But that's no problem within itself, because we never seem to be at a loss for coming out with new stuff, new ideas, new rhythms. I'm not relating this to anything else that's going on, because we only take up half a degree of a 360-degree circle of what's going on, but nevertheless, it's all exploratory to us."

But once more, what about those people who aren't fans and claim that Zeppelin have rigidly adhered to a formula established on the first album?

"Well, I don't know. Obviously, there's an essence within the group, and obviously there was a certain intensity on the first LP, and I would say that it grew from that and stretched this way and that. As far as the rock elements go, they veered over one way, and the acoustic ones again another way, and there's the blues side of it. I think that there are enough elements within that to keep a changing face. It just comes out that way. It's not as though it's definitely planned or calculated."

Was there really that much scope within Zeppelin's framework?

"Yeah." The affirmative stretched over three seconds. "Definitely. If the content was being difficult, you know, if it was hard to write and we sat in LA and nothing came out apart from a couple of numbers, then I would start to question it, but when everything is coming out so fluently and there're no problems coming up with new ideas, I feel pretty confident. As far as the playing side of it goes, I know that we can have a go at anything."

Anything?

"Yeah." There was an air of defiance. "Don't forget, John Paul Jones was an arranger, and both of us worked on sessions. You never knew when you went into a session what was coming. They didn't inform you that you were going to do such and such a thing. You just walked in there and it could be, you know, a huge great orchestra or a rock'n'roll session or jazz, so you really had to be able to weather any storm. I guess that sort of background helped us."

Was there really that much more for Zeppelin to do?

Page's reactions are constantly interesting to note. His hands wave in the air. They indicated that there is more to do. He says: "Crikey, yeah. I mean, we're only scratching the surface if you start relating it to classical work. It depends how far you want to take it."

Did he really believe that?

"Sure I do. There's such a wealth. There are no horizons as to what could be done. It just takes a lot of work, writing and recording. You can bet your life that in the next five or 10 years, there'll be some amazing things happening, with musicians coming up.

"For instance, we got most of our influences from the blues players and the early rock players. Well, the musicians that are coming through now have got such a great textbook to take it all from, that you just know and feel that there's going to be some new and great music coming up. I wouldn't accept in any way that music or whatever is going to be stagnant. People say, 'Oh well, it's just going to keep blossoming out.'"

But there is a prevalent feeling of stagnation.

"No. It's only people that are – and I don't mean to insult you – people that have got to try and keep it ticking over on a weekly basis. Obviously, you can't have a new trend coming out every week. Things take months and years to come out. Then you get a really strong thing, say like The Beatles or Hendrix or something like that – you know, people who could just tie up all the loose ends and really come forging through.

"But there're still a lot of healthy aspects in British music, I would say, in relation to American music. I know there's a feeling – a feeling that the American music has got a lot stronger – but I still believe that the British musicians have it, you know. They just had to fight a lot harder to get it going and come through. They didn't have it really cushy to begin with, and I think that out of every struggle there's always a lot of sense to come through.

"What I mean is that I've always felt that there's far more conviction, especially in rock anyway, in people behind British music than there is in American."

AND WHAT ABOUT Zeppelin? In his sudden attack of optimism, did Page envisage what the future role of the band would be? Did he have an idea of what way to go? He hoped so, and said the next year would be spent working really hard and devoting a lot of time to writing, putting material down on tape and building a reference library.

"I don't know about new fans. It's hard to say. I think, really, when you're talking about new folk or whatever, you usually get those from singles, I think. By that, I mean to say that you've got more of a pushing power through the medium of radio and television, which we normally don't exploit in that sort of way.

"I mean, we're more into touring, doing dates, and coming across more with the environmental thing. Then the name gets spread by word of mouth. That's certainly what happened at the beginning.

"We don't write single material. It's got to sort of be within that three-minute time schedule. When we're writing things together, it's just a number that develops and is worked on and becomes a statement at that time, and then they get grouped together on an LP. It's not ever thought of as single material, and it would be a bit of a drag to have to start thinking that way."

Then what about a band like 10cc, who claim that they're an albums band and that they'll release a single if there is a suitable track on the album?

"With 10cc, I'm sure it's like a singles-orientated group. I would say so. I don't think they'd be pissed off if somebody said that. I'm sure they do think that way. If you get accustomed to bringing out a record, going on television, doing a spot there, getting airplay, you keep fulfilling that role, surely."

And television?

"It's a shame in a way that there isn't a programme that just goes into that area of bands who don't necessarily concentrate on singles. *The Old Grey Whistle Test* is the only one, as we well know."

So the only way for Led Zeppelin to get exposure in Britain is to play live. The last gigs here were the series of shows at Earls Court, London. Many fans were disenchanted that the appearances were confined to London, despite the travel facilities laid on for the occasion. What about a major British tour?

"But we can't," Page explained. "As far as criticism goes, we can't win over here. When we started doing bigger places, there was an outcry about Zeppelin deserting the Marquees, the Nottingham Boathouses, etc. So we did a tour of those and then it was (*his voice is raised in Muhammad Ali-style*): 'How selfish can they be to play in small pubs when people can't get in to see them?' I mean, you just can't win."

And until Robert Plant's leg injuries have fully healed, Zeppelin will be doing no touring. That might not be until the end of this year. But Page isn't too concerned about the lay-off. After spending the past year travelling, he can get some new music together during the forthcoming months.

"We've done a lot of constructive work in the period off the road. It's not as if we've retired." *Harry Doherty* •

Past, Presence & Future

"Life is simple"

RONNIE LANE might be rejoining the SMALL FACES, if his principles will allow it. On a Welsh farm, he recalls life on the road, and the problems the music business has with a genuine one-off. "If you don't fit into a pigeon hole," he says, "then you're an oddity."

— MELODY MAKER JANUARY 17 —

"THE ROMANS USED to mine lead over there. The lead still gets into the water and poisons the animals. This can be quite a dangerous place." Ronnie Lane, bubbling, effervescent, his face etched by the cares of the rock life, but undaunted and determined, swung the wheel of the grey Land Rover, as we trundled through the border country between England and Wales, heading for his home for the past two years.

The Ronnie Lane that the world knew as the cheery Small Face, or Rod Stewart's compatriot in the Faces, has travelled many miles before finding his ultimate destiny and happiness with his wife and kids on an ancient homestead in the wilds of Shropshire.

Now he lives in a cottage, where the water comes from a well at the top of the hill, and a wood fire burns in the grate, where his neighbours are scattered over the hills, and include folk like old Annie who is over 70 and snares rabbits, and comes around to tell unwritten fairy tales to Ronnie and Kate and their two kids.

Ronnie met me at Shrewsbury station, and drove the nine miles or so to the farm, waving at passers-by. "These are Border people," he explained. "They don't feel particularly Welsh or English, which makes them nicer, more independent."

The mountains began to grow on the horizon, with smoke from burning heather giving them a volcanic effect. As we passed the lead mines, from the main road to a narrow lane, Ronnie gave a yell: "See that bridge over the stream, well this is England… and *this* is Wales!"

The farmyard where Ronnie has been working on his new album for the past few months presented a remarkable scene. The cottage, untouched by tarty innovation or modernisation, nestled at the foot of the mountain.

In the yard stood, jammed amidst the churned-up mud and hay, the glistening, torpedo-like Lane mobile studio. »

WILLIAM CHRISTIE

Ronnie Lane at Fishpool Farm in Hyssington, near the Welsh/ English border

Country Lanes

"THE ROMANS used to mine lead over there. The lead still gets into

takes as we went along, but we never did."

"And we hadn't spent a lot of money. I didn't even have a car. Didn't even have a place to live."

There was time for a cup of tea in the cottage. The interior could have been untouched since the 1920s. Electric light, but all else was ancient, a plethora of antiquities, and knick-knacks. Old Annie sat (with her teeth in for visitors), talking to the children, while Ronnie's wife Kate brewed the tea. Charlie Hart, Ronnie's keyboard player with Slim Chance, smiled a cheerful greeting, and he was eventually cajoled into joining us for a lunch at the Castle Inn.

"We spent most of this year working on the album," Ronnie told me as we settled down at the inn. "We started around July. The album didn't take that long, but all the things that went wrong around the album took up the time. Circumstantials. Chris Thomas [producer], bless him, has been doing Roxy Music, and I thought he was leaving it a bit tight. He took on too much and couldn't make it with us. He was just whacked out. All sorts of stupid things went wrong. The boys stayed up here and we recorded it in the barn.

"It got dragged out," said Ronnie. "I didn't have any material ready when we started it. I got the band down to work on the rough demos of some of the ideas. Most of it we kept anyway, because it turned out all right. Then it needed sorting out, because some of it wasn't any good, obviously, when we had been down the pub."

Ronnie's famous mobile studio, the LMS, is a key factor in Ronnie's life, into which he has sunk most of his money. A shell-shaped object, which he proudly calls his space machine.

"It may be a complete fluke," he told me, "but the sound inside is just right because there aren't any corners, it's all rounded off. So many mobiles I've used before, not mentioning any names, the sound can be very flattering and you get your recordings into an ordinary studio to mix and it sounds terrible. Faces did that on the second album."

Ronnie says that Charlie was a great help to him in the preparation of *One For The Road*: "I have a few ideas I don't think much of, but when you hear the band play, it sounds all right – it's got possibilities and you take it from there. Charlie writes a little bit. Me and Charlie wrote some of the tunes together. He was a great help anyway. In a way the album has been a documentary on the last eight months."

What was the significance of titles like "Don't Try And Change My Mind" – was it a rebuke to those who might try to tell Ronnie how he should live and work?

"It's just about rotten me, really. I was trying to think commercially. People don't tell me what I should do, but they insinuate. They suggest all the time, and it gets on your tits after a while. It's all pigeon holes, ennit? If you don't fit into a pigeon hole, then you're an oddity."

Does it cause Ronnie any problems, leading his own life on the farm with the music business centre several hundred miles away in London?

"We're clashing all the time. Why do you think we're here? (*laughter*). If you're down in London, you sit in an office and they say, 'Well what are you doing?' And they don't know how you live. You'd get a far better idea looking around the farmyard for half an hour than you would sitting in London for three hours."

Was Ronnie looking forward to hitting the road again?

"Not particularly, no. I'll enjoy it when I do it, but the thought of leaving this place doesn't appeal to me . It's not as if I haven't done it before. If there wasn't so much travelling involved, it wouldn't be so bad. But the novelty of motorways has worn off. People don't realise – they think it's really easy. They forget you've been travelling all day. I love travelling, but it's transport we're talking about.

Then Ronnie surprised me: "I'd really like to go to America," he suddenly announced. "I've been away long enough. And it's changed over there. And I'd be going over there as smalltime again. That's a big change anyway. I've not been there since the Faces.

"If I've got any ambitions at all, I'd like to go on tour in humane conditions. I'd like to turn it into a life, instead of tearing about all the time, then sitting at home for a month with nothing to do. I don't think it has to be like that. That's the way it was with the Faces.

"A lot of people would rather do that – they'd like to kill 'emselves for six weeks and get as much money as they can. I don't see the point."

That was the way Ronnie worked in the Faces with Rod Stewart and with Steve Marriott in the Small Faces. Had he seen any of his old compatriots in recent times?

"Well I haven't seen Steve since November last. Yes, I know people have been talking about us getting together again. Well, I wouldn't mind, but it's a bit like going back to your old school, ain't it? I wouldn't mind visiting, but you wouldn't want to go back to school, would you?"

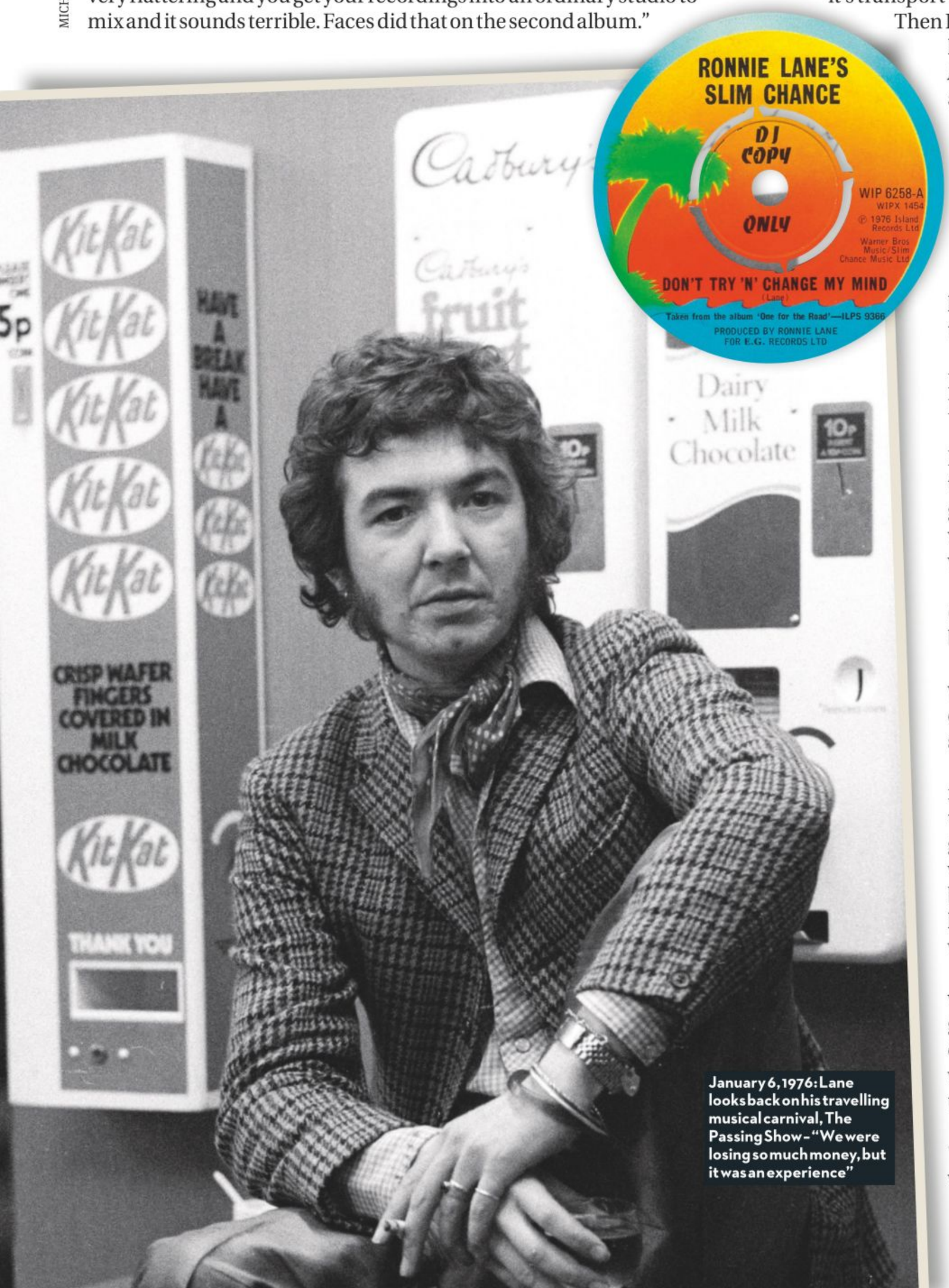
How did he feel about the reissue of *Ogdens' Nut Gone Flake*, the old Small Faces classic first put out by Immediate?

"Not much. No nostalgia – it's gone, ain't it? Yeah, it was all right. It's got a lot of holes in it. But when I was over in the States they were flogging it as if it was some sort of collectors' piece."

"Did you see The Passing Show?" Ronnie asks, referring to his unique but ill-fated '74 project. "I'm trying to talk EG [his management] into the fact that it's gotta be done again. Do you remember the clowns – the worst clowns in the world? I thought they were hilarious but nobody saw the point. The audience was just looking at 'em. They were total bullshit, they just came with the tent. We got as far as Scotland, and I fired 'em.

"The fire service was the hardest thing to contend with. We got to Bath and the guy wasn't going to let us go on because we only had four fire buckets. And the extinguisher wasn't good enough. So just before they were going to close the show, Bath Arts Council turned up and lent us a fire engine. Should have seen it.

"Next time the fire inspector turned up we said, 'We've got our own fire engine, it's round the back.' So we took him round and there were a couple of geezers



MICHAEL PUTLAND / GETTY

January 6, 1976: Lane looks back on his travelling musical carnival, The Passing Show – "We were losing so much money, but it was an experience"

with long hair, standing there in old jeans with fire helmets on, looking all pale and wan, by this bleeding old fire engine. So we snapped our fingers – show 'em, boys! And this miserable squirt of water came out the hose. The inspector walked off shaking his head – he'd had enough. He let the show go on. So we thought – what a great ruse and talked 'em into coming round the country with us on their fire engine. As it turned out, the fire engine was the biggest fire risk on the show. It kept blowing up.

"It was really fantastic – we had a lorry towing a lorry, towing a caravan; a Range Rover towing a bus, towing a caravan. And the law used to come along and they couldn't believe this… *thing* coming along. So we had a ruse, we had a tent man called Captain Hill, a total pirate, big geezer with a red beard. And whenever we got pulled up by the law, we'd snake up, all over the road, jamming the road both ways, and this geezer would get out and start arguing. The law would see this jam building up and shout, 'Get going, get going!' And we got away with it. There were only three trucks working in the end.

"It's funny to talk about it now, but I was upset at the time, something shocking. The first few weeks, my mind did bend. I felt so helpless, and after the third week I gave up anyway. We were losing so much money – but it was an experience. We tried to correct the mistakes as we went along, but we never did."

Would he do it again? "Maybe, but it wouldn't be done like that. It was a very romantic idea, it was all lovely and sounded great. In actual fact it wasn't. Unless you really want to do it, it's 'ard. It was still much more of a life than pulling into a bleeding hotel.

"You start living like the bourgeoisie, 'cos they've got a lot of money. They live in big houses with huge mortgages, buy huge cars, and the lifestyle is not particularly comfortable for them, but they feel it's necessary. And then they end up running to keep up this life style, because they're terrified. If it's taken away from them, they'll be devastated.

"It's happened to a lot of people I've known. But you can't give a lot of these people advice – not in the pop business. They think they know everything. I don't like musicians myself. I don't count myself as a musician.

"They take on this bleeding title 'musician' and they know everything. If you're a 'musician' you're supposed to act like something special. It's a load of bollocks – I've had enough of it with the people I've worked with in the last two years, let alone the eight years before that. Once you can play an instrument – it seems you can do this that and the other, and I don't know who made these rules, but there's a lot of people living by 'em."

Was Ronnie talking about professionalism?

"No… see… if you've made it, you're supposed to look such and do such. You're expected to live in a big mansion, and live out the public's dream. Pigeon 'oles."

How long did it take Ronnie to discover he didn't like the way things were – in the pop business, f'rinstance?

"It was a very slow process (*silence*) … maybe I shouldn't shout so loud, 'cos I went through the same thing as everyone else. It's just that some people that are older should know better. When I was a kid it was all right. I suppose it began when I was happy, with the lady, and the kids. And also I thought, 'This can't go on forever, and I don't want it to go on forever.' I wasn't going anywhere. And yet I get this feeling that I'm looked upon as an oddity."

Ronnie had experienced all the pop life style when he was 15-16…

"I was 18," corrected Ronnie. "It's not only this business, it goes on everywhere. It depends on the individual capacity to grow up, I suppose. Or to grow down, one of the two."

"When we started the Faces it was just for a loon. And then they had to turn it into something else. All the rock bands turned into the very thing they were supposed to be kicking against. It all became an industry, and that's what really nauses me. It really does. Because a lot of these people earn enough money, and have a big enough pulling power and enough popularity to actually do something and turn it on its head. What do they do? Oh. They'll play the game. And perpetuate stagnation. Anything that kicks the cobwebs down is all right by me.

"Did you know that when the Small Faces folded up we were left 30 grand in debt?" Ronnie asked. "And we hadn't spent a lot of money. I didn't even have a car. Didn't even have a place to live."

When we finally arrived back at Fishpool Farm again, where the wind howled off the mountain, there was just time to hear the album before a taxi would come from Shrewsbury to whisk me back to the railhead and the life of a city slicker.

We plunged somewhat uncertainly out into the teeth of a gale that had blown down a great pile of corrugated iron lying in the yard. With a great crashing, Ronnie threw it back against a shed. Finally we made the mobile, and undergoing a pantomime transformation scene, we found ourselves in a technological wonderland. Soft lights, carpets and a battery of controls and humming machinery.

"What do yer think? It's my spaceship. Welcome, my name is Dr Who." Ronnie settled back with his glass and began to wax philosophic. "This life is very simple. It's as simple as you wish to make it. It's also as complicated as you wish to make it.

"I'll tell you something – now everyone's gone – between you and me, life *is* as simple as you want to make it, and as complicated, and I'm doing both at the moment, which I don't like. I'm trying to make it simple, but all the time it gets more complicated."

Surely the studio was a world of complications?

"No, no, it's a very simple room. There's a machine, a bunch of noise reductors and the ultimate product. This is a very simple machine. Ah, yer bastard!"

This latter remark was not addressed to me, but to the simple tape machine that had just cut Ronnie's finger. "Look," he cried, pointing at the bespattered tape spool. "Blood on the tracks."

As the tape of the album began to roll and the strains of "Don't Try And Change My Mind" filled the mobile, all Ronnie's mock cynicism rolled away, and his eyes shone and a beatific smile glowed as he listened to the sustained jangle of the mandolin. You could see he was knocked out with the way the band had treated his song, and was getting high on the robust music. "That's the single, actually."

As the album progressed, it seemed to me that several of the other tracks could make singles. But Ronnie fixed me with a serious gaze. "A single? I'll tell you something, mate. I don't care. I've got some good management now. If they want to make something of it – good luck. (*Pause*) I'm tired of this business – I ain't tired of myself, or life. Just this business. I'm tired of it all – why shouldn't I be? I still enjoy playing – it's the only thing I know.

"I'm not complaining; I'm just saying I've had enough. I'm not bitter, no. That's pretty negative. You see – I ain't got any money left. All I've got is credibility, which seems to be worth money. So I'm gambling on my credibility, for a project that I really want to do.

"And it's a game that I'm getting tired of. I had it all with the Small Faces, and the Faces. The Faces paid off in the end, but now, I'm not sure if people want to hear my music. I don't know what sells or gets in the charts. If this is a competition, then I ain't in the running.

"I'll tell you something. This is just an album. It's no big deal – just a bunch of songs. But these days you're supposed to make a big deal out of it. But I've got no big speech to make. I live the way I do, and if I can't make this business into my life, then I'll leave it. I really will. I'm giving it another six months."

You're determined?

"I'm determined to live my life." *Chris Welch* •

> "They take on this bleedin' title 'musician' and they know everything"

"Follow that"

PAUL McCARTNEY is in receipt of an enormous offer to reform The Beatles. Why would he, though, when WINGS are on the road. "I talked to John [Lennon] the other night," he says. "And we never talked about the reunion or about the offer. The bugger didn't mention it."

— MELODY MAKER MARCH 27 —

"I'M NOT GOING to be blackmailed into going." No, Paul wasn't talking about the much-publicised and debated reunion of The Beatles. Nor even the Wings tour of America. He was in the throes of attempting to opt out of a dinner invitation, pressed home with persistence by one of the throng milling at a West End hotel last week.

Paul, Linda, and Wings were on the loose in a suite where sandwiches piled up around bottles of beer. DJs tripped over journalists in the merry-go-round of interviews at a press conference convened only hours before the band were due to depart on their first dates of 1976. "Look, I'm off to Copenhagen tomorrow and I've got to get some sleep." "But we'd be thrilled if you came…"

Well it was a private conversation, but it underlined the kind of pressures still exerted on the famous ones of rock. Paul extracted himself from the situation with a mixture of firmness and diplomacy born of long practice.

For just a few seconds the warning signals flashed and you could sense the old Liverpudlian cutting edge being honed and made ready, and remembered the days when all four Beatles were ready to cut through cant if threatened or surrounded.

But Paul relaxed and seemed eager and happy to talk about the new Wings album *Wings At The Speed Of Sound*, with an enthusiasm and courtesy that is rare among lesser talents than McCartney's. He was even prepared to comment on the $25 million offer currently being made by US promoter Bill Sargent to re-form The Beatles despite his having made clear in the past that his interest is now in Wings and not the past.

But first he discussed Wings' recent adventures.

"We had fab fun in Australia," said Paul, slipping into Mersey Mania dialogue. "It was the first real tour we'd done for a while. »

GETTY

Wings in 1976: (l–r) Joe English, Linda McCartney, Paul McCartney, Denny Laine, Jimmy McCulloch

WINGS AT THE SPEED OF SOUND

"The audiences were great and we just dug playing. It was more like a holiday."

What happened about the trip to Japan that was cancelled when the Japanese authorities wouldn't let them in due to an old dope-smoking offence?

"It was the minister of justice's fault. I suppose he'd say it was my fault for having smoked some of the deadly weed. But we had our visas signed by the London Japanese embassy. Everything had been cleared, David Bailey was coming over to do a film and we were in Australia, just about a week out from going to Japan, when a little note arrived saying sorry, the Japanese minister of justice says 'No'.

"They're still old-fashioned out there. There's a generation gap and the wrong end of the gap is in the Ministry Of Justice, as it is here. The older folks see a great danger in allowing in an alien who has admitted smoking marijuana, and supposedly they're trying to stamp it out, using all the wrong methods as usual."

Did Paul feel angry about being barred?

"Oh yeah, a bit over the top. It was just one of those things, but we felt a bit sick about it. It's so short-sighted."

After the Australian tour they sent a televised version of their show to Japan.

"We did the TV show for all the people who couldn't get in to see us in Australia because some of the tickets were going for Sinatra prices.

"And we immediately got a print of it up to Japan, so that the weekend we were supposed to have arrived, they had a big TV show and they turned it round into a big current affairs programme, too, with an hour and a half of people discussing the merits of marijuana.

"In a way we had become martyrs for the cause, which is a drag."

With all this travelling, when did Paul get time to start working on the album?

"We fit it in, y'know… We did Australia, and then because Japan didn't come off, we had a great holiday, and as Hawaii was on the way back we stopped there and I got the album together in my head.

"We'd done a little bit of recording in September and then had Christmas off. We started on the album in January or February – sometime – I'm a bit hazy. The album didn't take too long – it could have been done a lot quicker. We didn't rush it, but let the ideas blossom.

"There were a few things I especially wanted to do. I had a song for Denny written and a few other tunes I definitely wanted to do and got those down. And then there were a few I didn't really know what to do with. I put a backing track down, then got the idea of getting Joe English to do it, because he's got a very good voice.

"Linda's got this track, 'Cook Of The House', so I thought it would be good to give one to Joe as well. He said, 'Oh, er, well OK.' And when he'd done it we were all surprised. He can sing well, can't he? But it's nothing to what he could do, but that's down to the future.

"And Denny I obviously wanted to get going and cooking a bit, because I like the idea of giving him a push. The band came together a couple of weeks ago for rehearsals down at Elstree, and the nice thing is there is a song called 'Silly Love Songs', which has a brass bit which the brass players in the band worked out in the studio.

"They can really get behind it, because it's their bit. We also used two euphoniums on 'Warm And Beautiful', but those are session guys."

Was it Paul's intention with this album to bring the members of Wings forward as much as possible?

"That's always the object with anything I do, and to try and get out of a rut and do something different. When I was in Jamaica, I heard a reggae record which featured a trombone all on its own. It sounded daft and fruity and I filed it away at the back of my mind that I'd love to use a trombone.

"And, of course, we have Tony Dorsey, who plays trombone for us, so we could use it as a solo instrument on the album."

What was the origin of the doorbell used to introduce 'Let 'Em In', the album's first track? Were they the McCartney household chimes?

"Well, as it happens, it is our actual doorbell which our drummer bought us, so it has a group significance. And it seemed a good introduction to the album."

Did Paul want to involve himself in a theme, like *Venus And Mars*?

"Well, it wasn't really a theme on *Venus And Mars*, actually. No, I didn't think at all of themes. I thought of a bunch of tunes… There is a theme to it once you've heard it a few times, a sort of family, love-ish, warm-ish feel. Well, I can never analyse me own stuff."

Was he steeling himself for criticism?

"Waal – you know, this time… You take it differently each time. I sit there and think, 'It's gonna be great reviews this time,' and you are disappointed if there is one bad one.

"But this time I'm just thinking, 'I'm getting on with it, I've just made a record, let them get on with it.' I hope they like it, but if the reviewers don't, well, I hope the people like it."

Will Paul incorporate many of the new songs in the show?

"Because it's a very new album and we're off to Europe, it's a bit soon for anybody to have heard much of the stuff. So we've only got three of the songs in – 'Beware My Love', 'Silly Love Songs' and 'Let 'Em In', all uptempo. We've got plenty of rehearsal time before we actually play America, and by that time the album will be better known. We're not going to pre-judge, we'll see what numbers people like."

> "We just ran wires into the kitchen. Take one: bacon frying"

It seemed to me that "Silly Love Songs" was an obvious single.

"Yeah, that seems to be the one people are talking about. But we've released the album before any singles, mainly because the radio stations haven't been told what is our preference and they can decide for themselves.

"And they'll play various cuts and see which rises to the surface. 'Silly Love Songs' is the one we're thinking of at the moment.

"Another surprise for me was 'Warm And Beautiful'. It's no way a single, but 'Yesterday' wasn't single material. It's in that vein though. A nice song."

What was the origin of 'Cook Of The House' – Linda's speciality in raunchy rock'n'roll?

"Well, we were in Adelaide and rented a house to stay at rather than a hotel. And after the gig each night, Linda and I would get dropped off and sit up in the kitchen and have a late-night bite.

"They had these pots of sage and onion – all the condiments of the season – that's a joke that, condiments of the season."

Oh, er, delayed *MM* laughter as slow-witted journalist entirely fails to spot jest.

"Well, all this stuff was lined up, and it was a kind of freak song, and I took everything I saw and tried to work it into the song. Every line in the song was actually in that kitchen."

What were the sizzling noises heard in the introduction?

"We went round to our house with the mobile unit and Linda decided to cook a meal and get cooking sounds recorded, and then fed the meal to us and the engineers.

"We all had a laugh and a drink. The mobile was outside the house and we just ran wires into the kitchen. 'Take one. Bacon frying.' The first British cooking on record.

"There are chips at the end, which is great because it sounds like applause. If you get any letters to Any Questions, you can tell readers it was an E flat bacon pan and Selmer chips.

"The song is very high school orientated because that was Linda's scene as a kid in America. Of course, we didn't have any of that dating and taking chicks out in cars at the age of 17.

"The most we had was a hop on the back of a tandem, and we'd have records in the classroom at the end of term. I remember one day when the guy in the Remo Four brought a guitar, I brought a guitar, George brought in his guitar and we went into the history room, Cliff Edge's room.

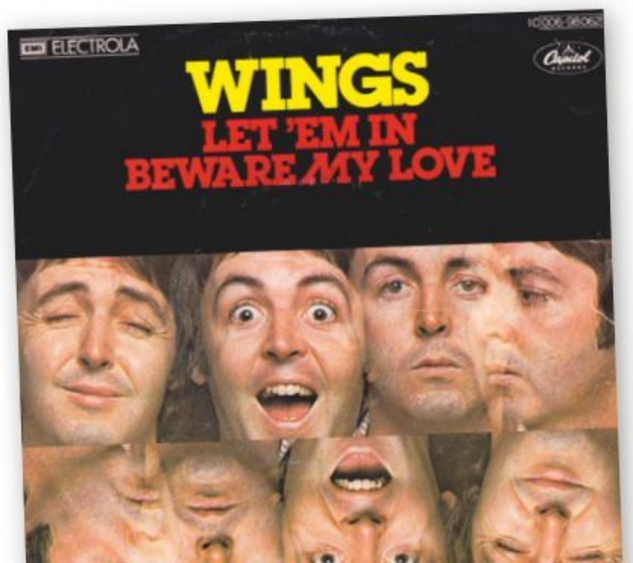
"The teacher's name was Mr Edge, see. I remember doing 'Long Tall Sally' and all the old stuff, and that was the nearest we ever got to a high-school hop."

Why not get Wings to do an album of old pop hits?

"Listen – now don't get me on projects. There are so many of those to do. I've got a head full of that. A Buddy Holly album, an album of old pop tunes – there are millions of ideas like that."

But how about the hits of the '70s?

"I know what you mean, but it hasn't happened yet."



May 3, 1976: Paul McCartney and Wings in concert in Fort Worth, Texas

Were there any major projects for Paul in the coming year other than the Wings tours?

"Well, no. We go to Europe and America, and then we haven't got anything planned, just some breather time. But Wings is growing, and it surprises me in a way because I half-expected it not to happen. It was a question of follow that, after The Beatles.

"But it's established and the main thing is we are enjoying playing, and can get off on it, which is a great advantage over a lot of older groups. As Denny says, 'It's a great group.' The old feeling."

Does Paul get tired about being asked about the Beatles reunion?

"I don't mind – as I say, at the moment we are definitely going on a tour of America with Wings, and that's a nice thing I'm looking forward to. But I don't count out anything else.

"Maybe in America one night, we'll loon down to a studio with someone," said Paul noncommitally. "I'm just playing it by ear. The main thing about this huge offer… THE HUGE OFFER… well the man's an embarrassment.

"If I were a fellow back in Liverpool aged 18 doing me first job, well I'd think, 'Nobody can refuse that, can they? It's just too much money.' Even if we were terrible it would be worth it – right?

"Well for me, the trouble is, I've always been so proud of The Beatles thing and the embarrassment of the thing is that so much money is being offered, most people in the world would say, 'You have to accept.'

"But for me the thing is that for a thing like that to actually happen I wouldn't want it that way, 'cos of money. It's what people said when we split up. All the wiseacres, all the Jack The Lads – 'Well they'll be back soon enough, as soon as they feel the pinch.'

"I hate that that's what it's come to. It's a drag and, for me, the main truth about the whole thing is I know as much about this offer as you know. Exactly what's in the papers, and the telegram I've received from this man Bill Sargent. Er – now I haven't had any other communication besides that from anyone. You can talk to the other three about it.

"In fact, I talked to John the other night. Just happened to be talking to him on the phone. We chatted for about an hour and a half – he was in New York. We just chatted and rambled, about politics, whatever we were interested in.

"A natter. And we never once mentioned the reunion or the offer. I thought about it after we got off the phone. We just didn't even mention it. John didn't say, 'Well what do you think?' So that's where it's at for me. It's a funny one. I understand how most people in the world think we'd have to accept it.

"For me, the only way The Beatles could come back together again would be if we wanted to do something musically, not lukewarm just to get the money. You could do it to make a lot of money, but it would be the wrong motive, and this is what bugs me. I really don't want to do a thing that was always for the right motives – and The Beatles were for the right motives – and make it a total cop-out.

"It would ruin the whole Beatles thing for me. If the four of us were really keen on the idea, or something in the next year makes us keen on it, or I just talk to the others and find out that they are really keen secretly, then I must feel I ought to do something about it.

"But not having talked about it at all – as I say, we talked on the phone for an hour and didn't even mention it. And I'd read the papers which said John Lennon was the hottest on this.

"And I spoke to the bugger and he didn't even mention it. Where do you go from there?" *Chris Welch* •

RICHARD E AARON / GETTY

McCartney: pressure cooking

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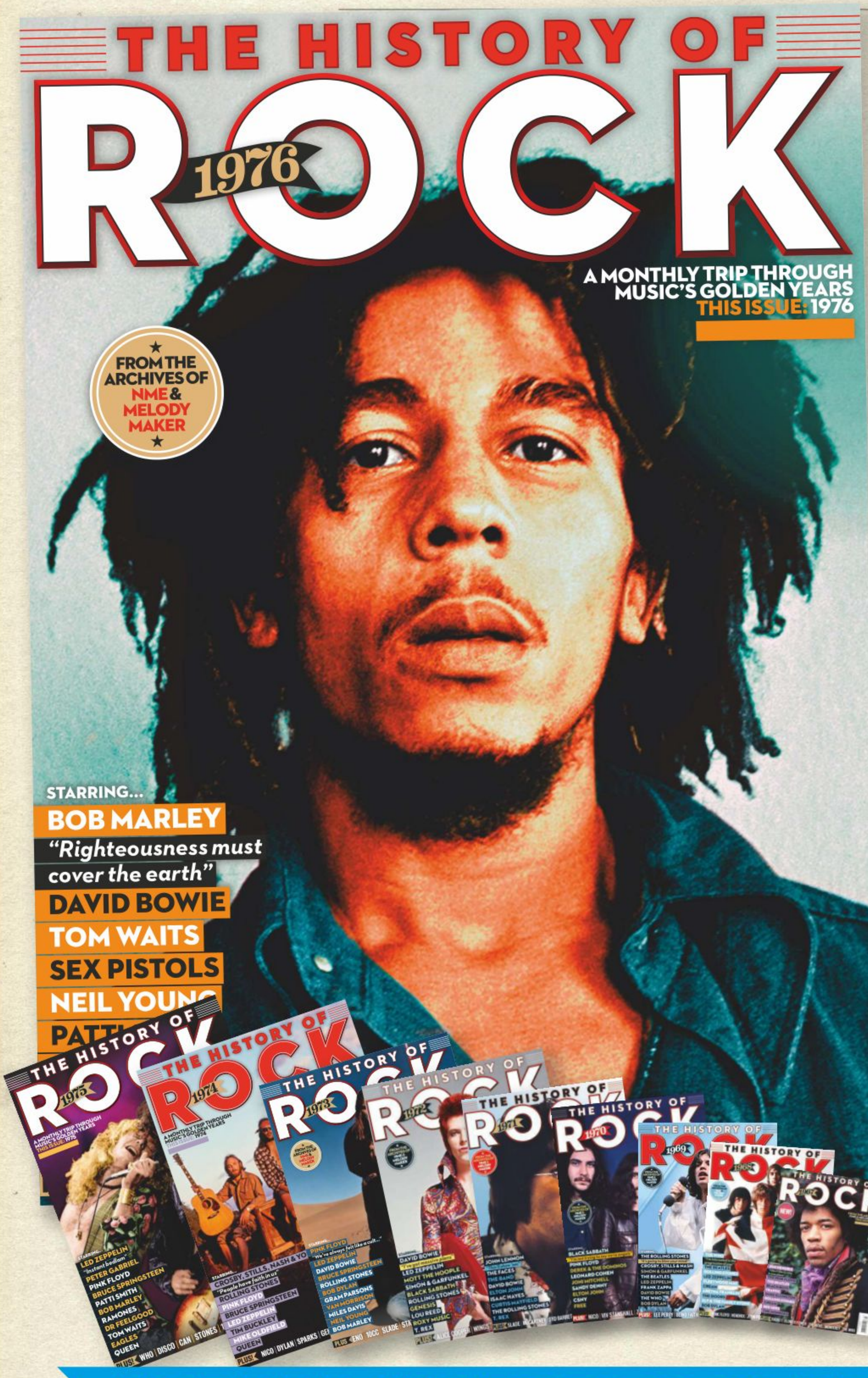

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NEED ANY BACK ISSUES? SEE PAGE 144

Readers' letters

MM JAN–MAR Pay up, Percy, "rockified" reggae and a string-driven thing.

He went of his own accord

LP WINNER!

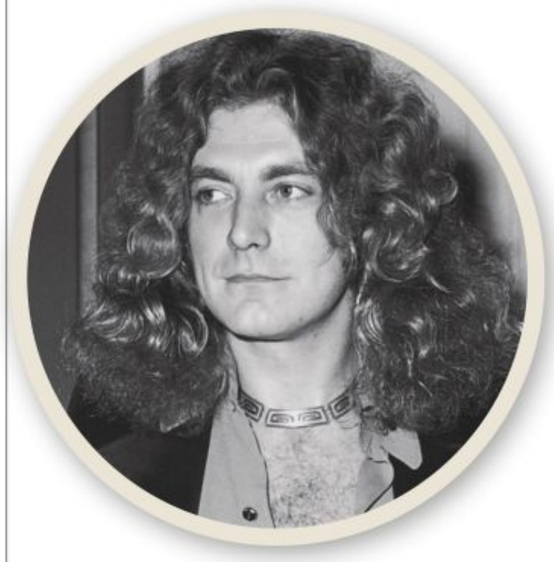
Robert Plant's remarks about the British tax laws in your last issue sickened and disgusted me. He seems to believe that the primary motive for creating music is financial and to have an inflated opinion of his own worth and relevance.

The creation of music should be essentially an act of giving, the imparting and sharing of emotional responses. But Plant seems to view it as a manufacturing process with one ear tuned to the sound of the cash till. Has he forgotten that some people still play music just for fun, and that some of his fellow superstars use their privileged positions to help the less fortunate? On the same page as Plant's outburst, for instance, it was announced that Elton John intends to tour for charity.

In addition, if it is true that most rock stars find their work enjoyable and satisfying, they simply do not deserve the huge financial rewards they receive.

Is Plant seriously trying to tell us that he could not live and work in Great Britain and earn as much after tax as the average coal worker or nurse, who works just as hard, and performs just as useful a service for the community as he does? If self-centred superstars feel they must live abroad for tax reasons all you can really say is – good riddance.

CHRIS DURSTON, Grove Road, Emmer Green, Reading (*MM*, Feb 21)



FOTOS INTERNATIONAL / GETTY

Uncivil rights movement

LP WINNER!

I am amazed at the decision of the Performing Rights Society to ask for royalties for records played in shops and I wonder whether anyone has had the sense to calculate the amount they would get, and weigh it against the money they will inevitably lose by lost sales?

I, like many others, am prepared to buy albums by lesser-known bands, providing I can at least hear some of what they do, but if this goes ahead my record shop will not play an album, I won't buy it, and everybody loses, not least the young up-and-coming bands who have so little exposure anyway.

Take away that element and yet another nail will be hammered into the coffin of our musical future.

GRAHAM TRUFFET, Corn Close, South Normanton, Derbyshire. (*MM*, Jan 31)

Rock and a jah place

The signing by Virgin Records of Peter Tosh, The Mighty Diamonds and U-Roy may not prove to be "a major boost for reggae" if Richard Branson has his way.

He says: "We want to break them as artists who can appeal to both white and black audiences."

If this means their product will be subtly altered to become a kind of rock reggae, then it would be no boost at all.

What has happened to Bob Marley is a pointer. His live LP shows he was playing this rock-orientated reggae with less emphasis on drum and bass and more lead guitar.

What would be good for reggae is if more white people could grow to appreciate the real, unadulterated roots reggae.

LOU CAZEAU, Bulwer Road, Barnet, Herts (*MM*, Feb 7)

Although empathising with Lou Gazeau's sentiments (last week's Mailbag) regarding the increasing "rockification" of reggae, it's worth stressing that while our intention is to popularise our Jamaican artists, they are under no pressure to provide us with anything contrary to their wishes and simply send us finished masters for release.

If all he is protesting against is the welcome now being afforded to what was previously regarded as an ethnic backwater, then he and anyone else who wanted to keep it to themselves is going to be extremely disappointed in the months to come.

AL CLARK, Virgin Records, London W11 (*MM*, Feb 21)

Original issue

What a lot of bickering we've had lately. The "Are 10cc and/or Queen original?" argument seems to me to miss the point of music altogether. If people want to be subjective, let them be so honestly.

PET HILLS, Fennets Road, High Wycombe, Bucks (*MM*, Jan 24)

Star in the making?

Your article in last week's *MM*, "Those We Have Loved", interested me. The item that really caught my attention concerned your correspondent's review of Big Star's *Radio City* album. He concludes with the information that both Chris Bell and Alex Chilton were recording in New York during the summer.

What he didn't say was that Chris Bell spent most of last year in London, where he made several tapes at his own expense. While his brother, David, was trying to attract the interest of record companies here and being cold-shouldered for his pains, Chris was trying his luck as a solo artist and was getting very much the same kind of treatment from the "know-it-all" folk club organisers on the London circuit.

Every Wednesday night from May to August, Chris was playing as an unpaid resident singer at the Half Moon, Putney, and was turning in some pretty solid performances, too. He also did some gigs backing an American folk singer by the name of Jim Lord.

Finally, I take issue with your correspondent's review of *Radio City*, which he says "was the better of their first couple of albums." I prefer *No 1 Record*. This was a far stronger collection of songs which reached a screaming climax with Bell's "Don't Lie To Me".

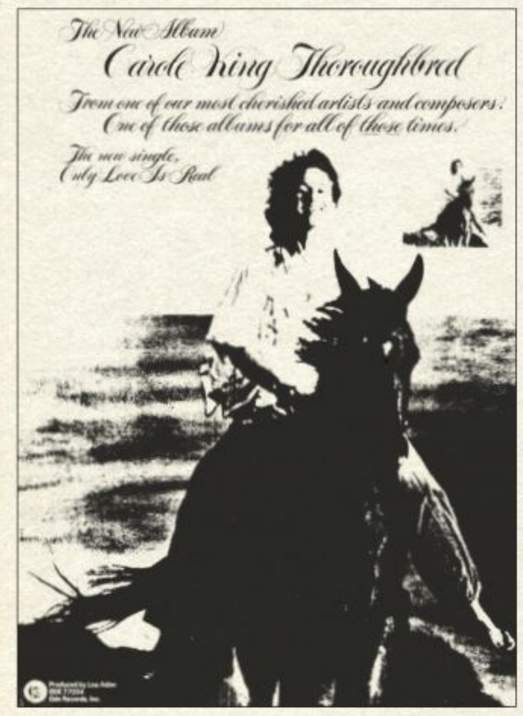
PETER HOLDFORTH, Munster Road, London, SW6 (*MM*, Feb 21)

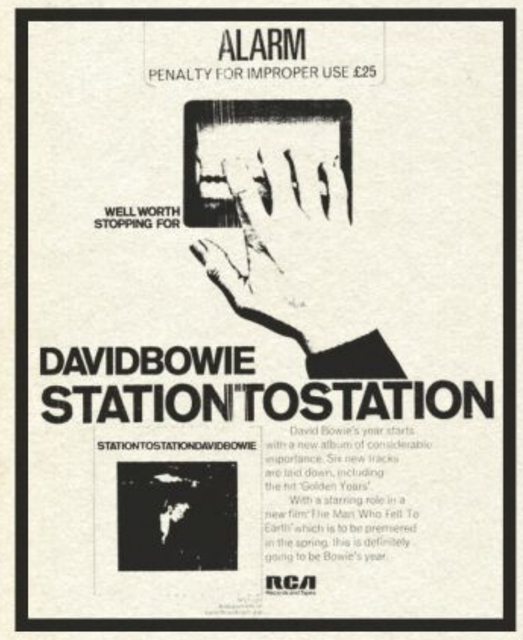
Fiddle about

I have long been driven to ecstasy by the magnificent fiddling of Horslips' Charles O'Connor playing straight rock, then Irish traditional and returning again to rock. Now, on the new Dylan album *Desire*, I go crazy over the superb violin of Scarlet Rivera.

The axemen have had their day. It's time that horsehair, rosin and sound-posts came into their own. Viva Vivaldi!

D CAMPBELL, Knock Road, Belfast (*MM*, Feb 14)





1976

APRIL – JUNE

NEIL YOUNG, THIN LIZZY, KISS, ROLLING STONES, BOB MARLEY AND MORE

Surprised and shocked

MM APR 3 David Bowie appears in court, charged with possession of marijuana.

DAVID BOWIE APPEARED in court at Rochester, in Upstate New York, on Thursday, pleading not guilty to charges of possessing marijuana in his hotel suite in the town after a concert there last weekend. Fans mobbed him as he arrived at the courthouse.

Also pleading not guilty to the charge were two members of his touring party, James Osterberg and Duane Vaughans, who were apparently in Bowie's suite when two women narcotics agents, apparently attending a party in the room, revealed their identity and arrested all three men.

The case was adjourned until April 20, and the three defendants were permitted to remain free on $2,000 bail each.

After the case, Bowie was besieged by news reporters and he appeared on film on the Channel Five news later in the day, expressing his satisfaction in the way he had been treated by the police.

Asked by one reporter whether or not there was any truth in a rumour that the marijuana may have been planted by a former business associate, Bowie looked surprised and shocked at the suggestion and declined to comment.

On Friday night, Bowie played Madison Square Garden and a small party was held afterwards at the Penn Plaza Club, the private lounge within the Garden.

REX FEATURES

March 25, 1976: three days after his arrest and overnight detention in Monroe County Jail – and concerts in Springfield, Massachusetts, and New Haven, Connecticut – Bowie has his mugshot taken before pleading not guilty to drug charges at Rochester City Court

1976

APRIL – JUNE

The Beach Boys sail on in '76: (l–r) Dennis Wilson, Carl Wilson, Al Jardine, Mike Love and Brian Wilson

"Most of the album will be Brian"

MM APR 3 Dennis Wilson explains the Beach Boys renaissance and the return of Brian Wilson to active duty. "I am dumbfounded at him. I am in awe of him."

A NEW STUDIO ALBUM is in the works, Brian Wilson is back in business and The Beach Boys are planning to visit England in late summer.

These were the main points to come out of a chat with Dennis Wilson, who passed through New York last week to spread the word that The Beach Boys are no longer going to rely on their golden oldies to maintain their current status as a major concert attraction in the US.

Over the past three years, the group has found a change of fortune here. While they were considered unfashionable at the turn of the decade and early '70s, The Beach Boys have made a comeback of great proportions, helped not a little by Capitol, their old record company, releasing a couple of double albums comprising numerous Beach Boys hits during the summers of 1974 and 1975.

Two other factors have helped them reattain their status as a major touring band. After years of management problems, they were taken over two years ago by James William Guercio, the rock mogul who owns Caribou Studios in Colorado, manages Chicago and had a lifelong desire to join The Beach Boys. He played bass with the group for a while and handled their affairs with superb strategy.

Also The Beach Boys were suddenly befriended by a whole host of other, more successful groups, whose Good Samaritan attitude hoisted them back on the concert trail.

They toured with Chicago in a double bill last year, were invited by Elton John to play at Wembley in London, and found themselves playing massive arenas with such top drawers as Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young.

And while all this was going on, they had no current record to plug, only the classics of the '60s and a few songs from *Holland*, their last album for Warner Brothers.

But: "We're doing a new studio album which we hope will be out in June," said Dennis. "We've been working on and off on the album for about nine months, and the personnel includes the original Beach Boys, including Brian.

"He has already recorded six cuts with us, and the way it looks is that most of the album will be Brian, although there's one song of my own that may get on.

"Actually, we've put together something like 40-odd tracks over the past few years but never released them. I guess you could call the songs rather like choral religious music that moves into rock'n'roll later.

"What we want is an album where every track is great, no low spots, a total concept that we can be proud of."

It must be hard shaking off the oldies image and getting down to new material, especially as the old material was finding a new life with new fans?

"On the new tour that's coming up we will be doing the new stuff as well as some old material," said Dennis. "There will always be people wanting to hear the older tunes. I don't get bored with them... they're fun.

"I have to say, though, that I get tired of playing some of the old tunes, but many of them are timeless to me.

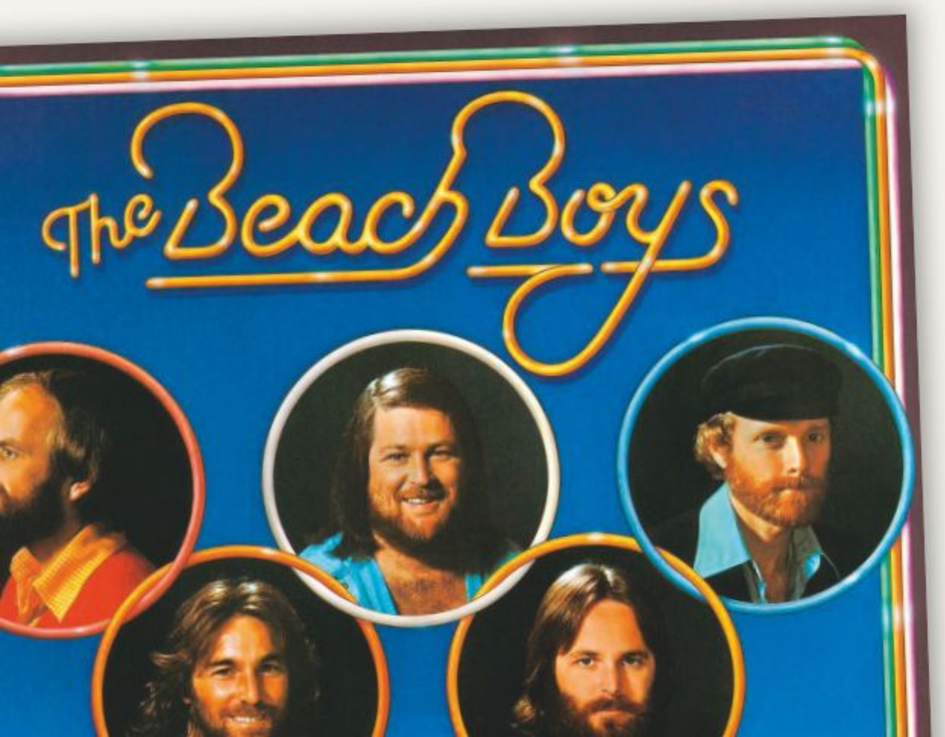
"As a musician you can let go with them instead of making them sound contrived. You can play them in a new way each time and bring in little variations."

"You could call the songs rather like choral religious music that moves into rock and roll"

Nevertheless, it's the old tunes that have brought about the Beach Boys renaissance. "There was a time, long ago, when The Beach Boys were a very big touring group. Then, after a while, there was a time when it was uncool to be into The Beach Boys.

"Somehow The Beach Boys didn't fit at one period, but now... well, I guess we're just fitting again. It's not uncool to like The Beach

GETTY



Boys any more. Personally I've always liked them," he says, laughing.

"But that is a fact," continues Wilson, serious again. "The group really wasn't hot at one time, and the record sales weren't hot, but we got back on to the concert trail and changed things around. It was hard work, but worth the effort because we're very respected now."

Wilson argues that the increased touring activity was primarily responsible for the enormous sales of *Endless Summer* and *Spirit Of America*, rather than the other way round.

"There were problems with Warner Brothers but we couldn't help that," said Wilson. "We were drawing 100,000 people to concerts yet they couldn't move our more recent albums at all.

"I'm sure a lot of people had never heard the group until those records came out. I see 14-year-olds at the shows who were not even born when we started."

And Jim Guercio's influence? "Well, I think we were already coming back as a concert band when he joined us, but we have a great respect for him and we also like Chicago's music.

"I think that now The Beach Boys represent the truth in the creative sense instead of the pop sense. There's no hustle to get the three or four albums out in a year, just a desire to create something meaningful... and that's why there's been this delay in putting out a new album."

Having consolidated their position again, Wilson says the group intend to relax live appearances in favour of the studio in future. "It may sound funny, but I want to concentrate the next 10 years on making albums. As a Beach Boy I want to stay with them and stand behind Brian, being a tool for his disposal for the rest of my life no matter whether it's music or mowing his lawn for him.

"He is a master, musically. I am dumbfounded at him. I am in awe of him. I've grown up with him and watched him go through changes, and he is the most vulnerable human being I know. The depth of that guy... I mean... he changed the world with his influence.

"When you sing on something like 'In My Room' and then sit back and listen to what he's done, not just with my part, but with the song... then you realise. I'm devoting my life to Brian on a musical level, and the rest of the group all feel the same way. When Brian plays something for us, we just gape. It gets very emotional."

Last year The Beach Boys opened their own studio in Los Angeles, a studio that Dennis describes as the best in the world. It is available to others for hire, but so far its only incumbents have been the group themselves, clustered around Brian Wilson, shaking down harmonies that he's written.

"Brian is like a little kid in the studio, like a kid who's just discovered sex for the first time. He rushes around playing this and that, and telling us to play this and that. The enthusiasm he still has is infectious, really."

Chris Charlesworth

"Additional work together"

MM JUN 12 Bowie, Eno, Fripp and Iggy Pop set to collaborate?

DAVID BOWIE WILL probably work with Eno and Robert Fripp this autumn – recording a new Iggy Pop album in Canada. And there are plans for further projects involving Bowie, Eno and Fripp. The idea for the joint project arose after Bowie had been quoted extensively in American papers earlier this year expressing admiration for Eno and Fripp's work. In particular Bowie singled out *Another Green World* – Eno's third solo album.

Eno contacted Bowie and sent him a copy of *Another Green World* and Bowie responded with the suggestion of working together alongside Robert Fripp, who has recorded two albums with Eno, *No Pussyfooting* and *Evening Star*.

Bowie worked with Iggy Pop on his album *Raw Power* and since then Iggy has been Bowie's constant touring companion.

"The original idea," explained a spokesman "was that Eno and Fripp would collaborate with Bowie in putting out an album for Iggy. But is also looks likely that Eno, Bowie and Fripp will do some additional work together."

Bowie and Eno agreed on going ahead with it at the Empire Pool, and although no contracts have been signed as yet, there's little doubt that it will go ahead in Canada this autumn.

Iggy Pop: plans to record an album in Canada

"It's their own fault"

MM JUN 26 The Greater London Council bans ELO's arsenal of lasers.

THE ELECTRIC LIGHT Orchestra were banned from using a laser light show at their sell-out concert in London's New Victoria Theatre on Sunday. The lasers, which are part of the band's full US touring equipment, were deemed too dangerous by the Greater London Council. The concert, which was filmed by a London Weekend Television crew for a one-hour Mike Mansfield special, opened with an announcement from stage that, contrary to the programme advertisements, there would be no lasers. The announcer apologised for the lack of lights and explained that it was through a directive by the GLC that they would not be there.

Later, Jeff Lynne, ELO founder, lead singer and guitarist, broke off midway through the show to apologise yet again. "We'll do a better show than usual," he promised "to make up for not having the lasers."

A spokesman for the GLC told the *MM* this week that certain guidelines had been laid down by the council to govern laser use. He added that their first experience of lasers in entertainment for the council was in 1971 and since then engineers from the council have sought advice from authorities throughout the country on safety guidelines. The ELO concert, he said, contravened some of these conditions. "We try to go out of our way to accommodate people, but we do need time to check if their lasers are set up in accordance with the rules. In fact they didn't seek permission to use lasers and when it was established they were using them, the group didn't even give us any details of their lasers. We look for something like 10 days' notice for use of lasers, but when you're only given 12 hours or so there's not a great deal we can do really. We are sorry they couldn't use lasers but it's their own fault."

The ELO concert was filmed in its entirety for a one-hour special on the band in a new Mike Mansfield-directed TV series as revealed in *MM* last week. The ELO show will be broadcast on July 30 at 11.30pm by London Weekend TV.

ROBERTA BAYLEY / GETTY, REX FEATURES

ELO's Jeff Lynne (centre): "We'll do a better show than usual"

"I'm a legend in my own mind"

NME JUN 5 Kerouac, Moondog, Symphony Sid... a chat with Tom Waits has historical references, and vivid contemporary touches. "I don't like the Eagles," he says. "They're like watching paint dry..."

May 25, 1976: Tom Waits browses the bric-a-brac at Portobello market, West London

I CAME IN ON the southbound flyer, then hoofed it halfway across town to see Tom. From a nearby window drifted the sound of Billie aqua-freshing "The Man I Love", Prez singing long, thoughtful phrases and making it, really making it. Was it really like that? Hell, no. But when you're booked to interview Tom Waits, the Brian Case of singer-songwriters, then it's best to get in the mood.

Waits is in town for a gaggle of nights at Ronnie [Scott]'s. That his gig seems a well-kept secret I'll agree – just another chapter in Waits' as-yet-unwritten biography, *The Last Of The Big Time Losers*. The guy's had three albums released so far. The first was deleted after just a fly's life, while the second never received a UK pressing. And the third, a live-in-the-studio double, got slammed by reviewers who never had a chance to ease on into Waits via the more accessible preceding duo. Three strikes in a row then.

Writing-wise he's been luckier. It's become fashionable to include at least one Waits song on an album. However, our hero claims this trend doesn't exactly keep him in Savile Row suits – not as though sartorial elegance has ever been a strong line with the Californian, whose bum-of-the-year appearance has brought forth accusations of gimmickry from non-believers.

"I'm not a household word – I'm just a legend in my own mind," croaks Waits in a voice that's broken out of Alcatraz and got shot up in the process. "Still, I've come a long way since I was a dishwasher and had a good job sweeping up. I once worked in a jewellery store and when I quit I took a gold watch. I figured they weren't gonna give me one 'cos I'd only been with them six months anyway."

Back to those cover versions, though.

"I don't like any of 'em."

Not even the Eagles' version of "Ol' 55"?

"Naw – I don't like the Eagles. They're about as exciting as watching paint dry. Their albums are good for keeping the dust off your turntable and that's about all."

Eric Andersen then? After all, Andersen's included Waits' songs on his last two albums.

"Naw – I don't like Eric Andersen either."

He takes the copy of Andersen's latest Arista project, which I proffer, and reads the sleeve notes, punctuating the singer's own poetic album jottings with the words "Rod McKuen" every few seconds. I remark that even if Waits has a low opinion of Andersen's output, the reverse would not appear to be true.

"Yeah, right. But I still don't like *him*. I wish he didn't like me. We had a fight once because he was messing about with my girl. Y'know something? It's really difficult to hit a guy who likes you, so I wish he didn't.

"I guess I shouldn't badmouth anybody, though. I mean, who the hell am I? Still, I've got my own tastes and I have to say that most of the performers currently on the circuit don't, with the exception of a few, fall into that category."

Many of the people Waits actually admires are long gone... Kerouac, Lenny Bruce, Lester Young, Tim Buckley. While others like Zoot Sims, Al Cohn, Charlie Mingus and Thelonious Monk remain as living reminders of the time when New York's 52nd Street was the hub of the music world; all bop, berets and goatees. Waits himself sports a 35-year-old goatee on his 27-year-old chin. His threadbare cap seems even older.

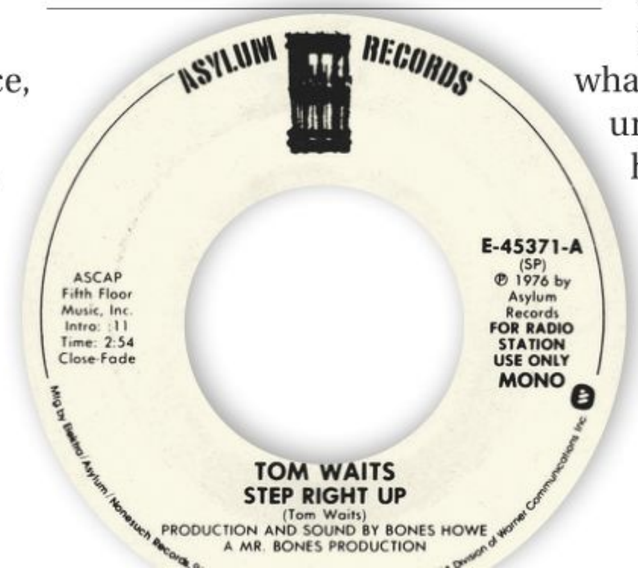
Talk about Kerouac's *Visions Of Cody* ("I've got a first edition that's signed by Jack"), Moondog, the legendary blind street musician who once made an album featuring the sounds of the New York streets, Symphony Sid, the DJ who once preached Bird and Diz from tiny Bronx radio station WBNX, or King Pleasure, the singer who taught the world vocalese, and Waits latches on, swapping story for story.

He digs the whole beat generation scene ("I was something of a misfit during the '60s") but resents any suggestion that his act is any part of the current boom in nostalgia. He shudders when I toss around names like Bette Midler (who recorded Waits' 'Shiver Me Timbers' on her last LP) or The Pointer Sisters.

"The whole thing is rampant y'know. Those people who go in and enjoy Manhattan Transfer don't know who the hell Lambert, Hendricks and Ross are. Music is not a big part of most people's lives. When it stops becoming something you do and becomes rather what you are – then you begin to understand what's important historically. I don't see anything I do as being nostalgic – I feel very contemporary.

"The thing is to do something that's not

"I've got my own tastes, and I have to say that most of the performers on the circuit don't"



MICHAEL PUTLAND / GETTY

necessarily here today and gone tomorrow. But most people don't care about that, they're under a lot of social pressure. When getting laid depends upon what you've got in your record collection, then you gotta have all Top 10 hits – that's the way it is."

Interviewing Waits is both easy and difficult. It's easy because he's an inveterate raconteur, a mainman on words, a sultan of scrabble. But the difficulty arises when he opts for being Waits the entertainer, testing whole routines on unsuspecting journalists waiting merely for the short answer. Already he'd thrown two monologues my way – one being a hilarious (but true) story involving Waits himself, his '54 Cadillac, Ed Begley Jr and a girl from Persia who couldn't speak English ("I hadda pinned up against a wall, trying to explain things to her"). Another being a tale called "Rocky And Charlie Dutton" that's likely to appear on what Waits terms his fourth, coming (geddit?) album. It takes a little time to get him back on course again.

So tell us about your backup band, Tom.

"Well, I've got Frank Vicari on tenor sax, Dr Huntingdon Jenkins III Jr on upright bass and Chip White on drums. Vicari's being playing since he was about 13 years old. He used to line up outside Birdland when he was a kid… the only white tenor player lining up with a whole lotta black cats – just for a chance to sit in, listen or hang out. Since then he's played for Woody, Maynard Ferguson… lots of others."

Waits has always had a penchant for useful tenor players, people like Tom Scott and Al Cohn, once of Herman's great '48 Herd, along with Zoot Sims and Stan Getz.

"Yeah, I had Tom Scott on one of my albums – but that was before I found out I could get anyone that I wanted. Tom's OK but he's too young and too stylised, more like a rock tenorman, not really what I'd call a jazz player, though he can play jazz. He did some nice stuff on the soundtrack of a movie called *Taxi Driver* that's very big in the States. Al played with me for a couple of weeks once and I hope to have him on my next album if everything fits in with his schedule. I admire him and his style. And he drinks about a quart of Johnnie Walker Red Label a night – though how he does it I just don't know."

Though Waits plays some guitar and a reasonable line in gin-soaked piano, he describes himself as a pedestrian musician. "I'd never cut it as a sideman, I just accompany, that's what I do. I'm glad to have my band with me, they're a real high-voltage bebop trio. I've been on the road for about five years now but I've never been able to afford a band until recently – and even now I can't afford it, I just pay through the ass."

Reminiscences next – about the time he tried to get a gig with a then unknown Al Jarreau at the Blah Blah Club in LA ("A real toilet, that place"), about Maria Muldaur explaining to Martin Mull just how much an ancient necklace had cost her ("Just imagine what you'd have paid if it had been new," said Mull in mock wonder), and about the multitude of American tradenames and expressions that proliferate throughout Waits' albums…

"Muckalucks are carpet slippers, a Peterbilt is a truck and Stacey Adams once were a very prestigious shoe… If you had them on, then nobody messed with you and you could go anywhere. Staceys stayed ahead of current affairs and were considered extremely hip. By the way, the shoes I'm wearing are called Ratstickers!"

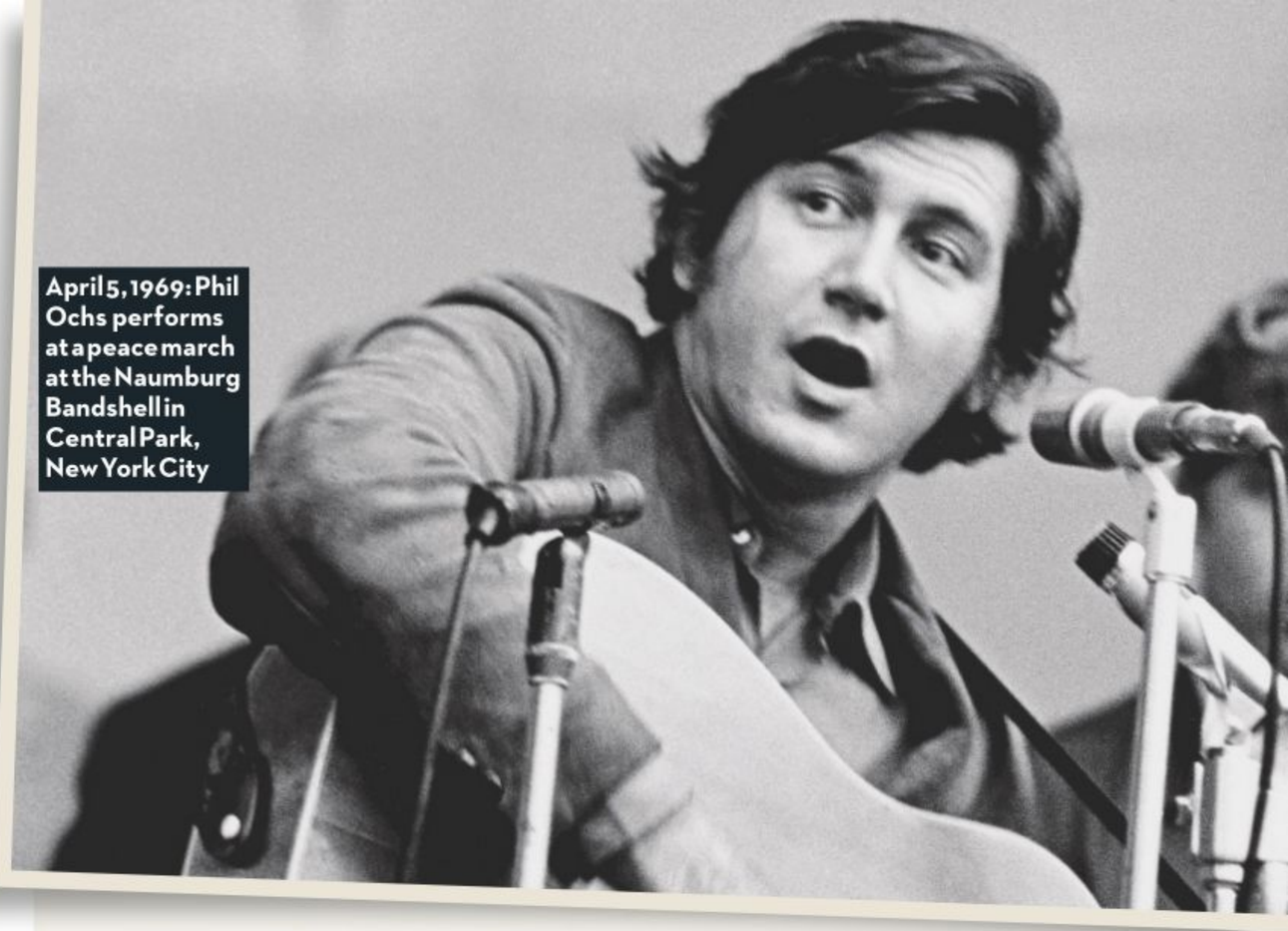
It's retaliation time, so Waits begins writing down some of the British expressions he hasn't heard before. "You call them French Letters here?… or Packets Of Three? Yeah, I'll have to remember that."

One last question then. Is there anyone in this wide world who he'd actually like to cover his songs? "Ray Charles… and I'd like Cleo Laine to do one. The thing is, though, that people never record the songs I'm really proud of. There are songs I do every night and the magic is still there – but there are others that you can ambush and beat the shit out of until they just don't water any more for you.

"I've got a lot of new songs – 'A Bad Liver And A Broken Heart,' 'A Briefcase And The Blues,' 'Frank Is Here', 'Whitey Ford'… and a lot of these haven't been written yet but I've got the titles and I'll be glad if somebody covers them.

After a brief discourse regarding that next album – which is likely to be called *Pasties And A G-String* – the subject moves finally to the ineptitude of some country rockers. "Those guys grew up in LA and they don't have cow shit on their boots – they just got dog shit from Laurel Canyon. They wouldn't last two minutes in Putnam County, that's for sure. If somebody gets shot and killed there on a Saturday night, the Sunday papers say he just died of natural causes!"

At which point I, in the words of Waits himself, made like a hockey player and got the puck outta there. *Fred Dellar* •



April 5, 1969: Phil Ochs performs at a peace march at the Naumburg Bandshell in Central Park, New York City

DAVID FENTON / GETTY

A fearless protagonist

MM APR 17 RIP, "journalistic" folk singer Phil Ochs.

PHIL OCHS COMMITTED suicide on Thursday last week. He died at his sister Sunny's house in the New York suburb of Far Rockaway. Ochs was 35 years old. He had been severely depressed for the past six months, during which time he had been virtually inactive on the music scene. His last studio album was released in 1970 and Ochs' record company in the United States refused to release a double album recorded at the Carnegie Hall. He will be remembered, however, for his many early achievements.

Born in El Paso, Texas, in 1940, but raised in Ohio, Phil Ochs moved to New York in 1961, met Bob Dylan within a week and immediately established himself at the heart of the Greenwich Village folk/protest scene. And although there were plenty of contenders for Dylan's crown, the general consensus in those early Village days was that Ochs would follow Dylan into the limelight.

He secured a recording contract with Elektra in 1964 and recorded *All The News That's Fit To Sing*, establishing the simple formula that was to see him through his next two albums. The songs were journalistic in nature, sketching out a political scenario and then offering criticism, and their impact was considerable.

George Wallace, for one, was unhappy with "Talking Birmingham Jam" on the second album. And "Here's To The State Of Mississippi", with a chorus line that dictated "*find yourself another country to be part of*", earned Ochs few friends in that corner of the world. In fact, threats to his life proliferated.

Each of his three Elektra albums charted, but his biggest commercial success came not with one of his own recordings, but with Joan Baez's single of his "There But For Fortune", which was a hit around the world, and made the Top 10 in Britain in July 1965.

Ochs' notoriety worked against him, and for a couple of years he was subject to a broadcasting ban that prevented him from appearing on TV or radio in the States. In '67, he signed with A&M and issued *Pleasures Of The Harbor*, ushering in a new musical style, based around elaborate arrangements and the lavish, romantic pianistics of Lincoln Mayorga. "In such an ugly time," wrote Phil in an explanatory sleeve note, "the only true protest is beauty…"

Three more A&M albums followed: *Tape From California*, *Rehearsals For Retirement* (which feature Phil's tombstone as a cover design) and *Greatest Hits*, which, in keeping with his sardonic outlook on life, was an album of all new material.

Greatest Hits, issued in 1970, was his last studio album, although at the height of the Watergate fiasco he put out a single on A&M, a remake of his old Mississippi diatribe, retitled "Here's To The State Of Richard Nixon". A double album of live material, recorded at Carnegie Hall, which A&M declined to issue in the States, can be obtained as a Continental import. But it has to be said, Ochs' creativity deserted him in the '70s as he drank more and more and became less reliable. Then, during a visit to Africa in '73, he was robbed and almost strangled, as a result of which his vocal cords were damaged and he was never able to sing as well. When political urgencies arose, however, Ochs was still capable of pulling off an organisational coup or two. In his day, he was a fearless protagonist of worthy causes. Hopefully, that's how he'll be remembered.

1976

APRIL – JUNE

March 28, 1976: Neil Young leans into the wind from a huge fan at the side of the stage during a four-night stand at the Hammersmith Odeon, London

“I live on nerves”

NEIL YOUNG returns to England with CRAZY HORSE and a sideways look at his work. “All those people who say Neil Young songs are a drag – it’s a sign of strength rather than weakness if you, the listeners, can cope with them.”

— MELODY MAKER APRIL 10 —

MM: *“What epitaph would you like engraved on your tombstone?”*
Neil Young: *“This man, the longest living rock’n’roll star, died searching for a Heart Of Gold. He never found it but he turned a few people on” (Smiles).*

PERHAPS I SHOULD have been better prepared for the whimsical reply. That afternoon, during a bizarre three hours in Neil Young’s suite at the Dorchester Hotel, London, he’d finally quashed the long-held theories that he was a manic depressive whose songs were born out of sheer inner torture.

The sunken-eyed star whose stance and writing have been portrayed as the fears and haunted images of a generation is suddenly immensely happy! The hunted look has gone – almost. He’s no longer striking those self-conscious poses to complement the impression of a loner which has stuck with him all these years.

The huge success of his first real European tour had helped reassure him that he had a place in the panoply of today’s music. No, he added, he wasn’t exactly uncertain before he left California five weeks ago, but – well, who wouldn’t be “up” after such ecstatic receptions? In the last 14 days, he’d done 12 shows in eight countries.

“It’s been like taking in Europe through one of those View-Master slides. All the halls are a blur. The people backstage in each hall think we’re crazy – we nod and talk to them as if we saw them the previous night, whereas it was in a different country and we don’t know where we are. Of course we are nuts. Do you know a rock’n’roll musician who isn’t nuts?”

But seriously, the tour had been such an experience. Japan had been conquered, and this during Neil’s first visit. “Nobody spoke English to us there, and the response was very different from western responses, but they understood us, I think, and gave us a great reception.

“My first time in Japan for those four cities, and it was amazing to see people had come to the shows and copied even the way I dress, the patterned trousers. This has always happened everywhere, but when it happens among people of a different culture, whose whole background is so different from the West’s, it’s nothing less than staggering.

“Apart from that, the main thing that occurred to me was the size of people – we towered above them all in Japan! A psychological advantage, which I needed”. Shades of the old paranoia?

In each of the cities Neil has played during his European jaunt, he’s hired a film crew. Various aspects of life of The Rock Star On The Road have been filmed – backstage, in hotels, in cars, out walking or relaxing. Early one morning »

MICHAEL PUTLAND / GETTY

Neil: feelin’ groovy!

MM: "What epitaph would you like engraved on your tombstone?"
(Long silence).

dates in America, which he favoured against mass stadia. Coming to terms

and his career, boosted by four spine-tingling London concerts which easily regained him a temporarily-lost crown for live performances here, were, though, at odds with his morose per-

preparing for a performance than any other," he said. "Also, the more nervous I make myself, the better I

March 16, 1976: in a hotel in Copenhagen, Denmark, on tour with Crazy Horse

in London, the crew was in his hotel bedroom to literally film Neil waking up, getting out of bed.

Connoisseurs of the Young story will recall his flirtation with movie-making through the years, and this exercise was described by him as "part of the plan". He also intended to loaf around London Bridge during rush hour, guitar in hand, to be filmed playing at busking. " Just love getting some good film. I've got loads of footage of film back home at my ranch; my music will continue, at least on record, but eventually I'd like to make films. I have all the movie equipment you'd imagine back home, and it's more than just a hobby – it's an obsession."

My own visit to his Dorchester hotel room, and our conversation, was partly filmed too. He had the chefs deliver an absurdly sophisticated four-course dinner for us, which purported to show that Our Star was more relaxed than in fact he was. The cool, pre-concert supper!

But there was no disguising straightforward butterflies. It had been two years since his last concerts, apart from the small club dates in America, which he favoured against mass stadia. Coming to terms with this tour, which in sheer logistics had been, for Neil, absolutely monstrous, had been traumatic.

"Shall I really do Europe? Are the people still there? Has the Continent disappeared? You read so much in the newspapers! Ahhhh – let's try it. But nerves? Are you kidding? Nothing's certain with me, you see. Things go so wrong or so right anywhere, in the studio, at home, anywhere. The guitar head pulls out at the very worst time during an important song. This tour's been a great fillip to my career."

And yes, he'd thought long and hard before deciding to include all the familiar songs which had charted his path: "Cowgirl In The Sand" "Heart Of Gold," "Needle And The Damage Done," "After The Gold Rush". No need to disown them and concentrate on invention. Acknowledge the past!

It's been a good past, he conceded. The artist would always crave the public's patience, care, understanding, when trying to move on. "But I like those songs, I am now able to detach the Neil Young of today from the person who wrote them. I'm older – clearly – and if all those songs are going to help me reach people with newer stuff, that's fine by me.

"I've never liked it, though, when they shout out for the old songs immediately after you've finished a new one. Kinda deflating. You know, you pour yourself into a song you've just written, lose yourself in your lyrics. Applause. Great! You think: 'Ah, that one made it.' Just as the applause dies down, someone shouts out, "SOUTHERN MAN!" And you think, 'Awwwww, they still prefer the old ones. To HELL with the old ones.'"

> "I need that edginess... on the precipice of disaster"

But yes, he agreed, he'd been persuaded by the comeback tour of his friend and artistic mentor Bob Dylan, in 1973, that even for a helplessly hoping artist, it was honourable to live with the past. "Dylan has always had my total respect. He has shown so many of us, especially with that *Before The Flood* album tour with The Band, that a major performer can live with his people".

Neil's cheerful attitude towards everyday things and his career – boosted by four spine-tingling London concerts which easily regained him a temporarily lost crown for live performances here – were, though, at odds with his morose personality of old.

On stage last week, he positively bounced, compared with the introspective fumbling of old. "Confidence. I've found confidence this tour," he stated. "And I'm happy. I guess I've always written songs that made people think I'm sad, but they're just songs. Most of my songs are lonesome; I find it hard to make a happy point in a song, that's kinda easy.

"Loneliness – I've always found that a perfect subject for a song, and since I always write the music and the words together, I'd have to be pretty UP, and undergo a complete character change, to write a song that conflicted with my songs so far. I wish I could write something happy. But remember, all those people who say Neil Young songs are a drag because they bring you down – it's a sign of strength rather than weakness if you, the listeners, can cope with them.

"Songs must make the listener's mind work – they don't have to finish the story, but leave whoever's hearing it out there with a sort of canvas to draw his own pictures. Anyway – OK, one day Neil Young will write a happy song. But I'll probably sell it to TV for a commercial!"

As a composer of so many genuinely touching lyrics, did he consider he had now written *the* song, the one which he could never eclipse, the Neil Young epic by which he would be marked for life?

"I hope I have not written THE song yet. I'd like to think I'll have enough new experiences, feelings, to do something much better than what's gone down. The past is a trap – we only remember the good things."

As the time for the concert drew near, Neil contemplated the show, nervously fiddled with the piano and played around with a chocolate soufflé. This had followed melon and steak and red wine, and I remarked that in spite of its excellence, it didn't seem the most, er, pure way of tearing down the West Cromwell Road to Hammersmith and on stage, late, for a concert. "I live on nerves and this seems no worse a way of preparing for a performance than any other," he said. "Also the more nervous I make myself, the better I perform. I need that edginess. Keep myself uncertain. On the precipice of disaster. It's the only way I can function. I love good food – and anyway, hey, man, I haven't eaten ALL DAY!"

The film crew was left to finish the food (scraps – from – the – rich – man's – table) as Neil's manager Elliot Roberts decided there was no time left. Into the limousine outside the Dorchester, Neil collecting a few disbelieving looks in the foyer from conservatively dressed people who regarded his long, straggly hair, patched-up trousers and crazy Sherlock Holmes hat, bought that day, as – shall we say – peculiar?

Inside the car, Neil began showing nervous signs and muttering. "Used to be petrified. Now I just wonder," he said, half contradicting his earlier confession. "Think I'll change the show around tonight. Yes, tonight's the night. Do you know why I fiddle around with the instruments during the acoustic set which begins the show? To give people something to look at. It's very important (*talking himself into confidence now...*) Helps them to focus, deviates from looking at my face all the time. Boring, just looking at an artist with guitar in hand for half an hour, no matter how good his songs are. You must interest the audience. I don't need to fiddle around so much with guitars, and I sure don't have anything to say to anyone, except the next song, but if I change instruments for a bit, that helps them, makes them think I know what I'm doing, too – heh heh!"

"Don't worry," says Roberts. "It will all be over two hours from now."

"You know, Muhammad Ali always comes back so strong," says Neil, "just as you thought he'd lost whatever he had originally. Me, I can never come back if I've been anywhere else. I feel more like a racehorse – a horse saves up every bit of energy for that race and it either wins or loses, no second chance for the knockout. Yeah, that's it, a performer like me is like a racehorse. Except I don't eat hay." *Ray Coleman* •

GIJSBERT HANEKROOT / GETTY

"A furious and dazzling assault"

MM APRIL 3 Young and Crazy Horse bring a sonic hurricane to London.

AT APPROXIMATELY 8.25PM on Sunday, Neil Young, unannounced but immediately recognisable, loped on to the stage of the Hammersmith Odeon to open, with a brief acoustic set, his first solo concert in London since the traumatic and confusing *Tonight's The Night* performances of November 1973.

"Seems like I just got here from somewhere else," he observed quietly, casting a nervous, apprehensive stare at his audience. Characteristically dishevelled in a torn and battered suede jacket which hung loosely about his hunched shoulders, and his hair long and matted, he arranged himself behind a cluster of microphones with a complete lack of physical grace, mumbling incoherently to himself as he selected a guitar and, apparently satisfied and prepared, eased into "Tell Me Why". The high notes of the song he hit with difficulty and he smiled wryly as he negotiated the guitar chords. It was a beautifully informal, casual introduction.

"Let's see what we've got here," he continued, grappling with a banjo and fixing a harmonica into the twisted metal frame around his neck. He began "Mellow My Mind" – the only composition from *Tonight's The Night* he was to perform – picking at the banjo and blowing gruffly into the harp. "Put it in upside down..." he grumbled, half-smiling. "...Don't do that every night."

He started again, transforming the number from its recorded form into a crude, rustic affair which recalled "For The Turnstiles". He waved a brief acknowledgement to the audience and, more relaxed now, moved to the piano for a delicate, aching "After The Gold Rush".

Despite the intimacy he had, by this time, established, and the genuine nature of his casual asides to the audience, Young maintained an air of bruised desperation. He has, curiously, the general demeanour of a thoroughly wasted, disorientated James Stewart, ambling wide-eyed, his concentration slipping in and out of focus continually.

He included, in this opening section, three new songs: "Too Far Gone", "Day And Night We Walk These Aisles" and "Don't Say You Win, Don't Say You Lose", which he included between renditions of more familiar compositions from *Harvest* (including a simple and moving "A Man Needs A Maid", performed at the piano and far superior to the overblown sentimentality of the original).

The trio of recent compositions, lyrically at least, were of a more intimate nature than the majority of the songs which appeared on *Zuma*. "Too Far Gone" was instantly both haunting and utterly compelling, with the refrain "*We had the drugs, we had the blues/We still had something to lose...*" sending a chilling vibration around the theatre.

> **"He has the demeanour of a thoroughly wasted, disorientated James Stewart"**

"Day And Night" was similarly passionate, with Young twisting and contorting his voice as he repeated the lines, "*Jab something through me, don't make me wait/Don't cut out the good things I appreciate.*"

It was with some sense of relief, then, that the audience received the more accommodating "Heart Of Gold", with which he ended the acoustic segment, promising to return with Crazy Horse after a short interlude, "to keep this story moving".

Neil Young with Crazy Horse, as the ferocious electric set of the Hammersmith concert emphatically stressed, are still the greatest bar-room band in the world. With Frank Sampedro (who made his debut on *Zuma*) in the place of Danny Whitten on rhythm guitar, the formidable Ralph Molina on drums and Billy Talbot on bass shoring up the impenetrable structure of his songs, Young's electric guitar playing is allowed an expressive freedom.

He played, in fact, with a vigour and strength which contrasted vividly against his torn and frayed physical condition. He may have looked as if he'd just been washed ashore on some deserted beach, but his playing on "Don't Cry No Tears", especially, was gloriously healthy.

He drew even greater strength from Sampedro (a stocky, genial individual with an abrasive rhythm style which complemented perfectly the unorthodox, robust guitar of Young) and Talbot as he unleashed an overwhelming, brooding and extremely violent reading of "Down By The River".

Caught in the crossfire of Sampedro's attack and the explosive bass patterns, Young twitched and cavorted across the stage, lost completely in the passion of his performance. With Talbot and Sampedro close around him, he would turn occasionally to the microphone to deliver the lyrics of the song with demented force.

"Losing End", another selection from *Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere*, provided a rare moment of calm and included, from Young, a solo of some delicacy and wit.

"This is another new song... about a bar in California," he offered as an introduction to "Hurricane", a strange and powerful composition which proved to be as relentlessly fierce as "Down By The River".

A large fan to the right of the stage whirred into action, sending a sharp breeze through the air (a typically idiosyncratic touch, that), as Young spiralled into a dizzy orbit during the climactic section of what may be his most expansive and lunatic song since "Don't Be Denied". "One more laid-back song," he laconically announced as Crazy Horse fell in behind him and he led them through "Let It Shine".

We were back in the frontline, however, with "Drive Back", as Young and Sampedro combined to launch a furious and dazzling assault. The audience had barely enough time to catch its breath before the virtual holocaust of "Southern Man" ("Another old tune Lynyrd Skynyrd made famous long ago..."), an exhausting, nerve-jangling juggernaut of sound and energy which left Young looking drained and tense.

He returned then for two encores. A magnificent version of the epic "Cortez The Killer", full of anguish and damaged grandeur, which segued into a brisk and efficient "Cinnamon Girl".

By 10.30 it was all over. It's extremely unlikely that we shall witness a performance more impressive, from an artist of such stature, again this year. *Allan Jones*

Acoustic segments punctuate "ferocious" sets with Crazy Horse at Hammersmith Odeon, March 28, 1976

MICHAEL PUTLAND / GETTY

"I let Thin Lizzy interpret my songs as it wishes": Phil Lynott at home in Embassy Court, West Hampstead, London, 1976

“To me rock is a game”

THIN LIZZY have built a reputation, and are reaping the rewards. “I believe in the rock culture,” says Phil Lynott.” Six months of your life travelling to gigs and the other six months playing. Acting the star, I can’t take that.”

— MELODY MAKER APRIL 3 —

THERE WE STOOD. Dumbfounded, we stared in stark amazement at the spectacle. It’s Liverpool Stadium and the mashed wood strewn around the floor had earlier that night formed 10 rows of seats.

There’s a distinct feeling of pride in the ranks. You know, sad about the damage, but we, Thin Lizzy, had this traumatic effect on our audience. At last.

“Jaay… sus.” The awesome silence is broken. Laughter breaks out, the band’s reaction to the significance of the audience’s ecstatic reaction. Phil Lynott makes a reasonably balanced proposal. “Let’s get out of here before they ask us for the money.”

The night before, Lynott, overwhelmed by the response, passionately told the audience in Manchester that they’d earned the “best fans” tag. Tonight, Liverpool has forced a reassessment.

The myth that Philip Lynott *is* Thin Lizzy is disintegrating speedily. As the wheels of this British tour gather momentum, the parts played by Brian Downey, drummer, and especially those of Scott Gorham and Brian Robertson, are being acknowledged as important. Just as Lynott is a true rock character, so are the rest of the band. Lynott himself accepts that his reign as the sole frontman is coming to an end.

“It’s this band that’ll crack it once and for all. The two guitars fill the sound out much better. They bounce off one another’s playing. They’ve brought in ideas that wouldn’a happened otherwise. I got the attention because I was the darkie in the middle. I was the figurehead.

“I feel that in the band, everybody pulls their weight when it comes to the music. I just happen to write a lot of the songs and lyrics, but what I do with Lizzy as opposed to what I’d do if I was on my own are two completely different things. That’s how I know it’s a band. »

IAN DICKSON / GETTY

The best encore in the world

HAMMERSMITH ODEON LONDON
LIVE!
JULY 11

MM JUL 11 Lizzy put the seal on their long-sought-after status.

THE PREVALENT MOOD that hung over this Hammersmith Odeon gig on Sunday night, that this would be the occasion to herald once and for all the arrival of Thin Lizzy, gave the event an edge of excitement and anticipation rarely noted at rock concerts these days.

But in living up to all the expectations, Lizzy did much more than merely consolidate their recently acquired position as top-league rockers and took the opportunity to put their followers through what really amounted to an endurance test.

Lizzy could have churned out endless riffs to guarantee the desired reception but instead, early on in the act, turned the tables to pull a blues from their archives, "Still In Love With You" from *Nightlife*, that was totally at odds with the hard rock their audience undoubtedly came to see.

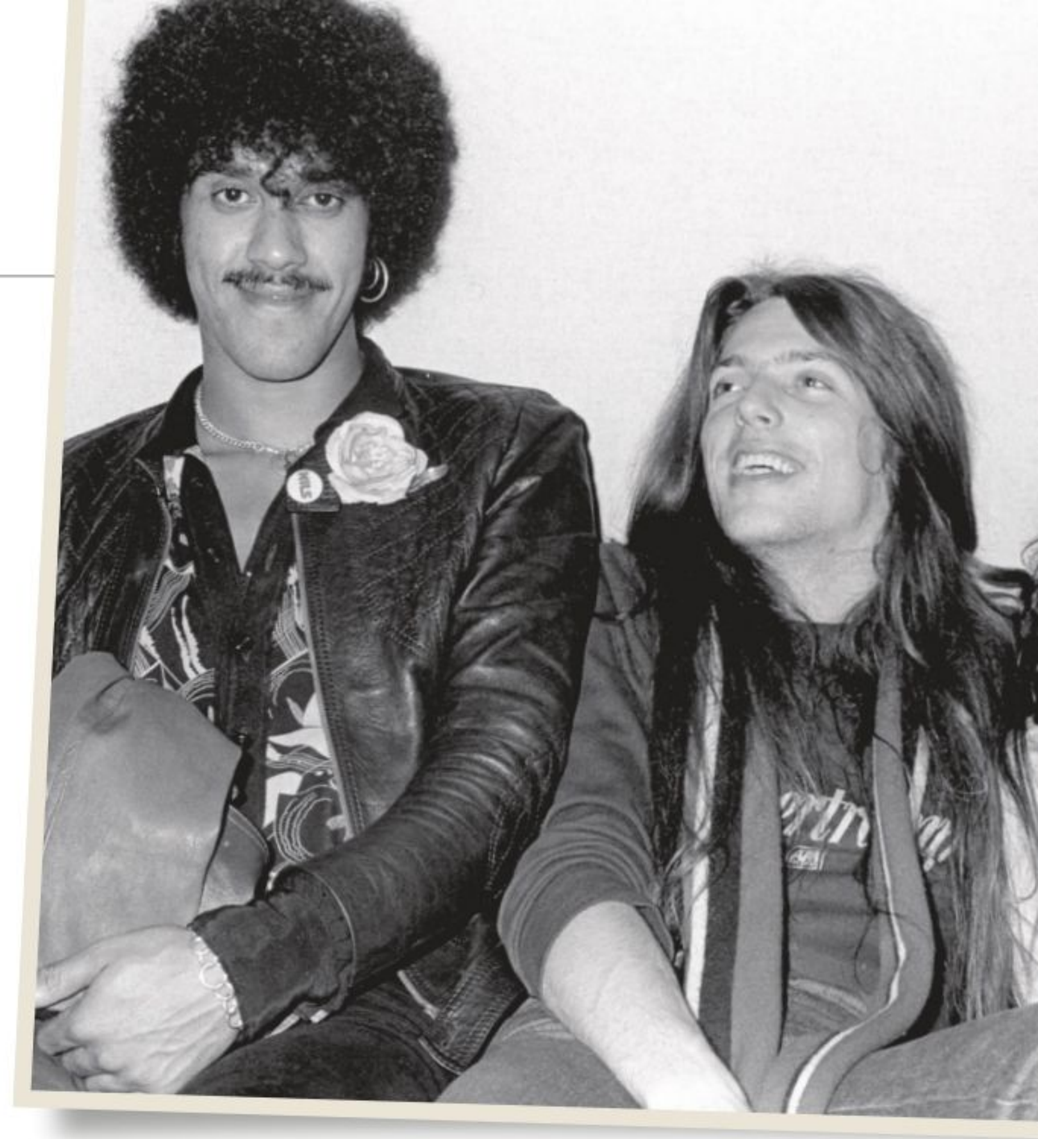
Surprisingly, the audience reacted to this sudden change warmly, sitting back (or standing up) and taking the music in after vainly attempting to clap along. Apart from featuring the affectionate, echoey vocals of Phil Lynott, the number provided a platform for the guitar talents of Brian Robertson and Scott Gorham, who played two beautifully held-back solos.

It was a great gig, one of the best I've seen this year. After a fairly haphazard start, when Brian Robertson appeared to be a little out of sync with the rest of the band and Phil Lynott was slowed down by the effects of his recent illness (doctors advised him not to play, but the show blah blah), Lizzy slipped into top gear via the thunderous Celtic riff of "Emerald" and after that never let up, pushing themselves to climax after climax.

But the orgasm for both band and fans came with the best encore in the world, "Me And The Boys Were Wondering How You And The Girls Were Getting Home Tonight", which builds so fast that the heart beats furiously, the adrenaline flows like a waterfall and then, aided by smoke bombs, snaps to reach yet another high. Nothing, but nothing, could have capped that finish.

And the answer to the question everybody's asking? Yes, Thin Lizzy are big time now, and thriving on it.

Harry Doherty



ERICA ECHENBERG / GETTY

"I let Thin Lizzy interpret my songs as it wishes. I come down with a song and Brian [Robertson] says that he'd like such and such a beat. Then I let the band develop the song, and even if I disagree, my power's only a quarter. I'm only a figurehead as far as the press is concerned, but that's the superficial thing. I mean, Brian Downey is the quietest member of the band, but if he says he doesn't want to play a number, that's it stumped."

Lynott is as close to the grassroots as anyone is likely to get in the rock business. He's a true showbusiness character, always prepared for a good laugh, an outrageous Casanova and has the sort of charisma that makes you feel comfortable in his presence, whether it be with three persons in a living room, or in front of 2,000 at a gig.

"I believe in the rock culture; that is spending six months of your life travelling to gigs and the other six months playing. Insofar as acting the star, I can't take that."

But while Lynott is as normal (abnormal?) as the boy next door, there's also a longing within him to become a star. He wants his name to be remembered in the history of rock.

"I wanna be successful, but it's how we do it that counts. That's the most important thing to me. Tomorrow we could go out and do 'Baby, Baby, Baby' and 'The Rocker' for the next year and go well, continuing with the set that people want to hear.

"But we've taken the chance of introducing all the *Jailbreak* [the new album] numbers, which we didn't have to. We can get up there and do what we want and the kids are still payin' to see it. I only want to be successful for what we are rather than for what people want us to be. We got the brand image thing – Thin Lizzy, heavy rock. That's not true. If we wanna do soft songs and hard songs on albums, we can do them. There's a lot of subtlety in what we do.

> "I wanna be successful, but it's how we do it that counts"

"We don't want to work in a vacuum. That's self-strangulation. We're taking this on our own terms, nobody else's. If the crowd didn't like what we did, I'd have to make a definite decision whether to give the crowds what they want or stick to me guns, like I've done all me life.

"To me, rock is just a game. I just wanna be a true living genius," he laughed. "I'm workin' on becomin' a genius. I've got a lot of ambition. I set my goals but there is no preconceived plan. I don't know where I'm going. All I know is that I want success at what I'm doing because that's how you're judged, by the level of success. You know that if you don't succeed, you're failin' ."

Against the experience and maturity in rock of Lynott, consider the youth of one of Lizzy's guitarists, Brian Robertson. Robertson joined the band at 18. He's just turned 20, but in showbusiness that means he'll always be 18, even 16 or 17, depending on the extravagance of the storyteller, never 19 or 20. He's the token teenager.

As Thin Lizzy mature as a great band, Robertson will inevitably mature as a great guitarist (as, indeed, will his lead partner, Scott Gorham). He will also become – already *is*, in fact – an idol, a guitar hero, to fans of similar age, and younger, who see themselves in his place. More than any other member of the band, Robertson – with his combination of youth and talent – is most likely to steal the limelight from Phil Lynott.

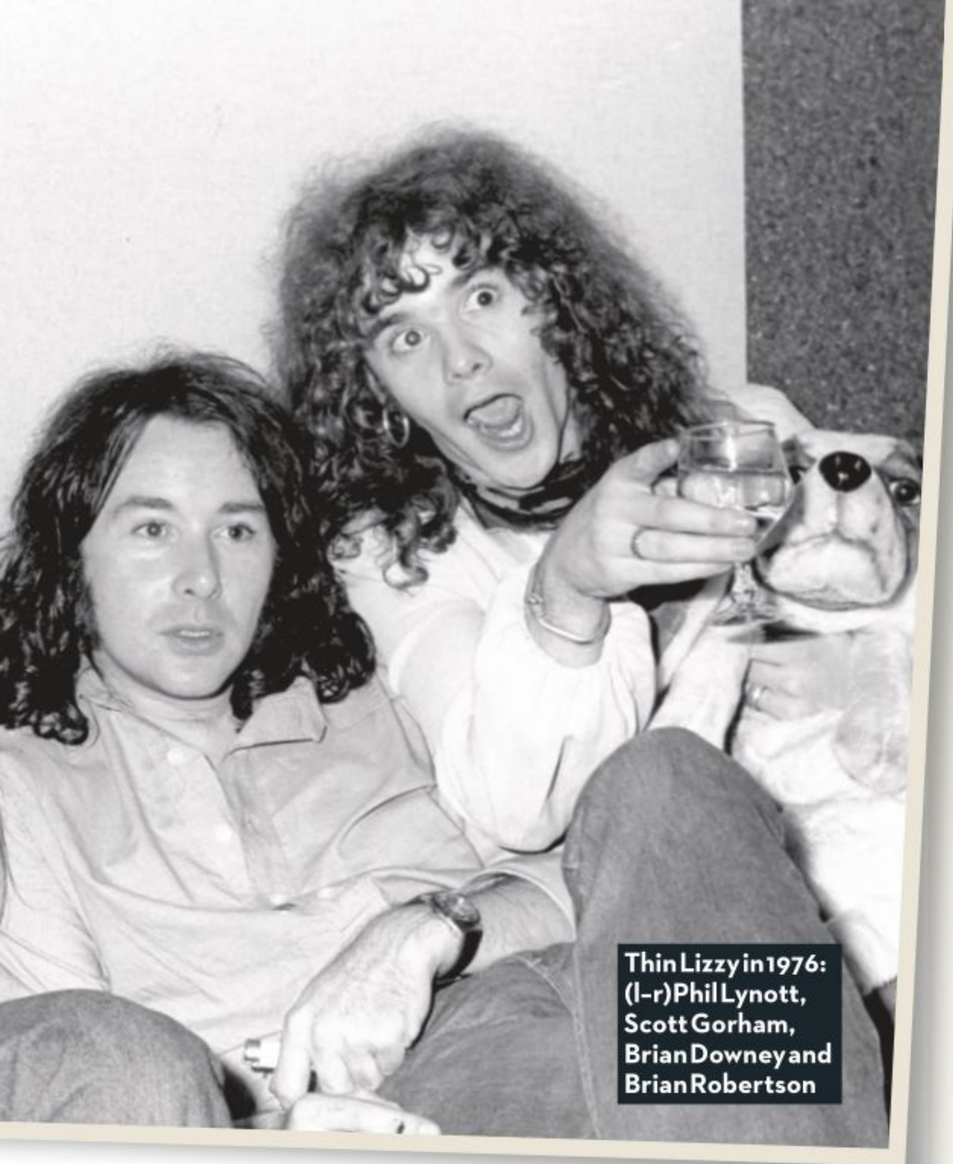
Robertson could be the archetypal rock musician. When he's not on stage, playing solos, throwing shapes, he has the uncanny knack of always being caught with a glass of whisky or beer in his hand. He appears decadent, short-tempered, a boy working at becoming a man. But he's an easy person to talk to and maintains that he is aware of the pitfalls of rock.

So he's not worried that he's given up his life to music? "Naw," he replies immediately, in a Scottish accent that is faintly tainted with a little Irish. "Once you're a muso, man, you're a muso for the rest of your life, and I'm not going to change it. I've been brought up in Glasgow and it's a really bluesy place. The whole band has been brought up in centres of blues music."

For Robertson, playing in a rock band, a famous rock band, is the realisation of a fantasy that has lived with him since he was knee-high.

He has been playing around in bands since he was 13. He's jammed with the Average White Band, the Alex Harvey Band, Maggie Bell and many other Scottish bands. But his talent goes further than just playing guitar. He's had eight years' training in classical piano playing and is responsible for the arrangement on many of Lizzy's songs, particularly the dual-guitar runs.

"Although I'm younger than the rest of the band," he says, "I've been on the road as long as



Thin Lizzy in 1976: (l–r) Phil Lynott, Scott Gorham, Brian Downey and Brian Robertson

anybody else. Consequently, when I was 15, my friends were 21 and 22. I just grew up fast.

"I'm not very aware of my age. I never have been. I've had a beard since I was 12. Really. In some ways, I am different. Because I'm younger than the rest of the boys, I've got some different ideas and tastes. They remember records that I've not even heard.

"For instance, I'm not into early Dylan. I'm into The Band more than I am Dylan. I can't stand his fucking voice and the way he plays harmonica.

"When I go on stage, I just play what I feel. I very rarely play the same solo twice. I can't. I get bored. When I play bad, I'm lousy, but when I'm on a good night, I can really hit some peaks. There are some nights when I go on slashed, half-cut, drunk and play great.

"I might cock a run up, but I've never once blown a gig with this band through being drunk or smashed. I never will. When I first joined the band, the management told me to watch my drink before going on stage. I said, 'Fuck off, I'll have as many drinks as I like before going on stage.' If you can handle it, you can handle it, and I can."

The current British tour is putting Lizzy on new planes, from where they'll achieve magnificent successes.

"It's the same old system," explained Lynott. "We're doing the tour to sell the albums to make the money to do the tours. But we're trying to break that circle. If we can break our albums sales big, once and for all, then we'll have very little worries and we'll be able to continue on doing whatever we want.

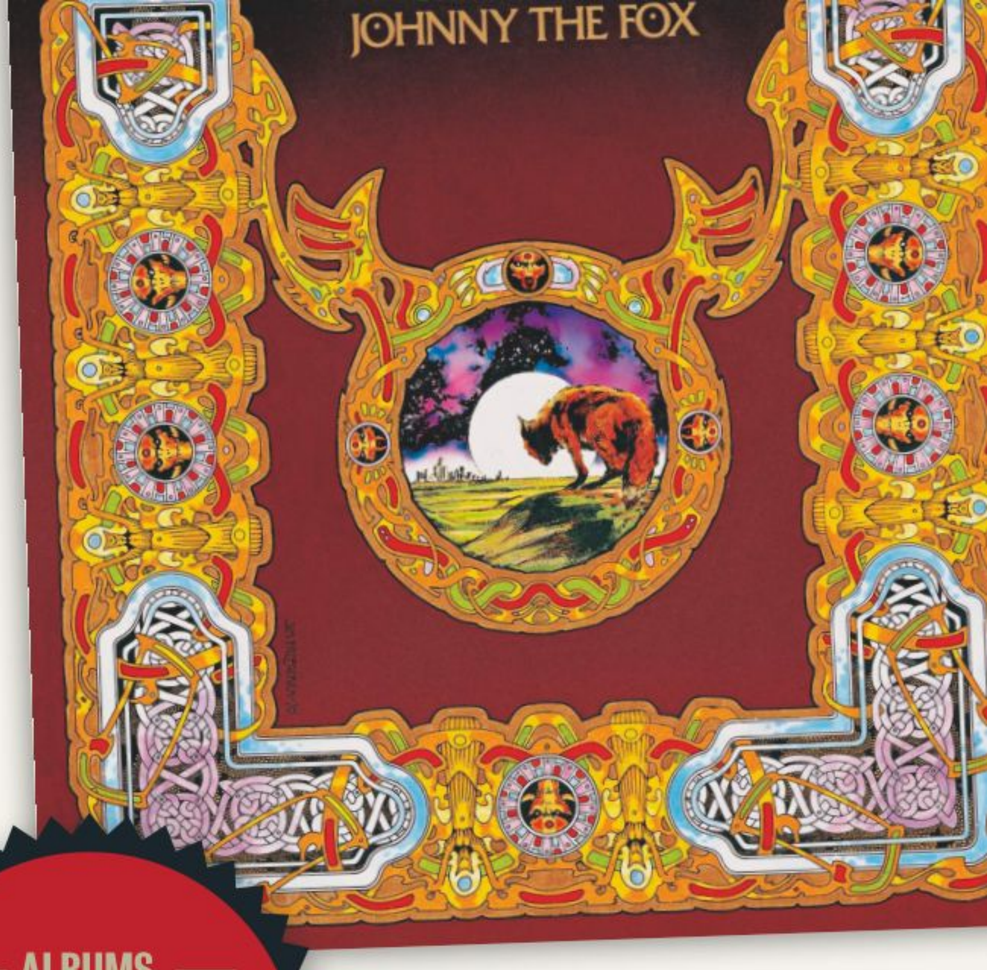
"We've built up our whole reputation in the '60s sort of style. It's like Free built and became an institution, Yes built and became an institution. That's the way we're goin'. Lizzy's name has always been a solid, good name, with good players in the band."

So why is it suddenly happening in '76? Lynott, a dedicated supporter of Manchester United, replied in true football fashion.

"Well, you see, we're goin' for the double – America and Britain. Just like the lads [United]. With the two wingers [Gorham and Robertson], our play is spread across the park. Seriously, I don't know why it has come good. It just has. A year ago, we were confident that it would happen. It's no great surprise to us now that it has." *Harry Doherty* •

A thread runs through it

MM OCT 16 Lizzy's second album of 1976 assessed.



ALBUMS REVIEW 1976

Thin Lizzy
Johnny The Fox VERTIGO

It would be quite an album that could eclipse *Jailbreak*, the album which established Thin Lizzy earlier this year. It's no mean feat, then, that in the process of nudging its predecessor into the background, *Johnny The Fox* sharpens the band's identity.

The persona of *Jailbreak* was that of a solid, power-chord band, but with plenty of melody, as exemplified by "The Boys Are Back In Town", "Emerald" and "Fight Or Fall". *Johnny The Fox* retains these characteristics and adds to them. There's more subtlety, the melodies are stronger, and most importantly, the scope of the material is much wider than the hard rock associated with Lizzy.

Only five of the 10 tracks are head-shakers, and the others range from soft ballads to medium-paced numbers. Phil Lynott's writing has at last returned to the versatility that marked *Vagabonds Of The Western World*, the first Lizzy's last release.

"Lynott veers between the viciousness of the street and heart-felt love songs"

As I said, Lizzy's identity on *JTF* is more robust than ever, due to the contributions this time of all four members of the band. Take the two guitarists, Scott Gorham and Brian Robertson. Apart from playing better solos ("Fool's Gold", "Johnny", "Boogie Woogie Dance", "Massacre" and "Sweet Marie" stand out), their dual-lead work is taken a step further, progressing from the predictable twin runs to the dramatic nuances of "Johnny" and "Old Flame". One minor criticism I would make is that Gorham and Robertson must be careful to avoid overkill: the beautiful "Borderline", for instance, suffers from one guitar overdub too many.

Lynott, however, shapes this identity. Apart from distinctive, rich vocals, the material he has written seems to draw much from his own past. There's a thread running from his early Lizzy days that seems to be knotted on *Johnny The Fox*.

The opening track, "Johnny", is in direct line of descent from "Little Darling", right down to the emphatic use of brass. "The Rocker", from *Vagabonds*, continues in "Rocky" with its similarly raucous feel (though the vocal is a little harsh), while "Johnny The Fox Meets Jimmy The Weed" recalls the funkiness of "Black Boys On The Corner" and is practically an extension of the riff on the latter. "Boogie Woogie Dance" and the old single, "Randolph's Tango", are associated for the obvious reasons, and the vicious "Massacre" is a cross between two *Jailbreak* tracks, creaming off the neo-Celtic riff of "Emerald" and the crazy chord pattern of "Angel From The Coast".

Lyrically, Lynott veers between the viciousness of the street and heartfelt love songs. "Johnny" and "Johnny The Fox..." are stories of urban seediness, and "Rocky", like "The Rocker", proudly proclaims the relationship with rock'n'roll life. The love songs are: "Don't Believe A Word" (complete with stock blues riff and ambiguous lyrics à la 10cc's "I'm Not In Love"); the singalong, but touching "Borderline"; "Old Flame" (a lovely chorus); and "Sweet Marie", a poignant, very melodic ballad written with Scott Gorham.

There's also the prospector's story in "Fools Gold". On "Massacre", Lynott poses a controversial question especially pertinent to the religious conflict in Ireland. "*If God is in the heavens, how can this happen here?*" he asks despairingly.

The subtleties of *Johnny The Fox* are in the little chugging riff hidden behind the main power chord on "Johnny", the second crisp drum beat (Brian Downey is in impeccable form throughout) and sneaky bassline on "Rocky", the beautiful, and admirably restrained, orchestral arrangement on "Sweet Marie" and the tango middle section that adds a touch of humour to "Boogie Woogie Dance".

You might also like to know that *Johnny The Fox* is, I believe, a pseudonym for Lynott, being a reference to the American expression "foxy", and there is a loose concept to the album built on recollections of incidents involving Johnny's hectic lifestyle. To conclude, *Johnny The Fox* represents a Thin Lizzy more versatile than on *Jailbreak*. It is not as immediately powerful as *Jailbreak*, but after a few listens you realise that its power is deceptive but nevertheless real. There are true signs of a great album. *Harry Doherty*

“We may be having a party”

A surreal, possibly fictional, encounter with a prickly ROLLING STONES. “I only really listen to black music these days,” says Keith Richards. “I ain’t too interested in white bands who rip off white bands who ripped off black bands.”

— NME MAY 8 —

THE NICE THING about the law of gravity is that it applies to everybody.

Basically, the law of gravity don’t give a flying one if you’re President of the United States or Princess Anne or Keith Richard or just some schmuck on the street. You mess with the law of gravity, man, you get your centre of gravity at too acute an angle to your feet and bubeleh, sure as bears poop in the woods you’re gonna fall on your rosy ass, and that *fact*.

Gerry Ford falls down a lot (maybe he was attempting to walk and chew gum at the same time). Princess Anne got slung off her nag the other week and – da da ba da daba da da – Keith Richard, guitarist, songwriter and social arbiter to a whole generation of middle-class drug abusers, skids wildly on the polished, dragon-painted portable stage that the Rolling Stones are using on their ’76 Tour Of Europe and takes a dive in front of 10,000 earnest young Frankfurters right in the middle of “Jumpin’ Jack Flash”.

It don’t faze ol’ Keith none, though.

Ol’ Keith just collects his legs until he’s sitting in some kind of weird discombobulated lotus posture variant and continues whacking away at his guitar, not missing a single saw-toothed rusty-chrome chord the whole time.

It don’t faze Mick Jagger either – Mick Jag-gur performing on the ramp that leads down into the audience from stage centre like the tongue on the Stones logo. Jagger just flounces over to his fallen comrade, his mouth a giant red O like some dumb glossy PVC Claes Oldenburg sofa or something and he bends down oh-so-graceful and he hands Keith his pick – which the maestro has dropped on his journey from here to there – and helps him locate his legs and jack-knife back on to his feet.

“*Falling down gets you accepted*” – Mick Farren, 1976.

Yeah, but Keith Richard don’t got to devote one second’s thought to what gets you accepted as opposed to what gets you the Cosmic Phooey. Keith, you dig, is one of the ones who get to do the accepting – or, alternatively, to hand out the »

MICHAEL PUTLAND / GETTY

April 28: Mick Jagger at the Frankfurt Festhalle, Germany, the first date of the Rolling Stones' Tour Of Europe '76

FRANKFURT FESTHALLE

LIVE!

APRIL 28

Cosmic Phooeys to the poor unfortunates who come over limp when measured up to the Big Yardstick.

The Rolling Stones may not be Keith Richard, say the folks who are hip to the finer nuances of these things, but hey Keith Richard is the Rolling Stones. You know the riffs:

There's the one that goes "When Keith Richard comes into a room, rock'n'roll walks in the door", right, and the "Keith Richard, the world's most elegantly wasted human being" which comes equipped with hyperbolic virtuoso prose which attempts to outdo the last writer's description of how utterly, utterly out of it and cadaverous Mr Richard looked at the time, and the scholarly bit about Keith's pitiless open-tuned riffing and Newman Jones III and the four hundred and ninety-seven guitars: all of which boil down to a single one-liner terse enough to stick on a telegram and not be hurting when you get your phone bill, and that one goes: "Keith Richard *is* rock'n'roll."

Yeah, well, rock'n'roll just fell on its ass. In Frankfurt. Where else?

ANYWAY, enough of this – whoooooeeeeeee! – kandy-kolored tangerine-flake streamline babysitting and down to hard-tack brass-hat fax 'n' info about what this month's Biggest Fuss is about and what a number of you equivalent to the population of a decent-sized city have sent out upfront bread for a chance to get a brainful of: the Rolling Stones show, 1976 model, as performed before the finest flower of Frankfurt youth at some concert hall I never found out the name of and soon to be on display at Earls Court, an occasion which will mark the first appearance of the Glimmer Twins on the shores of this green and unpleasant land for – ummmmmm – two years.

Bill Wyman and Charlie Watts – who earn less than their more charismatic colleagues owing to their restricted compositional activities – have been around more recently. In fact, I spotted them at a Heathrow check-in counter last year, and no one seemed to be paying them much mind.

The new Stones show is prefaced by an admirable cassette tape of exclusively black and mostly pretty tough dirt-yard black music. It's got Bo Diddley doing "You Don't Love Me", and some Robert Johnson and Earl Hooker, plus some real dirty-ass JA juice, intermingled with some soupy modern falsetto creamy pimp-suit crooning.

The journalistic herd in the cattle-pen press section right under the left speaker banks plays conjecture poker and comes to the conclusion that the drunk-and-dirty-mo'-dead-than-alive stuff was Keith's choice and the well-groomed shot-silk pimpmobile muzak was Jagger's, which is about 50 per cent correct, since we later ascertain that our phantom DJ is none other than Honest Ron Wood, with a few additions made by Big Mick.

The Stones' tradition had always been to have black support acts, the best they could get. BB King, Stevie Wonder, Ike and Tina Turner (ITT to their accountant), on a couple of dates even Muddy Waters – who is the blues even more than Keith is rock'n'roll – they've all vaulted to white acceptance of varying degrees off the Stones springboard. It's pretty cool of the Stones to use these acts, 'cuz before they come on their audiences get to see a little bit of where they're coming from and why they got the soul and the balls to consider that there's still some dues to pay.

The Meters, in case they haven't slipped through your screening processes, are Allen Toussaint's house band from N'Awlins: a finger-lickin' tasty funk rhythm section fronted by a rather unfortunate singer/percussionist who, in terms of sinuosity and control, outdances Jagger completely; but in the process winds up so disco prissy that he fails to establish any real individual presence.

However, The Meters' *collective* presence is strong and happy. From "Fire On The Bayou" through a rock'n'roll medley and even their slightly over-inflated version of Neil Young's "Down By The River" (which works great on the verses, but their reluctance to get into any backing vocals blows it on the chorus), they lay it down warm, sweet and twitching.

Guitarist Leo Nocentelli (playing, for guitar freaks, a black Telecaster Deluxe – the same model that Keith Richard will play later on) proved once again that the most constructive elaborations of the Hendrix legacy are coming from young black guitarists like Sugar of the Ohio Players and Labelle's current lead guitarist, not to mention Ernie Isley.

The Meters go down OK, but the applause has faded almost before Art Neville has made it into the wings, which means that the audience were into digging them while they were there, but right now it's Stonestime, and nuthin' but nuthin' gets to delay Stonestime.

Not by more than half an hour, anyway.

We listen to The Tape again, and then the lights go down – wheeeeeooooowwww! – a WEA dude comes on to introduce the band – in English, possibly as a concession to the GIs off the bases who make up at least half the audience. You can spot 'em easy. They're the ones with the short hair and the frayed jeans who're looking aggressive and hooking down booze and hash at as frenetic a rate as possible.

The German WEA guy says, "The Rolling Stones!" like he was about to take his bow after performing some particularly abstruse conjuring trick, and in the dark two shadowy humans with dapper silhouettes move purposefully towards strategic seats behind drum kit and piano.

And then the lights come up and Mick Jagger, Keith Richard and Ronnie Wood lurch onto the stage in a cluster and Bill Wyman, looking timidly rather than satanically withdrawn, beams in to his spot in front of his stack. Wood, cigarette mounted at a jaunty angle, scuttles over to his amp, Keith Richard ruffles his hair and hitches up his guitar, Jagger – wearing a silver leather jacket that looks to be part of David Bowie's 1972 offstage wardrobe – parades around the stage with a gait like his pout expanded into an entire bodily style.

Charlie (ah, Charlie's good tonight, innee? Whaddya mean, scumbag, Charlie's good every night) lights the fuse on that snare-bass drum-and-cowbell intro to "Honky Tonk Women". Keith, leaning backwards from the knees, methodically chops out those measured opening chords like each chord was a white line on a mirror, Jagger prowls the stage like he's sniffing each bit of it for a particular odour – like a dog trying to remember just where he pissed the night before – and yep, it's the Rollin' Stones right enough. Know 'em anywhere.

The sound is loud and a trifle frazzled round the edges. Only thing wrong with it is that you can hardly hear the guitars or the vocals. The vocals come up a bit in time for the chorus, Mick and Keith leaning into the mic and Jagger stretching out the syllables like Silly Putty, rubber

May 6, 1976: Keith Richards and his son Marlon at the Hilton Hotel in Brussels, Belgium

notes from rubber lips. "…*Haaaaaaaawonky tonka haawonky tonk-uh waaamaaanuhhhh*…"

The Great Charlie Watts is playing so clean and crisp and precise that it's almost a shock to pick up on the fact that there's also a ridiculous amount of muscle in his backbeat. Even allowing for the fact that Ollie Brown, a lean black denim percussionist, is whoppin' ass on various passive objects right behind him, it's clear just who's down in the engine room hefting the coal into the furnace.

Next up they do "All Down The Line" off *Exile On Main St*, and halfway through someone wakes up behind the mixing desk and cuts in the afterburners on the guitars. It happens in mid-chord and suddenly a Keithchord comes scything out of the speakers and slices the top of my head off. I suddenly feel that my skull's just done bin metamorphosised into a two-and-a-half minute softboiled egg and that some intensive bastard is about to dig in which a spoon and eat my brains up.

Trouble is, the sound man put so much treble onto the guitars (which, since I was right under an exceedingly musclebound speaker stack, had suddenly become hideously loud) that the music from there on in was reduced to being about as aesthetically pleasing as having some demento engrave the Lord's Prayer on your scalp with a dentist's drill. It was just too goddam loud to make any sense put of, and I speak as a man who once sat five feet away from the stage at a Sabs gig and spent the entire set yowling, "Louder! Louder!"

It probably sounded great at the back, but from where I was… look, I'm only telling you this so that you'll realise that all musical judgements contained herein are approximate.

Apart from Ollie Brown, the only other supporting musician (leaving the mysterious Exact Status of Ronnie Wood out of it) was the omnipresent Billy Preston ("Ivories tickled to order; Beatles and Stones a speciality") who, for some reason, appeared minus his mushroom-cloud Afro wig and satin and tat.

> Mick leans into the mic, stretching out the syllables like Silly Putty

Messrs Wood and Richard flanked Jagger, looking for all the world like a pair of diseased crows. They're a remarkably well-matched pair both eyewise and earwise. Eyewise, they were like bookends propping up the Jagger Library Of Poses; and Wood's extrovert contrast to Mick Taylor's studious angelic self-effacing whiz-kid-in-the-shadows-next-to-Bill concentration erodes Richard's previously obvious Number Two Son position. He's taken over some of the backing vocals that used to be Richard's, and his cheery scampering about and winning ways with a cigarette butt set off the traditionally limned legendary Jagger-and-Richard stage mannerisms.

Earwise he works out infinitely better than I'd foreseen (or foreheard). I've heard him play some of the most lamentable guitar known to medical science during his days with the Faces (working, perhaps, on the principle that band and audience alike were too wiped out to know the difference and that nobody cared but a few snotty reviewers who'd get savaged by their readers in the letters pages anyway), but now and then, like on the early Stewart solo albums and the Clapton Rainbow concert and one or two occasional Faces gigs when Rod Stewart's ego and the various consumptions had been kept in check, he'd hauled out some chops that weren't to be coughed over.

Here, operating as an extension of Richard, filling out Rock And Roll Himself's riffs and squeezing curlicues out of the lead-guitar tube to put the icing on the cake, he got it on with a ferocious energy and a commendably disciplined and canny channelling of same. Dig: nobody gets 15 minutes to solo while the rest of the band go off to leak, take a hit, cop a drink or get blown in this band. Nobody gets to be self-indulgent except You Know Who.

A WHILE BACK I was ripped at the zoo with Ian Mac and the lady I'm getting married to, and as we drifted through the ape section we saw a gibbon going through its party pieces. Using its tail like a fifth limb, it was swinging around the trees in its romping ground with a kind of insolent facility and grace that said, "I'm only doing this 'cuz I feel like it, suckers. Any minute now I'm gonna stop and just squat in a corner and you're gonna stand around like dummies and wait for me to do it some more and I won't. So there."

That gibbon is totally hip to Mick Jagger.

Except that Jagger don't stop. He prowls and struts and minces and flounces like a faggot chimpanzee, his whole body one big pout. His moves are athletic/gymnastic rather than balletic, like a calisthenics programme designed jointly by Lionel Blair and the Royal Canadian Air Force.

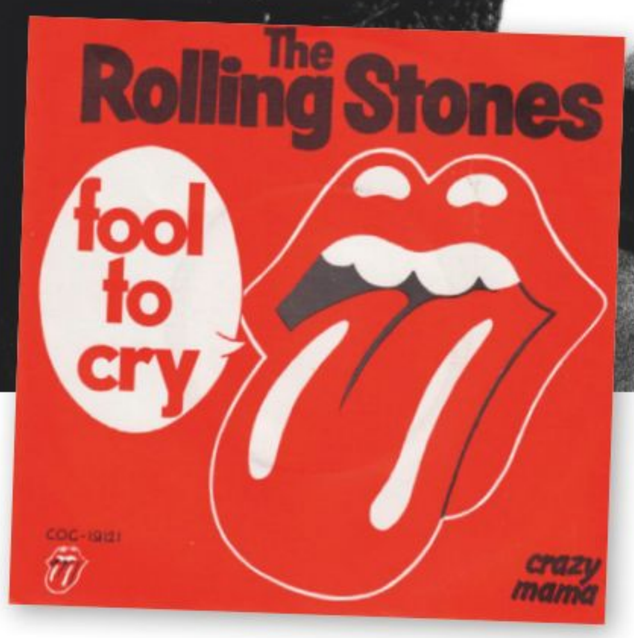
He shoulders into Ronnie Wood, limpwrists so extravagantly that the movement spreads right up his arm to his shoulder, and jives outrageously between numbers, going "All right!" and "Yeah!" and "Sssssssssu-guh!" like he was Ike Hayes or somebody.

The only time he stays still is when he sits down behind the electric piano for "Fool To Cry", one of the four numbers they do off the new album (the others, in case you wanna learn the words in time for Earls Court, are "Hey Negrita" – so-so – "Hand Of Fate" – more impressive live than on record – and "Hot Stuff" – which still sucks on ice).

They do "Get Off My Cloud", "You Can't Always Get What You Want", "Happy" (which Jagger caps with a heavily sarcastic, "Fank you, Keef. That wos great"), "You Got To Move" (with Keith standing back to spin out the guitar lines and Jagger, Preston and Wood clustered round the mics), "Brown Sugar" (audience really picking up on the "*Yeah… yeah… yeah… shoooooo!*" bits) and an oddly perfunctory "Midnight Rambler", which doesn't really play tug-o'-war with your nerves the way it oughtta »

GIJSBERT HANEKROOT / GETTY

May 6, 1976: Ron Wood – who is "commendably disciplined" on stage – and Mick Jagger relax at the hotel in Brussels



despite the ritual whipping of the stage with the hallowed silver belt and not-quite-dramatic-enough lighting changes.

Still, it was "Midnight Rambler" which launched the set into second gear, which it needed to coming as it did after Billy Preston singing "Nothing From Nothing" and performing a rather undignified Ikettes dance routine with Jagger.

Where it all really cut loose was on the final "Jumpin' Jack Flash"/"Street Fightin' Man" medley wherein Keith fell down, etc, etc. Richard/Wood doesn't have the crystalline snaky lead/firing-from-the-hip rhythm purity as Richard/Taylor, but it's so raunchy that if it moved in next door your lawn wouldn't even wait around long enough to die, it'd move to a nicer neighbourhood.

The trouble is that Jagger's cosmic inflation of spoiled brattishness has been so crudely exaggerated that it's stylised itself up its own ass. It's a good show, sho' nuff, but he comes on so strong that it just degenerates into hamming. He plays the spoiled brat much better offstage, anyway.

Well, in my dream he did. Lemme tell you about it.

After the show I went back up to my room and had a smoke. Somebody spoke and I went into a dream. I had me a dream that made me sad, about the Stones and the…

In my dream, Dave Walters from WEA ushered me and three other rockpress folks into Ronnie Wood's room so that we could like hang out. And as soon as I'd been introduced to Mr Wood – who acted pleasant and civil despite my having, in the real world, written some fairly unpleasant and uncivil things about him in the past – we sat down and smoked.

The end of the room we're in is occupied by a sofa, a table, a gang of chairs and a mammoth sound system blasting out Maceo Merriweather, Furry Lewis, Robert Johnson and good reggae. Over at the big table, Keith Richard, who looks – let's just say "tired" – is giving an interview to a Swedish radio guy.

I'd read in the *Sunday Times* that each Stone received £25 a day pocket money, so after we'd talked blues a little bit, I asked Woody what he spent his on.

"It's more like £350 a week," he said amiably enough. "That's just the per diem."

I discovered that Honest Ron was brother to Art Wood, former leader of The Artwoods, a group who I'd dug when I was 15 or so and who'd included Keef Hartley on drums and Jon Lord on organ.

A seat at The Captain's Table had fallen vacant, so I annexed it just as Keith started into answering someone's question about why all the stuff on the new album was a year or more old.

"Those were just the dates on which we did the basic tracks," he articulated carefully. "There was a lot of overdubbing and mixing later on, but there's only so much room for information on an album cover."

I asked him what happened to the stuff they'd cut with Jeff Beck.

"We didn't do any songs; we just played and sometimes the tapes were rolling and sometimes they weren't."

So how was it?

Irritable flicker of the eyes. "You know Jeff. Sometimes 'e was brilliant and sometimes it was rubbish. Ronnie can tell you far more about Jeff Beck than I can anyway."

Richard assembles refreshments delicately on the table in front of him, emits a resounding *snfffff* and leans headlong into the next question, which is: "What do you think of groups like Eddie & The Hot Rods and The Count Bishops and the Sex Pistols who are like what the Stones used to be like 12 years ago?"

It seems pretty dumb to ask a cat who ain't been in England for two years what he thinks of three unrecorded bands who've sprung up in the last six months, but hell, whaddya expect from a dream? Logic?

"I only really listen to black music these days," says Richard, *snfffff*. "I ain't too interested in white bands who rip off white bands who ripped off black bands."

Ronnie Wood wanders over and hands Richard a fragment of cigarette packet with something written on it. Richard scans it, *snfffffs* it, and looks at me very hard. He also makes no attempt to pass his refreshments around.

That fragment of my conscious mind which is monitoring the dream wonders, "Is this some masterly demonstration of Zen and the art of Cool Maintenance, or is the guy the most outrageous bogarter in Christendom?"

Keith looks at the note and then back at me.

GIJSBERT HANEKROOT / GETTY

Though I'm sitting opposite him, in some weird floating dream way I can read the note. It says, "Keith – do you realise that you're talking to Charles Shaar Murray?" I must be dreaming – big rock stars passing notes in class.

We talk a bit about how Albert King's still fantastic but BB King's down the pan these days, and then I look up from Number Three and see that Mick Jagger's come into the room, making a Grand Entrance which unfortunately nobody really reacts to. Sure, I know what Robert Greenfield wrote in *STP* about how by his mere presence, Jagger changes any event that he is present at, but Jagger's coming into this room don't change it none. He just gets the automatic glance that the sound of an opening door and footsteps always gets.

"I read your review, Charles, and I thought it was rubbish," Keith says suddenly and, staring defiantly around the table to dare anyone to call him out, snarfs loudly. Weirdass dream. Nick Kent told me that when Keith gets annoyed he throws ashtrays.

"Yeah, well," I say, "I thought the album was pretty disappointing."

"Most people liked it," he comes back. "Did you write that just to be different, then?"

"Naw, most people I know thought it was dreadful too."

"Maybe you ought to broaden your circle of acquaintances," he said.

"Oh, I dunno… it's getting broader all the time."

Damn! I wouldn't dare to talk back to Keith Richard like that normally. I'm waiting for him to do something bizarre and heavy and Keithish when Ronnie Wood intercedes:

"There was something in your review," sez Honest Ron, "that Keith got really upset about. I can't quite remember what it was, but… I'm surprised that he didn't take it up with you."

From beyond Wood comes a sound exactly like Mick Jagger saying in his proletarian voice, "Oi fort your review wos bahluddy stoopid."

Mentally shutting out these disturbing hallucinations within the dream, I carry on talking to Wood.

"OI FORT YOUR REVIEW WOS BLAHHHDY STOOPID!"

Louder this time. Omigawd-omigawdomigawd. This is a dream. This is a dream. Even if it wasn't, that bit wouldn't be happening. Do not panic. Think only of yourself. Do… not… panic.

Jagger gets up and flounces away to talk to Paul Wasserman, a heavy-set, bearded, very straight-looking American who's doing the tour PR.

Shortly after, Dave Walters from WEA comes over to me. He's turned green. He tells me that Mr Jagger would like me and my fellow rock chroniclers to vacate the premises immediately. I gather up my various impedimenta like a good boy should. Dave Walters is back and this time he's colour-coordinated to match Billy Preston's velvet jacket.

"Paul Wasserman's just told me that Mick said that if you're not out in 30 seconds he'll get the heavies to throw you out." Dream or no dream, I'm a lover not a fighter. Ultimately, I'd rather be a healthy wimp than an injured punk.

Just past the threshold, Keith appears looking placatory.

"Look," he says in conciliatory tones, "Jagger…" he enunciates the name in less than admiring tones, a sort of aw-come-on-you-know-what-he's-like intonation. "Jagger wants to go over some songs and rearrange the set. We're probably havin' a party in Bill Preston's room when 'e gets back from eatin'… give us yer room number and I'll give you a buzz later on."

We roll a smoke, light it up.

As soon as it gets to Keith, he says, "What's your number? 572? OK, talk to you later," and vanishes into the room with it. We are left staring at the door.

With that tranquil acceptance of the utterly impossible that accompanies a dream state, I assimilate the fact that Keith Richard, quintessential rock star, cool personified and the idol of millions, has just ripped me off for my last smoke.

Back in the room I started reading my book. And then I took the phone right offa the hook.

Woke up in the morning, and then realised that it was only in my dream. God, if only it had really happened… the night I stoned the Stones. Somehow, it made all the bread I'd spent on Stones records when I was a kid worthwhile. Somehow. Couldn't quite figure out how, though.

Then, just after I'd checked out, the porter rushed over to the cab and handed me this envelope marked "Charles Murray Room 572". Inside was a note scrawled in red felt-tip on a torn-out page of the tour programme.

And this is what it said:

"Dear Charles (The disappointed man):

"Just to say that we hoped you get yourself and your critical faculties safely back to Tin Pan Alley. How come you don't get high? You sure work at it hard enough. That's what London does for you. Enthusiasm-unship (an equation from the smoke). Did you ever write a review of *Exile*? If you did, and still have a copy, I'd like to see it!

"Anyway, thanks for the number at the door! Come see us in London and we'll get you mighty high (you deserve it; hanging out with neurotic queens from the provinces is gloom by the bucket). I'd love to see a review of your visit to Ronnie's room, now we understand it all. Death to Eddie & The Hotrods!"

It was just signed "Stones", but that "number at the door" bit just had to refer to the final encounter with Keith in my dream. But that was impossible unless Keith had had the same dream I had.

After all, I've never even met the Rolling Stones. I'm not even sure I've ever been in Frankfurt. Or reviewed a new Stones album. Or even heard about them putting one out since *It's Only Rock'n'Roll*.

Look, don't turn me in. I'm harmless. Really I am. I've just got a vivid imagination, that's all. I made all this up, honest. I mean, any fool knows the Stones aren't really like that.

Are they?

Hey Keith… we can't go on meeting like this.

Charles Shaar Murray •

> "Mick said if you're not out in 30 seconds he'll get the heavies"

Comes on like an idea-shaped vacuum

NME APRIL 24 The Stones' delayed 13th proves unworthy of the wait.

The Rolling Stones Black And Blue
ROLLING STONES

"THE ROLLING STONES are a really good band, but, like, I consider them like a boys' band because they don't play men's music. They don't play professional music for men, they play music for young people, and even with their most intelligent material as a stimulant, they play music for the young." – Mike Bloomfield, 1968

"I've heard some of the Rolling Stones' new tracks and although I dig them, I don't think they're anything more than what they are, which is incredible, delicious and wonderful rock'n'roll and well overdue from them. The Rolling Stones should always be a non-progressive group." – Pete Townshend, 1968

"Quite simply, I personally feel that the Stones are the world's best rock'n'roll band – quite unqualifiedly. Not that I think their records are always great... it's like Glyn Johns says about a Stones session, you can sit and wait for weeks and they'll just churn out a lot of rubbish." – Pete Townshend, 1970

"That's what makes the Stones the Stones: they never back down, never lose ground, they plunge ahead as raw as life itself, and even though they made mistakes sometimes they're not afraid to admit 'em, and they'll take another wilder chance round the very next bend. That's rock'n'roll, brother, and so are the Rolling Stones." – Lester Bangs, 1973.

The last time the Stones put out an album was nearly two years ago. That was *It's Only Rock'n' Roll* and since then they've pacified the natives only with a couple of crash-course-for-the-ravers compilations of their Decca and Rolling Stones Records periods (*Rolled Gold* and *Made In The Shade* respectively), Bill Wyman's *Stone Alone*, assorted cameos on Ron Wood's solo LPs, and the everything-you-always-wanted-to-hear-from-the-Stones-and-then-wished-you-hadn't-asked *Metamorphosis*.

Mick Taylor blue-jaunted at the tail end of '74, just as the Stones were about to embark on their next bout of recording, and various notables – including Jeff Beck, Ronnie Wood (two guys I would deem it inadvisable to invite to the same session), Robert A Johnson (from John Entwistle's Ox), Harvey Mandel (late of Canned Heat and John Mayall) and Wayne Perkins (late of Smith, Perkins & Smith) – zoomed in amid flurries of are-they-or-are-they-not-the-new-Stones to help The Greatest Rock And Roll Band In The World to lay down their weary tracks.

Anyway, Ron Wood won the door prize and gets his pic on the sleeve despite still not being "officially" a full-fledged Stone, and the nationals generally play safe by referring to him as "guitarist with the Rolling Stones and the Faces" even though the Faces are gone-gone. And guess what? *Black And Blue*, the Stones' new album, released last week, is composed entirely of material recorded between mid-December of 1974 and early April of 1975, featuring Wood, Mandel and Perkins on auxiliary guitars. Relevance, right? Immediacy, right? Fast throughout, right?

In his celebrated *Rolling Stone* interview, Keith Richard responded to Robert Greenfield's remark that "Stones albums usually take a long time" as follows: "Which really pisses me off. Because everybody's laid back a little more and everybody has other things, whereas when it was just a matter of being on the road and recording, that's all you did... and obviously you could do things much quicker that way, but you can't have weddings of the year and solo albums..."

So *Black And Blue* comes out nearly a year after it was cut, which would imply (a) that the Stones have been having a more than somewhat turbulent time of it and (b) a fairly low read-out on the prolific-o-meter.

Still, it wouldn't matter a hoot in hell if the album had proved itself worth the wait, but *Black And Blue* is a letdown of hideous proportions, devoid of either the epic sense of sleazy grandeur or the galvanic bejewelled tension which are the Stones' twin ace cards.

From the top, then. Side one opens up with "Hot Stuff", with two guitar parts from Keef, led by Harvey Mandel, and a dollop of piano from Billy Preston. It's little more than a lengthy (nearly five-and-a-half minutes) workout on a funk riff with Jagger alternately breathing, *"Hot Stuff, can't get enough"* over the top, and indulging in what sounds like a drunken impression of Captain Beefheart doing an I Roy talkover. Mandel takes a lengthy psychedelic I-am-backward-tape solo when Jagger pauses for breath, which isn't nearly often enough. Richard's rhythm lick is awesomely casual in the time-honoured Keef tradition of playing so loose that it sounds as if he's going to miss a chop at any moment – except that he invariably holds it down with his patented throwaway precision. Plus Charlie's good tonight, innee?

Unfortunately, even the sterling efforts of these two stalwarts can't make "Hot Stuff" anything more than an embarrassment.

"Hand Of Fate" is built around a cluster of supposedly fail-safe Stones devices: a snarling, lurching Keef riff, a spitting, grandstanding Jagger vocal, Watts cymbal smashes to boost the momentum, mixed-down Preston piano, and a hardnosed lead guitar (by Perkins, who sounds uncannily like Mick Taylor, which doesn't hurt a bit). Only trouble is it don't work. It sets itself up as the latest heir to "Brown Sugar" and "Stray Cat Blues", but winds up as little more than a poor relation.

"Cherry Oh Baby", the Stones' latest stab at reggae, was written by Eric Donaldson, who recorded the original version which, regrettably, I haven't heard. It features Nicky Hopkins in the unfamiliar role of organist and no less than four guitar parts (three by Keef and one by Honest Ron Wood, putting in the first of his three cameo appearances). Charlie Watts plays delightfully crisp and solid drums – the best white reggae drums I've ever heard, in fact – but Bill Wyman's bass is far too sluggish and the guitars stumble over each other, completely demolishing the feel of the track.

The last time the Stones addressed themselves to the wonders of dat JA beat ("Luxury" on *It's Only Rock'n'Roll*), they covered their bets both ways by simultaneously stylising reggae to hell 'n' gone, and maintaining a basic classic Stones rough-edge drive with a reggae backbeat. Here, they attempt a straightforward cop of Actual Real JA Licks, and blow it.

The vocal is so hammy that any devout Rasta, Muslim or Jew wouldn't even allow it in the house. The final track on the side, "Memory Motel", goes part of the way towards reclaiming the lost ground. Perkins and Mandel play guitars (acoustic and electric respectively), and Jagger and Richard pianos (ditto), while Billy Preston weighs in on string synthesizer (the acceptable face of Mellotron). It's a fair-to-middling example of the Stones Ballad, with just enough roughage from the vocal and drums to satisfactorily complement the pastoral keyboardarama and extremely winsome melody. It would be a more than adequate Second Division cut on a Grade-A Stones album, but on this one it's the first track that actually achieves what it sets out to do.

In general, things pick up a little on the second side. They don't pull off any masterstrokes, but

ALBUMS REVIEW 1976

May 19, 1976: the Stones in their hotel at 2am after a concert in Stafford – (l–r) Charlie Watts, Billy Preston, Ollie Brown with Keith Richards' six-year-old son Marlon, Mick Jagger, Keef, Bill Wyman and Ron Wood

on the other hand they don't fumble the ball.

"Hey Negrita" is the album's winner dance track; sinuous, stomping funk with Richard and Wood on guitars (a commendably restrained one guitar track apiece) and Preston on piano and organ; tailormade accompaniment for stuff-strutting. The song ain't no Nobel Prizewinner, but it's just solid enough to give the riff an excuse for living and the chorus vocals (by Jagger, Richard, Preston and Wood) have a nicely sassy urgency.

"Melody", which follows, is another of the album's better moments. Cool, slinky, feline and deceptively mellow, it gives Billy Preston a hands-down landslide as its Best Supporting Player for his piano, organ and backup vocals, tho' Bro' Keef comes a respectable second for his snaky blues fills. It also wins Best Lyric and Best Vocal – not that Jagger gives himself too much competition on this album. There's a beautiful verse which goes sump'n like:

"I took her out eatin' but she drank up all my pay/She said, 'I'm gon' fix my face, don't you go away'/I was lookin' for her high and low like a master for a hound/She was passed out in the bathroom in the arms of my best friend."

Cute, huh? Unfortunately, the next cut, "Fool To Cry", throws away a very pretty backing track (Richard and Perkins on guitars, Jagger on electric piano, Hopkins on acoustic piano and string synthesizer) and a lovely chorus with a quite unprecedentedly crass vocal and lyric. Maestro?

"I come home, baby, after working all night long/Put my daughter on my knee/And she say, 'Daddy, what's wrong?'/And she whisper in my ear so sweet/You know what she say?/ She say, 'Daddy, you're a fool to cry'..."

Look, I know Mick and Keith used to write for Gene Pitney, but this is ridiculous. For closers, there's "Crazy Mama", another entry in the Write-A-Classic-Stones-Rock-Out sweepstakes. The song's a bit of a 98-pound weakling, but the track has a rolling, methodical, remorseless power, with Richard playing both the rhythm and the principal leads, augmented by Mr Jagger himself on Assistant Rhythm and (it says here) Wood and Preston for the gorgeous solo and fade-out lick. I haven't the faintest idea what Preston's playing, since it sounds like three guitars to me, but I'm too chicken to argue the toss with an Actual Mock-Up of Actual Engineers' 16-Track Mixing Notes.

Commendations: Keith Richard still plays Keith Richard better than anybody else, though he's played it considerably better in the past. Charlie Watts is, on the other hand, greater than ever. Mick Jagger's guitar is improving dramatically, and he's playing very respectable piano indeed.

The Massed Engineers (played by Glyn Johns, Keith Harwood, Phil McDonald and Len Hahn) have achieved a radically different Stones sound: ultra-crisp, clean and sharp, with an enviable degree of solidity and punch on the bass and drums, as opposed to the tangled, shaggy meat-grinder mixes of yore. It's a Conventional Good Sound, and I still haven't made up my mind about it.

It doesn't sound as if the Stones are too much in touch with what's actually happening

Brickbats: the quality of the material and of Jagger's vocals is at an all-time Stones low. The songs are mostly poor, and Jagger sounds strained and uptight, substituting caricature phrasing and enunciation for the deadly, lynx-like confidence of old. Could be he's unhappy with the songs and is thus unable to work within them to his customary degree.

All in all, *Black And Blue* comes on like an idea-shaped vacuum. Why it wasn't released a year ago I haven't the faintest idea; and I can only presume that it's surfacing now because they haven't had the time/energy/inspiration to cut anything better in the meantime.

Perhaps the most upsetting aspect of the album is that parts of it already sound dated. "Hot Stuff", particularly, reminds one that a year ago, when it was cut, earnest folk in the rockbiz were all enraptured by Thangs Fonky (Kool, Ohio Players, Fatbacks, etc) and the likes of Keith and his pals were probably dying to try their hand at Summa Dat Fonky Stoff. (Ditto reggae, for that matter.) Well, Fonk precision-tooled itself into a blind alley and "Hot Stuff" is still staring blankly at the wall.

It doesn't sound as if the Stones are too much in touch with what's actually happening. *Black And Blue* is neither a triumphant return to the forefront to show all the upstart bands of the last two years that the Original Is Still The Greatest, nor a work of resolute classicism. Rather, it radiates confusion and aridity; isolation and stalemate.

Unquestionably they've still got the chops to play the ass off of their next set of good ideas, but those good ideas are gonna haveta be there if the Rolling Stones intend to be anything more than an oldies band. *Black And Blue* is neither a trailblazing foray off the beaten track, nor a confident lap of honour round the main freeway, but a directionless mooch round the side streets.

Oh well. I suppose it's rather naive at this point to expect veteran heroes – even colossi like the Stones, The Who and Led Zep – to return messianically toting rock'n'roll salvation in the form of Tablets from the Mountain. The two first-named bands have by now enjoyed longer periods of genuine creativity than either Elvis or Chuck Berry, and even rock stars (*especially* rock stars) have to contend with built-in obsolescence.

The hell with it. If they won't rock us, somebody will. But then you can't always get what you want. *Charles Shaar Murray*

GETTY

Kiss in 1976: (l–r) Ace Frehley, Gene Simmons, Peter Criss, Paul Stanley

“Larger than life”

In the wake of Alice Cooper, KISS are storming America with their theatrical, sleazy rock. “I love to do all those deliciously painful things to you,” says bassist Gene Simmons, “that make you writhe and groan in ecstasy.”

— MELODY MAKER MAY 15 —

“I DON’T FEEL I have to defend myself to you, and I won’t take your criticism either. I’d take the criticism of a fan, though. If someone who pays money to see us wants to offer an opinion or advice, then I’ll gladly listen. They’re the ones that count…

“I’m a star, you see, a big star. I’m a larger-than-life hero and that’s what I want and have to be. I’ve known I’m a star for a long time because I have a very big ego. Stars should look like stars, they should look better than their audience.”

Gene Simmons is an outspoken fellow, perhaps the most outspoken member of the most outspoken band that America has thrown up in the last two years. He is the bass player of Kiss, a band that has erupted from being a heavy metal garage outfit to superstars in the last 12 months.

The facts speak for themselves all too plainly. On last New Year’s Eve, Kiss headlined a concert at the giant Nassau Coliseum on Lone Island, topping the bill over that other US heavy metal outfit, Blue Öyster Cult. Twelve months before, Kiss supported the Cult at the New York Academy of Music.

During the past 12 months, Kiss’s albums have sold in huge quantities, not only in the US but also in Australia, Japan and Canada. Germany seems to be the only European country that has picked up on them so far, but their upcoming tour of England and the Continent may change all that.

The nearest comparable act to Kiss on the US rock circuit is probably Alice Cooper, though Alice has, in recent years, cut down on the outrageousness and mingled with the establishment to the detriment of his more youthful following.

Between them, Kiss and their manager Bill Aucoin noticed the void that Cooper (and probably Grand Funk Railroad) had left behind and systematically moved in. A combination of hard work, unrelenting heavy metal riff music, sado-masochistic suggestions and every conceivable theatrical cliche of their genre has turned them into the biggest success story of the past year.

Unquestionably, their audience spans an age group somewhere between 14 and 18, the same age group that Alice appealed to during his peak years with the old AC Band.

Kiss’s complete lack of musical sophistication sticks two fingers up, not only at the establishment, but also at other established rock bands who, over the years, have progressed beyond the confines of their original statements. »

FIN COSTELLO / GETTY

On stage, Kiss look like refugees from a Marvel comic, complete with bats' wings, black leather costumes and circus clown-like makeup that would look funny if it wasn't all intermingled with the SM pose they adopt. It's no coincidence that their name Kiss and the logo they utilise includes the twin "S" symbol of the Nazi secret police.

Similarly, their stage routine includes fire-breathing, the speciality of Simmons, and extensive use of strobe lighting, smoke bombs, police sirens and any other prop they can lay their hands on to add to the gross spectacle of a live Kiss concert.

Simmons' other speciality is his protruding tongue, which seems to be at least an inch and a half longer than normal, giving him the look of a vampire, accentuated with makeup that includes a triangular black path running down to a point near the bridge of his nose.

He's the bass player and, for the technically minded, he uses a Gibson Grabber, a singularly appropriate choice of instrument. Elsewhere, we have guitarists Paul Stanley, easily identifiable by the black star over his right eye and Gibson Flying-V, and "Space" Ace Frehley, whose eyes are surrounded by silver stars and who makes dubious claims about being descended from a race of spacemen whose fashion style he emulates to this day.

On drums we find Peter Criss, who paints his nose red, daubs on stripes like Indian warpaint and adopts a catlike pose, ready to spring like a jungle predator. Up until now, the music they play has merely provided a backdrop to a display of outrageous behaviour and spectacle.

But all this may be changing soon, as Bob Ezrin, the noted producer, has been brought in to take over the musical side of things. Out of the marketing concept has developed the Kiss Army centred in the Midwest of America, where their following is bigger than anywhere else.

For the benefit of their Army, Kiss make public appearances, not only playing concerts, but simply to shake hands, meet fans and – as always – appear as larger than life characters from another planet.

That their gamble paid off was a huge relief to both Aucoin and Neil Bogart, the boss of the Casablanca label. Their success has taken the rest of the industry by surprise.

The Kiss story begins in 1973, which is the year that Aucoin, a dapper little chap who seems to have a high regard for Shep Gordon, Alice Cooper's manager, saw the group appear at the Diplomat Hotel in New York. Up until that stage, they had no manager, and were handling their own business activities, promoting themselves and inviting anyone associated with the industry to come and see them.

At first, Kiss weren't too impressed with Aucoin. He wasn't a real manager with experience in management and they thought he was just an amateur with optimistic dreams.

"I told them that in two weeks I could get them a record contract and set down specific plans as to their future. If that didn't happen, they could have nothing more to do with me," he said.

Aucoin, unlike many managers, is very open about the financial side of things. "The original deal was that Kiss were signed with a $15,000 advance, but between Bogart and Rock Steady (Aucoin's management company)… Well, we wound up putting a quarter of a million into the band before the first year was out.

"We were out of pocket until the last few months of this year. It cost ten thousand a week to keep the band on the road at the beginning, and six months ago, when they were just beginning to break nationally, it was costing 20 thousand to keep it going.

"The record company put in another 120 thousand and we put in the rest, but there was never any real negativity about us not making it. The feeling was always there that it would happen in the end."

Aucoin was, in fact, aware of Alice Cooper's approaching "retirement" and this was a factor that led him to take on the group in the first place. Bob Ezrin's introduction into the fold – Ezrin, of course, produces Cooper – came about not only through Aucoin's invitation, but also through his own intuitiveness.

Believe it or not, Ezrin is constantly in touch with young kids who call him to discuss new developments in rock. Such a fan called up about Kiss, mentioned that though their stage act was quite unbelievable, their records were lousy. Forewarned, Ezrin accepted Aucoin's invitation without hesitation.

"They'll get more musical now," said Aucoin. "Don't forget that when you're running around the stage like Kiss do, you can't be overly critical about every note you play.

"Now they've been on the road for a couple of years and know how to handle an audience, they can concentrate on the finer points of music."

As a press conference last week demonstrated, it is really quite hard to get straight answers from any of the members of Kiss. After half an hour's questioning by about 15 reporters gathered to witness this "eve of European tour occasion", it was doubtful whether anyone was much wiser about the four members of the band.

Talking is not their forte and they seemed much happier striking ridiculously exaggerated poses with a blonde model who is shortly to appear as the centrespread in *Playboy* magazine, who had been brought along to add a touch of glamour to the ugliness of Kiss's made-up facade.

"I was born a pervert," replied Simmons when I caught him alone some time later, but his talk

> "Sure, we've picked up Alice's crowd… Grand Funk's, Sabbath's"

CHRIS WALTER / GETTY; MICHAEL PUTLAND / GETTY

Kiss of life

feel I have to defend myself to you, and I won't take your critic-
ther. I'd take the criticism of a fan, though. If someone who pays

of instrument.
Elsewhere, we have guitar-

now," said Aucoin. "Don't band once signed to Columbia

became more reasoned as we progressed. His image is, perhaps, best summed up in his own sleeve notes on Kiss's live album, where he writes: "I love to do all those deliciously painful things to you that make you writhe and groan in ecstasy. My spiked seven inch boot heels are at the ready should you be in the mood for heavy sport."

All of which sounds rather like a classified advert from *Screw* magazine, so it comes as a surprise to discover that 26-year-old Simmons was, at one time or another, a teacher in a secondary school and, by all accounts, an academic success at university. He also worships British bands like the Stones and The Who, and makes no secret of basing his own musical ideas on them.

Simmons is reluctant to talk about his past, partly because Kiss are currently so successful that he feels the past is of no interest and partly because he was, with Stanley, in a band once signed to Columbia whose album was never released. Mention of all this, he thinks, could prompt the label to release the album on the strength of Kiss's name and he doesn't want it to happen.

Suffice to say that the other members of this early five-piece outfit were fired by Simmons and Stanley because their physical characteristics and attitude towards live performances didn't shape up to what they had in mind.

"We've always felt that we have to look better than the people who come to see us," he said. "There's something wrong when the audience looks better than the people they've come to see. It's very important, to us at any rate."

Legends are made of stories like this one: Simmons and Stanley negotiated an advance from Columbia and, with the money, rented a Greenwich Village loft in which to rehearse, filling it with English amplifiers in their attempts to emulate the British heavy metal sound of the early '70s.

"We knew we wanted to be exciting, so we asked ourselves who we thought was exciting... Well, there's The Who, Led Zeppelin and Jimi Hendrix, the loud guitar-orientated bands... so that's what we had to become. Then we decided that if we had one frontman, there was a possibility that the audience might become bored with him. So our idea was to get four frontmen, each one could have his own personality, look different yet fit into a unifying band."

Drummer Criss was discovered after placing an advert in *Rolling Stone*, which Simmons answered.

"Before I asked him about his musical ideas I asked whether he was fat, if he wore a beard and things like that. He couldn't believe that I wanted to know those things, but it was important because we had to get the visuals right from the start.

"Then I went to see him in some club, playing in a band, and he was great. He hit the snare real hard, like the English drummers do, so he was in."

As a trio, Kiss – for the name had been decided on by now – rehearsed for three months and even auditioned for a couple of interested companies. "Then, when we thought we were ready to add an extra layer, we advertised for a second guitarist in *The Village Voice*.

"Ace was about the 30th guy we heard... I mean, we had guitarists who couldn't speak English coming along, but Ace came in and I noticed very distinctly that he was wearing one orange sneaker and one red sneaker.

"He seemed so spaced out that I knew he was it. All he had to do was shave off his moustache and he was in."

They made their first appearance in January 1973, using whatever girls' makeup they could lay their hands on and adopting a style of dress as much like the present style as they could afford on their stretched budget.

During their first year under Aucoin's management, Simmons estimates the band played 290 concerts supporting just about every headliner on the circuit. He delights in recalling how Kiss used to get newspaper coverage over the headliners simply because they were so outrageous, but says that the only other act to give them trouble on one of these double bills was ZZ Top, who objected to their performance.

Paul Stanley admits that they've picked up fans from other acts, notably Cooper. "Sure... we've picked up Alice's crowd, we've picked up Grand Funk's and Black Sabbath's," he said, joining in the conversation, while Simmons went off in search of the *Playboy* model.

"A natural thing is that bands get older and as good as the Stones are, they're reaching a point when... well, in a couple of years I don't know how credible they will be. If my father was playing rock'n'roll, I'd be a bit sceptical." *Chris Charlesworth* •

The lowest depths

Paul Stanley and (right) Peter Criss at the Hammersmith Odeon, London, May 16, 1976

MM MAY 22 The Kiss phenomenon – fake blood, fireworks and all – fails to impress the critics.

HAMMERSMITH ODEON
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MAN, KISS HAD everything; every single effect in the book. They had a perfect lighting system; dry ice; smoke bombs; a fire-eater; a huge lighted insignia; sirens; confetti that simulated a blizzard; guitars; drums. EVERYTHING.

But what Kiss hadn't got at their Hammersmith Odeon gig on Sunday night was a feeling for music. They depended on their bland pyrotechnics to win over this English audience and, admittedly, they seemed to do that. But it was all so nauseatingly contrived that the showmanship meant nothing. I comfort myself in the knowledge that the audience were battered into submission by the sheer fantasia of it all.

I remember what their manager Bill Aucoin said in last week's *MM*: "When you're running around the stage like Kiss do, you can't be overly critical about every note you play." An admission of their pathetic musical ability if ever there was one.

First, let's look at the image on which they stake their reputation. There's the facial makeup and leather gear that's obviously calculated to outrage. This semblance of outrage is apparent in everything they attempt to do. Bass player Gene Simmons is well to the fore. He's the guy who breathes fire in one song and a couple of minutes later starts spitting blood as he pumps out a bassline. He also sticks his tongue out a lot and, like his comrades, poses. Of the entire band, I reckon he must feel the most stupid.

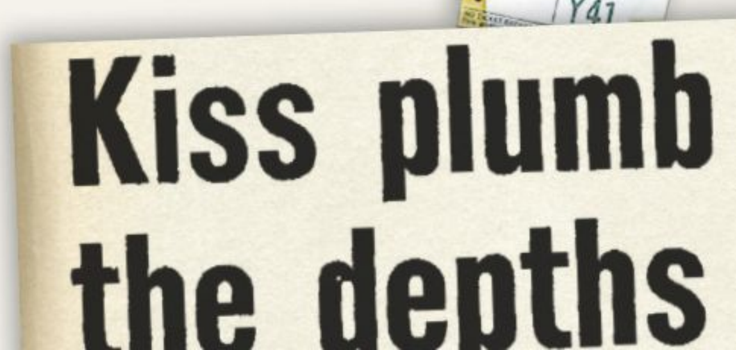
Rhythm guitarist and vocalist Paul Stanley almost matches Simmons for this distinction. He's the "link man", hollering out his lines like a man possessed. As well as that, he's about the worst guitarist I've ever heard.

Ace Frehley, the lead guitarist, I had a little sympathy for. A few times, just a few, he looked as if he was well into what he was doing. To the others, it seemed to be just another gig.

Musically, Kiss sink to the lowest depths. The wall of noise only partially hides their musical inadequacies: for the entire night they slammed out mindless riff after mindless riff, and it's a reflection on their mediocrity that they all sounded the same, apart from "Detroit Rock City", which I quite liked.

And don't give me the line that that's what heavy metal bands are about, because that's just a feeble excuse. I can honestly state that at no stage during the 80 minutes Kiss were on stage did my nerves tingle at anything they did. And that is simply because there was no feeling in what they were doing, no sense of purpose. They were ice-cold.

Please bar me the intellectual argument that Kiss are a parody of all that has gone on in rock for the past 10 years. No way. Even parodies have talent. I pray that Kiss will not have the same superficial effect on this country as they have in America. They're boring. *Harry Doherty*



"He deserves to be copied"

DAVID BOWIE returns to London. As if to confirm his role as "the generational leader of the '70s", his audience includes an army of doppelgängers. "I'm devoted to him," says one. "If it wasn't for him I'd be like everyone else. I'd probably be at home watching television."

— MELODY MAKER MAY 15—

CHRIS HORLER

BILLY NEVINS HAS the look of some hoodlum space punk created by Harlan Ellison after a vision suggested by David Bowie in *Diamond Dogs*. A wild mutation of Ziggy Stardust and Aladdin Sane, his makeup is smeared and grotesque; his T-shirt grimy and torn across the chest, an old fox fur stole is draped in nonchalant contempt about his shoulders. Badges and stickers and graffiti swarm over his jeans and shirt. He stares wild-eyed, with a kind of demented innocence, his eyes slightly glazed.

How old are you, Billy? "Fifteen," he replies, with a trace of cocksure arrogance in his voice and shrug of his shoulders which establishes a mood of petulant defiance. Billy has come to see David Bowie at Wembley Empire Pool. He has travelled, on the underground, from his home in Rayners Lane, Harrow, and suffered, without embarrassment, the indignant and outraged reactions of those members of an older generation he encountered on his journey.

"I didn't care what they thought. I'm devoted to David Bowie. If it wasn't for him I'd be like everyone else. I'd probably be at home watching television or something. I'm dressed like this because it's like a fantasy. When Bowie was Ziggy, it was a fantasy. He's not a fantasy any more, but I'm still devoted to him. He's playing David Bowie now. He's expressing what he feels like because David Bowie isn't as interesting as Ziggy Stardust."

As Michael Watts observed last week in his *MM* review of the opening night of David Bowie's concerts at the Empire Pool, where he played over six nights to an estimated 48,000 people, no other rock star of the '70s has captured so vividly and with such accuracy the imagination of the contemporary teenage audience.

He may have inherited from Jagger a capacity for outrage, but Bowie has not been content to merely reflect the frustrations and aspirations of his audience. Rather, he has sought to interrupt the mood of the times and created for himself the role of a significant influence over the lives and attitudes of his most ardent followers. He has connected with the mood of constant change which has characterised this decade and instilled in his fans a fervent and challenging appreciation of the necessity to confront the anonymity which contemporary society would seek to impress upon them by celebrating the notion of outrageous individuality.

Everywhere at Wembley over those six evenings his influence over his followers was apparent in the style of their dress and mannerisms and ideas. The »

Christopher Aslanan, 21, from Liverpool: "I get into fights because of the way I dress and behave"

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Jeremy Good, 17, from Havant, Hampshire: "I think what he's said about fascism is just a whim"

austerity of his current persona was copied by dozens and dozens of young kids who probably had no inkling as to the references Bowie was making, through the presentation of his show and his appearance, to the Berlin of the '30s with its atmosphere of radical upheaval and social and moral change.

And those closest in their style of dress and affinity to Bowie and his music could barely articulate the depth of their passion and admiration. One thing, however, emerged quite clearly: all were totally infatuated with Bowie's persistently changing image.

Indeed, their appreciation of Bowie was dominated by an imperative demand that he never remain the same. In an age of "*grand illusion*", to quote the man himself, it is, after all, appropriate that the current hero be an artist who is an established master of disguise.

STEVE GARDINER, 18, from Lynwood Road, Blackburn, expressed an attitude which was entirely representative. "It's important to have someone to follow. Someone to associate with. He's distinctive and individual. He's always different. He avoids monotony by changing all the time.

"I respect him for the glamour of his image and his music. He's outrageous and listening to outrageous music, like Bowie and Lou Reed and the New York Dolls, breaks the monotony. He's not a great artist, but he's an influence, so it doesn't matter. It's more important that there's someone to follow. It's an occasion to see Bowie. It makes you want to dress up."

Alan Davies, 18, a hairdresser from Bristol Avenue, Bolton, and Martin Sharp, 17, from Lever Edge Lane, Bolton, who had adopted an extravagant punk style for the concerts, were even more assertive in recommending Bowie's image above his music.

Davies: "He's always exciting. He does what he wants and gets away with it. He doesn't care about anyone else or what they'll think of him. The music is less important than the image. Everyone needs an image to hold your attention. You've got to be outrageous."

Sharp: "We want to be outrageous, and so we identify with Bowie and want to be like him. People at home, most of the lads, think if you like Bowie you must be strange. You get a lot of dirty looks and stares and we get into fights. It gets a bit frightening sometimes, but we want to show everyone that we like Bowie, so we don't care. He's so great that he deserves to be copied."

Christopher Aslanan, 21, a chef from Sandfield Park, Liverpool, has, like Davie and Sharp suffered the anger and violence of those less than sympathetic to Bowie. He is currently a carbon copy of Bowie, with two-tone hair, black waistcoat and trousers and crisp white shirt. He even sports a pack of Gitanes, a detail he picked up from photographs of Bowie in concert (such is the extent of Bowie's influence that he has just started smoking).

"I always wanted to be different," he said. "Bowie was different, so I copied him. He's a lot like me. He has the same style and he's a bit of a rebel. I like to be noticed and to look a bit special. I'm an exhibitionist really. I get into fights because of the way I dress and behave. People call me a poof and a queer. But if you dress like this you expect people to react like that. No, it wasn't important to me when Bowie said he was bisexual."

Cliff Parker, of Douglas Road, Aylesbury, a salesman for John Collier the tailors, attached rather more importance to Bowie's professed bisexuality: "I have tremendous respect for him as a singer and a writer and as a performer he is incredibly versatile. But I also respect him because he was the first rock star to admit that he was bisexual, and that took a lot of courage."

David Carr, 18, a hairdresser from Manchester and an uncanny Bowie lookalike, was even more forthright: "Why do I like Bowie? Because he's such a beautiful man. He's an original gay. Everyone's bisexual. I have to put up with a lot of abuse in Manchester because I go to gay clubs. Tonight's better. It's a special night. Everyone's dressed up. I don't care what he says about fascism. I was into fascism long before Bowie."

Nigel Cummings, 17, of Selkirk Road, Bolton, and Jeremy Good, 15, of Warbington Secondary School, Havant, were more vague in assessing Bowie's importance and explaining their infatuation. Both, however, had paid over £20 in fares for travel and accommodation in London.

It is enough for Cummings to say that he likes Bowie, without explanation: "He's unique, isn't he? He's always startling. Everyone follows him. He's always doing something different. No, I don't always dress like this. It's just for the show, and to show everyone I'm a Bowie fan, and that I'm a bit unique, too."

Jeremy Good was a little less defensive, if no more enlightening: "I heard *Ziggy* and I thought it was brilliant and very important. I've followed him ever since. I had red, spiky hair at the time of *Ziggy*, and then I went onto the Cracked Actor look and now this (he was dressed like Bowie in *The Man Who Fell To Earth*).

"I think what he's said about fascism is just a whim. I don't think he'd be accepted as a politician. I wouldn't mind if he went into politics if he stayed in rock'n'roll. I think he'd be competent as a politician. If he puts his mind to something he always succeeds."

Steven Huttersley, 17, an electrician of Henley Street, Manchester, and Martin Haley, 17, an apprentice hairdresser from Manchester, were less convinced about Bowie as a prospective fascist candidate: "It's a publicity stunt," Huttersley observed. "It's got nothing to do with his music. He admits that he's a liar. The press pester him and he says something outrageous. We know what he really means."

Dick Key, 18, originally from Maidstone, now a kitchen porter in a hotel in Abersoch, North Wales, was in contrast a little more cynical about the whole event: "I used to think Bowie was a big poof, you know, in the early days. But I was a bit of a hoodlum then. A real hooligan, I used to wear makeup, but it was more of a *Clockwork Orange* thing. I've just dressed like this tonight for the occasion. I love to see all these dudes dressed up, I love 'em. It's not that I really want to like him; it's just for the birds really."

Frenchie, 18, a fashion designer, was more gushing in her praise for Bowie: "He's opened doors for all of us. This is a very emotional experience tonight, because I think it's the end of Bowie as a cult figure. He's changed and we've all grown up. He's grown up, too."

Jez Blake, 18, who works for his father, who is a newsagent in Enfield, made not a single attempt to rationalise his feeling towards Bowie. His was, perhaps, the most extreme attitude to Bowie, who he described as "my God". He spent £15 for tickets for five of the six shows (he missed Tuesday's concert).

"I like his image. He's flamboyant and different. I think he said all that about fascism because some reporter was getting on his nerves. It makes no difference, anyway. If he was sincere I'd go along with it and agree with 'im because he's my God, ain't he…"

Jez stated finally that he spends his time drinking, playing golf and "spending money on myself."

Perhaps the final word should go to Christopher Aslanan. Rather exasperated with his blank acceptance of everything Bowie did and his determination to emulate every change Bowie went through, I asked casually what he would do if Bowie suddenly became infatuated with the idea of shooting members of his audience for the encore. "I'd buy a gun, I suppose," he replied with no trace of a smile. *Allan Jones* •

Black tie/ white heat

MM MAY 8 Bowie brings a touch of Isherwood's Berlin to his home town.

WHATEVER ANYONE WRITES now about David Bowie, it will have no bearing upon his position as a rock figure. At London's Wembley Empire Pool on Monday, the first of six concerts there and his only British appearance for almost three years, he was given a reception that eventually, as he performed "Jean Genie" for the final encore, brought tears to his eyes.

But he was not the only one overcome. From the moment he walked on stage, young male lookalikes with red-frosted hair were making sobbing protestations with hands outstretched, while the impressive show of unanimity amongst the audience at the end finally confirmed that Bowie is the most potent British taste-maker since Mick Jagger.

Even the most impassive critic would have to admit this was a real event, and not just an exercise in the minting of LSD, for Bowie left Britain, when he "retired" in July 1973, with only a shaky optimism, but he has returned from America as the fulfilment of Tony Defries' prophecy that one day he would be an "empire".

No other '70s rock star has represented so much in the fashions and social conduct of the young, or, for that matter, been so overwhelmingly ambitious as to want to extend that influence over the cinema and intellectual circles. That he has done this with some success must be at least partly due to his greatest talent as a manipulator of images and social forces.

He is so dominating in teenage culture not only because he knows so many more things than his rivals, but because he understands how to exploit them to stay ahead, if only instinctively.

For instance, his appearance in black silk

David Bowie on stage as the Thin White Duke as his Station To Station world tour stops at the Wembley Empire Pool in London for a six-night residency

LONDON EMPIRE POOL, WEMBLEY
LIVE!
MAY 3

waistcoat and trousers, with his hair slicked flat back, and looking like a character from Isherwood's Berlin, raised immediate echoes of his recent controversial comments about fascist rule for Britain.

No other rock artist – certainly not Elton John – could provoke that kind of intellectual connection. Yet it's debatable how great is his actual contribution to music, as opposed to the lifestyle and theories of popular culture.

Though he has had his artistic successes – perhaps most notably with the doom-mongering *Diamond Dogs* – his gift seems always to have been to synthesise styles, as he has done even on his last two albums, *Young Americans* and *Station To Station*, where he performs what he describes as "plastic soul".

Indeed, though only the keyboard player – the former Yes musician, Tony Kaye – was white, the music performed at Wembley by Bowie and his five-piece band had a metallic ring that was oddly familiar from every album he has made since *Hunky Dory*.

It's undoubtedly funky, but it remains somehow mechanistic, ferocious in its loudness and intensity, and quite unlike soul white or black. In vulgar shorthand, he has doctored "heavy metal soul", in which the sustain and feedback style of guitarist Stacy Heydon, and the conventional rock keyboards of Kaye, are contrasted with the stroke-playing of second guitarist Carlos Alomar and bassist George Murray, and the [Bernard] Purdie-like drums of Dennis Davis.

In practice this worked extremely well. It made for high-definition rock music, executed with great clarity; songs from *Hunky Dory* and all albums since followed swiftly upon each other.

This professionalism made nonsense of old memories of Bowie as a rather naive, aspiring performer, so in control was he. He sang forcefully, and largely without the *chansonnier* mannerisms that jarred on his Jacques Brel interpretations, but then in this show there is no room for songs that disrupt the momentum; and his torchy style was mercifully moderated on such modern pitfalls as "Word On A Wing" and "Stay".

But his stagecraft is now considerable. He mugs and flounces with the conviction of a Broadway trouper and none of the earnestly mimetic movements that once made his performance at the old Rainbow uncomfortable to watch.

On an unfamiliar, vastly reworked version of "I'm Waiting For The Man" he had even developed a shrewd cameo for himself as the nervous white boy trying to score "uptown". He went into this perfect little shtick of fumbling with his cigarette and mumbling apologies ("Oh pardon me, sir, I'm just waiting for my man") for his presence on a Harlem street corner that blew open Lou Reed's own sullen, defiant version of the song.

With just such touches as these he defined himself as a musical performer rather than as a rock act dutifully repeating his hits. He has even learned to move with passable expertise, though his grace seemed acquired rather than natural as his often gangling figure snapped into a hip-swivel and his legs pumped like bellows, but at least he has confounded his current travelling companion, Iggy Stooge, who once maintained that Bowie could never cut it in rock because he couldn't dance.

"It's undoubtedly funky, but it remains somehow mechanistic in its intensity"

This performance, in short, was more about Entertainment, and of a very superior and calculated kind, than Art, though it wasn't without its affectations. It seems that, like other rock artists with extravagant conceptions of their work, he cannot resist the touch of kitsch.

It was surely that, and not a sense of humour, which prompted him to preface his own appearance with the Buñuel/Dalí warhorse, *Un Chien Andalou*, whose grander, if now tame, moments of shock surrealism (the slitting of a woman's eyeball, the poking with a stick of a severed hand, the fondling of breasts, etc) were derisively greeted by a young audience interested only in the imminent arrival of Bowie and its own self-conceit.

Yet the staging of his actual performance was inspired. Using an overhead bank of neon lights and the auxiliary power of kliegs, he exposed the stage in a brilliant glare of black and white expressionism that emphasised the harshness of the music and reflected upon his own image as a white-shirted, black-suited creature of Herr Ishyvoo's cabaret. It was, I think, the most imaginative lighting of a rock concert I have ever seen.

All these achievements, then, and yet ultimately I confess I remained unmoved by him. If his show has the pace and slickness of a soul revue, he nevertheless failed to create the emotional involvement of a James Brown, or even a Sam & Dave.

One is face to face after a while with the paradox of Bowie; that, though his talent is extremely admirable, even fascinating, it is not often likeable. He invites our respect, but not our sympathies, because usually he is observing just that distance from us.

You might answer that Jagger is really a showman, also, but they are two very different people. Bowie on stage is almost too cerebral for my tastes, and not enough animal, which is where Jagger's appeal really lies. But this is not a point of view that would commend itself to his audience, which seems to see in Bowie not only a hero but a figurehead, a position of which he is perfectly aware.

In this sense "Changes" was the most poignant song of his performance. When he sang the lines "*Time may change me, or I may change time...*" [sic] one felt his understanding of his power, the extent of his ego; but when he pointed directly at his audience, a gesture he made several times, and shouted out, more as an interpolation, "*They're quite aware of what they're going through*" I was stirred, almost frightened, by the conviction of this bond.

It's as well to remember that Bowie is the only real generational leader of the '70s, a rock artist who neither settles for the present nor looks back to the past, but speaks for the future. *Michael Watts*

MICHAEL PUTLAND / GETTY

Slik: (l–r) Billy McIsaac, Jim McGinlay, Midge Ure and Kenny Hyslop

ALBUMS REVIEW 1976

ALBUMS

Slik Slik BELL

Slik, it appears, have been granted the honour of becoming the first teenybop band to be credited with a bit of skill and hope. And though their debut album is nothing special, there are signs that this optimism is well-founded.

Apart from the two classy pop singles on *Slik* – "Forever And Ever" and their most recent, "Requiem" – the material, featuring compositions from the band as well as producer Phil Coulter, is quite ordinary, nothing too sensational at all.

It's an album on which no chances are taken, a compilation of poppy songs, simple enough to please the teenybop audience the band have, initially anyway, chosen to aim for. I'd like to have seen a more daring approach taken – Slik do insist that their influences range from the light to the heavy – but then I suppose it's difficult to depart from the proven formula. The Coulter numbers, apart from the MOR ballad "Better Than I Do", are the predictable, commercial compositions he has made his forte. "Requiem", with its unusual time changes, stands out. The band numbers are less polished and none too memorable. Like all early compositions by aspiring songwriters, they're about love – "Do It Again" (Ure), "Day By Day" and "Darlin'" (McIsaac) and "No We Won't Forget You" (McGinlay). Hopefully, they'll improve with experience.

So, with nothing too startlingly fresh in the material, we must look to the musicianship for substantiation of their optimistic claims, and that, indeed, is where we find hope. Midge Ure is a good vocalist and fair guitarist, with a fine sense for feel; Billy McIsaac is a capable keyboards man; Kenny Hyslop's drum work is quite good; and Jim McGinlay's bass playing is adequate. McGinlay, too, comes across as an outstanding singer on the tracks he handles: "No We Won't Forget You", "Darlin'" and "Better Than I Do", with a vocal that sounds like a cross between Paul McCartney and Clifford T Ward. The harmony work of the band, too, is well above average.

That's Slik's debut. Perhaps next time they'll show a little more nerve and go out on a limb, which they refuse to do here. It's an album that doesn't give too many glimpses of their credibility but which shows, as their live performances did earlier in the year, that there's more to them, musically, than meets the eye. *Harry Doherty, MM May 22*

MICHAEL PUTLAND / GETTY

Led Zeppelin Presence SWAN SONG

There is a man I know, a college lecturer, for whom there is only one rock band. He literally knows of no other group than Led Zeppelin, and while his tastes otherwise roam 'twixt classical and jazz music, when it comes to rock he will listen entranced, solely to Zeppelin.

Such is the power the band hold over their devotees. And with good reason, for there is a classic simplicity about Zeppelin's music that is instantly recognisable to those who appreciate symmetry and interlocking forces. From the opening bars of the remarkable "Achilles Last Stand", the unity of Zeppelin, in the eighth year of their existence, is striking.

Each member fulfils his function with complete awareness of what the others are doing and why, so that every slight moan or ad lib from Robert (like the "*well, well*" of rising expectation at the beginning of "For Your Life") seems to fit into a logical place against the rhythmic pulses emanating from John Bonham, John Paul and Jimmy.

"Rhythmic pulses" seems very tame when one is attempting to describe the rock-solid heartbeat that is the mainspring of the band. The excitement Zeppelin generated with their relentless performances of "Trampled Underfoot" at their last concerts was among the more memorable rock events of the last couple of years. Well, Zeppelin have come among us again, this time with a whole album of dynamic compositions delivered with a fervour that shows how anxious the band were to get down their new ideas.

"Achilles Last Stand" is Zeppelin at their most propulsive, its speed and pace regulated by the locomotive drumming of John Bonham, who has the knack of finding a fresh beat to work out on and provide the basis for the duelling role of Jimmy's guitar and Robert's vocals.

The guitar drifts in unaccompanied in a mood-setting statement, then blazes into action as the pace accelerates like a battle hymn.

But this is no mere rock bash – the tune has a most unusual construction, Robert's vocal lines adding unexpected extra phrases, heavily emphasised like a litany. There is something mystical about the way this piece develops, and undoubtedly this lengthy performance provides the most satisfying moments of side one and would be worth the price of the album alone.

Observe the way the drums and guitar work together in the final bars of Robert's first vocal, choruses phasing together with the power of six combined orchestras. Then, when Jimmy takes off for his singing guitar solo, the bass and drums batter out a ferocious series of unison triplets; a simple enough device but one perfectly placed. And instead of slowing down the action, it heaps more coals on the furnace.

The triplets return as Robert sings as if calling the faithful to prayer from some eastern minaret at sundown. Great gusts of cymbal and bass drum hammer home the beats in six-eight time (according to my counting), then the pounding stops as Jimmy takes out the piece with rotating menacing chords.

"For Your Life" has to follow this stunning workout, and they neatly drop into a relatively relaxed backbeat, with cliff-hanging suspense between beats, the tension increased by a simple tambourine beat. Robert weaves in and out of the firm and ferocious guitar lines, jamming and scatting in time-honoured fashion. The guitar-vocal dialogue is a tradition that goes back to the roots of jazz and blues.

It's this living quality that Page the producer has captured, while the West German studio sound is fantastically clean and clear. The combination of studio, producer, compositions and energy on the session has worked with that indefinable chemistry that everybody hopes will result when it comes to making an album.

This single album has certainly caught Zeppelin with their atomic particles flying, if you will pardon the expression. The explosive power is maintained on the second side (play side one a few times before allowing oneself the pleasure of exploring the rest of this offering).

"Nobody's Fault But Mine" has Robert in recalcitrant mood, as he stags the title line, and the guitar seems to run in the point with nagging insistence. Jimmy whirls through a series of furious runs before joining with Robert in a thoroughly bluesy unison guitar/vocal section.

They suddenly abandon this piece to switch into "Candy Store Rock", which would intrigue Chris Spedding, who has tried to achieve this very '50s sound.

Echo fills the room as the drums and guitar bounce over a brutal John Paul Jones bassline. The guitar sound recalls Neil Christian and The Crusaders, if anyone can remember that far back. And just when you think they've said all they can with the riff, they get into a sexy boogie, ideal for go-go dancers the world over.

A night on the tiles follows with "Hots On For Nowhere", a jazzy dance beat, which will thoroughly exhaust the aforementioned go-go dancers. Another potential concert rave-up notable for some unusual Page guitar work, where he drops in some thoroughly Stax-type licks before the party mood grows in excitement. Just listen to Bonzo's answering snare drum crackle to Jimmy's guitar break!

Well, before we start going over the top, our emotion is contained, then rechannelled by the final item, "Tea For One", which is the Zeppelin I love to hear, working out on a slow blues, their power held in abeyance and ever-ready to break out. Robert intones softly over the firm but laidback bass and ride cymbal, while Jimmy chords with atmospheric fervour. The mood here perfectly complements the optimism and strident attack of "Achilles Last Stand" and makes a solid conclusion to an album that has pace, direction and tremendous style. *Chris Welch, MM April 10*

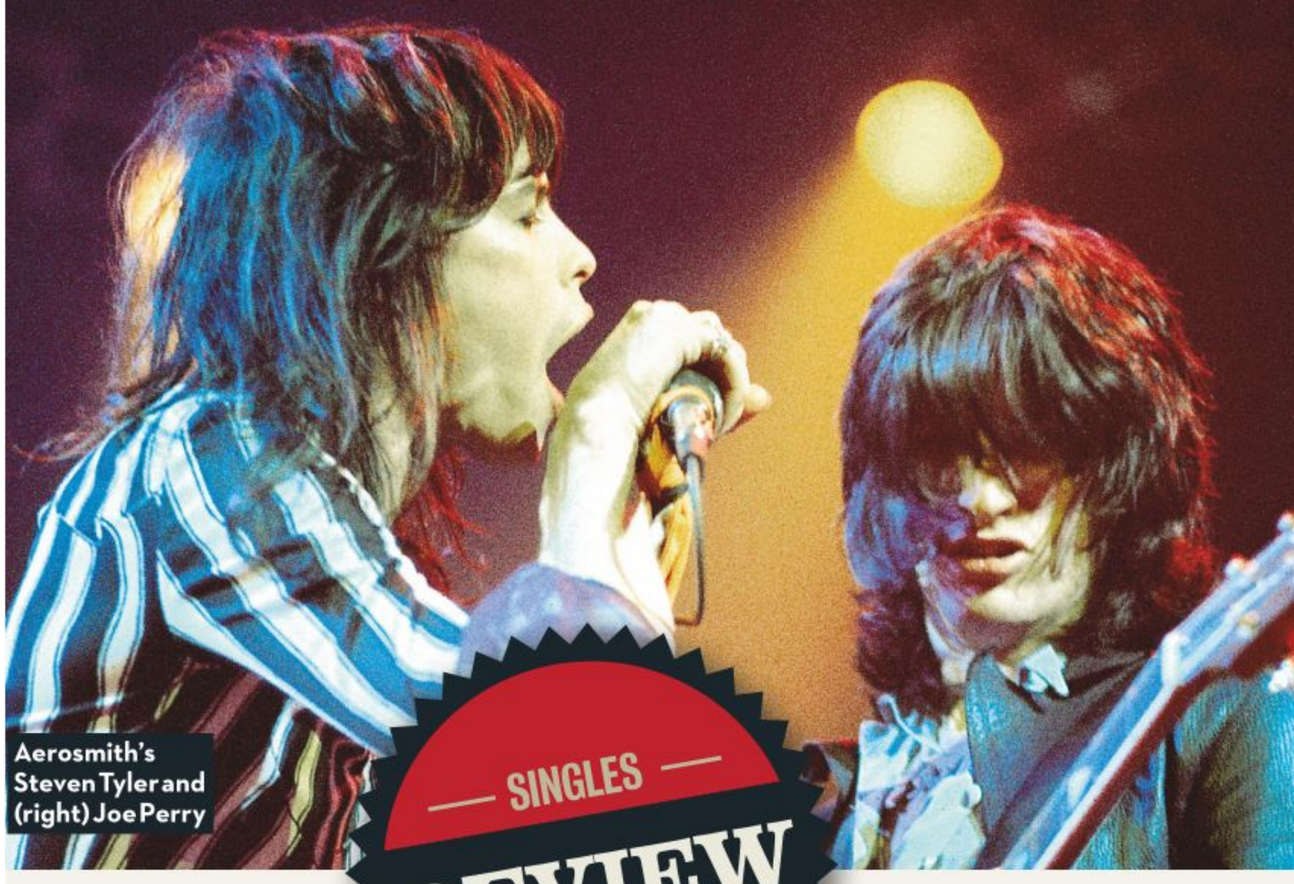
Canned Heat Live At Topanga Corral UNITED ARTISTS

White plagiarists almost killed the blues as a vital force in popular music. The perpetual rip-off of Elmore James' phrases and the piquant cries of John Lee Hooker, BB King et al rendered them trite and meaningless, the butt of satirists and cynics. But the blues boom of the mid-'60s was founded on a genuine enough passion for the blues.

So mention today of such a band as Canned Heat draws a hollow groan. It recalls an era of exploitation perhaps best forgotten. Which is unfair on Canned Heat, who despite their patent limitations as musicians (they never could swing much), were sincere and deeply committed to the blues heritage. And still are, of course, as a recent edition of the band has just completed a visit to these shores.

These "live" recordings stem from a gig at Topanga Corral in early 1967, and although the tempi drag a bit on tunes like "Bullfrog Blues", due to the then-popular habit of drummers attempting to keep time with eight beats on the bass drum, there is some fine, atmospheric blues guitar soloing on "Sweet Sixteen", and "Wish You Would" develops a kind of insistent thump that contrasts with the much more neurotic Yardbirds version recorded a year earlier.

They are much better on the slow tempi, where the guitar and vocals have plenty of space to work out, than on the faster riffs, where they tend to get messy and the tempi wobble uncertainly. It's a shame the drum fills manage to ruin the fine lead-guitar playing by Henry Vestine on "Sweet Sixteen", but there is sufficient good blowing here for those interested in an era of British and American rock development that is being somewhat haughtily forgotten. *Chris Welch, MM June 5*


Aerosmith's Steven Tyler and (right) Joe Perry

SINGLES REVIEW 1976

SINGLES

Thin Lizzy
The Boys Are Back In Town VERTIGO

A lilting Phil Lynott song, radiating warmth and hooliganism, sung by the man who is heir to Van Morrison's Irish soul, cascading words over a tricky eight-bar line, each one a different picture: "*You know that chick who useta dance a lot/Every night she'd be on the dance floor shakin' what she'd got/Man, when I tell ya she was cool, she was red hot/I mean she was steamin...*" Punched along by unexpected power chords, sharp-shooting bass and stuttering guitar chorus.

The B-side, "Emerald", also from the superb *Jailbreak* album, is a pulversingly violent piece that crescendos into a positive military assault by a battery of guitars and drums. Only 65 pence. *NME May 8*

Aerosmith
Dream On CBS

This has recently had a long run on the US charts: certainly it's a grower. The B-side is yer usual HM blitz, with Steven Tyler's voice rather like McCartney the Rocker, but the A-side's a real surprise. A slow, spiralling song, mature and restrained, but not-yet-addictive. *NME May 8*

AC/DC
It's A Long Way To The Top (If You Wanna Rock'n'Roll) ATLANTIC

Something is stirring in the outback. Already this year there have been strong single releases from down under by Hush – a brainless metallic revival of the DC5's awful "Glad All Over", which nearly didn't die the death it deserved – and by Jeff Phillips, whose pulsating rock song "Superman" should have been a smash. AC/DC, like so many heavy bands, get mighty boring over the length of a stage performance, but they send the adrenalin count soaring over the three-minute single. Crass lyrics, but a buzz. *NME May 8*

David Bowie
TVC 15 RCA

The ex-Spiders From Mars vocalist has really carved out a strong solo career for himself over the last few years, but by the sound of this he just might be missing the lads. After all that hanging out in LA and appearing on *Soul Train* he's returned home to England, bringing along a record that sounds uncannily like it could have been cut at the sessions he recorded with the Spiders for the *Aladdin Sane* LP, three long years ago. Actually, the players are all Yanks with names like Earl and Carlos, but you can close your eyes and pretend its Mick and Woody and everything's hunky dory. Nice one, Dave. *NME May 8*

Fleetwood Mac
Rhiannon REPRISE

More gentle rocking from the Mac, who hit a new groove with the legendary *Kiln House* album, and have stuck with it since. And who can blame them? The sound is a big success in the States, even if it's a bit too delicate to bludgeon its way onto the British charts. Stranger things happen, though, so here's hoping. *NME May 1*

FIN COSTELLO / GETTY

June 15-18, 1976: Bob Marley & The Wailers play four nights at the Hammersmith Odeon during the Rastaman Vibration Tour

“My music fight against the system”

Already a songwriter and performer, BOB MARLEY steps into a new role: superstar. “People come to me, say ‘Bob Marley, big international artist’ and I laugh,” he says. “If God had-na given me a song to sing, I wouldn’t have a song to sing.”

— MELODY MAKER JUNE 12 —

“Don’t want success. Success mean nuttin’. Plenty people been successful, but dey still living dead.”
Bob Marley

IT’S NO ORDINARY rehearsal room, the door-less outhouse in the garden of Bob Marley’s house in Hope Road, Kingston, just a few minutes along from the prime minister’s residence.

The Wailers practise here, in a room about twice the size of the average British lounge. What makes it extraordinary in atmosphere is the unmistakeable feeling that when the musicians are there, playing and smoking and planning a concert or an album , it’s as if nothing had ever happened and they were still jamming purely for fun, as they did 10 years ago. With few cares or considerations beyond the next tune, the new single, and not the faintest prospect of world tours and hit albums.

ANDREW PUTLER / GETTY

A drum kit lies idles, an empty guitar case here, a chair or two… and what's this? A running order is scribbled and stuck to the wall reading as follows:

"Revolution / Natty Dread / So Jah Seh / No Woman / I Shot The Sheriff / Talking Blues / Road Block / Belly Full / Jah Live / Trenchtown Rock / Nice Time / Concrete Jungle / Kinky Reggae / Midnight Ravers / No More Trouble / Bend Down Low / Get Up Stand Up / Rat Race / Burnin' And Lootin' / Stir It Up / Duppy Conqueror / Slave Driver / Rock My Boat / One Love / Thank You Lord."

On another wall, an article of faith – a portrait with the words:

"Imperial Majesty, Emperor Haile Selassie, King of Kings, Lord of Lords."

Incongruously, a sticker is pinned beneath it: "Album of the Year – *Natty Dread*".

Bob Marley lives here, works here, plays here; and if there's one thing absolutely endearing about the whole Jamaican-Rastafarian reggae story as it reaches its British peak with Bob Marley's tour next week, it's this: what you see, and what they say, is all there is. There's no hiding behind poses, and the uncluttered sound of their music runs synonymously with their personalities. The rehearsal room is the opposite of pretentious.

MARLEY IS HARD to reach. Even his friends say that strangers, particularly white ones, should not go to his house unless accompanied by a face which Marley recognises. It is virtually impossible to make an appointment to see him, because he appears not to recognise schedules, even for himself. But, eventually, on that hot evening, he appeared from the table tennis room in his house and walked me outside, saying he would think better with some air.

His house is large and old and rambling, and bears the vibrations of a commune. People drift in and out, by car and on foot, and he waves to them all, while remaining seated on the steps.

The house is a positive statement by Marley. Opposite, there are some terrible new apartments which look like prison cells, and Bob continually laughs at the fact that they have bars up, protecting them from burglars. "No way to live, no way to live!" he keeps saying. "Must run home like mind. Keep open."

Thus, Marley's home, Island House, in Hope Road, Kingston, is open to all-comers. Especially Rastafarians. As the Marley/Wailers success gathers momentum, so their allegiance to Rastafarian principles becomes more concentrated. Every other sentence of Marley's speech is punctuated by a reference to Jah (God) and as he drew harder on his cigar-sized spliff (joint) repeating: "Righteousness must cover the earth like the water cover the sea", I had visions of a sermon rather than a conversation, and certainly fading hopes of a lucid conversation.

And yet it's too easy to dismiss the obsession with Rasta as excluding their attachment to reality. It's impossible to catch, first time round, every word and nuance of what Marley is saying, but his drift is quite simple to understand, and while he keeps returning to his declarations that commercial gain is not his aim, he is acutely aware of all that's happening around him. His mind moves very quickly indeed, and his powers of observation are uncanny.

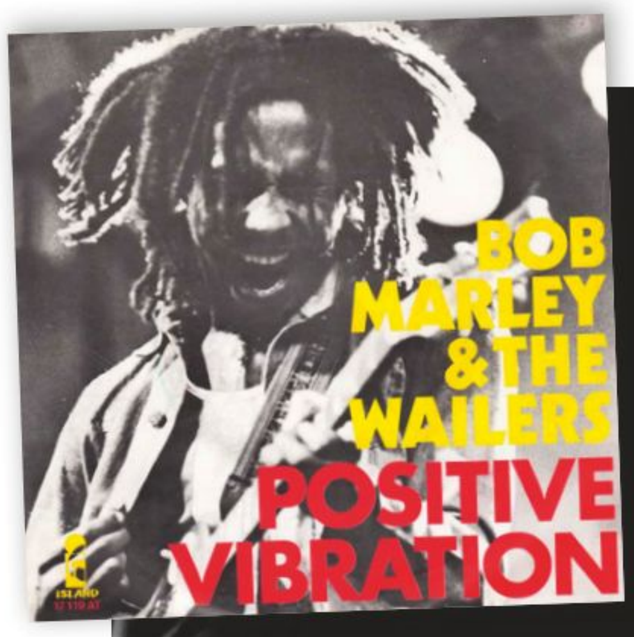
I asked him first about his evident need to smoke ganja (herb), of which he partakes a pound a week, and why the smoking of it was so dovetailed into his Rasta beliefs.

"Herb is healing of a nation," he said quietly. "When you smoke, you don't frighten so easy. Herb bring all brethren together, all thinking alike, and that's why they lock you up when you smoke herb, because it makes people think same way. But if people don't smoke herb they think different from each other, can be told what to do and get… confused.

"In Babylon we give thanks for herb, and if we didn't have herb to educate us, we be educated by fools who tell us to live like funny, like in Babylon. Herb is the healing of a nation, Bible say that. Herb come out of the ground!"

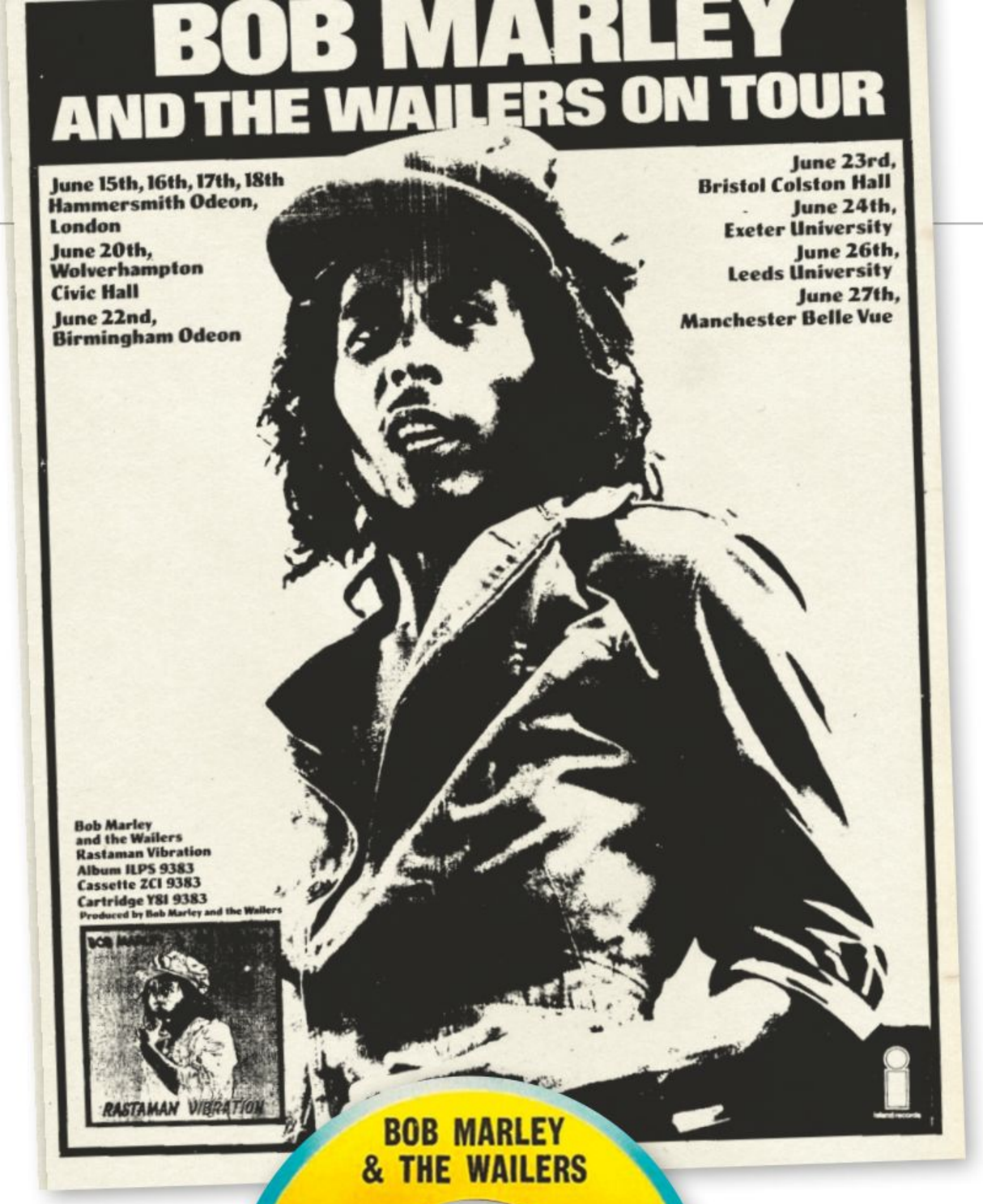
Did this contempt, then, for materialism and Babylon (western culture) and even for organised society represent Black Power, and did Bob feel his music was preaching TO white ears, or to blacks about whites?

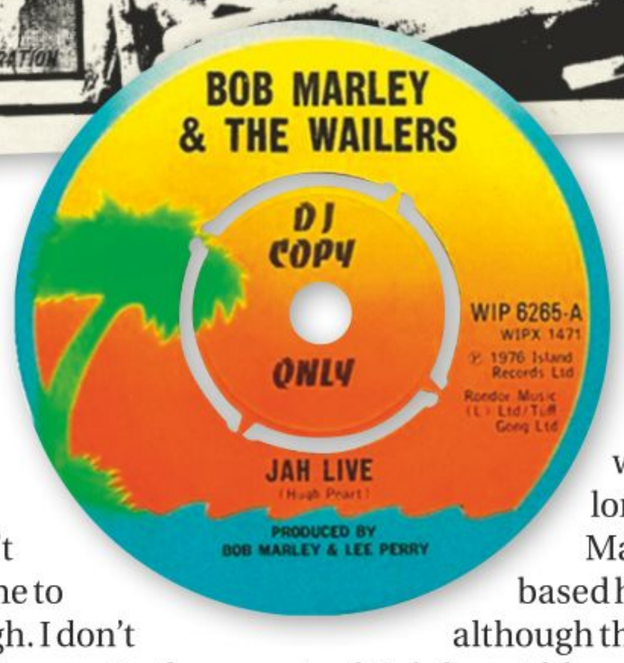
"My music fight against the system. My music defend righteousness. If you're white and you're wrong, then you're wrong; if you're black and you're wrong, you're wrong. People are PEOPLE. Black, blue, pink, green – God make no rules where my people suffer and that why we must have redemption and redemption is now. Against white people? Couldn't say that. I fight against the system that teach you to live and die."



June 13, 1976: Marley on a river boat in Amsterdam, Netherlands, before that evening's concert at an ice rink in the east of the City

ADRIAN BOOT





So his music existed for propaganda? He laughed at the seriousness of the word. "No, if God had-na given me a song to sing, I wouldn't have a song to sing. So it's not MY music, from my soul, doing these things, saying these words. I don't know about propaganda but in telling truth, and I don't deal with the wrong things of life, and I don't want to know them, you… know them, and because you're not perfect you might try to change. Don't like the idea of propaganda, that's not how I-and-I see it. Don't deal with dark things."

And yet many of his songs, I said, were laced with stabs at various inequalities. "Bellyful", for example, was surely a commentary on the starvation of some as compared with the abundant wealth of others?

Not exactly, Marley answered. It was more subtle than that – "You belly's full, but we're hungry for your LOVE of your brethren. Food's in your stomach, but cannot you see there is more to living than filling it? Where's the love for your brother?"

No, he averred, it wasn't entirely a materialistic commentary, more a sad declaration of the bankruptcy of believing that everything ended with self-gratification. But he was positively not playing a role. Asked if he felt any responsibility as the most popular star reggae had produced, he said: "I don't think about it, you know. Too busy working. People come to me, say, 'Bob Marley, big international artist,' and I laugh. I don't know what that mean. If it mean more people listen, enjoy music, then good. That's all."

Still, he had been watching the adoption of reggae by others, and he liked Johnny Nash's "Stir It Up", a world-hit version of the Marley song, and he was interested in other incursions into the style, mentioning Paul Simon's "Mother And Child Reunion" ("nice").

"See, dem American players come down here and play with Jamaican musicians who are very friendly. Make good records. It happens all the time."

So there was no determination to keep reggae as a wholly private scene, and Jamaica was happy for the world to go into Kingston and join in?

"Nah, world cannot take it," Bob replied immediately. "This is one of them things the world cannot take. It's like gold is gold and silver is silver, and what is… imitation can be seen t'be imitation.

"So the real thing, nobody can take away from here. You have to really come in to this thing at our time to have the feel, y'know. It's art, y'know, art. Not just a purposeful thing, but from knowing. That's why I-and-I know nobody can take it. They can go anywhere and play funky and soul, but reggae – too hard, reggae. Must have a bond with it. The real reggae must come from Jamaica, because other people could not play it all the while, anyway – it would go against their whole life. Reggae has t'be… inside you."

Marley was now trying to get himself to define reggae music as clearly as possible, and the nearest he could get was to say it was like jazz. "Jazz – a complete music," he declared, still smoking. "Reggae complete too. Reggae is funky, but it's also different from funky, and sometimes I think funky soul music goes little too far in what it tries to do. Reggae music is simple, all the while. Different from soul as well. Cannot be taught, that's a fact."

It relied on a mental attitude, he explained. If he was depressed and was going into a studio, he could not make music properly. But then, it might easily have something to do with the people and their vibrations. He felt – well, not uneasy in the company of non-Rastafarians, but not relaxed either. He wanted to stress, though, there was no antipathy towards non-Rastas.

"Well, I say give a man a chance if he's not Rasta. The Bible full of stories of people not treated right for not believing. Problem is not with people who are not in touch with Rasta, but with people who are once Rasta and then have left it and have to go back to it. These can be difficult and… confused people."

Propaganda for Rastafarianism was something he admitted, if not for black repression.

Are you trying to make audiences outside Jamaica appreciate what Rastafarianism stands for?

"Yeh, mon, *Rastaman Vibration* gonna cover the earth! Jah say: until the philosophy which places one race superior and one race inferior is finally and permanently discredited and abandoned, then we won't have no peace.

"Babylon believe in divide and rule, but Rasta one way only, the right way, and we can do it but it take longer. We have redemption now, nobody can stop it…"

Marley said he read a chapter of the Bible every day, and based his belief on that, including his diet. He is a vegetarian, although that is not a prerequisite of Rastafarianism. He didn't drink, he said, because it was obvious that pumping chemicals into his body would make him ill. "A little wine, sometimes," he reflected.

"The reason people drink is because they want to feel how I feel when I smoke. Everybody need to get a little high sometimes, just that some people get high on the wrong thing. Herb does grow. How much do I smoke? Plenty."

Could someone be a Rasta and not smoke?

"Yeh… but if you believe in Rasta and fight against the herb, you are wrong. Herb needs to be understood properly, but, in hands of Rasta, it is the healing of a nation."

Smoking is highly illegal in Jamaica, however, and Marley repeats his view that society is frightened of people thinking the same way.

"Vampires!" he roared. "Most people are negative out there, but Rasta people think positive. Most people in Babylon want power. Devil want power. God don't want power, but Devil need power, 'cos Devil insecure."

Insecurity never bothered him. Even when he travelled outside Jamaica, he remained confident, secure, positive. The only place he would contemplate settling in, except Jamaica, was Africa – this was naturally bound up with his Rasta convictions – but even without the prospect of settling there, he planned a trip there soon. Friends say they dread the day Marley goes there, because he's such a highly charged, sensitive man that it is bound to change his entire attitude, one way or the other, towards his beliefs.

He said the system taught people that they must live and die, but he and his brethren did not agree. Furthermore, they were totally opposed to the worshipping of material goods to the point where people in "Babylon" (Bob's all-embracing word for the centre of the world's problems) died working for material objects which would do nothing to enrich their lives.

It wasn't that he personally renounced materially useful things: bicycles, cars, were OK in the Rasta creed, but they were merely a means to an end. »

> "Herb bring all brethren together, all thinking alike"

"If somebody gave me a spaceship, I would give it back to him because I could not use it," Marley continued.

He pointed to that ugly block of new houses opposite, and laughed sadly. "Those people over there are working to live in a situation not good, but the system educated them to think that is the end of their life," he said. "People not taught to be at peace with themselves. Education all wrong. Put you in a bracket where you earn enough money to pay for *these* things!" (He pointed at the houses again.)

"Well, you have to be a Rasta man to beat the system, and when they can get a Rasta man in jail, they do, and then they try to get you back there. Everyone wants the biggest car, refrigerator, crazy, mon – this is the system I keep talking about…" He started to sing "Rat Race".

What about the race for the title of the biggest reggae band in the world, then? Did he concede such a contest existed?

"Can't say that," he answered, convincingly. "I-and-I, and my brethren, only answer to myself and to Jah. If de Wailers are in some race, we must have been put there by somebody, but not us."

How about the future of the band, Bob? Does it plan to change, progress in any foreseeable way?

"When I feel that the job has been done that I-and-I have been sent to do, I-and-I pack it up," he stated firmly. When would that be? "When I feel satisfied and when Jah tells me I am finished with this work. It might be at the end of the American visit, or the English visit – I will know that when as many people as possible have learned what we have to say."

When the system is challenged?

"System bound to go," he answered.

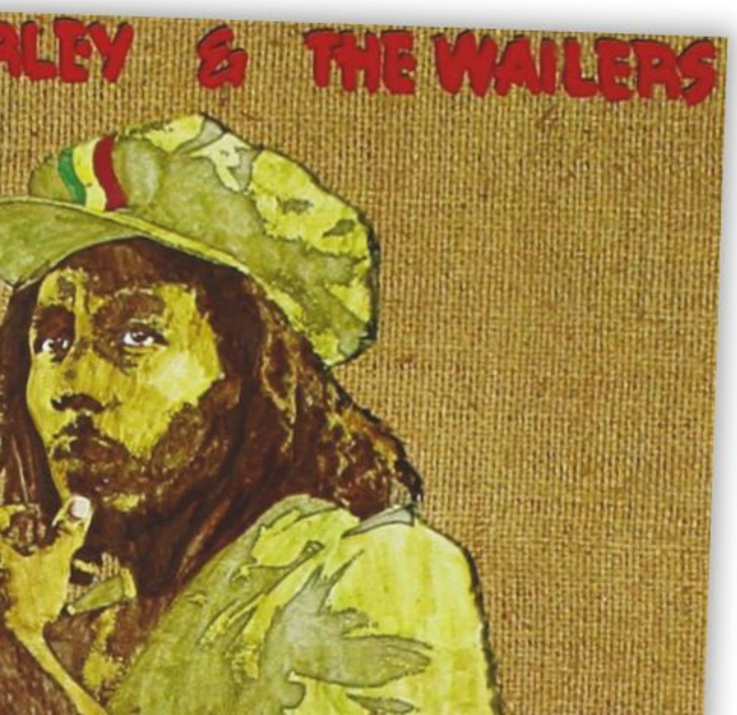
The personal manager of Bob Marley is Jamaican-born Don Taylor, who has worked with Tamla Motown in Detroit, and especially closely with Marvin Gaye, Little Anthony, Martha Reeves and Chuck Jackson. He's managed Marley for a year, and says he was warned against taking on Bob by locals who described Marley as a "problem, difficult character".

"What you must remember," said Taylor one day as he contemplated the escalating Marley story yet again, "is that Bob's sharper than all of us. Right now, he's getting to the position he was in 10 years ago, of not trusting people, and that's a pity. Lots of people hang around the studios, for instance, saying they are broke and asking him for 10 dollars just like they used to. He always used to give friends dollars if they needed it, but now the whole world seems to be joining in.

"Maybe it's because there's jealousy in this town because Bob's the one who made it, and people are out to take him for a ride. This is real bad, y'know – they should realise that he's made it possible for everyone to make it. Instead, people are talking behind his back and speaking all this crap about selling out. Listen, the same guys who knew Marley when he was in Trenchtown are talking behind his back now, and it's sickening…"

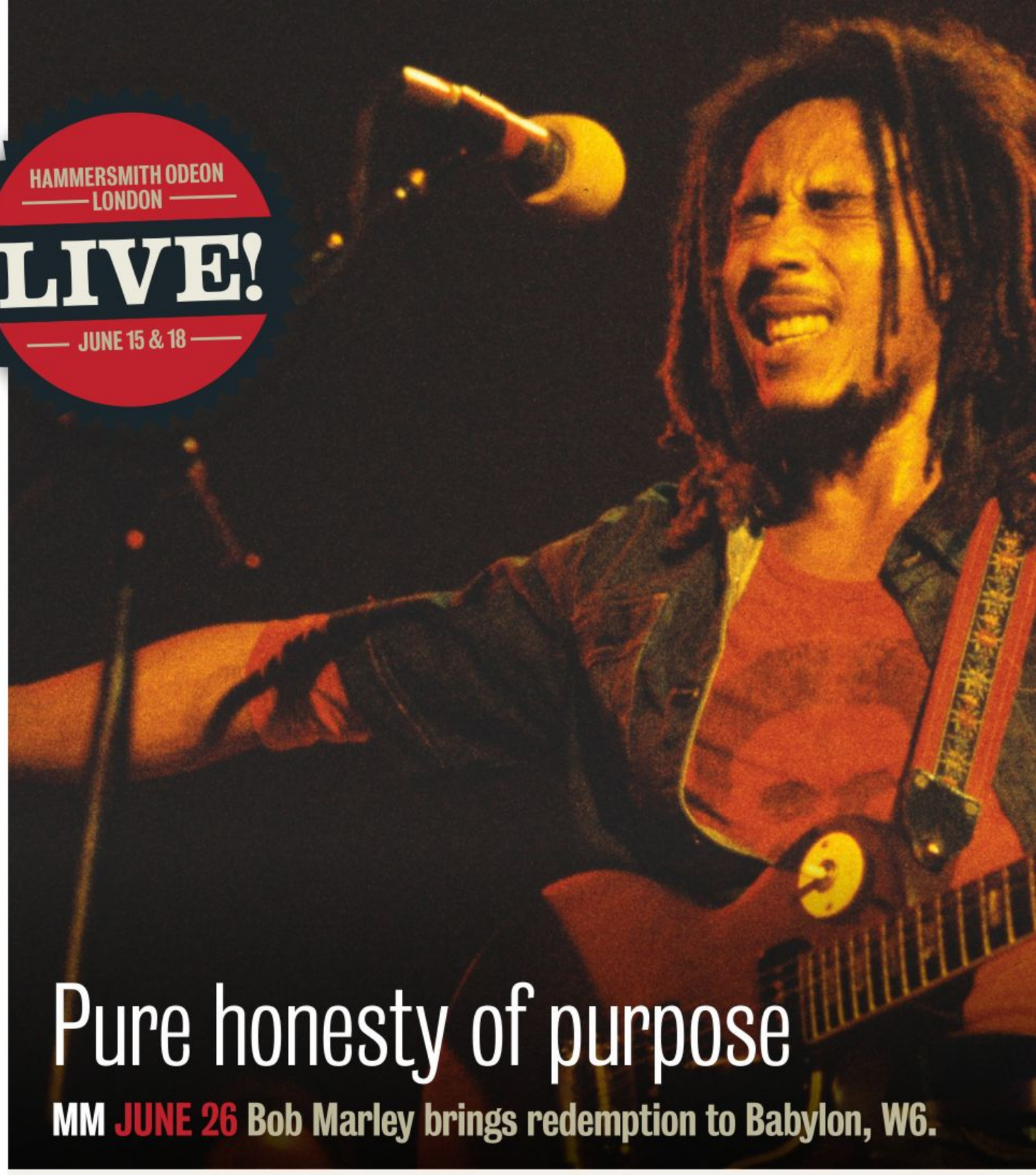
Bob Marley, he declared, knew all about the rats and the roaches of Trenchtown living. "He also knows all those old slogans about no money, no jobs, no future. Well, Marley's giving them a future."

Flying out of Kingston next day aboard Air Jamaica, I asked the hostess her views on reggae, Rastafarianism and Bob Marley. She was about 23, a black Jamaican.



"Rastafarianism? Oh, it's quite popular but only among the very young here. I don't think reggae will ever catch on much. It's really dance music for the young. What would you like to drink?"

Ray Coleman •



Pure honesty of purpose

MM JUNE 26 Bob Marley brings redemption to Babylon, W6.

IT'S FREQUENTLY SAID that no single artist has yet captured the flagging spirit of the '70s. Led Zeppelin and heavy metal, singer-songwriters by the score, middle-of-the-road demons like The Carpenters, soft rock, folk rock, jazz rock, electronic rock, glam rock, sham rock and The Chieftains – it's all valid and honest and worthy and good of its kind. But it's true to say that no one solitary force has erupted which can be accurately described as reflecting the heart of the '70s in a meaningful fashion, like The Beatles did with the '60s.

The single star who comes nearest to it is Bob Marley. This is partly because his concerts are actual events as important for the occasion as for the music he so powerfully projects – and partly because, by virtue of the fact that he's black and sings the blues of the '70s, he's capturing the heat of the times.

The man has a hypnotic magnetism, and it's the sure sign of a giant when it scarcely matters that the quality of his music is occasionally rough. What counts is solely that he's up there, delivering and communicating.

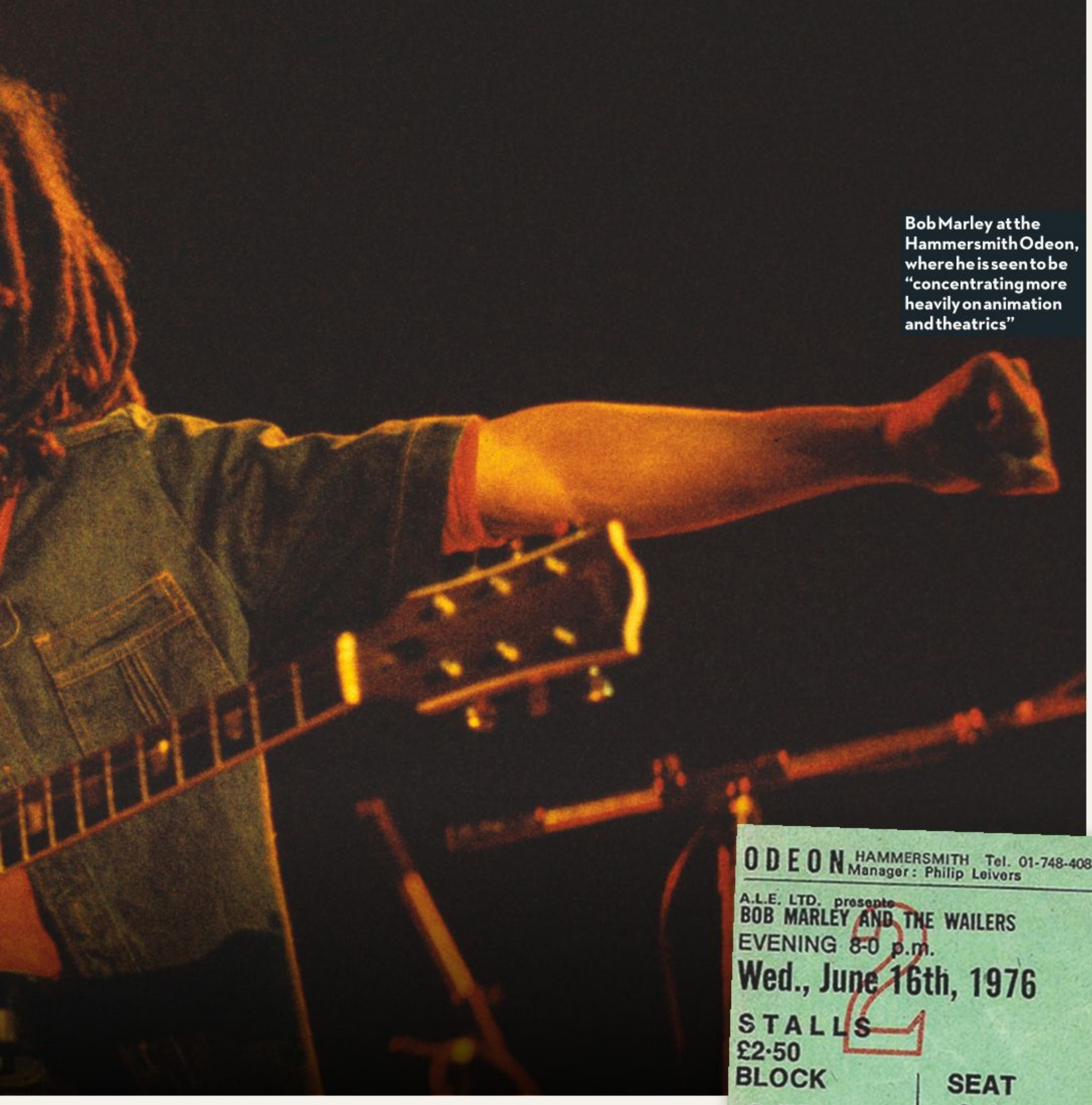
For too long, it seems to me, contemporary music has failed to emphasise the emotional rapport essential between an artist and the audience. Bob Marley & The Wailers, during their concerts at Hammersmith Odeon, London, last week, had that rare aura of familiarity and warmth and heart and presence.

"Feel The Vibes" said the notice outside the Odeon, and inside, the Rastaman's vibrations were powerful indeed. "Let peace and love abide in this house," said Marley as he took the stage, flanked by congas draped in the Ethiopian colours of green, yellow and orange, and atop the stage, a flag of the same persuasion bearing a portrait of the Rastafarians' idol, Haile Selassie.

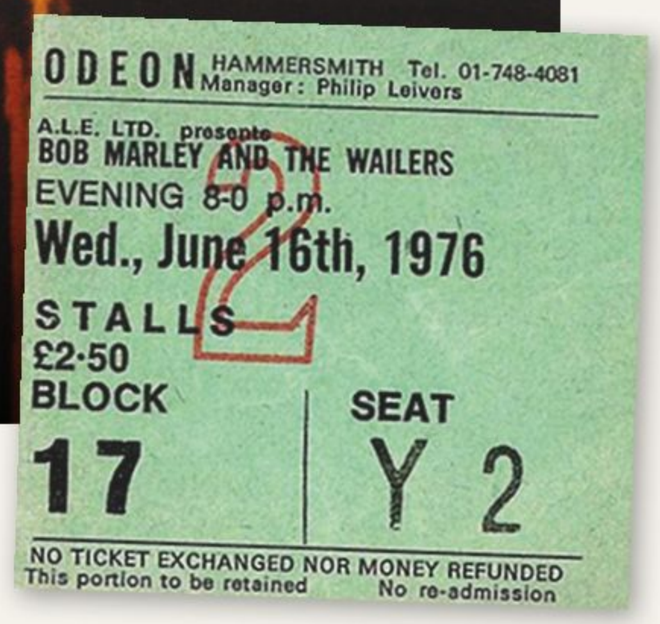
Audiences were very mixed in colour, but white or black, all were instantly caught up in the intensity of the event. Today, of course, Marley is more politically committed to the black "redemption" cause than he was a year ago when he played that very special gig at the Lyceum, London. Everyone at the Hammersmith gigs last week seemed peculiarly aware of the seriousness of Bob Marley & The Wailers' stance.

He came out, singing "Trenchtown Rock", and we were away, as those deceptively simple rhythms gripped an audience which immediately abandoned its seats and took to the floor or, like me, stood on seats for a better view. "*One good thing about music, when it hits you feel no pain*," sang Marley, and his message was accepted.

The Odeon, a venue as cold as this music is hot, often eats artists alive, because it is impossible for them to radiate much from the invisible barrier erected by the stage. Yet within seconds, Marley had done it – completely enveloped his audience and commanded the entire theatre. It was a remarkable achievement.



Bob Marley at the Hammersmith Odeon, where he is seen to be "concentrating more heavily on animation and theatrics"



What was equally surprising was the speed with which he raced through his songs. "Rasta-far-i!" he exclaimed after the first song, and the crowd roared back approvingly as he sailed into: "*This morning I woke up in the curfew... How many rivers to cross before we talk to the boss...*" ("Burnin' And Lootin'").

All Marley's songs have these cryptic dashes of pure demonic fury, so that even when you're unaware of the complete storyline, it's easy to catch the mood. Furthermore, Marley is now concentrating more heavily on animation and theatrics. He may dress meanly, in red T-shirt and ordinary denims, but his out-stretched arms, with hands across face in desperation, clenched eyes, finger-pointing to the extreme to stab home a point – all these characteristics are, if not rehearsed, at least statements of intent. Bob is now working hard to get across his lines, every bit as seriously as a professional actor.

Head held back, he launched into "Them Belly Full", a reminder that most of his songs stand up as anthems in themselves; the lead guitar solo here, from Donald Kinsey, was a killer. Throughout the concerts, Kinsey impressed with guitar licks that absolutely flew, but raced away with their understated control rather than dabble into that head-strong philosophy of the desperate rocker.

On "I Shot The Sheriff", Marley's enunciation was fascinating. He rode far away from the Eric Clapton version, relying more on the potency of the lyrics than Clapton, who took the song up the chart on the crest of its rhythm.

Here, his arm-waving as he spat out "*...but I didn't shoot the deputy*" was immaculately timed, and the back-up vocals of the I Threes was an object lesson in restraint and taste. (A word about the I Threes. They're Marcia Griffiths, Judy Mowatt and Rita Marley. Not only do they look majestic in flowing white and Ethiopian flashes, they deliver back-up vocal shots in honeyed tones. As always with the greatest of artistry, it's what they leave out, and where they choose to join the show, that's so special. Their cohesion and timing was a pure joy.)

"*Reflexes got the better of me... what is to be must be*," sang Marley, hand over face, pointing his hand to the audience. And next, on "Want More", his hand regularly covering his face as he delivered the words: "*They stab you in the back... After you get what you want, do you want more?*"

The blood-curdling organ of Tyrone Downie announced the classic "No Woman, No Cry", and although nothing can eclipse the memory of this particular song at the Lyceum last year, Marley did it OK.

The audience chanted "*Everything's gonna be all right*" along with the song, and the simple act of clapping by the I Threes in mid-song was really something. It's the little things that count...

And so it went: "Lively Up Yourself", "Roots, Rock, Reggae" with the I Threes' glorious counterpoint to Marley's voice, and the crowd really loving the line: "*You know, mister, music sure sound good to me!*"

Whether by planning or accident, Marley's encore was devoted to his political slants. "Rastaman Vibration", "Rat Race" and a lengthy "Get Up, Stand Up", perhaps his hottest song, all demonstrated what an immensely powerful repertoire the Wailers now have; I thought they had used up too many of the goodies to encore with anything significant, but how wrong can you be!

Here, Marley delivered his speech in the form of the words of Haile Selassie: "Until the philosophy where one race stay superior and the other inferior is finally and permanently discredited and abandoned, there will be no peace..."

Dancing off the stage, as he had done several times that night, he had assumed the mantle of a finely honed artist. It may well have seemed a long way from Trenchtown, and he may be spouting songs from a safe vantage point, which irritates some of his brethren – but at least he is DOING it.

For his final London show last Friday, before the band took off for its provincial tour,

Marley was in even more joyous mood than on the opening show. Dancing around the stage, arms and dreadlocks flailing as if he had been choreographed, he looked and sounded physically tired and mentally high enough to carry him through.

"I Shot The Sheriff" and "No Woman, No Cry" were again the musical and spiritual peaks, and by this show the I Threes had added short but cute individual dances to the start of several of the songs.

Again the audience was politically receptive, especially wailing when Bob sang "*We build your penitentiaries... we build your schools...*" (during the glaringly anti-capitalist song "Want More"). What of the music? Economy is the strength of Marley & The Wailers' sound. Aston Barrett's bass, Earl "Chinna" Smith's rhythm guitar, Carlton Barrett's tasteful drums and the percussion work of Alvin Patterson combine for a lift-off which doesn't rely on volume at all, but through the insistence of the beat and heart-beat of the music, makes for intoxication after a couple of minutes.

Marley and the Wailers grab you by the gullet and refuse to compromise. No other artist speaks for the time so eloquently, and the pure honesty of purpose is like a breath of garden air in a scene recently dominated by business motives.

"I Shot The Sheriff" and "No Woman, No Cry" were the musical and spiritual peaks

Marley may well be the pawn in a Rasta chess game – woolly hats bearing the Rasta colours, posters and T-shirts are on sale at concerts, so the marketing of a cult has certainly taken hold. Whether that's a good or bad thing for the music's future is debatable, but the momentum would seem to be unstoppable. For the moment, though, Bob Marley & The Wailers are the leaders, the most potent voice to erupt into the contemporary music arena within the past six years.

And Marley himself is a terrific artist, full of nervous intensity, delivering the goods spectacularly, with a wealth of hot music that can chill the spine like few other events in recent years. All this, and he has his finger on the mood of a generation, too.

Who could ask more? *Ray Coleman*

ERICA ECHENBERG / GETTY

“It’s going to spread everywhere”

CHRIS BLACKWELL didn’t invent BOB MARLEY, but he did believe in him and fund him. In Jamaica, the Island Records owner explains how and why. “I don’t want to sound too clever about this,” he says, “but it’s a mistake to underestimate artists.”

— MELODY MAKER JUNE 12 —

MOVING AROUND REGGAE circles in Kingston, Jamaica, it’s easy to sense uneasiness about the commercial bandwagon to which some of the music is hitched. There’s generally delight that Bob Marley has “made it”, but still a suspicion that musicians had better be wary of opportunistic record businessmen from America and Britain, who see the music as a current fad, to be exploited quickly and then dropped just as speedily when all the dollars have been drained off.

Such is the love and dedication of many of the players that they are loath to sign anything. The rumours of rip-offs are to be heard everywhere, and “trust” is not a word uttered anywhere. The attitude is understandable, yet also self-defeating, because the very thing wanted by musicians who know full well that they have “it” is, indeed, commercial success and international recognition.

What they all seek to help them, therefore, is that rare animal, a combination between genuine fan and shrewd businessman. Someone who can exercise discretion in weighing up the music, and who can bring a little, say, taste into the business end. Chris Blackwell has these attributes. He’s head of Island Records. His name will be identified by all reggae fanciers, not only as the producer of much of Bob Marley’s work, but also as a projector of Jamaican music since its days of pure novelty value.

When Millie’s “My Boy Lollipop” was a smash hit in 1964, Blackwell – a white Jamaican who had arrived in London two years earlier – ran the Sue label. (Incidentally, it was on Blackwell’s classy little Sue operation that The Beatles originally planned to model Apple: “Small and funky, just like Sue,” George Harrison once told me.)

Blackwell had grown up in Jamaica subconsciously realising the fermenting musical culture, but not until he reached Britain did he fully appreciate the long-range potential for the music. »

BRIAN COOKE / GETTY

"I feel that Island has been rather like Atlantic, the only company that decided to build artists": Chris Blackwell in London, December 1972

Today, he is acknowledged as a sort of father figure of reggae's success, living testimony, perhaps, to the idealism inherent in all musicians that they can have their cake and eat it.

In Blackwell, art meets money and survives.

Curiously enough, Blackwell did not know Marley when the two men lived in Jamaica. Chris had heard of Bob, but not until 1971 did Blackwell make contact with him, when both were in London.

Together, they've forged a kind of musical revolution since a first meeting at Island's Basing Street studios, and their rapport now is complete. Talking to each man separately, one becomes aware of a peculiar relationship of trust, yet not of warmth. Blackwell has masterminded an incredible operation which has hoisted Marley to the top of the reggae tree, so that now he is faced with the inevitable question of: which way now and how do we face a future even trickier than the past, artistically speaking?

Marley, however, though not a man to emit emotion with much candour, was laying himself on the line, by his own standards, when he said to me without any prompting: "Chris Blackwell do good for reggae. Do much to encourage musicians, and no bad deals."

Blackwell jet-hops round the world these days, but the Blackwell in swimming trunks drinking lime juice at the poolside of a Kingston hotel is different from the man of action in bigger cities.

Yes, he agrees – he feels relaxed and at home here in Kingston, even though nowadays it feels rather heady returning to such teaming intensity. When he lived here, there was scarcely any local scene, which was precisely the reason he left. Now, the town is awash with music, and he was proud of what his company had achieved with Marley. "He will be bigger than Hendrix," he declares.

Do you feel Marley would have warmed to you and to Island Records if you had not been a Jamaican? I think it goes round the other way. In many cases a record company does not, or even cannot, add a lot to an act's long-term future, but I know that in this case I was able to communicate with Bob and a large part of the early relationship was based on my need to eliminate his mistrust and lack of understanding of what I was planning.

I know this will sound like I'm believing in my own publicity, but the fact is that that assurance for Bob could not have come from just anybody. If I had not been Jamaican, with some sort of knowledge of the local situation, I don't honestly believe any other company could have come along and got the same results.

Exactly what was it, then, that clinched your relationship and made it work, bearing in mind Marley's suspicions? I like to think that Bob Marley came to us and stayed with us because he and his band could see we loved their music, believed in them, and most important, would stay with them.

I mean, Island Records has invested over $200,000 in the band, so that's some act of faith. Reggae artists are not used to that level of money, quite naturally, and the difficult thing is that they sometimes tend to equate the amount of space they get, say, in the *Melody Maker* with the amount of money they should be getting.

For example, David Bowie might get a full-page article, and a reggae artist who has not earned any money might also get a full-page article for musical reasons, rather than commercial reasons, and straight away the reggae musician will say something like, "Hey, where are my royalties for 100,000 sales?"

So unless you're *really* sure, you can end up giving them advances or paying them royalties for records that will never be sold. It's a very delicate business, but sometimes when you are convinced, you just have to give a lot of money to convince them you know and believe, and that's what I did with Bob Marley.

I knew it was going to happen eventually. It's a weird way to work, and hard for the accounts department, but it's about music, and music cannot always be defined in purely logical terms.

Do you see your personal role as the music business's populariser of reggae? Did you feel evangelical about it years ago, or do you feel that way now? No, not at all, I just love it. I understand it well, always have done, I think, and I'm able to help it along at this important time because I also know the rock'n'roll side of the business. So far, I've been the person most able to – well, put it across. But I think a lot more people will come into it.

Do you think this is reggae's beginning rather than the middle part? I think it's the beginning, but I hope the beginning really gets started, because at the moment the scene has a crazy-ish feel to it, which is very dangerous. It would be terrible if the people who are very good don't get a chance to come out before reggae as a subject becomes written off.

And how do you view other record companies' activities in reggae? Well, it depends on who they are and what they do. I certainly welcome a CBS or an Atlantic or an A&M or a Warner Brothers coming into reggae if they would really get behind and promote whichever artist they sign. And the small basic reggae labels which have always existed in England play a very important part in exposing all the, as it were, unknown artists.

I agree with any record company that tries to do a job, get behind the artists to whom they should be committed. I only get angry with labels that pick up something because they feel it's the rage, and they plan to throw out reggae as "releases" with the rest of the regular rock albums.

Do you feel you have changed or diluted Bob Marley and the Wailers' music in order to get a bigger audience? Not diluted, no, I don't. The thing people must realise about Bob Marley and the Wailers is that they could never be persuaded to do anything they did not believe in, so there is no sense in which I, or they, could properly be accused of manipulation of the musicians or the public.

On *Catch A Fire*, I deliberately tried to put something into it which I felt they could relate to, with rock mixes rather than reggae mixes and the bass heavier up front and more things happening on top. I simply tried to get from the musicians something that was basically there anyway but wasn't coming out. That's what a producer exists for.

What did Marley and the others think of your attitude, which must have been motivated by a commercial ear? They were very happy with it. But it wasn't a "let's get success" move, just a natural progression. *Catch A Fire* was not a commercially successful album, wasn't considered rootsy enough, perhaps.

Did you sense with that album that certain purists would say Marley was heading towards "selling out"? Sort of, yes. You always get that backlash of feeling when an artist has a kind of – well, destiny. But I'm quite happy even looking back on what happened, because what needed to be done was done.

When it says on an album "Produced by Chris Blackwell and the Wailers", what does that precisely mean? Well, for example, on *Catch A Fire*, with all the tracks recorded in Jamaica, I wasn't here. They were produced by the Wailers themselves. Then Bob Marley came to England with the tracks and in England what we did together was put on the other instruments – lead guitar on some things, Moog here, organ on other things. Then I would actually mix it with Bob. On the second album, almost all the stuff was done in Jamaica, but overdubbed in England, and we were all together again, mixing and remixing. My production involvements include

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Has reggae sold out?

hris Blackwell (right), ho introduced ska to ritain through Millie ith 'My Boy Lollipop', nd who, as head of land Records, nursed

"Catch A Fire," with all the tracks recorded in mainstream of popular music with the adaption stance of the music?

perhaps extending a track, saying this track is really good, maybe we should put more colour into it, do it again, maybe. But now, as always, the basic roots of the music have always rested with Bob Marley and the Wailers. On this latest album, they've done all the stuff.

Did you envisage in your early associations with reggae its influence on the mainstream of popular music, with the adoption of the style by Paul Simon, Paul McCartney, Stevie Wonder? I do know that when I first signed the Wailers, what I wanted to do urgently was get their records to musicians. Because I really felt the correct way to break them would be by getting them respected among other players.

The musicians were so unusually strong, instrumentally, that I fully expected other artists to get as hung up as I had become on basslines, things like that. Often a musician would say, 'Well, ah, it needs to have something *more* going, you know. It's loud and boring.' But I'd have to argue that that's not the music, really, it's a controlled sort of sound.

In those early days, and we're only talking of say four years ago, were you aware of the political stance of the music? It was impossible, as a Jamaican, to be unaware of it.

Do you see the strength of the music today as in its message rather than as dance music? If you are a black Jamaican and you come from Trenchtown, or if your friends come from Trenchtown, and you are writing your own songs and producing reggae music, the natural source of your music is your environment.

Reggae musicians here feel ostracised by society at large. It's still very much underground music, really. We all know that Bob Marley and the Wailers are huge, but it hasn't got through on every level out here.

Do you agree with Bob Marley that many reggae musicians have been exploited by record businessmen? Yes, the rip-off stories are often true, but there is a side to the early stages in a career, when an artist claims to have been ripped off, that bears thinking about. For instance, let's take the case of [Blackwell names local producer]. I talked yesterday to a musician who pointed out that it was a kind of school everyone went to, and everyone claims that he ripped people off, recorded them, made lots of money out of them, then moved on to the next musician.

But really, as a recording operation, it should be regarded exactly as a school in which the musician can learn. You went there, didn't pay anything to learn, and didn't get paid anything to write million-selling tunes or whatever they might be. The musician did his session, and good luck, in a way, to the producer if he had a hit.

The producer wasn't behaving as a conscious rip-off merchant, but operating in his own little sphere on a certain basis, where supply and demand was completely turned around.

He wasn't a hard-headed businessman, and he didn't say, 'OK, sign here for five years.' Everybody left him, but it's worth remembering that they could leave. There was no contract.

It was a kind of useful workshop. Some people might call that a rip-off, but on reflection I believe musicians gained something, too.

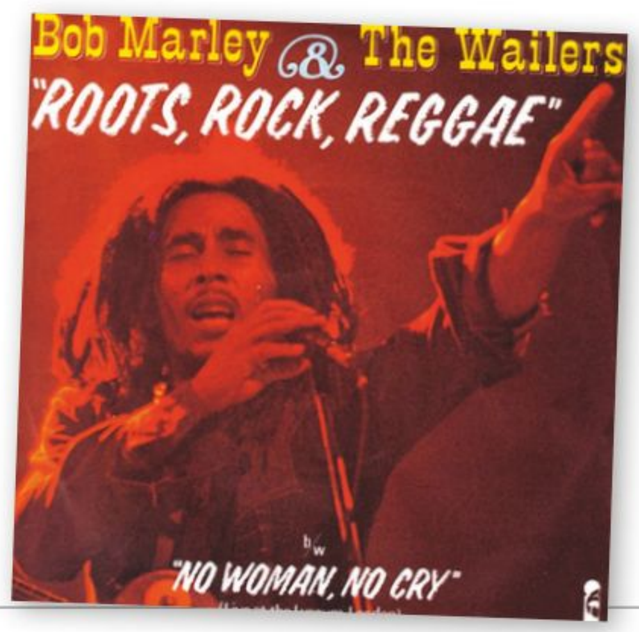
Nevertheless, Marley seems to regard you quietly as some kind of saviour who's come along and wiped the slate clean, making it possible for him and other musicians to achieve some credibility. Does that weigh heavily on your shoulders? Well, it's a bit weird. It's just that the business here has been so much like the early rhythm-and-blues. I feel that Island has been rather like Atlantic – a parallel situation to R&B in that Altlantic, if you remember, was the only company that decided to build artists.

Other labels just cut tunes. If it was a hit, great! Didn't really matter who sang it! That used to be the system. Here, I've always been more interested in artists than records. We take on artists not just for their first album or single they make, but for their future.

With the general feeling among reggae purists that reggae has or might soon sell out, exactly what do you think the musicians can do to counteract against that possibility? I think the musicians generally feel so strong today, and they must know that what they have is what is wanted, that I can't see it possible that they will get dumped by anybody, if you see what I mean.

These people have a lot to offer today. It boils down to really caring for artists: when I gave Bob Marley and the Wailers that first cash advance to go and make an album, people said I was mad and I could kiss goodbye to it. They reckoned I'd get a call from Jamaica saying they'd finished three tracks and run out of money, end of story. I don't want to sound too clever about all this, but it's always a mistake to underestimate artists.

How convinced were you, on that first meeting with Marley, of any charisma attached to the man? Right from the start, when he walked into my office above the Basing Street studios. It wasn't apparent in his other two musicians at the time, though it is now, but at that moment I realised he has a special… presence.



> "When I gave the Wailers that advance, people said I was mad"

As a Jamaican, do you feel mentally at one with the music, that this is my country's sound and the arrival of a giant star like Marley is a kind of nationalistic triumph for you? Well, I definitely feel it's the music of Jamaica. If only the people in society at large here would realise it! It's original and it's going to spread everywhere and certainly I feel a pride.

I'm really pleased to have something to do with it. But it really is absurd that you can't hear a note of reggae music in this hotel, except on the radio occasionally.

It's going to break here, though, this year, above-ground. When I left Jamaica in 1962, the biggest-selling album in Jamaica ever was *The Student Prince* by Mario Lanza, and to be an intellectual music lover was to tune in to Andy Williams. It takes a long, long time to change public taste really drastically.

Have you ever had a serious argument with Marley? No, and I don't think we'd ever really have one. I think it's more than possible that at some time we might part, Bob and Island, because it's in the nature of a small independent company that when a contract expires, an artist on the way up goes to an RCA or a CBS or wherever, because often, though not in all cases, the artist can get a deal rather like one might get from an insurance company. And when they start talking that sort of money against a company like Island, which is not a public company – well, you see the problem.

Does that prospect make you despair? Yes. But there is no way out of it.

Finally, let's go back to Marley the man. What kind of person do you see in him? Super-sensitive, amazingly bright, takes in a lot of things right to the back of his head. He's a natural leader, and he has some very, very heavy people around him – when I say heavy, I mean in the sense that they're very bright, very intelligent and talented.

And it says a lot for him that they acknowledge him as their leader, because they are all very strong people in their own right. Basically, the attitude of Bob and the Wailers has always been that they would, on their terms, like to expand their music.

They had their own little shop here even when I knew them at first, and when they wanted some money they'd go and make a few records and sell them themselves. So they've always been a very independent crowd of people, the Wailers.

As a non-Rastafarian, how do you manage to get such closeness with Jamaican musicians? I don't participate in the Rasta thing, but what I know about it, I like. There's a general attitude of anti-establishment about it that I appreciate and go along with. Musicians are traditionally anti-establishment, and I guess I always have been too. *Ray Coleman* •

1976

JULY – SEPTEMBER

AC/DC, DR FEELGOOD, LYNYRD SKYNYRD, QUEEN AND MORE

"A couple of oiks"

NME SEPT 11 Peter Cook and Dudley Moore debut their foul-mouthed alter egos, Derek & Clive.

PETER COOK LAUGHS like a drain, though he has to admit that the prospect of a duffing up by muscle-bound Mickey Hargitay – Jayne Mansfield's most celebrated ex-husband – is not to be dismissed lightly.

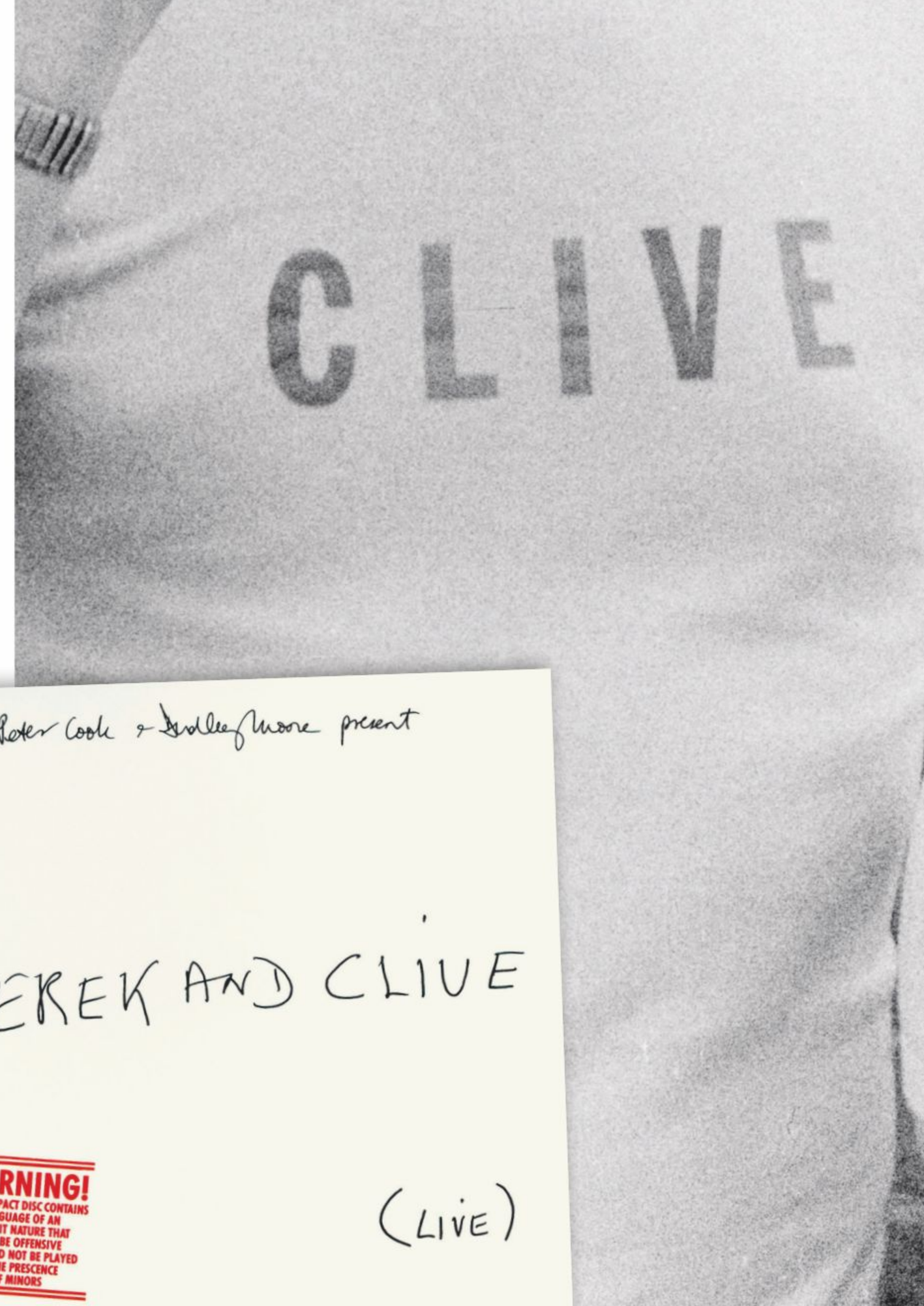
Peter Cook and Dudley Moore may just have something to worry about, as anyone who's lent an earful to the infamous Derek 'n' Clive tape will testify.

The Derek 'n' Clive tape? It all went down some three years back, when Cook and Moore for some reason not exactly clear took themselves into a recording studio and put down on tape a series of outrageously funny, frequently obscene routines of the kind that make your average stag club compère sound like the Pope.

For instance, Peter Cook, who assumes the character of Clive to Dudley Moore's Derek, revealing that the worst job he ever had was nursing Jayne Mansfield through an affliction known as lobsterisimus bumaquisimus, which you won't find in any medical dictionary but is an unpleasant and pleasantly rare condition where a certain species of seafood somehow takes up residence in the victim's rectum.

The removal of this aquatic parasite is a highly skilled but unappealing task rivalled only by the worst job Derek (Dudley Moore) ever had: collecting Winston Churchill's bogies.

You get the picture? Not exactly your usual BBC 1 Light Entertainment fare, though the tapes were never »



MICHAEL PUTLAND / GETTY

August 20, 1976: Peter Cook (left) and Dudley Moore at a press call for the album *Derek And Clive (Live)*, Hampstead, North London

January 24, 1976: Cook and Moore as "The British Sonny & Cher" on *Saturday Night Live*

intended for public consumption. Cook and Moore did their Derek 'n' Clive bit for their own amusement, and for friends.

Pretty soon, though, the Pete'n'Dud-as-Derek'n'Clive tapes had attracted wider attention than just their immediate circle of friends. Duplicate cassettes proliferated as their notoriety spread. A hot little property for the man – or rock star – who has everything.

The Who picked one up; Led Zeppelin got hold of a copy to amuse themselves on the road. So did the Stones, Bad Company, etc, etc – so that possession of a Derek 'n' Clive cassette was as prestigious in certain circles as a white label of the Watergate tapes.

There it would have ended, except that Cook and Moore decided that if they could find a record company with sufficient nerve they might as well bring their tapes well and truly into the public domain. Island took the plunge, and released them this week as the album *Derek And Clive (Live)* with a warning on the cover: "This record contains language of an explicit nature that may be offensive and should not be played in the presence of minors."

Even so, *Derek And Clive (Live)* won't be exactly welcomed in every record shop in the land, and if Mary Whitehouse doesn't get there first it's odds on some Member of Parliament is going to be waving his Hansard in outrage before long.

"It's not meant as a come-on," says Peter Cook, referring to the warning sticker. "It's not like those movie posters which proclaim: 'If you're offended by scenes of explicit sexuality then please stay away.' Which usually means: 'Come inside and see a lot of people screwing each other and in particular watch the alligator screen left.' *Derek And Clive (Live)* is not aimed at the Pete 'n' Dud audience."

Dudley Moore agrees. "In every way, Derek and Clive are very different from the more familiar Pete and Dud characters. Pete and Dud talk knowledgeably but respectfully about the world and its mysteries. Derek and Clive are a couple of oiks who are just pissed off with the whole business.

I mean, anyone who says 'Hello' to them is automatically a …"

Cut to a recorded highlight:

Clive: I was at Tottenham Hotspurs watching a game against Arsenal and this bloke came up to me and said, "Hello"…
Derek: Oh no.
Clive: And I thought, "Christ, this bloke comes up to me and says, 'Hello'…
Derek: Provocative fucker…
Clive: I said, "What do you mean 'Hello', and do you know what he came back with? He said, "Hello". I said, "I can suss you out for a start… get this in the bollocks", so I kicked him in the balls and as he fell to the floor he said, "Yuuuccchhhh." I said, "Don't you 'Yuuuccchhhh' at me, mate"…
Derek: Like he comes in with "Hello" and comes out with "Yuuuccchhhh"?
Clive: I said, "Don't you 'Yuuuccchhhh' at me, mate," and I kicked his fuckin' teeth in and then he went, "Aaaaahhhh…" And I said, "Don't you fuckin' 'Aaaaahhhh' at me", so I really kicked his car in… bunged him right in the car with the left boot, and d'you know, he still had the audacity to come out with, "Yurrrhhh-hhh-urrrrhhh – I'm dying." Well, what could I say to that… I just walked away. I left the situation. I wasn't going to be put upon.
Derek: You weren't going to be dictated to!
Clive: Why should I be dictated to by some cunt who says "Yuuuccchhhh"…
Derek: Preceded by "Hello"!
Clive: What a cunt!

"A matter of taste doesn't come into it, or morality. It's not malicious in any way"

THERE ARE OTHER cuts on the album, which, through continuous usage, render as harmless words that shock and offend certain sections of the public.

Says Moore: "We set out to explore a whole area of humour that for some reason or another has been glossed over. Derek and Clive is basically about people who are much too daft to talk any other way."

"There are plenty of people like that around," says Cook. "All sorts of people who are outraged by what's going on in the world but who have no way of articulating themselves. Instead, they're forever in a blind fury; that's precisely what Derek and Clive are all about. Pete and Dud may differ quite drastically from Derek and Clive, but truthfully Derek and Clive emerge more as human beings."

"Pete and Dud don't really see the world at all," insists Moore.

"Or, for that matter, meet anybody," adds Cook.

"They're enclosed in a small box somewhere in Kilburn, where they talk about cosmic subjects like religion, sex and life itself. They only ever emerge for the odd packet of dried prunes," Moore observes. "But it's obvious that Derek and Clive are right in there being put upon, out on the streets rubbing shoulders with humanity… in the Kentucky Fried Chicken shop, down the lav, up the Palais, down the disco…"

"Absorbing as they do," muses Cook, "the whole rich panorama of life as it passes by their windows as a never-ending pageant."

Even in these "permissive" times, however, there are those who will argue that by exposing themselves as Derek and Clive, the much-loved figures of Pete and Dud are taking an unnecessary gamble: that it might prove to be detrimental to their future career. "I know precisely what you mean," says Cook. "I can see the sort of reviews appearing in the press which begin: 'Why do Peter Cook and Dudley Moore, who have a certain wittiness about them, need to resort to this kind of material for laughs?' Well, it's not resorting to this kind of material, but utilising the kind of material that most people don't, and making it humorous."

So how would you answer the critics?

"I'd just have to say that it makes us laugh," Moore declares. "That's the only possible criterion. A matter of taste doesn't come into it, or morality. It's not malicious in any way. If it was, then it couldn't possibly be humorous."

"The only people we've missed out," Cook interjects, "are the Jews, but that kind of remark can make it appear as if something deliberate happened when in actual fact it didn't. As far as Britain is concerned, there aren't many sacred cows left…" He pauses for a moment. "There's only Winston Churchill, Sir Francis Chichester and the Queen Mother, and as we've included Winston and the Queen Mother on the album, that only leaves Sir Francis."

I wonder if sailing around the world single-handed was the worst job Sir Francis ever had?

Roy Carr

NBC / GETTY

THE WORST JOB I EVER 'AD
Derek and Clive and the rich panorama of sub-human life

Jamaican roots-reggae vocal-harmony group the Mighty Diamonds in the early '70s

"Time to get worried"

MM JUL 3 Sell-out shows by Bob Marley or no, reggae is banned from the Hammersmith Odeon. "Curious," says Virgin's Richard Branson, "when it's the music of the moment."

REGGAE HAS BEEN banned from London's most prestigious rock venue, the Hammersmith Odeon, and the first victims are the Mighty Diamonds, U-Roy and Delroy Washington. The ban follows incidents involving the police at the recent series of Bob Marley & The Wailers concerts at the venue.

Virgin Records, who were promoting the Mighty Diamonds package, learned of the ban when they attempted to reserve a further date for the artists apart from August 14 and 15, which had already been verbally agreed with Odeon leaseholders Rank Leisure Services.

They were told by a spokesman for Rank, Tony Williams, that neither the Mighty Diamonds nor U-Roy could play at the theatre in the "foreseeable future". He added that the company would "still be interested in putting on such concerts at the Lewisham or Kilburn Odeons, which we feel would be able to cope much better."

Virgin's managing director Richard Branson said this week: "It seems curious that such a ban should be imposed when reggae is by far the most popular music of the moment. When a top group like the Mighty Diamonds is prevented from playing at a major London theatre on such thin grounds, it is time to get worried."

Williams said: "I have come to the conclusion that it would be commercially wrong for this company to allow the Mighty Diamonds and U-Roy to play at Hammersmith Odeon in the foreseeable future. It can only create problems. If we want to keep our licence, we are not in a position where we can afford to antagonise local residents, the general public, the police or the local authorities. We want to assess fully the implications of last week's Bob Marley & The Wailers concerts.

"It will be some time before the complications have been sorted out and that is why we are unable to put on a similar concert for the time being. We have to be the arbiters in such a situation and the decision we make has to be the right one for Rank Leisure Services."

Virgin are currently seeking a venue suitable for the only London appearances of the Diamonds and U-Roy. The original Hammersmith dates were set to precede the appearances of the band at this year's Reading Festival.

Reggae banned at Hammersmith

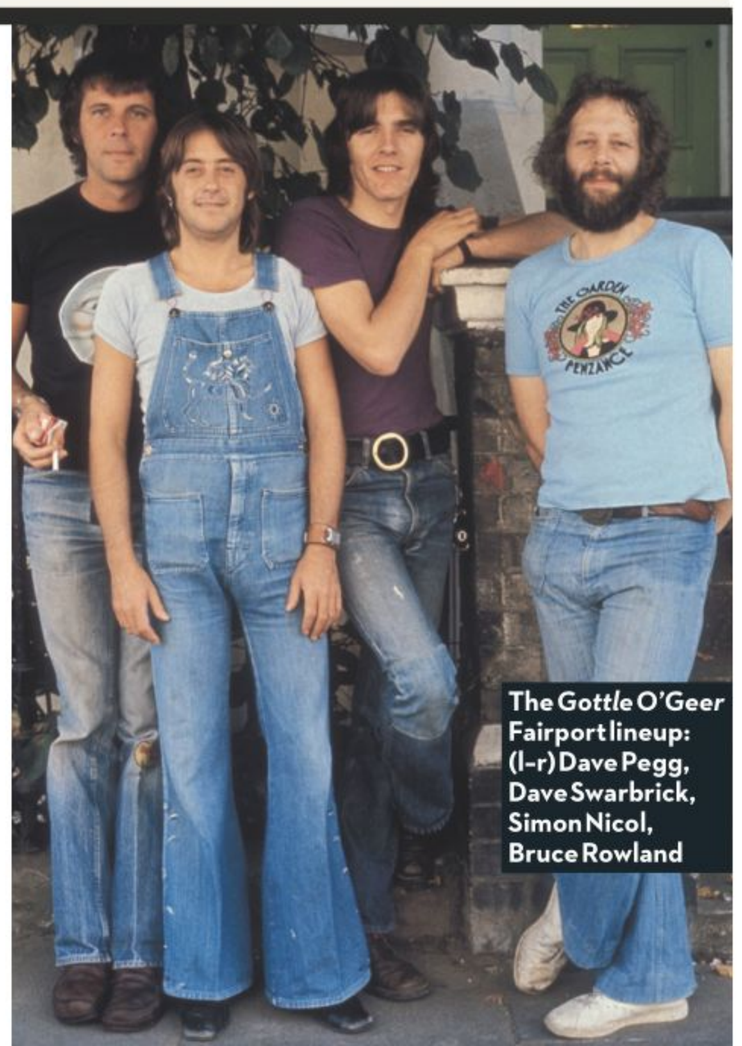
REGGAE has been banned from London's Hammersmith

Critical indifference

MM JULY 17 Fairport Convention are off Island.

FAIRPORT HAVE BEEN dropped by Island – ending an association that has lasted more than seven years. The label, which has released all Fairport's records since their second album *What We Did On Our Holidays*, in February 1969, has decided not to renew the contract which expired after last month's release of *Gottle O'Geer*, an album received with critical indifference.

But the band, who are planning a 30-date British tour in the autumn, are not despondent about Island's decision and are currently negotiating for a new record deal, saying a label change will give them a recharge with their new lineup. They dropped the Convention in their name after Sandy Denny, Trevor Lucas and Jerry Donohue quit the band earlier in the year to be replaced by Dan Ar Braz, Roger Burridge and Bob Brady. *Richard Green*


The Gottle O'Geer Fairport lineup: (l–r) Dave Pegg, Dave Swarbrick, Simon Nicol, Bruce Rowland

GAB ARCHIVE / GETTY, ESTATE OF KEITH MORRIS / GETTY

JULY–SEPTEMBER 1976

➤ Six tons of the Beatles' compilation album *Rock'n'Roll Music* were shipped from London to Japan recently to meet the demand there. Fifteen thousand albums in all were sent from EMI's factory at Hayes, Middlesex, to Japan, another country gripped by the resurgence of Beatlemania. **MM JUL 3**

➤ Beatles compilation albums, under concept tags like the current *Rock'n'Roll Music*, which is No 11 in this week's *MM* chart, will become a regular feature of EMI'S releases in the future. EMI are considering releasing previously unissued material – including a live album. The Beatles have never had a live set released, although tapes of concerts exist and bootleg versions have been issued in the past. **MM JUL 17**

➤ Led Zeppelin release a double album next month – the soundtrack of a film of the band in concert. Titled *The Song Remains The Same*, the live set was recorded at the band's New York Madison Square Gardens concert in 1973. It features a 27-minute version of "Dazed And Confused" and a closing 14-minute version of "Whole Lotta Love". Zeppelin's label Swan Song told *MM* the album will be available late next month and the film in November. **MM SEPT 25**

“I can’t flake out now!”

A minor character in The Herd and Humble Pie, PETER FRAMPTON has hit it big in the USA with a massive live album: *Frampton Comes Alive!*. “The audience was behind me,” he says. “There were ovations during songs as well as at the end.”

DAVID REDFERN / GETTY

— MELODY MAKER JULY 10 —

WHAT WAS IT about the ’50s that encouraged the birth of so much talent? Was it the result of H-bomb testing or increased sunspot activity that resulted in the mums of the British Isles yielding up a plethora of sons and daughters destined to be key figures in the evolution of rock music?

During the ’60s we saw most of that talent flowering and forming the cornerstone of contemporary music. But it seemed as if we had seen the last of the Pete Townshends, John Lennons, Eric Claptons and David Bowies. Were there any more songwriters, guitarists and embryo pop phenomena left in the vaults?

Well there was one man left that ’60s watchers had long cherished as a potential superstar. But it seemed that Peter Frampton would never emerge from the cocoon of restraint that seemed to dog his career.

He had flashed to fame with The Herd in 1966-7 and was such a good-looking young musician with much potential as a singer, guitarist and songwriter. But, apart from his initial stardom as a teen idol, it seemed as if the rock audience at large could not take him seriously, even when he finally tore himself away from the strictly formalised confines of The Herd (a great band despite the chart image), and took on a subsidiary role as Steve Marriott’s cohort in Humble Pie. »

October 27, 1976: Peter Frampton on stage at the Birmingham Odeon

At first, Frampton and Marriott were equals in the Pie adventure. Certainly, Peter has always admitted his debt to the band and Steve in helping him find his feet and musical direction. But there came a time when Peter had to go his own way. He chose to split from Pie just as the band were breaking huge in America after gruelling tours from state to state.

Peter formed his own band and straight away hit problems. His group was called Camel, an unprepossessing name which reflected Peter's desire not to cash in on looks and teen appeal. Strictly low profile was the attitude that Frampton fostered, to his own detriment.

The band meant little in England, already overcrowded with struggling groups. In the week Camel were launched, there were about a dozen other new bands hitting the road in search of success.

Peter was starting from scratch and found gigs and money hard to come by while he learnt the craft of leading other musicians, who sometimes had ideas of their own that did not necessarily fit with the Frampton way.

His songwriting developed, however, influenced to some extent by one of his idols, Stevie Wonder, and his lyrics were unmistakable reflections of his mercurial personal relationships with his girlfriend Mary, a fashion model, who later became his wife.

Meanwhile, although he released a succession of likeable and attractive albums, it seemed he could not break out of the web of apathy that pressed in on him at home. He found solace, personal happiness and eventually success, in America.

With a new lady and his rock-like manager Dee Anthony behind him, and the challenge that America offered, Frampton… came alive.

Nobody was more shocked by the instant success of his live double album *Frampton Comes Alive!* than Peter, and it seemed fans in America could not get enough of his music, thrusting his single "Show Me The Way" high in the chart.

They flocked to his headlining shows, and now Britain, for so long asleep to his existence, has hailed the man, who at 26 still looks 16 and feels his career has only just begun.

With a Top 10 single and album, Frampton will be coming home soon – as a conqueror. It is difficult to grasp just how big Frampton is in the States at the moment. In hotels he has to check in under the name of his road manager to avoid the groupies and fans who patrol the corridors. He has to be surrounded by bodyguards and chooses his restaurants and bars with caution to avoid inevitable mobbing.

But when we met in a New York hotel to celebrate his success with toasts of cold beer, he seemed utterly unaffected by the change in his fortunes, except that he now has a confidence that was lacking in days of yore.

During our chat he was interrupted on half a dozen occasions by phone calls from around the world, from Japan and Australia, as rock writers clamoured to find out all they could about this mysterious new superstar.

"You want me to tell you about my credentials," grinned Peter as he talked, with difficulty, to an earnest interviewer in Tokyo. "Yes, I have been playing the guitar a long time…"

But Peter is funny and patient, and eager to talk about the events of the past few months which have left him breathless. He now lives in upstate New York and has no plans to return to England on a permanent basis.

He was delighted to see his parents, who went over to Philadelphia to see him play at the incredible 120,000-strong concert in the JFK stadium. But he feels that America, which has given him so much, is his home now.

"It all started taking off in March, with the double album becoming a hit. There's a funny story about that… I wanted to do a double album, but Dee said, 'No, you mustn't.' He wanted me to use the cream of two albums, a couple of acoustic numbers and some rockers. It was originally going to be 'All I Want To Be', 'Plain Shame', 'Doobie Wah', 'Jumping Jack Flash', 'Lines On My Face', and 'How Do You Feel'.

"It added up to a single album. We played it to Jerry Moss and he turned round and said, 'Where's the rest?'

"And I said, 'What do you mean more?' I'd been programmed to do a live single album, but he told me to go ahead with a double. 'Show Me The Way' wasn't even meant to be a single. We put the album out first, then we got the radio playsheets and that was the track everybody wanted to hear.

"I'd never had a hit before – no single hits – ever. I'd just been plugging away on tour, just learning. If *Wind Of Change* had been a hit album for me it would have been a mental-home job – just too much of a strain. I wouldn't have been ready for it.

"But I knew that it was time to do the live album. The audience was right behind me, which meant that I was getting there. I was communicating with them as much as the music does. They were giving us ovations during songs as well as at the beginning and end.

"And I said, 'Dee, the next one has gotta be live.' The kids just can't contain themselves at the beginning of a number, and then they go really quiet during an acoustic song. It's great!

"The fans are a complete spectrum of all age groups. There're young kids the Top 40 stations are built on, the 12-year-olds – again – which is really funny for me.

"But I love it, because they're the ones that made it a hit. And there're the avid Frampton fans who have stuck by me over the years and grew up on the Herd album. They heard that over here when they picked up that I was the guitar player with Humble Pie. A lot of the fans from Pie stayed with me when I left, too."

The Herd must seem a long time ago to Peter now, I said, remembering their gigs in Bromley and at the Marquee Club.

"It's 10 years ago! Sixteen I was… and I lied about my age, too. I said I was 15. Yep, I was just working it out – 'From The Underworld' was 10 years ago, and I can't remember the words.

"It was a strange album, though. You remember the big band track, 'Impressions Of Oliver', and there were all the singles. And you remember one of the first songs I ever wrote – 'Woken Up The Blackbirds: Better Run'?"

Did Peter feel more confidence as a writer now?

"Oh sure, success has done two things to me. It's made me much more confident as a writer and it makes me want to go back and practise and rehearse. Normally, when I get through a tour, I just want to relax, eat, sleep and watch TV. But now I've been accepted like this, I can't stagnate. This is a crucial time for me now, but I rely on Dee and Jerry Moss and their guidance."

Aren't you bigger now than Humble Pie were a couple of years ago?

"Yeah… I know… which is really strange. When I walked on stage to that ovation at Philadelphia I turned round and saw my parents on stage watching me. I just couldn't believe it. I knew it was going to happen because it's been happening on every gig, but they didn't know what to expect.

"When I sold out a gig in 24 hours I knew it was a pointer to greater things. But there was a time when I felt I was banging my head against the wall.

"Around the time I recorded the *Frampton* album at the castle in Wales, I couldn't afford to put a band on the road unless something happened. That album did better than all the others put together, but it took the live album to make that one a gold.

"When I came back to the States I was headlining at all the gigs, with a middle spot once or twice. That *Frampton* album moved us up the market to almost headline status.

"It was my best-ever studio album and I still love that one. My next album I'll record in America in a house where everybody can live, wake up, have breakfast, kick a ball around and start recording. The best tapes are done between one and five in the morning, always."

Was Peter broke when he made that last but one album?

"Very. People were throwing other groups at me to join. But I thought if I do anything, I'll be a session man and try again later. But there were only two months when I was living in London when everything was very low. *Frampton* was a do-or-die album made out of desperation and I put everything I had into it, as I thought it would be the last I did for a while."

Were the lyrics of the song "Show Me The Way" prophetic? Did they have special significance?

"Yeah, maybe. I just met somebody that gave me such confidence. She does… my life is completely changed. All the lyrics in that song are about me and her. The line people pick out is, *'I wonder if I'm dreaming, I feel so unashamed / I can't believe this is happening to me.'*

"That's about you, everybody… so they all think I'm singing about them. I've learnt the secret through that. They – the audience – are the most important people. I can write personal songs about me, which they think are about them. All my songs are personal, and I've been put down for it many times.

"My lyrics are the worst thing that I do – I know that. But I think on *Frampton* the lyrics were a 100 per cent improvement. They were honest, they weren't trying to hide anything. They were just myself being happy. Now I sing 'Lines On My Face' with a smile.

"And it seems wrong sometimes. But I couldn't not do that number, because it gets an ovation. Diana Ross is doing the song. I think. She's done 'Baby I Love Your Way', and somebody else has done 'Lines On My Face'. Barbra Streisand also wants to do the song. Things like…"

Peter suddenly dropped from his American-tinged tones into pure Mike Reid cockney: "It's completely freaky! After all this time… well I can't flake out now. I've always wanted it to happen and now it has.

"So I'm going to lock myself away and write. I've got enough stuff for the next album already. I'm writing all the time, but I want an intense period alone to put it all together for a single studio album with about 11 songs."

Will Peter use the voice bag again?

"I've got to, it's my trademark now. Every time I see Ringo he comes up to me and goes, 'Wah, wah, wah, wah, WAAH.' I'd like to do a whole number and just talk it through. The voice bag was first used in 1925 or something, and the one I use took four or five years to evolve. It's been a secret for a long time, but it's so simple.

"Stevie Wonder used it on *Music Of My Mind*, which brought it back instantly. Then Joe Walsh did it and my girl Penny found out where Joe got it from. The one I use is called a Heil, which is from Bob Heil's sound system. He made one, and instead of a bag over the shoulder he has a box on the floor. It's quite difficult to use – I couldn't talk with it for a long time.

"But all it consists of is a small speaker in a box, with a tube coming out of the top leading to your mouth. The box becomes another lung or diaphragm. You just have to over-mouth the words.

"I always remember that bit on *Music Of My Mind* when Stevie is going, *'In other words…'* If you go back and listen to that album, he's talking all the way through. It's really nice to talk to audiences like that. I say things like 'I love you', and they like it. They don't wanna be shouted at like so many groups do. If you communicate subtly, they'll understand you."

> "I couldn't write acoustic songs with Humble Pie, so I had to leave"

Peter admitted that he felt American now he lived abroad. "I'm used to the facilities, the big cars…" His girlfriend Penny is American. Where did they meet?

"In New York, when I was still with Humble Pie. We sort of got it together, as people do. She was just a friend of a friend at the time. It was great when it happened – it was just something I needed. I'm a happy person now and that is reflected in my songs."

Why hadn't Peter gained greater personal success earlier in his career?

"Everybody needs that bubble of the business around them to harden into a shell. It happened to me with [Ken] Howard and [Alan] Blaikley and Steve Rowland and Jack Baverstock in The Herd, and it worked.

"They fought off outsiders and the machinery around me worked. And it was a protective layer that didn't let anybody in that wasn't wanted. I was a guitarist, occasional singer and songwriter, with no great aspirations. That's the wrong word – I had aspirations, but I never thought my songs were that incredible.

"Then I needed three-and-a-half years of just playing to people. They can tell you what's right or wrong, nobody else can. Whether it was a good move or a bad move, I had a very enjoyable time in Humble Pie. Maybe it wasn't the right music for me to do, but it was a great stomping ground… and we did stomp!

"I know you really loved the band, and it was a really good band. But it got to the point where I no longer had the facility to do what I wanted. I couldn't write acoustic songs and stuff, so I had to leave. And I'm very glad that I did.

"Although, at the time, I thought it was the one big blunder I'd made in my life. I left and the album went – wham! There's no doubt their success spurred me on."

Did Peter have any thoughts on what happened to Humble Pie after their first flush of success? He seemed reluctant to speak. "I'm very close friends with Jerry [Shirley] again, and he lives near us. But the band? Well, the music went in the wrong direction – for me.

"It was heavy English rock and then it went into American soul, which, to me, wasn't right. And Steve thought it was. I thought that was wrong, but that's just my personal opinion and that's not putting the band down. But I tell you, he still excites me when I see him. He did a tour here. The band wasn't that together, but they got a great ovation.

"I don't want 80 pages of me singing my own praises and then putting down Steve – do you understand? You know I never, ever want to put people down, but I do see mistakes being made. God knows, I've made some heavy ones!"

After tours of America, Australia and Japan, Peter will be coming to Britain in the autumn, when he is expected to play a concert at Charlton football ground in south London.

Peter agreed that his band had been a bit shaky on their appearance in Philadelphia, but explained that John Simios had just left after a few years and Andy Newmark was still finding his feet.

"It takes time to get a band together. I can't really direct them on stage, because I'm too busy with the audience. The band before was a working machine, and sometimes you have to make a change. Bob Mayo, my keyboard player, leads the band for me when I'm out front, and when I don't have to sing, I become the director.

"Round about October, November, we'll be playing Madison Square Gardens for two or three days. Nobody knows about that yet – but it's gonna be amazing. And I've got lots of secret surprises lined up – brass section, strings, things like that. I'll play numbers from every album, things I've never done before on stage. I can't tell you all the dates yet, but they'll be announced.

"You know, I never, ever thought I'd get a No 1 hit anywhere, and now I've had a hit in America, England and Japan. It's all coming true – like a big dream. And I'm grateful. I'm gonna keep doing what I'm doing for a long time. It's put another 25 years on my life." *Chris Welch* •

“I like to rip it up”

AC/DC’s triumphant residencey at London’s Marquee Club showcase an Australian band with a raw and ribald take on rock’n’roll. Audiences go wild. And that’s before they’ve seen the “human kangaroo”. Really, you don’t want to know.

MICHAEL PUTLAND / GETTY

July 26, 1976: Angus Young and (right) Bon Scott on stage with AC/DC at the Marquee Club, 90 Wardour Street, London

MICHAEL PUTLAND / GETTY

— MELODY MAKER AUGUST 21 —

THOSE PUZZLED BY the Status Quo phenomenon should beware. AC/DC, from the same rock family, could wreak similar havoc, but they will only realise their full potential if, amid all the raucousness that inevitably surrounds power-chord bands, they better organise their assaults.

But whatever they do lack in presentation at the moment, the band is certainly making great strides towards becoming a major attraction, as was suggested by their Monday-night residency at London's Marquee Club. When I caught the band there last week, they had just broken another house attendance record, which, I'm told, they'd set themselves the previous week.

AC/DC have been tagged as an Australian band, though three of the members, brother guitarists Angus and Malcolm Young and singer Bon Scott, are Glaswegians, with only the rhythm section of drummer Philip Rudd and bassist Mark Evans being children of Melbourne.

Although I'm sure that the gig I saw at the Marquee, where sweat was shed by the bucketful, was an off-night for the band – sound troubles (twice) brought the gig to a halt – they did enough to show that they're a good boogie band, with apparently no pretensions about being anything else.

But I was left hoping, somewhere around the middle of their set, that they'd shatter the uniformity of riff, vocal and solo (in that order), which all tended to become much of a muchness after a while, and widen the scope a little.

> "I don't like to play above or below people's heads"

The potential is there to do it if they'd only harness and direct the music, and vocalist Scott and punk guitarist Angus Young have certain charismatic qualities. Scott, with his moody stare and distinctive Scottish voice, could be a first-class frontman instead of, as he strikes me, a poor cross between Alex Harvey and Stevie Marriott. His enthusiasm did seem a trifle contrived at times.

Seventeen-year-old Young, with his schoolboy uniform (discarded after the fourth number of the set because of sauna bath conditions), has hit on the really good gimmick of looking like a rock'n'roll Norman Wisdom, only more backward.

Though not a great guitarist (solos over the one-minute mark became, to say the least, repetitive), he's a great showman. Where do AC/DC go from the Marquee in murky Wardour Street? Judging from the wild reaction of their audiences, they could just about slip comfortably into Status Quo's shoes once they have pulled their socks up. *Harry Doherty*

— NME OCTOBER 16 —

DEPENDING ON WHO they were trying to impress, the best ways for any band to leave a grateful audience used to be to either viciously trash their equipment, lurch full-tilt into a rock'n'roll medley, or disappear in clouds of dry ice.

But times change. Appetites become jaded. And with few exceptions, those well-rehearsed tactics that once transformed the front six rows of the local Odeon into a demolition area are now forgotten by the time the house lights have gone up – and the punters quietly file through the exits

August 9, 1976: backstage at the Marquee – (l–r) Angus Young, Mark Evans (foreground), Malcolm Young and Bon Scott

to the strains of *Dark Side Of The Moon*.

In terms of rock brinkmanship, it seems nothing short of Hari Kari can shock a mid-'70s audience – and even that might not warrant an encore!

We've seen it all before. So what else is new? I'll tell you – the Human Kangaroo!

According to Angus Young, demented 17-year-old lead guitarist with AC/DC, it's a jape that he picked up from singer Bon Scott, who employed it to jolly-up après-gig piss-ups.

The Human Kangaroo? Young Angus comes complete with instruction manual.

"What I do," he begins, masticating every word, "is to go behind the equipment, strip off all me clothes, put me legs tightly together, me hands behind me back and hop like mad across the stage."

Not, I assure you, a pretty sight, but it's made him the seven-stone darling of a whole new generation of thrill-seekers. However, Angus points out in all modesty that this artistic portrayal isn't de rigueur at every gig.

"I usually do it as a special treat – I've done it at the Marquee when the audience has been really great. But in any case I make sure the kids don't go away disappointed."

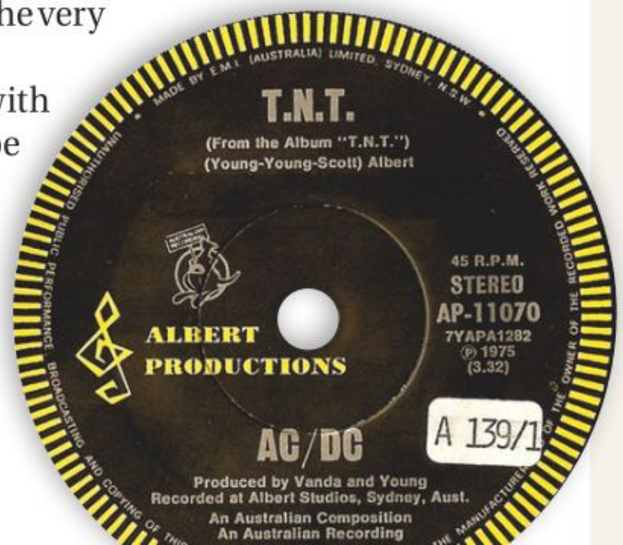
Precisely how Angus Young pleases all the people all the time takes this form. Having spent the best part of an hour trashing his Gibson, stomping the stage in bright-red schoolboy uniform and shaking his head as though trying to remove it from his shoulders, he strips to his briefs, mounts the highest speaker stack and, having turned his back to the crowd, dramatically lowers his undergarment below his knees to give a Full Moon. "You've got to really entertain a crowd nowadays," maintains the fearless flasher. "Personally, I think it helps if a lead guitarist has some kind of visual gimmick. Truthfully," he squeaks, "I just couldn't stand there in front of the group without doing something!"

AC/DC are everything you'd expect an antipodean boogie band comprised of three expat Scotsmen and two Aussies to be: crude, rude and exceedingly randy. On stage they sweat and swagger and seem to play at just one speed – flat out.

But despite the general ribald image, AC/DC are built almost entirely around the uninhibited antics of young Angus. Though as a guitarist he may be running on a quite different artistic ticket to, say, a Beck or a Gallagher, he has his own kind of star quality.

Angus makes it clear that he has no real aspirations to becoming the fastest new guitar-slinger in the west, but even so, if you cast aside his penchant for doffing his trousers, this bona fide Seventh Son builds up such a head of steam that only the very fittest can keep pace.

He equates primitivism in rock with honesty, and feels there'll always be a ready-made market for bands content to stick to basics and not get trapped by illusions of grandeur. "I don't like to play above or below people's heads," he argues. "Basically, I just like to get up front of a crowd and rip it up."



Tutored over the last six years by his brother Malcolm (a whiz-kid in his day) on a diet of Berry, Hendrix and Richard (Keith and Little), Angus theorises that the worst thing any rock band can do is to perform for their own amusement: "That's why we keep it simple and make it visual. You see, there are some people who can't get off on music no matter how simple you play it. You've also got to cater for them. Rock is all about having fun, and if you take the business part too seriously it isn't fun any more – and the audience sense it."

Having got as far as any rock band can get in Australia, AC/DC arrived here in April with a deadline of six months in which to make or break it. Within weeks they'd risen from a £25-a-night support band to potential bill-toppers.

"I'm really not all that surprised that we happened so quickly in Britain," Angus says without any trace of egotism. "I say that because I honestly believe that we give the public what they want. If we didn't then we'd be on our way back to Australia by now."

But what if his precocious brat image eventually runs out of mileage? By the time he's grown out of his togs and teens he could be washed up. "Yeah," he sighs, "I might be a has-been. If I am, I hope I'm a rich one. But really, that's not the most important thing to me. Of course I'd like to conquer the world and go on forever like Chuck Berry, but if I don't, if suddenly tomorrow it all ends, at least I can say I've done it. "And," he concludes, "just so long as we don't do like so many bands do – drift away from that thing that made us famous – I don't think there's much for us to worry about for the time being." *Roy Carr* •

ALBUMS REVIEW 1976

The same old boogie

MM JUL 3 AC/DC's debut fails to spark excitement.

AC/DC High Voltage ATLANTIC

Any new band that opens its first album with a song that goes, "*It's a long way to the top if you wanna rock'n'roll*," is asking for trouble. And it's particularly apposite in the case of AC/DC, whose musical development is still at the raw stage. Not that there's anything wrong with punk rock, of course, but if Lenny Kaye of the Patti Smith band, and acknowledged expert on these matters, can claim that his group aren't punk because they don't have a Farfisa organ, then there's no reason for AC/DC's lack of originality to be lauded.

Their main fault lies in the instrumentals: it's the same old boogie, the same old sub-metal riffs you've heard a thousand times before. Too many of their songs sound the same. Still, there's hope. The lyrics have a brashness and lack of sophistication that's always useful in the heavy branch of rock. Best of all is the suitably laboured punning and innuendo in "The Jack", a song which only the naive will think is about playing cards.

This track is evidence that AC/DC (said to be Australia's most popular hard rock band) have some potential. But then so did fellow Aussies Daddy Cool (arguably the best rock'n'roll revival band around – and long before most everybody else got in on the act), and what happened to them? *Michael Oldfield*

"We draw a rowdy crowd"

Everything you've read about good ol' Southern boys LYNYRD SKYNYRD is true. "As soon as one of us gets drunk and disorderly and we're put in jail," says singer RONNIE VAN ZANT, "we git press for it, just like that."

— MELODY MAKER SEPTEMBER 4 —

"HI. Y'ALL COME in now…" Ronnie Van Zant, two minutes out of the sack, wears a stetson, strengthening the popular theory that he was born complete with one.

Lynyrd Skynyrd have jetted into England for the Knebworth Fair (they were *the* success of the day, it turned out), and Van Zant insists that he hasn't touched a drop of drink so that his vocal cords will be in perfect condition for the band's most important gig ever in this country.

Which explains the two empty bottles of Moët & Chandon on a dressing table, another half-empty bottle of bubbly in another corner of the hotel room, and a just-opened bottle of whisky next to the bed. His resistance was low.

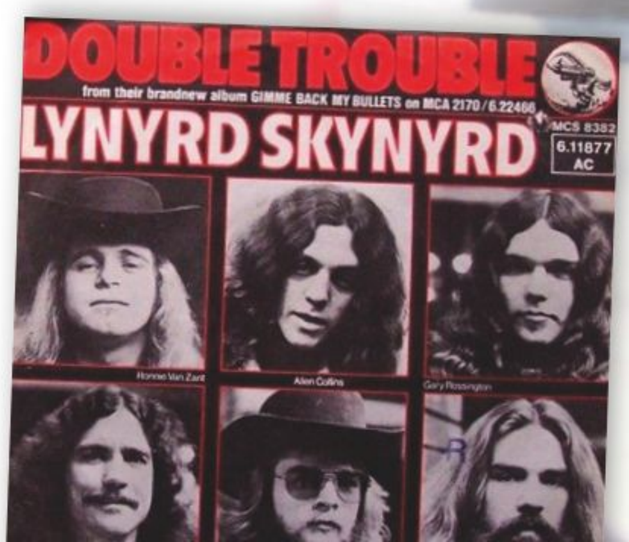
Lynyrd Skynyrd have just about made it big in England, a feat that was achieved with relatively little difficulty, via a few prestigious support spots, plus one short headlining tour at the end of last year. In fact at Knebworth they were playing in front of an audience which numbered more people than they've played to in all their previous visits here. All in one day.

Van Zant adopts a low profile about the Knebworth business; no bumming, no wild claims about who they would blow off the stage, no moans about why 10cc (who'd probably play third to them on an American bill) were billed above them here.

But there was a definite undercurrent of confidence that this gig would set them up for the superstarrish recognition here that they enjoy Stateside, which, two days after our meeting, they had gained.

Though the bulk of Skynyrd's publicity has been geared towards their drunkenness, rowdiness and »

MICHAEL PUTLAND / GTETY



August 21, 1976: appearing between Todd Rundgren's Utopia and 10cc, Lynyrd Skynyrd perform at the third Knebworth festival, headlined by the Rolling Stones

October 1, 1976: Lynyrd Skynyrd backstage at an open-air concert in LA – (clockwise from left) Artimus Pyle, Gary Rossington, Ronnie Van Zant, Allen Collins, Steve Gaines, Billy Powell and Leon Wilkeson

subsequent arrests, they're much more subtle than that image suggests.

Loud they are, boogie they do, but there are few bands around in the world who've consistently come up with loud, boogie classics: "Free Bird", "Gimme Three Steps" and "Simple Man" (from *(Pronounced 'Lĕh-'nérd 'Skin-'nérd)*); "Sweet Home Alabama" and "Workin' For MCA" (from *Second Helping*); "Saturday Night Special" and "Whiskey Rock-A-Roller" (from *Nuthin' Fancy*); and "Double Trouble", "Cry For The Bad Man" and "(I Got The) Same Old Blues" (from *Gimme Back My Bullets*).

But it's always the boozing and fighting that gets the attention, probably because the boys in the band booze and fight a lot.

> "You git hit with frisbees... Crazy – it can get out of hand"

They expect audiences to throw bottles and similar armoury at them in the States, says Van Zant; they then throw them back. So that's what's called "audience communication".

"I've seen Allen [Collins, one of the guitarists] git hit in the head with a boot one time. Staggered the poor boy, buckled his knees," cowboy Ronnie chuckles.

"We were laughin' like hell and he was comin' round about 12 bars later. 'Goddamn it. Gotcha, didn't he?' You git hit with frisbees. 'Throw a frisbee at the group. Maybe I can hit him on the head.' Crazy. It can git out of hand.

"I don't like seein' anybody git hurt or fightin', but there's nothin' you can do about it. If you holler down the microphone, 'Please quit fightin',' they say, 'Fuck you too.' If they're gonna do it, they're gonna do it. They've paid their money to come out and fight each other. Crazy people."

Van Zant calling his patrons "crazy" when his own reputation, and that of his band, had not been the most peaceful in rock'n'roll?

"Yep," he nods. "I think we draw all them rowdy bastards. We draw a rowdy crowd in the States. A bunch of drunks. Our type of people.

"Yeah, most of it is true about us. But almost every group I know fights. You don't hear about it, but as soon as one of us gets in a little thing, drunk and disorderly or something and we're put in jail, we git press for it, just like that.

"Other groups, they don't, but they jist love to pick up on that shit and write about it. That's the way it started out and they're still writin' about it.

"Matter of fact, Allen and Artimus [Pyle, drummer] is pending on trial right now, only lucky we got out of the States for the gig really. See, they [the police] beat the shit outta him [Artimus]. He hit a policeman at a Who gig.

"He was tryin' to git in at the stage door and this American policeman listened to nobody and started grabbin' Artimus by his beard to lead him away. Artimus knocked the shit outta him, knocked his helmet off.

"About that time, a batch of 'em came up and they all handcuffed him, threw him in the back of a paddy waggon and did a little number on his head. He had a black eye and knocks all over his head.

"Little things like that get all the publicity. I don't git into many fights now, not me, 'cos, fuck, you git hurt, hit on the throat, and you miss a gig. Cut the guitar player's fingers, and there goes Lynyrd Skynyrd for a while.

"There's always somebody, in the States especially, who wants a go. It was quite funny when we played Memphis on the Fourth Of July and I was walkin' backstage to the dressin' room, and I know it was gittin' pretty bad when I saw this man; there was these two kids, on a wall, they must have been 13, maybe 14, real young, and as I was walkin' by, I heard one go, 'Hey, he don't look so bad to me, does he?' That's really bad, isn't it?"

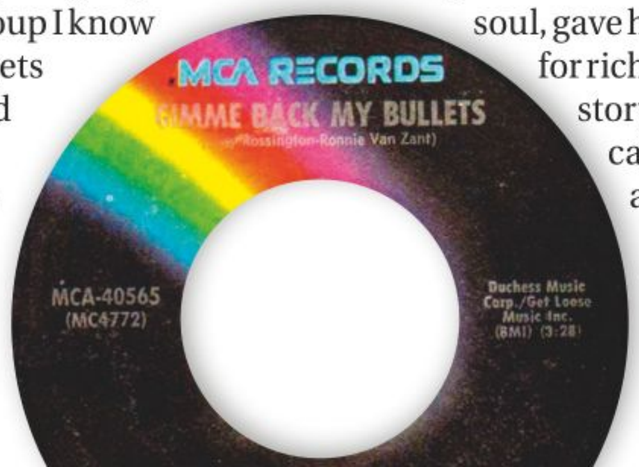
Funny, I had formed the same impression, but anyway, Van Zant was beginning to resent that that side of the band's character has been receiving so much unmerited attention.

"We've had enough of it, ya know?" His Southern brogue develops a sudden, serious purr. "It's been carried a little bit too far. I'd rather talk about the music."

The music and especially the lyrics, written mostly by Van Zant, are often far from rowdy.

"Simple Man" tells of the advice his grandmother, a very religious soul, gave him during his misspent youth. "Forget your lust for rich man's gold," she told him. And then there's the story of "Gimme Three Steps" of how Van Zant has been caught cavorting with somebody's wife and begs for a head start.

"I've had that happen to me several times. I'm sure you have too." Huh? "Well, I don't know if you got



GTETY

a gun pulled on you, but Jesus, I'm sure you've had someone say: 'Stay away from that woman. She's mine.' Well, this guy wanted to do me in, and there I was sayin', 'Gimme three steps towards the door.'"

Van Zant rises to display a wound in his leg.

"When I was a kid, I shot myself right there, fuckin' around with a gun. I'm tellin' ya, they hurt. Blew a hole right there in ma leg."

Back to the music, though, and Van Zant argues that if they play a bad gig, inquests are held immediately in the dressing room as to why such a disaster occurred and steps taken to ensure that the same mistakes don't happen twice.

"Maybe somebody got too tipsy and didn't know when to draw the line."

Skynyrd make no secret of the fact that they rely on drink to put them into the right sort of loose mood for work.

"Ya can overdo it. If that happens, the whole group, well, they've got on me before, scolded me. The rest of the group'll get on the guy who fucks it up. That happens quite a lot.

"We rehearse a lot and play a lot and it jist really shouldn't happen. Everybody knows their part. I can tell by lookin' at their eyes if they've been smokin' or drinkin' too much."

Recording-wise, Skynyrd are as meticulous in their own little ways as the next big band, relying a lot on a laidback atmosphere to get the work done or, if it's a fun song, bringing friends in to create a party mood.

Talk of producer Tom Dowd, who first produced Skynyrd on their latest album, *Gimme Back My Bullets*, drifts into conversation about Al Kooper, the rock star who went South, discovered Skynyrd, got them a recording contract, and produced for three albums, until it all went stale. What was the difference in the two men?

"There had been fights in the studio. Tom Dowd's a real producer, where Al was very hard to get along with in the studio. It had to be his way or that was it. No compromise, and that just wasn't cuttin' it with us.

"It was our album. We were gonna have to suffer the consequences, so we wanted to do it our way. Tom is more helpful, encourages us and suggests things, but forces nothing. He works with us.

"We'll say to him, 'We want the snare to sound like Charlie Watts' snare on 'Satisfaction'. We want the bass to sound like somethin' from the Grateful Dead. We want the rhythm to sound like John Fogerty,' and he just goes 'OK'. He's that good. He's a genius.

"We were fightin' all the time with Al in the studio, and both of us agreed 'no more albums', even though it was successful. Al was just about to have a nervous breakdown and we were goin' crazy ourselves. We're still good friends.

"I think *Nuthin' Fancy* was the turnin' point. Matter of fact, durin' *Nuthin' Fancy*, we chased Kooper from the studio. Made him go to New York and stay there for five days. We were down in Atlanta recordin' and we jist said 'git out'.

"I did one song and he was up in the control room arguing with somebody and I said I was ready to do it, run the tape. He was still bitchin'. The song was 'On The Hunt' and I sang it all the way through and got it off, just the way I wanted to.

"I knew it felt right. Al wanted me to do it agin because he hadn't even recorded it. Him and his engineers were arguing and we were trying to make a record."

Steve Gaines, Skynyrd's new guitarist, brings their lead guitar force back to three, after almost a year when they made do with only Rossington and Collins after the departure of Ed King. King and Gaines, not surprisingly, have quite similar techniques, good rhythm players who can churn out a mighty solo when called for.

King was the second original member of the band to quit owing to the pressures of constantly touring. Drummer Bob Burns was forced to retire because of illness. "Blew a 50-amp fuse," as Van Zant put it. "We're all bettin' to see who goes next."

Gaines has joined a band that thrives on hard work, and another "torture tour" of the States has already been fixed even before the conclusion of their present schedule, a three-month trek to coincide with the release of the live album in October.

"Three months of one-nighters can be hell," Van Zant informs us. "Pure hell. All the travellin', the airplanes, all that shit. There'll be a lot of fightin'. There'll be a lot of publicity on that tour. I guarantee it."

Harry Doherty •

"A beautiful marriage"

MM 31 JAN A new producer finally captures Skynyrd's earthy passion on album four.

Lynyrd Skynyrd
Gimme Back My Bullets MCA

FOR SUCH A great continent, America has given the outside world very few real rock'n'roll bands. Many have watered down the true essence of rock to the point where it lacks attack. Lynyrd Skynyrd are one of the few exceptions.

Not many bands around play with such an earthy passion. The music is from the roots and gives the band a distinctive Deep South sound, a sound that has, for the first time, been captured effectively on record on this, their fourth album.

None of the three previous albums have come anywhere near capturing the potential of this wild bunch. Al Kooper, who produced them, didn't show too much sympathy. Tom Dowd, who produced this LP, has managed to discipline them and harness the talent. Dowd has cleaned the sound considerably, but not too much. The grittiness that sets Skynyrd apart is still very evident. He's put instruments in the proper perspective – lead guitars are heard only when necessary; the rhythm section is given a body that it previously lacked. It's the first album Skynyrd have done without third guitarist Ed King, who quit during last year, and they've tailored their work so well that he is not missed. Gary Rossington and Allen Collins deal effectively with guitars, creating a beautiful marriage.

"Tom Dowd has cleaned up the sound, but not too much"

The band sound as a whole is more distinct than on any other album, due to the excellent vocals of Ronnie Van Zant. His unique offhand style, combined with guitars that play mostly lead, set Skynyrd up as an outstanding rock band. The album's failings are on Side One. I'm left on occasions with the impression that Skynyrd are trying to manufacture an anthem, bidding to record another "Freebird" or "Sweet Home Alabama". "Every Mother's Son" and "Trust" are the tracks which offend. But the last track on that side "(I Got The) Same Old Blues" by JJ Cale could reach such status. The number is given a tremendous treatment – slide guitar on top of an infectious riff, a sluggish drum beat, a stop, and then Van Zant enters on vocals. The best track on the album.

The second side sees Skynyrd play at their best on songs which suit their style perfectly. It opens with the raunchy "Double Trouble", with a female chorus adding the guts. A screeching guitar solo opens "Searching", another magnificent track. Drums are brought up in the mix to match the guitar work and thump the message home. The redoubtable Artimus Pyle, drummer, is at his crispest.

"Cry For The Bad Man" vies with "Same Old Blues" for the honours. Again, it builds slowly to a crescendo, with the bass work of Leon Wilkeson well to the forefront. The highlight of the track comes with a joint lead from Rossington and Collins, as notes come screaming out of the speakers. *Gimme Back My Bullets* will win Skynyrd many new fans in Britain. Southern Fried Boogie rules, OK.

Harry Doherty

ALBUMS REVIEW 1976

THE SCREEN ON THE GREEN LONDON
LIVE!
OCTOBER 17

Aggro chic

NME SEPT 11 The Clash and the Sex Pistols play an Islington cinema. Teeth are broken.

"Someone's got to come along and say to all of us, 'All your ideas about rock'n'roll, all your ideas about sound, all your ideas about guitars, all your ideas about this and that are a load of wank. This is where it is!'... Someone's got to come along and say, 'Fuck you'..."
Alex Harvey, November 1973

IT'S ALMOST FUNNY. Not quite worth an uproarious explosion of uncontrollable hilarity, but definitely good for a wry chuckle or two when it happens to someone else. Trouble is, no one's laughing because all the professional chucklers just found out that the joke's on them.

Any halfway competent rock'n'roll pulse-fingerer knows that this is The Year Of The Punk. You got Patti Smith doing Rimbaud's-in-the-basement-mixing-up-the-medicine, you got Bruce Springsteen with his down-these-mean-streets-a-man-must-go stereologues, you got the Ramones as updated Hanna-Barbera Dead End Kids, you got Ian Hunter doing I-used-to-be-a-punk-until-I-got-old-and–made-all-this-money, you got everybody and his kid brother (or sister) crawling out of the woodwork in leather jackets trying to look like they were hell on wheels in a street fight and shouting Put The Balls Back Into The Music.

Ultimately, if the whole concept of Punk means anything it means Nasty Kids, and if Punk Rock means anything it means music of, by and for Nasty Kids. So when a group of real live Nasty Kids come along playing Nasty Kids music and actually behaving like Nasty Kids, it is no bleeding good at all for those who have been loudly thirsting for someone to come along and blow all them old farts away to throw up their hands in prissy-ass horror and exclaim in duchessy fluster that oh no, this wasn't what they meant at all and won't it please go away.

In words of one (or, at the most, two) syllables: you wanted Sex Pistols and now you've got 'em. Trouble is, they look like they aren't going to go away, so what are you going to do with them? Alternatively – ha ha – what are they going to do with you?

In a way, it's a classic horror-movie situation. Dr Frankenstein's monster didn't turn out according to plan but he was stuck with it anyway, Professor Bozo opens up a pyramid/summons a demon/goes up to the Old Dark Mansion despite the warnings of the villagers and gets into a whole mess of trouble. Don't rub the lamp unless you can handle the genie.

The current vogue for Punkophilia and Aggro Chic has created the atmosphere in which a group like the Sex Pistols could get started and find an audience, and – dig it – it is entirely too late to start complaining because they behave like real Nasty Kids and not the stylised abstraction of Nasty Kiddery which we've been demanding and applauding from sensitive, well-educated, late-20s pop superstars.

Anyway, time's a-wastin'. Their gig at The Screen On The Green has already started; in fact we've already missed the first band, a Manchester group called Buzzcocks. All kinds of folks in Bizarre Costumes – the kind of clothes you used to find at Bowie gigs before 'e went all funny like – are milling around the foyer playing the wild mutation. The occasional celeb – Chris Spedding, who has eyes to produce the Pistols, and Sadistic Mika – is mingling.

Up on the stage it's Party Piece time. A bunch of people, including a chick in SM drag with tits out (photographer from one of the nationals working overtime, presumably with the intention of selling a nice big fat look-at-all-this-disgusting-decadence-and-degradation centrespread) and a lumpy guy in rompers are dancing around to a barrage of Ferry and Bowie records. Every time the lumpy go-go boy does a particularly ambitious move the record jumps. He makes elaborate not-my-fault gestures and keeps dancing. The record keeps jumping.

This goes on for quite a while. Movies are projected on the screen and someone gets creative with the lights. The area near me 'n' the missus reeks of amyl nitrate.

There is nothing more tedious and embarrassing than inept recreations of that which was considered avant-garde 10 years ago. Someone has obviously read too many articles about the Andy Warhol/Velvet Underground Exploding Plastic Inevitable Show. Andy and Lou and Cale would laugh their butts off. This ain't rock'n'roll – this is interestocide.

Sooner or later – later, actually – a group called Clash take the stage. They are the kind of garage band who should be speedily returned to their garage, preferably with the motor running, which would undoubtedly be more of a loss to their friends and families than to either rock or roll. Their extreme-left guitarist, allegedly known as Joe Strummer, has good moves, but he and the band are a little shaky on ground that involves starting, stopping and changing chord at approximately the same time.

In between times, they show Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising*. The Pistols' gear is assembled in a commendably short time with an equally commendable absence of fuss and pissing about and then the Pistols slope on stage and Johnny Rotten lays some ritual abuse on the audience and then they start to play.

Any reports that I had heard and that you may have heard about the Pistols being lame and sloppy are completely and utterly full of shit. They play loud, clean and tight and they don't mess around. They're well into the two-minute-thirty-second powerdrive, though they're a different cup of manic monomania than the Ramones. They have the same air of seething just-about-repressed violence that the Feelgoods have, and watching them gives that same clenched-gut feeling that you get walking through Shepherd's Bush just after the pubs shut and you see The Lads hanging out on the corner looking for some action and you wonder whether the action might be you.

The Pistols play loud, clean and tight and they don't mess around

The Pistols are all those short-haired kids in the big boots and rolled-up baggies and sleeveless T-shirts. Their music is coming from the straight-out-of-school-and-onto-the-dole deathtrap which we seem to have engineered for Our Young: the '76 British terminal stasis, the modern urban blind alley.

The first 30 seconds of their set blew out all the boring, amateurish artsy-fartsy mock-decadence that preceded it purely by virtue of its tautness, directness and utter realism. They did songs with titles like "I'm A Lazy Sod" and "I'm Pretty Vacant", they did blasts-from-the-past like "I'm Not Your Steppin' Stone" (10 points for doing it, 10 more for doing it well) and "Substitute" (a Shepherd's Bush special, that) and they kept on rockin'.

"Should I say all the trendy fings like 'peace and love, maaaaaaan'?" asked Johnny Rotten, leaning out off the stage manically jerking off his retractable mic-stand. "'Are you all having a good time, maaaaaaaan?'?" Believe it: this ain't the summer of love.

They ain't quite the full-tilt crazies they'd like to be, though: Johnny Rotten knocked his false tooth out on the mic and had the front rows down on their knees amidst the garbage looking for it. He kept bitching about it all the way through the gig; Iggy wouldn't even have noticed. Still, they got more energy and more real than any new British act to emerge this year, and even if they get big and famous and rich I really can't imagine Johnny Rotten showing up at parties with Rod'n'Britt 'n' Mick'n'Bianca or buying the next-door villa to Keef'n'Anita in the South of France. And if Elton ever sees them I swear he'll never be able to sing "Saturday Night's Alright (For Fighting)" again without choking on his Dr Pepper. *Charles Shaar Murray*

RAY STEVENSON/REX

August 29, 1976: the Sex Pistols' Glen Matlock and (right) Johnny Rotten at The Screen On The Green, Islington, North London

"What the kids want"

Protégés of Dr Feelgood, EDDIE & THE HOT RODS are a young, "high-energy rock'n'roll band", into the MC5 and "goin' out there an' doin' it". "The Stones can't relate to kids now," says bassist Paul Gray. "They're a completely different generation."

— NME SEPTEMBER 18 —

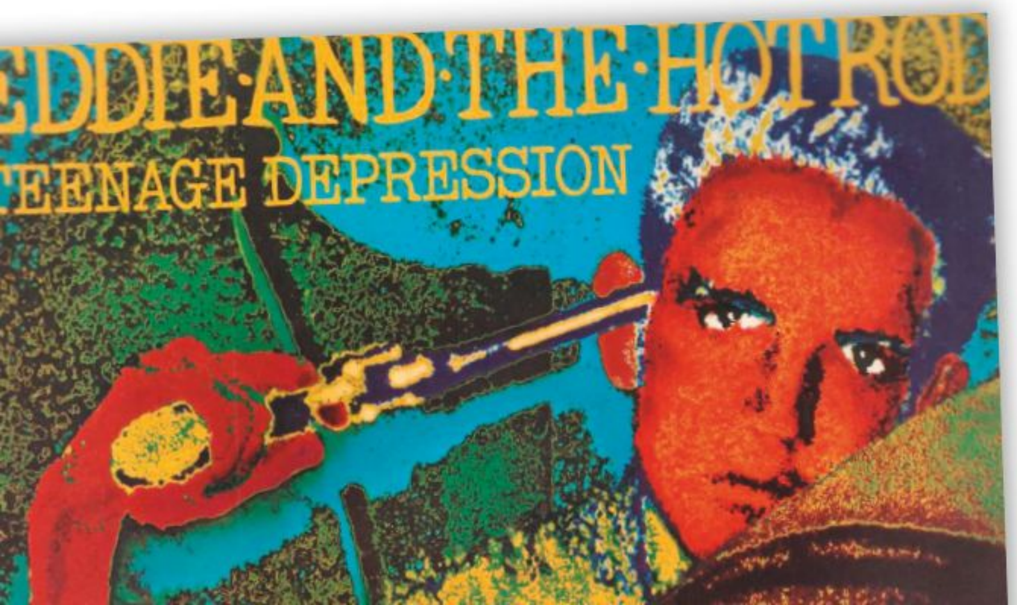
PROBABLY FOR THE first time this decade, *Top Of The Pops* was one of those miss-it-if-you-dare shows last Thursday. People rushed home to dump themselves in front of the box at 7.10 and – "Uggle-uggle-uggle, good evening, guys and gals" – watch Jimmy Savile introduce the hottest new act to make the show in years.

It was worth it, too, wasn't it: Paul Gray pacing malevolently from side to side behind Barrie Masters, who was doing his unlevelled best to spit his eyeballs out the screen at the nation, while the very wonderful Eddie & The Hot Rods rocketed their way through the demonic, chart-climbing *Live At The Marquee* EP. Yours for just £1.00 and worth the price of admission for the one track they did on *TOTP*, their fast-as-lightning-and-twice-as-electric version of Bob Seger's "Get Out Of Denver".

Even more worth the price of admission these days, though, is a live Hot Rods gig because, unless some nascent, jet-propelled beat group is already warming up to wrench the Rods' crown away before they've even finished trying it on for size, this is undoubtedly the hardest-rocking combo in the kingdom.

Cram yourself into the Marquee when they're back there next Tuesday. It's a good summer for that venerable establishment, with the Rods and AC/DC appearing virtually on alternate weeks, each group breaking the attendance record set by the other mob the previous week. Obviously, that can't go on much longer, so you'd better get in while you can…

The doors are closed within an hour of opening; the air is unbreathable; the disco »



ALAMY

Eddie & The Hot Rods: (clockwise from top) Barrie Masters, Dave Higgs, Steve Nicol and Paul Gray

is good – the new Velvets bootleg EP, for instance; semi-rival punks The Damned hang out with the tiresomely-paranoid-till-you-get-to-know-them little clique that surrounds the Hot Rods. It feels special.

WHEN EDDIE & The Hot Rods bounce like a wicked Bay City Rollers (oh, there are links: mods begat skins begat blank begat Rods; mods begat skins begat Rollers begat a new youth cult) you have to be deaf, dumb and blind not to know it's real special.

The atmosphere is beautiful, so cramped yet really friendly, and how else could it be when these exhilarating kids are bounding their way through "The Kids Are Alright"?

Regressive, innit? Funny that – I picked up that first Who album in a junk shop not long ago, and I'd forgotten just how regressive The 'Oo were back then, Bo and JB and all…

The Rods even clatter their way through Townshend's idiotic windmilled "solo" and the hammering build back to the verse. Good stuff.

They proceed to blitz an ecstatic audience, an endless stream of high-energy three-minute shots, Dave Higgs starting each number with a driving guitar riff that unfailingly runs straight out of Barrie Masters' spoken intro just right. Paul Gray and Steve Nicol pile in on bass and drums and within four bars Masters grabs the song and shoves it in.

It's an impressively polished show, for all its vim and its venom, its occasional tight-rope collective improvisations and its occasional pratfalls uninsured by any safety net except the bravado to get up and swagger on.

One such pratfall comes when Masters' rampaging limbs pass a little too close to the shaded Gray, snatching off his strap and ripping out his lead. It take an awful long time for Gray to sort it all out; his nervous cool is severely punctured, and the murderous looks he spears at Masters augur dressing-rooms fights after the gig perhaps.

It was Paul Gray who I interviewed after the Rods' midday appearance at the Reading Festival. Trying to get that together was impossible, traipsing around with the band and manager Eddie, getting chucked out of their caravan because the next act needs it to change in, loitering at the bar… I'd just about given up for the day when a friendly coach driver let Paul and me use his coach.

The Hot Rods at the Nashville Rooms in West Kensington, London, where they had a joint residency with Joe Strummer's 101ers in late 1975

ERICA ECHENBERG / GETTY

> "After the gig they'll say: 'You're the same age as us, same level'"

FIRST THINGS FIRST: bread. Are the Hot Rods still on the £20 per week mentioned by Max Bell back in April, or has the impetus of the EP been sufficient, to quote that April headline, for the band to "up their wages to £25 a week and find true happiness"?

"I dunno where 'e got that twenny quid from," Gray says, settling into the coach seat and lighting a fag. "We was on 15. We're still on 15 quid a week, but if things go all right we get a tenner extra.

"But I mean even 25 quid goes nowhere when, like, you're on the road. Like fuckin' truckin' up 'n' dahn the M1 and the services at four o'clock in the morning… the amount of cigarettes, booze and food you consume is astonishing."

You can't actually live on £25 a week…

"Well, none of us actually live on it," he says, and for a moment I expect him to reveal that Masters is, in the current fashion, bionic. "We all live wiv our parents, see, that's why."

So how do they feel about supporting a bunch of rock'n'roll delinquents?

"Me, I was at boarding school, right, an' I got chucked out, and my old man sort of manages a bank an' he's sorta quite high class an' everything, so he freaked out a little bit. I went to the Tech in Southend [an academy which has vouchsafed the world at least one necrophiliac genius of my acquaintance] up till last June. I don't know what I wanned to do; I went on the dole for a month, but I 'ad a shitty old guitar and like a Vox amp 'an all that sorta crap – I fort I'd try 'n' get in a band just for a laugh. So I put an advert in the local paper, of all fings, and Dave phoned up…"

Love at first sight. Gray auditioned for the Rods at Feelgood House (Dave Higgs comes from Canvey, used to be in a local 10-piece soul band in the '60s called the Central Heating Big Band) and joined Higgs alongside two other virtual novices, Masters and Nicol, and Lew, the blues harp player who has now moved on.

This was just last July. Since then the group has got its gear together (Gray got his by working for the Civil Service days and the Rods at night all last autumn), infiltrated the pub circuit (initial introduction via the Feelgoods), landed a contract with Island in December, put out two singles, played Reading and now, with an EP originally intended merely as a gesture to fans who wanted a representation of the live act on record heading for the Top 30, they're one of the most in-demand bands in the country.

A good year. "It 'as 'appened very quickly," Paul agrees with the air of one who has adjusted to being on the way up already.

HE CONFESSES TO having been into heavy metal before joining the band, while Nicol was "into jazz" and Higgs into blues. "We had really diverse interests. But the one common denominator was high energy, just goin' out there an' doin' it, y'know, so that people get off on it," he says, setting the centre of their mutual interest about the MC5 and J Geils.

Uh huh. And what about the newer US punks? (Profuse apologies for using that word – Gray reckons we lazy journalists should coin a new term for the Rods, like "high-energy '70s rock'n'roll". Yet the Rods are probably closer than any other band around today to what "punk" meant, in terms of music, when I was a kid.)

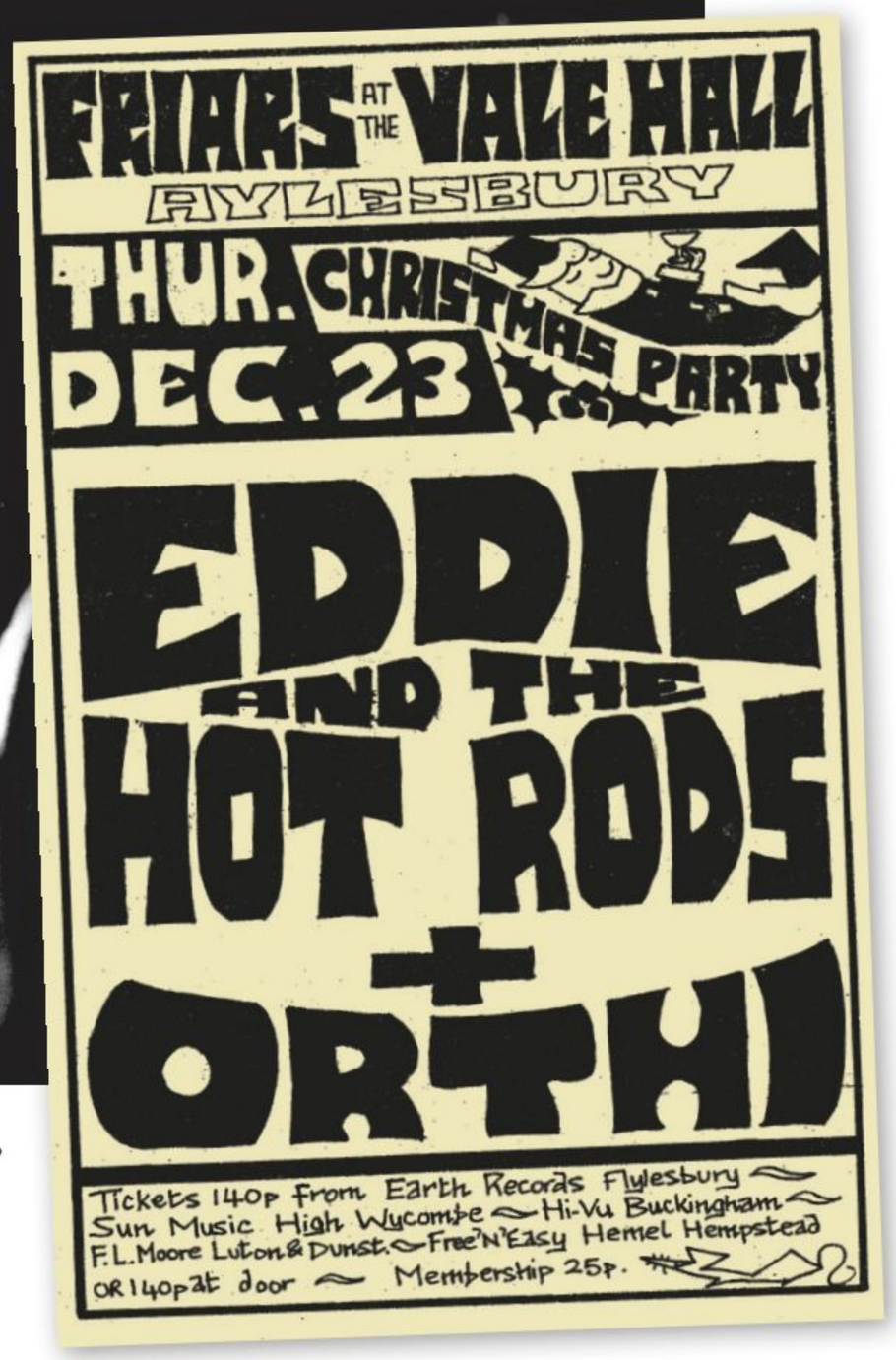
"I fink it's great… I liked Patti Smiff at first, but I think she's a bit overdone… I dunno, what other punk bands are there?"

The Ramones.

"They're all right for one song, but the album I just can't fuckin' tolerate. The thing that wires me up most is the vocals. Can't stand 'em. But I think the best band in that ilk were the MC5 – I should think they're my favourite band really."

So that's where the Rods take their lead from?

"No, because we only sort of discovered MC5 only like a few months ago," Gray tells me, without the least hint of realising that he may be



saying something a little uncool. "An' our ideas were already set."

Moving into the London collector scene by virtue of the music they played, they came into contact with people who could turn them on to such esoterica – though Paul still stands by his liking for Led Zeppelin.

"But the MC5, at the time they were doin' it… what other music was goin' round then… I think that's fuckin' genius, I really do. They shoulda made it, more than any other band.

And the Stooges I like as well, and John Cale… I don't like New Wave, y'know, I prefer the originators. Like them, though, I only really 'eard 'em a coupla months ago. 'Cept Lou Reed, everybody's 'eard 'im. But most people'd say, 'MC5? Who's that, a new pub band?'"

And has hearing them affected the way your hand plays?

"Not really, 'cos we don't wanna be like no one else – we just sorta play what we play. We all know what we wanna play, so there's no point rippin' off other people. But I think we're like them in a way, the same sort of high-energy thing and vibe that they caused."

ONE OBJECTION TO that remark, my knowledge of the MC5's performance being limited mainly to one blurred gig witnessed under the influence of LSD-25, or something similar, would be that the MC5 were political animals, White Panthers.

Gray, as if excusing their folly, reckons that was "probably forced on them" – and in a way he's right, just as the current political void in British kids' culture has "forced" a non-political stance on the Rods and a nihilistic stance on the Pistols.

At 18, Paul Gray epitomises the younger breed of rock player who's very conscious of his youth and who is profiting from a similar, later swing in the somewhat less fickle rock public to that in pop which launched the Rollers.

"Because we're young" is an extraordinary phrase to hear resuscitated today, but it comes easily to his lips. It's rather like asking Paul Newman what's his appeal and he says: "Because I'm handsome." Gray talks about his success thus: "Everybody's got a bit pissed off with everything that's been 'appenin'. There's been nothing new, 'as there, since about the early '70s. Punk rock's such a big thing. So many bands are doing it, and so many kids are in it, and getting pissed off with the older bands like the Stoo and the Hones…"

Who?

"Er, the Who and the Stones. Like, back in 1965 kids had them two and The Animals and The Yardbirds, and there was nothing like that right up until last year. Now it's all coming back, and kids today, who weren't into all that, they felt a bit missed out – I know I did – and they've got this whole new thing coming on.

"So they think, 'Great, I can get in on it – I'm right at the beginning.' God knows what direction it'll go in. But I was 18 two weeks ago, so like I sorta know, 'cos I'm a kid y'know, and I know what kids feel like. Old men like the Stones can't relate to kids now, they're a completely different generation. So if you're a young band like us you know what the kids want.

"After the gig they'll come up and talk to yer and say, 'It's great that we can talk to yer after a gig [which may strike cynics as the aren't-we-having-fun attitude to having fun], and you're the same age, on the same level as us'; kids playing to kids."

I'll leave you to draw your own conclusions (he lied) about people who make a virtue of such accidental attributes as their sex or nationality… or their age.

"That's why we wouldn't play 'Ammersmiff Odeon, 'cos it wouldn't be like that. I can't see us doing that like the Feelgoods did," he reckons. "You could do two nights at the Roundhouse, say, rather than one at Hammersmiff. 'Cos fuckin' seats, man, that's not rock'n'roll. You gotta have a floor where you can freak about."

Presumably coming out of the Southend scene – auditions at Feelgood House, etcetera – has helped the Rods a lot. Even now Graeme Douglas of the Kursaals is being very helpful towards The Wharf Rats, who could well be in the position the Hot Rods are in now in a year's time.

"Yeah, there's quite a little sort of community of bands. But there's also a lot of competition. Like when we started we were very friendly with the Feelgoods, but when we started to make it they got a little hostile towards us.

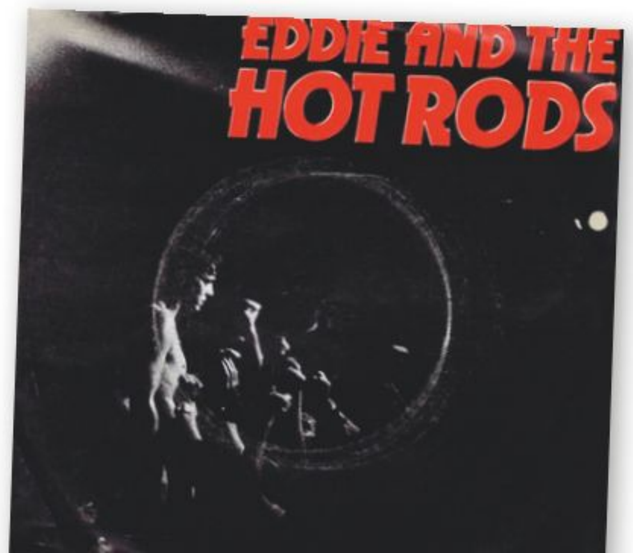
"I don't wanna say much, 'cos it's all right now, but I don't think they thought we'd make it. A lot of people that used to write for Feelgoods information write to us now, and we get a lot of Feelgood freaks coming to our gigs. They're not really interested in the Feelgoods now, because they haven't been gigging much."

BACK AT THE Marquee, it's obvious the Hot Rods have been gigging a lot. Not only are they right on top of every single number they play, but the audience is well acquainted with most of the set, singing along with many of the songs – particularly "Wooly Bully" which, miraculously, is actually enjoyable.

The rest of the set features R&B oldies like "Gloria", "Satisfaction", "96 Tears" and "Hard Driving Man" – all, notably, associated with white bands – as well as a few originals like their two singles' B-sides, "Cruisin' In The Lincoln" and "Horseplay".

The Rods are far less purist than Dr Feelgood, their own songs being more melodic and more catchy than Wilko's tend to be. They must stand a much better chance of writing their own hit singles – and getting "Denver" in the charts has already taken them one step beyond their mentors, as well as isolating them as leaders among their peers.

Hopefully they'll still have records in the charts 10 years hence, and will laugh at the days when they thought their audience rapport was due to age rather than music. But in the meantime, whether you're a bright young thing of 16 or an old fogey of 26 (or even older, if that's possible), take it from one who's been around long enough to know the score, kiddo, the Rods are Hot. *Phil McNeill* •



The Bay City Rollers in 1976: (l–r) Eric Faulkner, Derek Longmuir, Stuart "Woody" Wood, Les McKeown and Ian Mitchell

ALBUMS REVIEW 1976

ALBUMS

Aerosmith Rocks CBS

America has until now avoided a head-on confrontation with the big British production or stage bands. Since Led Zeppelin first smote the music biz on the far side of the Atlantic back in '69, America seemed to reel somewhat under the pressure. And when we followed up with ELP, Yes, Genesis, Pink Floyd and the heavy metal men – Heep, Purple, Sabbath and so on – Americans preferred country rock, singer-songwriters – almost anything except the type of "arranged music with glamorous lead vocalist" package.

There was Grand Funk Railroad, of course, but nothing quite like Queen to add to the long British honours list. That was – until Aerosmith. I suppose it was the mixture of instrumental prowess, musical attack and dash of flair that attracted me to the first Aerosmith album when it arrived on our shores virtually unheralded a couple of years ago. I'm still not a rabid fan of the band – we haven't even had a chance to see them yet. And of course they are bound to upset most critics by appearing to follow a time-honoured course. Dull stuff for rock writers really, just another group that appeals to the vast mass of kids.

I can almost see the heads bobbing to the beat of "Back In The Saddle" at the Odeon, Hammersmith, even now. What have this hugely successful combo (in America) got to offer then, I can almost hear resentful sceptics sniff with hostility and suspicion? A certain *je ne sais quoi*. Steven Tyler is the arrogant, ill-tempered lead vocalist of the saturnine features who looks as if he might give Freddie Mercury a severely slapped wrist if they crossed laser beams. But most impressive is the relentlessly riffing guitars of Joe Perry and mighty Brad Whitford. While Steve is shouting out the vocals on "Last Child", listen to the Whitford guitar (he co-wrote it with Steve) dig into as nasty a riff as has been blasted forth since Jeff Beck was hooked up with Carmine Appice. Not to put too fine a point on it, they cook, and the guitars send those icy fingers along the spine.

Dig the way the hi-hats belt in à la John Bonham on the fast "Rats In The Cellar", a kind of tribute to the canyons of New York City. Solid vocal harmonies, driving guitars – what more could a simple rock fan request? And for more laidback tastes there are the chiming chords and Who-like aggression of "Sick As A Dog", a most listenable stomper followed by the even more raucous "Nobody's Fault", with Tyler getting almost apoplectic. Joey Kramer is the man in the engine room, a blare of flailing crash cymbals and detonating tom-toms, and he kicks along a boogie epic like "Get The Lead Out" with angry vehemence. Depending on your philosophy, it's irresistible stuff that will get knees pumping in the three-quid seats, and groans from scribblers in the freebies.

But at the risk of being cut dead at the annual rock writers' convention, I find the sensuous rhythms and animal pulse of "Lick And A Promise" (just one of many erotic selections), a strangely heady brew. They could keep up this eclectic hullaballoo based on the familiar backlog of rock riffs all night, and I'd feel no pain.

Chris Welch, MM July 10

The Bay City Rollers Dedication BELL

The Rollers are such an emotive subject it is a problem to unravel fact from fantasy, to separate fanaticism from fury. A fan will swoon at the sight of Ian Mitchell placing one delicate hand upon a tartan-trimmed knee. The rock community at large froths at the mouth at the apparent crass incompetence they represent.

And yet somewhere between the extremes... there is just another group, struggling like all the rest to get an audience off the deckchairs, up and shouting: "More!" Only difference is, the Rollers don't have to struggle in that department any more. Now they want to prove that they can play and deliver music slightly more demanding and adventurous than "Bye Bye Baby".

They have created their own separate world from the rest of us, and yet buried beneath all the banners, tears and headlines, there *is* some sincere musical enterprise. If one can forgive them for being Rollers and listen, then there is evidence for the case that the Rollers really can play and don't need men in white coats to switch on their amplifiers.

It seems unlikely, even in this cynical age, that a totally different group, heavily disguised in false beards and dark spectacles, was called in to the Canadian studios where this album was recorded to take over the essential chores of playing and singing on the Rollers' behalf.

I am quite prepared to believe this is all their own work, in which case they deserve a gold star and a tick. I am constantly surprised at the scope of the Rollers' arrangements, their brisk percussive power, which could do credit to any new-wave New York rock band, and their disciplined, melodious vocal harmonies.

Listen to the driving power of "Rock'n'Roll Letter", or the Ramones-like "Yesterday's Heroes"; so virile, resonant and filled with the clangour of life. Eric Faulkner's lead-guitar solos are so funky on "Rock'n'Roller" that if the band arrived unannounced for a set of maximum R&B at the Nashville Rooms, the place would be in uproar.

And there is still room for romance. Note the warm,

GETTY

emotive vocals by Les McKeown on "Write A Letter", and when Ian Mitchell offers up a heartfelt monologue on "Dedication", with its massive Phil Spectorish string arrangement, one could imagine it bringing a tear to the eye of Elvis "The King" Presley himself.

There are some weaknesses. Bryan Ferry fans have been heard to chaff at Leslie's allegorical, almost surrealist treatment of Brian Wilson's somewhat trashy pop song "Don't Worry Baby", on purely aesthetic grounds, and it is true that compared to Ferry's alternative version, McKeown lacks a certain *je ne sais quoi* or *comment est ton père*.

But producer Jimmy Ienner and his engineer have given the Rollers a very respectable sound, rich in presence, with some of the best vocal tracking I've heard this summer.

The Rollers are generally better playing their own sturdy and simplistic riffs than dealing with the material of others, but here they show, especially on a dramatic and oddly mysterious grand finale, "Dedication", that the Rollers are more serious about their music than either their fans or sternest critics might suppose.

Chris Welch, MM Sept 11

Burning Spear Man In The Hills ISLAND

Next to the current crop of wild-eyed wired-op weird-asses coming out of JA these days, Burning Spear sound almost conservative.

They leave dub sorcery and dreadlocks-a-go-go right down there in the dumper for the carefree youngbloods to play with; their nitty's a different breed of gritty. Burning Spear don't play games.

They're dealing in plain speaking. Their music has a subdued but pushing backbeat, discreet horns, carefully layered keyboards; the occasional touch of ack-ack guitar stands out like a barbed-wire fence in an open field.

Their tunes are modally based (usually with a simple two-semitone or I-IV modulation) rather than structured around chord sequences, and their combination of unassailable dignity and extreme simplicity is reminiscent of nothing so much as the classic country-blues recordings of the '20s and '30s.

Burning Spear's stark understatement is almost enough to send the casual rock fan (no disrespect intended – that's where I'm coming from myself) scampering back to the safer and more familiar ground of Bob Marley, Third World, U-Roy and Toots.

In other words, unless you're hip to the ground rules it ain't the kind of reggae album you buy unheard on impulse to slap on at your next party when the skank initiates and midnight ravers want to forget their weakness and dance. Not that you can't dance to it per se – it's just that after a while you'll find your self either listening to Winston Rodney's vocals or else not listening at all.

Rodney is Burning Spear's lead singer and composer-in-residence. He wrote nine of the 10 songs contained herein all on his lonesome and the 10th in conjunction with one P Fullwood. Excellent though Delroy Hines and Rupert Willington's backing vocals are, it's pretty much Rodney's show all the way: he's the one you listen to; he's the picture and his arrangements – subtly coloured by Jack Ruby (AKA L Lindo)'s production – are the frame.

B Spear's first album, *Marcus Garvey* (which contains their most celebrated song, "Slavery Days", radically reinterpreted by Third World on their first album) is probably the most comprehensive musical collation of Rastafarian politics and theology extant. *Man In The Hills*, while no less committed, contains an extended range of subject matter within a similar frame of reference. The philosophy is the same (liberation, deliverance, brotherhood, peace) but the expression is looser.

Rodney is at his most moving on "Black Soul", a slow, ecstatic, incantation of pride and solidarity... reminds me painfully of how black folks address each other as "brother" and "sister" as a matter of course. How come it's so hard for any of us to call anyone "brother" and sound like we mean it? If anything, white racism over the centuries has cost white people more than it has black. The tangible things that we took from them they can take back; the intangibles that we lost in the process we may never regain.

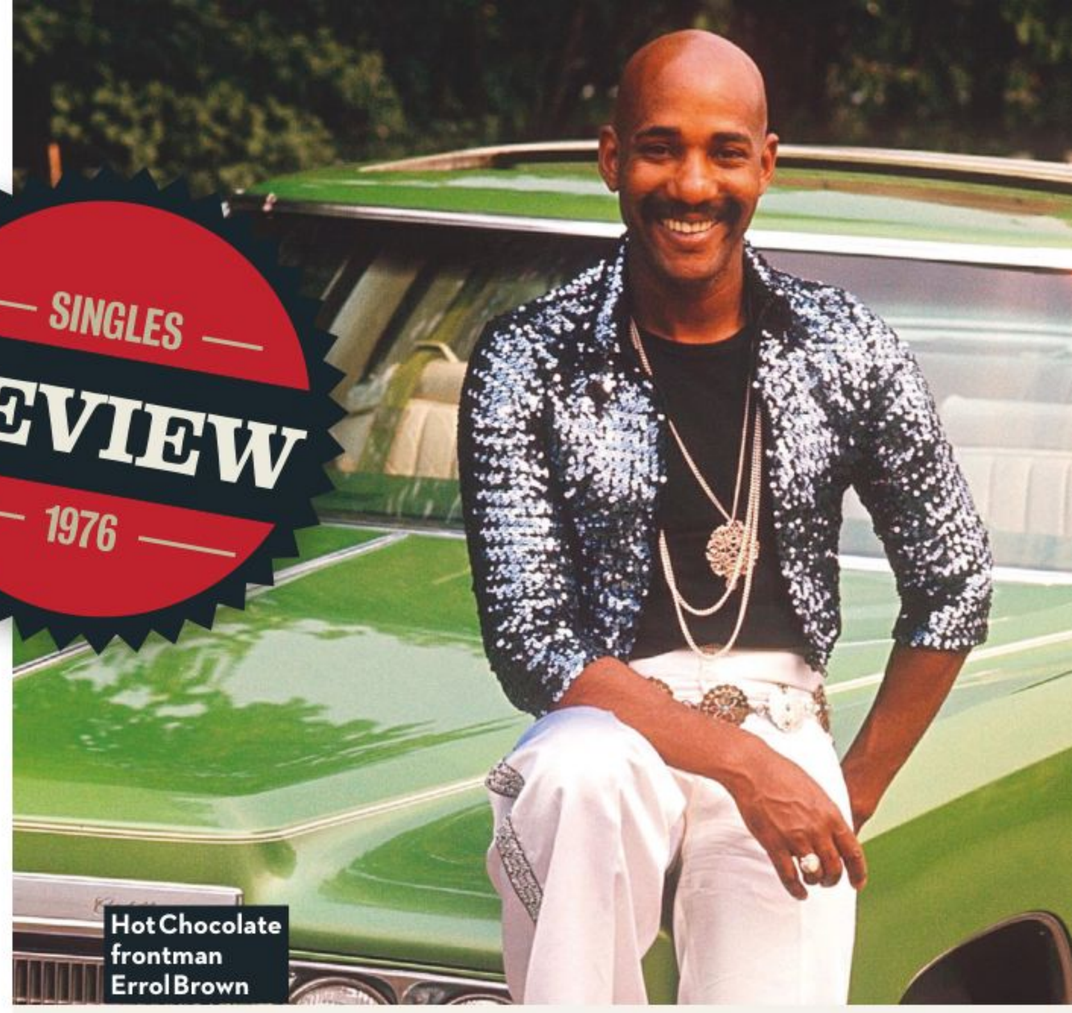
Anyway, on with the fun 'n' games...

Lemme say it this way. Bob Marley's a dervish shaman, a stoned Holy Roller; Toots is into hoarse hellfire. Racked up against those two, Burning Spear are puritans. They're a slow burn rather than a white-light-white-heat flash.

If you're prepared to work at getting into them and letting them work at getting into you, you could find that prising this album off your turntable is a task akin to shot-putting a pregnant elephant.

Charles Shaar Murray, NME Sept 11

SINGLES REVIEW 1976



Hot Chocolate frontman Errol Brown

SINGLES

Bob Marley & The Wailers
Roots, Rock, Reggae ISLAND

As Scrooge was haunted by Marley's ghost, so it seems that rock critics must be haunted by his substance. Having resolutely sung his praises for some years, reviewers are faced with Marley's vast popular success. What was once the preserve of the select few has caught on with the masses. And this poses a dilemma. There's no prestige in supporting an overdog. Who wants to live on Mount Olympus, if it's packed with picnic areas?

The inevitable result is mixed reviews, thus denying kudos to the army of latecomers. You know the sort of thing: "I dug The Wailers when their music was still valid."

The irony, of course, is that Marley's music has become less commercial, rather than more, over the last few albums. Where *Catch A Fire* had a thick layer of studio cosmetics, *Rastaman Vibration* is largely stripped of such disguises, and undeniably closer to JA. *NME Jul 3*

Queen You're My Best Friend EMI

There was no way they could top the grand guignol of "Bohemian Rhapsody", and it's as well they didn't try. One brilliant operetta is enough. When the second one comes out – all complexity and pidgin Italian – the public is bored, they've heard it all before. So, instead, a potential summer classic. John Deacon's melodic chunk of True-Life Romance. Gorgeous vocals from Freddie, peerless harmonies, exquisite loose-stringed guitar from Brian May. Possibly the finest thing they've done, but then everything they've done has been fairly fine. *NME Jul 3*

Abba Dancing Queen EPIC

The original exponents of pop autopsies, Benny Andersson and Björn Ulvaeus continue to produce themselves and their pre-programmed grand design. The title, in using the word "dancing", is as hip to the prevailing zeitgeist as were all those earnest hacks of last year, when to have "rock'n'roll" somewhere in your book-phrase was a guarantee of covering studio time and pressing costs. The word "Queen", too, is closely associated with money.

NME Aug 14

Hot Chocolate
Heaven Is In The Back Seat Of My Cadillac RAK

Errol Brown is the master of what connoisseurs of schizophrenia term the "inappropriate affect". You can thus be sure that this obvious invitation to a heavy-petting session will sound strangely menacing. It's on RAK, so it must be a hit. *NME Aug 14*

1976

JULY – SEPTEMBER

DR. FEELGOOD'S CHRISTMAS PARTY

DR. FEELGOOD

CLOVER

and

THE LEW LEWIS BAND

will be rockin'

Hammersmith Palais

on

Sunday, December 19th

Admission £2.00 in advance

Doors open 7.00pm

Christmas Eve at the Kursaal, Southend.

Wilko Johnson and (right) Lee Brilleaux – increasingly at loggerheads offstage – during Dr Feelgood's short US tour in spring '76

"Show you mean business"

DR FEELGOOD are about to release a live album, called *Stupidity*. It's not a flashy effort. "You don't have to be dressed up like some old tart in satin and sequins to play rock'n'roll," says LEE BRILLEAUX. But where do they stand on punk?

— MELODY MAKER SEPTEMBER 18 —

I FIRST ENCOUNTERED DR Feelgood in November 1974, at London's Roundhouse where they were supporting, quite incongruously, the veteran space warriors Nektar. It was a vivid introduction.

The Feelgoods' reputation was already considerable, but I was totally unprepared for the point-blank intensity and naked aggression of their unsophisticated, but immensely potent, Anglicised rhythm and blues (or, as vocalist Lee Brilleaux would have it, "rivvum 'n' blooze").

Ten minutes of the razor-edged velocity of Wilko Johnson's guitar, Lee's nicotine-smeared vocals and the unrelenting urgency of Sparko's bass and The Big Figure's percussion, and I was crunched.

The band was successfully making the transition from the London pubs and clubs, where they has first gained attention, to larger venues and larger audiences. In December of that year the Feelgoods accompanied Hawkwind on the preliminary dates of that band's massive winter tour of Britain, and mesmerised audiences in Glasgow, Newcastle, Manchester, Birmingham and their local mob in Southend. In February of 1975, the band consolidated that success with the Naughty Rhythms Tour, with Chilli Willi & The Red Hot Peppers and Kokomo.

It was a bold co-operative venture, designed to break all three bands from the insularity of the London pub scene. For Dr Feelgood it worked. The Chillis didn't survive the tour. Komomo still exist in a strange kind of limbo, unable to fully establish themselves outside a small circuit of British gigs.

Down By The Jetty, the Feelgoods' recording debut, was released to coincide with that tour and its sales reflected their increasing popularity. Their appearances later that year at the Orange Festival in the South of France and the Reading Festival in England demonstrated that they had effectively captured the imaginations of both »

Continental and domestic audiences. By November they were considered important enough to have the news of their first headlining tour (an exhausting 25-city trek) announced on the *MM*'s front page.

Within a month of that tour, culminating in a concert at Hammersmith Odeon, the Feelgoods were in America. They played at the CBS convention in San Diego, decided that the country was hungry for more of their ferocious R&B vitality and returned earlier this year (with a second album, *Malpractice*, behind them), for a gruelling two-and-a-half months of intensive gigging.

Since their return to Britain the group has been largely inactive. They've played only six concerts, principally to reassure themselves that their popularity had not declined during their American campaign, and prepared for release this week a live album.

It is disarmingly titled *Stupidity* and is a collection of the most requested numbers from their stage show. Recorded during their last British tour in Sheffield and Southend, *Stupidity* reaffirms the Feelgoods as one of the most vicious and electrifying R&B bands ever to strut their stuff on the planks.

Simultaneously, the group begins another extensive tour of the country. It's good to have them back…

"*Stupidity*," observes Lee Brilleaux, relaxing with a bottle of gin (that's being rapidly drained) in the United Artists Records press office, "is the natural culmination of the first phase of Dr Feelgood's career." It captures a certain quality of excitement and strength that was lost in the Spartan arrangements of *Jetty* and suggested only on the more successful tracks on *Malpractice*.

Rumours that the band was struggling to complete a third studio album are vehemently denied by Lee and Sparko, who finally gets his nose out of a glass of whisky to refute the suggestion.

They have been recording successfully, he affirms. But the next studio album, they anticipated, would mark a departure… slight, but definite, and had it been released now, would have made a subsequent live album, of material similar to that included on *Stupidity*, quite redundant.

It would have been too retrospective, offers Lee, to have released the albums in that sequence. Better this way, he continues, to satisfy those who have long demanded a Feelgoods live collection, and also to prepare the way for the new studio work.

> "I think this whole punk thing has got too stylised"

"We've become accustomed to studios now," he says. "There were difficulties at first, but they were gradually encountered and gradually overcome. We feel we can stretch ourselves a bit more now, without losing any of the intensity. I think this next album's gonna require time. I think we all realise that.

"We've realised that there's a lot more we can do in the studio, and we're determined to take our time over the new album to make sure we do it right. It'll still be Dr Feelgood. There'll be no mistaking that it's us," comments Sparko. "The ferocity will still be there. That is the sound of Dr Feelgood. It is cut down to the bone.

"It's the rawness of Dr Feelgood that distinguishes us from the thousands of other bands. But you can make the studio work for you, without destroying the impact. We still won't get into doing hundreds of overdubs. If we went into a studio and started acting like a lot of pansies, fiddling about, then it wouldn't be Dr Feelgood. It wouldn't work."

Certainly, the Feelgoods' success can be attributed to the very basic appeal of their music. At their best, the band is savagely unrestrained. They emerged at a time of increasing musical complexity and reminded us that rock'n'roll could be exciting and fun without recourse to advanced technology. They may be derivative, and no one could accuse them of attempting to innovate, but there can be no denial of their energy and ability to stimulate jaded senses. The Feelgoods, and their pub rock contemporaries like Kilburn & The High Roads, Charlie And The Wide Boys, Chilli Willi and later The Kursaal Flyers, played music with an enthusiasm and a lust for pleasure, entirely without pretension.

They played the music they liked, for fun. It was as simple as that. For Lee and Sparko it is still as simple as that, and they deny that their original stance – which provided so many journalists with reams of colourful copy – was consciously a rebellion against the techno-flash extravagance of so many bands. Their aggression, says Sparko, was not contrived: "If you're playing something you believe in and no one's listening, it makes you mad."

"Yeah," Lee agrees. "You look at an audience and think, 'Fuck you lot. I know this is good even if you don't. So listen, you cunts.' And you put that feeling of aggression into the music, rather than battering the audience with all the verbals. I never went in for calling the audience cunts. I used to think it sometimes, but I don't think it's really a good thing to tell them.

"All you can do is impress them through your performance. If you can show an audience that you mean business, then they'll pay you a bit of attention."

During their recent US tour, adds Sparko, audiences were often stunned, frequently confused, but never indifferent.

GETTY

March 23, 1976: Dr Feelgood by the rooftop pool at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, West Hollywood, LA – (l–r) Wilko Johnson, Lee Brilleaux, John "The Big Figure" Martin and bassist John B Sparks

"Most places, the kids never knew what hit them," contributes Lee. "I don't think they'd ever seen anything like us. Lots of those kids had never really heard rivvum 'n' blues. I mean, it was a weird one. We were playing rivvum 'n' blooze to an American audience in America and it sounded foreign to them.

"And they were surprised not only by the music, but also our appearance. They are still very used to musicians getting on stage dressed up in all the kit. You know, the whole rock-star bit. It's still the same old business. But, you don't have to be dressed up like some old tart in satin and sequins to play rock'n'roll. The music should speak for itself, and the people should speak for themselves.

"The point about rock'n'roll, and the reason it started in the first place was that anyone virtually could play it. Someone could get hold of a guitar and learn to play it reasonably well and then jump on a stage and play.

"Rock'n'roll isn't satin fuckin' trousers and limousines and massive banks of amplifiers and thousands of roadies everywhere. It's about people! Human beings. They are important. The rest don't mean nothing."

It is the uncompromising attitude that has characterised the Feelgoods' career. And one can divine in this defiance an influence on the attitude assumed currently by so many of the younger bands who have followed the Feelgoods into the pubs and clubs in London.

Bands like The Lovers – particularly Joe Strummer (who's now strumming with The Clash) – Eddie & The Hot Rods, even the Sex Pistols may not have deliberately copied the sartorial style popularised by the Feelgoods and Ian Dury and Charlie And The Wide Boys, but their shambling, ruffian look is certainly derived from these sources of inspiration.

"You're talking about all the so-called fuckin' punks, ain't yer," scowls Lee when I mention this connection. "But I mean, what's a fuckin' punk? A punk should be 17 and convinced that he's a star. Even if he can't play. And I admire that when it happens naturally.

"But I don't admire it when people make out that they're punks and they got two A-levels. When we came on in the early days, those clothes that we wore, they wasn't stage clothes they we 'donned'. They were the clothes that we turned up to the gig in. That's what we were wearing…."

"I always used to wear me best suit," interjects Sparko.

"Yeah, we didn't decide to try to look scruffy and wear old suits. We just thought that since we were playing music that everyone thought was uncommercial there would be no point in tarting ourselves up and blow-drying our hair. We weren't deliberately trying to develop a style. It's just that people picked up on it. We never deliberately threw mud over ourselves. We didn't have to.

"We had this van that we spent so much time underneath that we had enough stains on our clothes without having to get into all that. I think this whole punk thing at the moment has got too stylised. There's no such thing as punks any more. This lot are consciously making themselves out to be something they're not. They're trying to come on like little yobbos. And they're not little fuckin' yobbos. Little yobbos don't get up on stage and play guitars. Yer little yobbos go down the disco and kick people."

"And," says Sparko, adding a final word on the subject, "they wear smart clothes like me. Not second-hand rubbish."

As I mentioned above, this current tour is Dr Feelgood's first since the marathon trek last November. Once again, their itinerary takes them to provincial centres most bands these days avoid. It's not the Feelgoods' style, however. They owe their stature to the support of their admirers in these areas and aren't prepared to forget the fact.

"I think it's unfair," says Lee, "when some bands make it and then decide that they will do only four major gigs and sod the people in North Yorkshire who want to see them. If people in North Yorkshire want to see us, we ain't gonna say, 'Sod yer! If you really want to see us yer'll have to come down to fuckin' Manchester!' We'll go and play in Yorkshire. It's not the end of the fuckin' world."

Inevitably, such a decision precipitates enormous pressures on the band. Lee: "You always feel, see, that you're under an obligation to finish the act. People have paid their money to see you, and three-quarters of the way through the set you may feel really sick and ill, but it really don't matter if you die. You wanna do your job. It's hard and getting no easier."

You should, I suggest, "incorporate an acoustic set in the middle of the act".

Lee looks horrified at the suggestion. "That'll be the bleedin' day, mate," he replies. "That'll be the bleedin' day." *Allan Jones* •

Manic urgency

MM OCT 2 Two shows; one live album of raw Feelgood factor.

ALBUMS
REVIEW
1976

Dr feelgood Stupidity UNITED ARTISTS

Stupidity is, without doubt, the definitive Dr Feelgood album. A record that makes redundant both of their previous albums, *Down By The Jetty* and *Malpractice*, and confirms their reputation as the premier contemporary exponents of white rivvum 'n' blooze (as Lee Brilleaux so colourfully describes it).

Compiled from tapes of two concerts recorded last year (Sheffield in May, Southend in November), *Stupidity* captures conclusively the vibrant, frequently manic, musical personality of the band.

A ferociously orchestrated attack on the nervous system, its energy is irresistible. If there is such a thing as aural GBH, then *Stupidity* should get the Feelgoods sent down for a long stretch. The action starts with the strangled aggression of Lee's bruised vocals tearing into Chuck Berry's "Talking About You", which opens the Sheffield side, and has Wilko's guitar buzzing and skating across the pneumatic insistence of the rhythm section.

"20 Yards Behind" is despatched with characteristic urgency, and gives way to the title track, introduced by Wilko's explosive chords, which is pistol-whipped to the ground by Brilleaux's belligerent vocal performance. It is, however, with Wilko's "All Through The City" that the band really skewer the listener – the music is stripped to the bone, and twitches and jerks with authentic aggression. "I'm A Man" delivered with deadpan authority by Wilko, follows.

Again no apology is offered for the claustrophobic tension created here, as Wilko's guitar bites at the heels of The Figure's relentless beat. It's a smouldering furnace of a performance. "Walking The Dog" and "She Does It Right" are more examples of vintage Feelgood madness. The latter, which closes side one, screams in from nowhere, propelled by Wilko's guitar as he drives the band on with reckless determination.

The Southend side, if you can believe it, is even more crazed. The quality of the sound is even better here, with every guitar run and cymbal splash recorded with absolute clarity. From the opening drum blitz and raucous guitar runs that introduce "Going Back Home", which is punctuated by Lee's pugnacious harmonica, to the closing frenzy of "Roxette", it's clear that this gig must have been a spectacular nutcrusher.

"The music is stripped to the bone and jerks with aggression"

"I Don't Mind", "I'm A Hog For You Baby" (with its extraordinary guitar solo), "Back In The Night" and "Checking Up On My Baby" are all characterised by an almost brutal energy and a captivating lunacy.

I don't really know what the future holds for Dr Feelgood – although the success of this album is guaranteed. Lee Brilleaux and Sparko have already intimated that the band have reviewed their musical stance and realised that they must, if they are to continue to flourish, expand their sound and exploit new directions. But for the moment, one can simply enjoy this record. It's raw and exhilarating. It's rock and roll. Dr Feelgood know how it's played and burn parts of your brain that most bands couldn't singe with a blowtorch. *Allan Jones*

1976

JULY – SEPTEMBER

March 22, 1976: Queen aiming for an atmosphere of "excitement, expectation and, ultimately, enjoyment" at Tokyo's Nippon Budokan

And as their forthcoming Hyde Park concert testifies, QUEEN are doing all right. "We don't think we're above anybody," says Roger Taylor. "We don't consider ourselves to be above our audience."

"We do the best we can"

— MELODY MAKER SEPTEMBER 18 —

BRIAN MAY REMEMBERS Queen's first-ever free gig well. It was in London, five years ago, when the band invited 120 people along to a lecture theatre in Imperial College to hear them play. Orange juice and popcorn were served to the 80 or so who bothered to show their faces and lend an ear.

Since that unremarkable debut, the capital has hosted many landmarks in Queen's well-planned climb to the top: the Imperial College gig in September, '75; the Rainbow in March, '74 (promoter Mel Bush convinced the band that they were big enough to sell out a concert there); two sell-out gigs at the Rainbow during November '75; and, last year, four shows at Hammersmith Odeon. The icing on the cake, to confirm that Queen have well and truly arrived, is on Saturday, when the band play in front of perhaps 200,000 at Hyde Park. They insist, however, that the gig should not be interpreted as a "we're a big band now" gesture.

"I really hope it's not taken in that way," May said sincerely. "There must be other ways of doing that. You can play Wembley Stadium. I really hope that it's taken in the spirit that we're thinking of – just a nice thing to do. It's a dream to be able to do a free gig in Hyde Park, like the old days. It's as romantic as that. »

KOH HASEBE / GETTY

"I don't think there's ever been a show like we're going to do in the Park. We're not going to hold back at all just because it's a free concert. It'll be the whole works. I hope it all fits together as a very nice and peaceful and enjoyable afternoon. It's a way of saying thank you. It's an adventure, fighting your way through 15 million miles of red tape. It's quite hilarious."

Had anyone mentioned to Queen four years ago the possibility that they would be topping a concert in Hyde Park, it's likely that the band members would not have batted an eyelid and would have accepted that it was most likely that they would eventually play a gig of such magnitude. They always knew they'd be a big band, and they were conscious, from the start, of the importance of creating a highly distinctive and personal sound that could be associated only with them.

Queen's roots lie in a band called Smile, which Brian May (guitar) and Roger Taylor (drums) played together in. When the singer, Tim Staffell, left to pursue a solo career, Freddie Mercury came along and persuaded them to form a band with him. After six months, John Deacon joined on bass and Queen was formed.

But had the life of rock'n'roll turned sour, the men in Queen could easily have returned to comfortable professions: Mercury, who designed Queen's logo, studied graphic design and illustration; May received a BSc in physics; Taylor graduated in biology; and Deacon won a first-class honours degree in electronics.

The result of a studio trial at London's De Lane Lea studios was a demo tape that consisted of most of the songs that would appear on the first album, and EMI rushed to sign the band. A first single, "Keep Yourself Alive", was released during October 1973, and flopped, and the band's gig as support act on a Mott The Hoople tour earned them meagre attention.

The second album, *Queen II*, however, broke the deadlock, and it included the first hit single, "Seven Seas Of Rhye". From then on, it was plain sailing for Queen. They soon consolidated their success as a singles band with the snappy "Killer Queen" and, as an albums band, with *Sheer Heart Attack*. Then last year, "Bohemian Rhapsody", the six-minute opus with the operatic middle section, gave them a much wider audience, who went out in force to sample the variety of wares on *A Night At The Opera*. Now they're one of Britain's biggest bands.

QUEEN BOAST THREE strong vocalists – Freddie Mercury, Brian May and Roger Taylor. Mercury's lead vocal gives immediate identification, but behind that, Queen worked on achieving a notable harmony sound, with guidance from May. While Mercury's was the voice the public associated with, much of the success in the harmony vocals falls on to the incredible range of Taylor.

With their own identity intact, Queen refused to follow the accepted guidelines for success – working constantly on the club circuit – and instead played at parties for friends.

Taylor: "We didn't really want to get into that small-club circuit. We all wanted to play big, big concerts, and didn't want to get stuck in that circuit for years and years, which is so easy to do, no matter how good you are."

On their four albums to date, *Queen*, *Queen II*, *Sheer Heart Attack* and *A Night At The Opera*, Queen have meticulously stamped their own sound, and earned enemies because they've been so fussy about their work. *Sheer Heart Attack* and *A Night At The Opera* were particularly open to these attacks, but the days are past when Queen have been affected by such superficial judgments.

They go into the studio to get the best sound they possibly can, and adopt whatever means are at their considerable disposal to do so.

Queen's first album is still considered by many of their fans as their best. Like most debut discs, it's a work that encompasses the material that has been accumulated and played on the road for a few years before they got a chance to record, but many of the songs continue to form an integral part of the stage act.

"Keep Yourself Alive" and "Liar" are classics of the band that'll probably never be dropped, while "Doing All Right" and "Son And Daughter" are contrasting rockers that could be dispensed with to make room for new material.

Overall, the album epitomised what Queen were about – not just a hard rock band, but a group of musicians well into melody, playing with a subtlety that many '70s bands had ignored. The music was a '70s music, influenced and flavoured by the '60s but structured and orchestrated (especially May's guitar work) in a fashion that owed little to the past.

May: "It had the youth and freshness which was never regained, because you're only young once. It had a lot of rough edges, a lot of bad playing, a lot of bad production, but obviously we didn't have that time to spend on it, which we did subsequently. It was all done in odd times when Trident Studios were available, so it sounds a bit bitty to me, and sound-wise it's very patchy. But I would never think of going back and redoing it or anything like that, because I think it has a freshness which we won't have again.

"I still like 'The Night Comes Down', which was done as a demo on our own at De Lane Lea Studios. It was the first time we'd been, as a group, in the studios together. I'd also mention 'My Fairy King', because that was a portent of things to come. That was an experimental thing. It was the beginning really of Fred playing the piano. He used to play for his own amusement but was very against putting a piano in the stage act. He didn't feel confident, I suppose, and also felt that he wanted to move around, didn't want to be stuck playing a keyboard. The whole track was built around that and the backing track was done on the piano.

"The piano is gradually creeping in on the stage act now, which is good. It gives us so much more scope. From a thing like 'My Fairy King' came 'Black

September 18, 1976: Brian May and Queen play a free concert in London's Hyde Park to an estimated audience of 150-200,000

ANDREW PUTLER / GETTY

March 21, 1976: photo opportunities beckon as Queen go for a stroll in a Japanese garden, Tokyo

Queen', on the second album, and then 'Bohemian Rhapsody'."

Of all four albums, *Queen II* remains firmly my favourite. A work that brimmed over with inventiveness, it was Queen at their most consistent and certainly at their most mature, musically. The songs were outstanding, complemented brilliantly on record by their instrumental skill. Brian May's role as guitarist on *Queen II* was not as guitar hero, but of one who worked totally with the group to give a strong, unique sound. And I don't think that Freddie Mercury has out-matched his *Queen II* performance on any other record.

The album had most of what is good about Queen. The songs reflected versatility in that department. From May came the classic in the moving "Some Day One Day", and, of course, Mercury penned the first hit single, "Seven Seas Of Rhye", while the two contributed the tracks that were to form the loose concept of the album, "White Queen (As It Began)" (May) and "The March Of The Black Queen" (Mercury), the battle between good and evil. Mercury also gave us the ravaging "Ogre Battle", with its savage battle sequence.

To me, *Queen II* was an album which gave the band a direction, and to dabble adventurously with rock at such an early stage in their career was a move that displayed unusual confidence in their own ability. Strangely enough, the subsequent albums, *Sheer Heart Attack* and *A Night At The Opera*, have not portrayed the unity evident on *Queen II*.

May: "I must admit it's my favourite. It was the first time we've been able to – having got all those things out of our system on the first album – construct an album from a white sheet of paper. Everything that went on that album, we'd decided was right for the album out of a lot of songs we had around at the time. We really did try and shape it into a coherent whole, both musically and thematically.

"It really was, I think, the most considered album, because that album had been dreamed of right back before we made the first album. We knew we were getting all the stuff out of our systems so that we could concentrate on making an album and doing all these orchestral things that we'd always wanted to do with guitars and voices; doing the more fairly emotional songs and structured songs, which we couldn't even think of doing on stage but which we could do on album. All that was safe for the second album.

"The songs have a lot of meaning for us, and for our audience. That album crystallised what Queen was, I think, because, at that time, all the equipment we had to offer was on display in a way, the songwriting and the means of treating an album separate from a stage show. I think that set our direction more than anything else.

"*Queen II* was a point where all the adventurous ideas came out. There are seeds in *Queen II* of almost everything we've done since, but it was so compressed that all of it didn't come out unless you'd listened very closely."

> "*Queen II* was a point where all the adventurous ideas came out"

If *Queen II* offered adventure, excitement and a definitive Queen sound, then *Sheer Heart Attack* is, in retrospect, the calm after the storm, an album which presented nothing startlingly new from the band, save a bunch of excellent, slickly produced songs. Again, Freddie Mercury and Brian May dominated the songwriting, but the contributions of Roger Taylor ("Tenement Funster" – Taylor averages one rocker per album) and, for the first time, John Deacon (the soothing and poppy "Misfire") widened the writing scope a little.

Mercury's songs veered from the smartness of "Killer Queen" and "Flick Of The Wrist" to the poignancy of slower numbers like "Lily Of The Valley" and "In The Lap Of The Gods". May's contributions to the album, however, were more defined, for apart from one track, "Dear Friends", his songs were mainly straightahead rockers, like "Brighton Rock", "Now I'm Here" and the slightly lesser-paced "She Makes Me (Stormtrooper In Stilettos)".

Sheer Heart Attack has been the only album on which May has stuck so closely to the hard rockers. He usually shows other sides of his character by writing well-structured, often complicated pieces.

May: "I do feel an affinity for the hard-rock bands who are not ashamed to do hard rock all night and do it incredibly well, bands like Status Quo. I think that if I wasn't doing what I'm doing now, that's »

KOH HASEBE / GETTY

what I'd be doing, and I'd gain a lot of satisfaction out of it. It's one of the hardest things in the world to be a really good rock band. To write really good rock songs is much harder than writing little things that all fit together well, so I suppose that's what is in my mind when I do those.

"I never like to see us get too far away from rock. I hope we're never too sophisticated, if that's the word, and that we'll always be able to just get out there and do some rock'n'roll. I think that would be a loss, really, because it is not to be sneered at in any way, and to do that kind of thing is, as I say, as demanding as doing any of the complex things we do."

So *Sheer Heart Attack* was the straightest rock album Queen have yet recorded, strong but safe. Although it failed to present an experimental band, which the second album did, and although it worked within a much tighter framework, it was the album which virtually broke Queen as a major band worldwide.

May: "I regard *Sheer Heart Attack* as the most polished album, the most finished product, in the sense that we were playing better and the songs are all quite separate and treated in their own ways. It was done more for contrast than for continuity. The songs contrast but, at the same time, we weren't going out on any great limbs. Everything was a logical development from *Queen II*, although people didn't realise it at the time, but I think they do now."

May's right. *Sheer Heart Attack* was a neatly packaged, concise rock work, unlike last year's release, *A Night At The Opera*, which displayed the spirit of adventure that marked *Queen II*.

Queen were well established when the time came to record their fourth album and they decided that they'd spend whatever period was necessary on finishing the new album. They obviously went into the studios determined that the end product would portray a band much more diverse musically than any previous album, which it did.

There were typical Queen rockers in "Death On Two Legs" and "Sweet Lady" and typical Queen symphonies in the brilliant "Prophet's Song" and "Bohemian Rhapsody". Songs like those are expected from Queen. Not expected were the vaudevillian "Lazing On A Sunday Afternoon", folky "39", jazzy "Good Company" and middle-of-the-road love song, "Love Of My Life". It was Queen putting themselves out on a limb again, saying, "Look, we're not just a rock band, we're something deeper than that. Here's the proof."

Pretentious though it might seem to say it, *A Night At The Opera* pulled them away from comparisons with heavy-metal giants Led Zeppelin, and pushed them nearer to The Beatles. By becoming more diverse and writing a wider range of material, Queen had made themselves more accessible to a wider public.

A Night At The Opera, in my opinion, still had a few loose ends that weren't completely tied up, but the next album will probably see the full fruition of the ideas. For all intents and purposes, the album was to Queen what *Sgt Pepper* was to The Beatles. It's opened so many unexplored areas that have to be followed – at the risk of losing original fans.

May: "*Night At The Opera* is really the conundrum, because I don't really think of it as a very commercial album. But it was the one which broke all the records. It's not nearly as easy-listening an album as *Sheer Heart Attack*. There's a lot of very uncomfortable things about it.

"We were deciding to branch out again. It was a conscious decision. Thinking that *Sheer Heart Attack* had been successful but safe, if you know what I mean, with *A Night At The Opera* we wanted to be adventurous again, but at the same time, use the expertise which we'd learned in doing *Sheer Heart Attack*, and in doing all the millions of gigs in between. I'm pleased with it on the whole. It's got some very accessible things and also some very inaccessible things."

Queen's fascination for, and addiction to, recording studios, however, has taken its toll on the stage act. When they had finished recording *A Night At The Opera*, the band had two days to rehearse a stage act that would be taken around the world. The result has been that the stage act, good though it is, hasn't compared with recorded performances, which isn't surprising when nowhere near the same thought is put into making it original. The signs are that that approach will change this year.

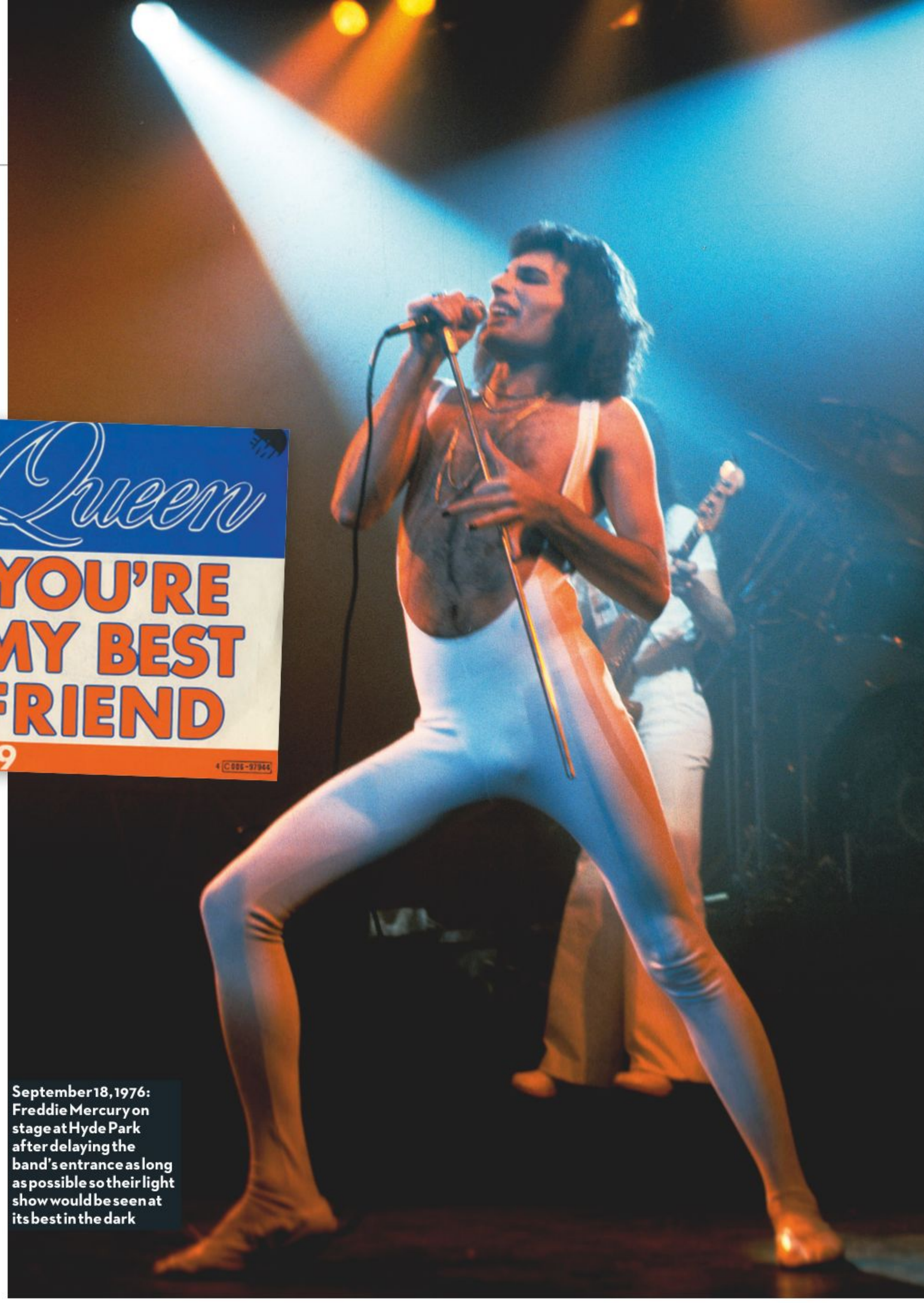
May: "It has been quite a problem. What we've decided on for these few gigs at the moment is to do a halfway thing, with a few new songs thrown in. It's right for what we're doing, because they're unusual gigs and a lot of people will see us who've never seen us before. It's right to present the complete history of what we have been. For the next tour – the one after these gigs – that'll be the one where we start restructuring.

"In the case of the last tour, there was almost no rehearsal, because we went ahead and planned all the tour and worked ourselves to death to try and get the album finished, and there were only two days between finishing the album and going on tour.

"But for the next tour, we'll rehearse. We're not going to make the same mistake again. Maybe we could have pulled out something special if we'd had more time to rehearse, so this time we're going to finish the album, make sure we have the right time for rehearsal and then go on tour."

QUEEN HAVE MAINTAINED that record performance and stage performance should be treated as totally separate entities, and that when they do one thing on record, there should be no obligation to repeat the feat in front of a live audience. Their stage act comes in the form of a compromise which works well.

The band adapt their songs as best they can for live work and, to bridge the gap between the perfect sound on record, they create an atmosphere around their set that involves their audience totally; so suddenly it doesn't matter to punters any more whether or not they play songs as on record.



September 18, 1976: Freddie Mercury on stage at Hyde Park after delaying the band's entrance as long as possible so their light show would be seen at its best in the dark

ANWAR HUSSEIN / GETTY

The set at the Playhouse Theatre in Edinburgh the other week was further proof of Queen following this logic, when they took it a step further than last year's British tour. For the duration of the set, dry ice is used to create a hazy mist on stage, so that the band are given a sort of obscure presence that captures the attention of onlookers.

Individually, songs are treated with whatever effects they need to transmit the feeling in them: smoke bombs in the battle sequence of "Ogre Battle"; dry ice to create a cloud effect on "In The Lap Of The Gods". Queen's stage act is a show in the true sense of the word.

However, the general criticism of this show is that Queen could do a lot more to recreate the sound of their records, and that the "separate entity" statement is a lame excuse, an easy cop-out to save them from a lot of bother. 10cc, people will say, go on stage and recreate their recorded sound, using tapes and whatever else is needed (an extra musician), quite comfortably. Why not Queen?

Taylor: "We could never do what we do on record. We try to get as near as we can. We've never used any outside musicians either on stage or on record. It's not because of any strict policy, more due to personal satisfaction, by dragging it out of ourselves. We like experimenting with instruments and voices to get the effect on record that we want. We don't really try to recreate the sound on stage. I mean, you can't do a thing like "Prophet's Song" like the record on stage. It's like a six-part harmony, and there's only three singers. There's no way that you can do it.

"Those are problems that we've got to solve ourselves, but if it sounds good, I don't think anybody can have cause for complaint. If it doesn't sound good, fair enough.

"All you can do is do either medium to the best of your ability at the time, and in the studio, you have so much time and so many different things, you have all the advantages – so why not make it as perfect as you can, even if it does make the stage act a harder thing to do?

"You say about using tapes, as 10cc do; well, I don't agree with that. When an audience comes to a concert, they come to hear music played live, not to hear backing tapes.

"All I can say is that we do the best we can within both mediums, and we're honest in both. I don't think that saying we treat recording and playing live as separate entities is a cop-out; I think that's honest. If we wanted to cop out we'd use lots of tapes on stage. The harmonies on stage are us singing, they're not tape-loops.

"When we go on stage, we want to make people enjoy themselves, to lift them. We're certainly not being political in any way at the moment. Perhaps a bit later on in all this, we'll want to say something real about the things that really matter, poverty or whatever, but at the moment it's not the right time or place to say it.

"For one thing, we're not influential enough. It would only damage ourselves to do it and it wouldn't have much effect on people, and possibly we're not even mature enough to know how to say it yet. I hope we say something on those lines after we've done something on purely musical lines and entertainment lines, which is what we're trying to do now.

"What John Lennon was trying to do after he left The Beatles was amazing. He was just being himself. Some of his statements might have been naive, especially in retrospect, but what a brave, honest way to do it. I've got unreachable heights of admiration for him."

Back to the stage act, and Queen involving their audience.

"What we want to do as soon as we start our set is to create an immediate atmosphere, if possible, of excitement, expectation and, ultimately, enjoyment. It's involvement and lifting them out of going home and listening to *The Archers* or watching *So It Goes*. That's what makes the live work as good as the recorded work. The rewards of working live are so much more immediate, because of the feedback.

"We really enjoy touring when we get into it, but we sell so many more records than we play to people that it's a much more far-reaching thing. Why the hell go on stage with backing tapes behind you and pretend you can do it like the record? I mean, you can give them something else. You can give them a visual spectacle, your live presence thing, and an excitement and an involvement that you don't get by listening to the record. I think we get pretty near on a lot of things.

"Why the hell go on stage and pretend you can do it like the record?"

"But the live show really is all about atmosphere. That's what rock'n'roll is all about, even though it's a show."

The flashness of Queen's live show is a mere extension of the individual personalities of the band. John Deacon, who always manages to dress in a comparatively sober fashion, Mercury and Taylor, in particular, and May on stage don distinctive uniforms.

Taylor: "The stage show has always been a show, and always will be a little different. The emphasis is on 'the show'. People are paying money to come and see you, so we want to give them something that's pretty entertaining. You can do it with just music, but doing the visual and audio thing is much better. The Rolling Stones have always done that.

"All we ever did was reflect our personalities, and that's all we're doing now. It's just that we can afford to do it in a more sort of lavish way now, but hopefully without becoming too showbusiness, which is always a danger. I wouldn't like it to become showbusiness because, quite simply, it's still rock'n'roll. I think we could very easily go over the top now if we're not careful.

"People seem to think we don't try enough on stage, but when we come off we are totally wiped out, exhausted. A lot of them seem to resent the fact that it's entertaining. They say that we've got no sense of humour, which is ridiculous. How could we have no sense of humour with the things that Freddie is wearing these days? Nobody could wear those without having a sense of humour.

"People say that we've kept above our audience, but I don't really think that's true. It is these days a bit, but only through necessity, because the organisation is so big. But I can remember the first two or three tours we did: we always used to try and let anybody who wanted to come into the dressing room. But we can't do that now, obviously.

"We don't think we're above anybody. We might think we're a better band than most, but we don't consider ourselves to be above our audience."

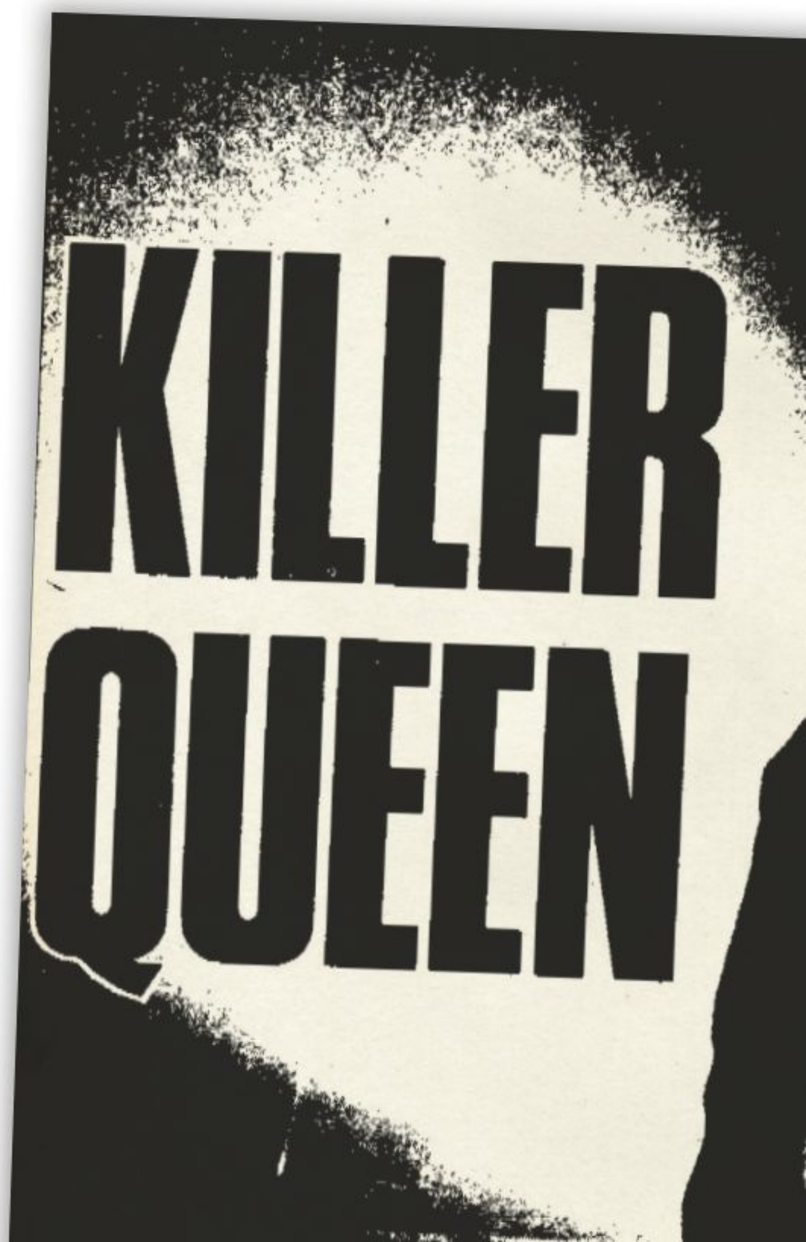
IN THE PAST year, Queen have entered a class of their own. This rise coincided with the arrival of a new manager, John Reid, who'd already made his name by handling Elton John. When he plotted the course for his first year with Queen, Reid decided that they should spend a substantial period cracking America wide open. The result was that the band are now one of the biggest rock acts in the States and, nine months after its release, *A Night At The Opera* is still in the charts there.

The feedback from the American success has opened many English eyes, and has given both Queen and Reid the confidence to stage the free show in Hyde Park.

May: "I'm staggered by the past year. I'm amazed. I suppose now we're conscious of having to live up to something, whereas before we weren't, so that's an additional strain. I will be happy as long as I feel that we do live up to people's opinion of us. If I think we justify it, then I'm happy. I'm always striving to see that we do.

"We're certainly not resting on our laurels in any way. We're always pushing on to new things. In a way, it would change us less than most people, because we've always had those attitudes really. We *always* went for perfection in the face of financial disaster."

Harry Doherty •



1976

OCTOBER – DECEMBER

PATTI SMITH, EAGLES, INDEPENDENT LABELS, STRANGLERS AND MORE

NEWS SPECIAL

PUNK

1976

"Say something outrageous..."

NME DEC 11 The Sex Pistols appear on *Today*, an early-evening news show. An unexpurgated transcript appears in *NME*.

THE INTERVIEW THAT started the controversy took place on Wednesday December 1 on Thames TV's early current-affairs programme *Today*. The actual interview lasted one minute 40 seconds, after a short introduction by Grundy and a 40-second clip of the Pistols on stage. Our recording started a few seconds after Grundy's introduction as he faced the four members of the band seated in the studio. Standing behind the Pistols was a group of fans.

The following is a transcript of what ensued.

GRUNDY (*To camera*) …Chains round the necks and that's just the fellas, innit? Eh? I mean, is it just the fellas? Yeah? They are punk rockers. The new craze, they tell me. Their heroes? Not the nice, clean Rolling Stones… you see they are as drunk as I am… they are clean by comparison. They're a group called the Sex Pistols, and I am surrounded by all of them…

JONES (*Reading the autocue*) In action!

GRUNDY Just let us see the Sex Pistols in action. Come on, kids…

(*A film clip of London Weekend's documentary on punk broadcast the previous Sunday came on the screen*)

GRUNDY I am told that that group (*hits his knee with sheaf of papers*) have received £40,000 from a record company. Doesn't that seem, er, to be slightly opposed to their anti-materialistic view of life?

MATLOCK No, the more the merrier.

GRUNDY Really? »

YOU WANNA SEE

MEDIA OVER —KILL

THE INTERVIEW that started

BG: You are serious?

"What a fucking rotter": when Queen cancel at the last minute, stand-ins the Sex Pistols and their "Bromley Contingent" entourage give *Today* presenter Bill Grundy more than he bargained for, Dec 1, 1976

MATLOCK Oh yeah.
GRUNDY Well tell me more then.
JONES We've fuckin' spent it, ain't we?
GRUNDY I don't know, have you?
MATLOCK Yeah, it's all gone.
GRUNDY Really?
JONES Down the boozer.
GRUNDY Really? Good lord! Now I want to know one thing…
MATLOCK What?
GRUNDY Are you serious or are you just making me – trying to make me – laugh?
MATLOCK No, it's all gone. Gone.
GRUNDY Really?
MATLOCK Yeah.
GRUNDY No, but I mean about what you're doing.
MATLOCK Oh yeah.
GRUNDY You are serious?
MATLOCK Mmm.
GRUNDY Beethoven, Mozart, Bach and Brahms have all died…
ROTTEN They're all heroes of ours, ain't they?
GRUNDY Really… what? What were you saying, sir?
ROTTEN They're wonderful people.
GRUNDY Are they?
ROTTEN Oh yes! They really turn us on.
JONES But they're dead!
GRUNDY Well suppose they turn other people on?
ROTTEN (*Under his breath*) That's just their tough shit.
GRUNDY It's what?
ROTTEN Nothing. A rude word. Next question.
GRUNDY No, no, what was the rude word?
ROTTEN Shit.
GRUNDY Was it really? Good heavens, you frighten me to death.
ROTTEN Oh all right, Siegfried…
GRUNDY (*Turning to those standing behind the band*) What about you girls behind?
MATLOCK He's like yer dad, inne, this geezer?
GRUNDY Are you, er…
MATLOCK Or your grandad.
GRUNDY (*To Sioux*) Are you worried, or are you just enjoying yourself?
SIOUX Enjoying myself.
GRUNDY Are you?
SIOUX Yeah.
GRUNDY Ah, that's what I thought you were doing.
SIOUX I always wanted to meet you.
GRUNDY Did you really?
SIOUX Yeah.
GRUNDY We'll meet afterwards, shall we? (*Sioux does a camp pout*)
JONES You dirty sod. You dirty old man!
GRUNDY Well keep going, chief, keep going. Go on, you've got another five seconds. Say something outrageous.
JONES You dirty bastard!
GRUNDY Go on, again.
JONES You dirty fucker! (*Laughter from the group*)
GRUNDY What a clever boy!
JONES What a fucking rotter.
GRUNDY Well, that's it for tonight. The other rocker, Eamonn, and I'm saying nothing else about him, will be back tomorrow. I'll be seeing you soon. I hope I'm not seeing you [the band] again. From me, though, goodnight. Today *theme. Closing credits.*

REX FEATURES

Siouxsie Sioux (née Susan Ballion) in 1976: to appear alongside the Pistols, Ramones and Talking Heads at a big London date?

NEWS SPECIAL
PUNK
1976

"The start of a wave"

MM NOV 6 The first major British tour for the Sex Pistols tour is planned.

A BIG PUNK ROCK concert starring the Sex Pistols is being planned for London later this month. The show celebrates the release of the band's debut single, "Anarchy In The UK", on November 19. The show will also feature Chris Spedding & The Vibrators, whose "Pogo Dancing" single is available from November 12, together with Suzi & The Banshees [sic] and, from New York, the Ramones and Talking Heads.

The venue has yet to be decided, though there were plans to stage the show at the Talk Of The Town, London's traditional cabaret club. This idea was dropped after difficulties over the licensing laws.

The show will be the prelude to the Pistols' first major British tour, exclusively reported in the *MM* last week. The concerts will be co-headlined by the Pistols and the Ramones – who made their British debut at London's Roundhouse earlier this year. Spedding and Talking Heads will also be on the tour.

The 20-date tour, from November 30 to December 21, visits all of Britain's major cities. Among the dates will be a show at London's Hammersmith Palais.

The concerts come as the climax to a triumphant three months for the Sex Pistols, Britain's top punk band. They were one of the big successes at the punk rock festival in London two months ago, and in October they signed a recording contract with EMI.

In this week's *Melody Maker*, Nick Mobbs of EMI, the man who signed the Pistols, claims: "I genuinely think that they're the start of a wave. I think they're the rare breed of artist; they're total entertainment and in a lot of ways uncompromising in what they want to do."

Mobbs is one of the top A&R directors featured in the *MM*'s Dialogue, which this week discusses the state of British rock.

"The time is right for an act that kids of 16 to 18 can actually identify with," says Mobbs. "The key point is that the group are very young. There's other groups giving entertainment, but this group are only 19-year-olds and because they're young they'll grow and their audience will grow with them.

"In the same way that the Rolling Stones were known as symbols of rebellion when they started, so are the Sex Pistols. The Stones are now the elite of the rock'n'roll establishment and the Sex Pistols are the new people knocking at the door.

"I think a lot of kids watch them and think, 'Yeah, I could do that, let's form a group'"

"To a lot of kids the Stones and groups from that era don't mean a thing. They're too old for a start, all over 30, and the kids want some young people they can identify with.

"A lot of people criticise the Sex Pistols for not playing well, but they've only been together for about eight months. I think a lot of kids watch them and think, 'Yeah, I could get up there and do that, let's form a group'.

"Again, that hasn't happened for a long time because groups are too good; the musicianship has been so high that kids of 16 have been put off. But already, there are about 12 groups in London directly inspired by the Sex Pistols."

"Rubbish"

MM NOV 20 A punk package tour proves problematic.

PUNKS ARE AT war! The special punk package tour in December, co-starring Britain's Sex Pistols and New York's Ramones, has collapsed.

The Ramones, Talking Heads and Chris Spedding & The Vibrators have pulled out – leaving the Pistols to soldier on alone. But the whole tour has been revamped and the Pistols are now joined by the Heartbreakers – the band formed by ex-New York Doll Johnny Thunders – The Damned and The Clash.

Highlight of the new tour will be the first-ever concert at a new major London venue, the Roxy Theatre, Harlesden, on Boxing Day.

Ramones manager Danny Fields claimed this week that the tour was never really on – but Pistols' manager Malcolm McLaren has slammed that statement as "a load of rubbish".

Fields told *MM* this week: "As of last Sunday night only three dates had been confirmed of the 20 or so the Sex Pistols' management had told us about. Fred Bannister, who was promoting the tour and who was a major factor in persuading Phonogram to back it financially, had pulled out – and when he quit, Phonogram pulled out.

"We weren't too concerned about violence. Perhaps Phonogram were, and I know promoters are always worried about violence. But I don't see what Phonogram are worried about – we'd be in the thick of it, not them."

Phonogram said they were not in business to set up tours, and any decision by them would not have affected the shows. Promoter Bannister was unavailable for comment. But Malcolm McLaren, the Pistols' manager, said: "All that about the tour is rubbish. It's just that Phonogram wouldn't cough up any money to promote the tour. The Ramones felt they weren't getting any publicity, but that's not my fault. Anyway, if the Pistols were touring America with the Ramones and we only got one line I wouldn't blow the whole thing out. It's ridiculous.

"Talking Heads are out because they were part of the deal we made with the Ramones."

McLaren claimed that Spedding had pulled out because he wanted to play his own dates, but neither Spedding nor his record company, RAK, would comment.

McLaren has revamped the tour for the Sex Pistols, which now starts on December 3 at Norwich University.

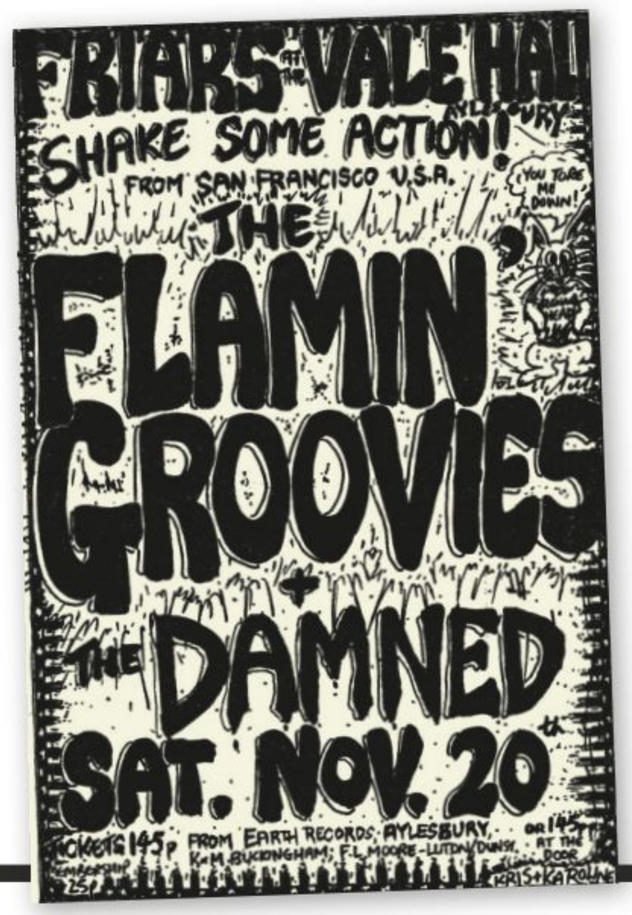
Further dates: Derby Kings Hall (December 4), Newcastle City Hall (5), Leeds Polytechnic (8), Manchester Electric Circus (9), Lancaster University (10), Liverpool Stadium (11), Cardiff Top Rank (12), Bristol Colston Hall (13), Glasgow Apollo (15), Dundee Caird Hall (16), Sheffield City Hall (17), Southend Kursaal (18), Guildford Civic Hall (19), Birmingham Town Hall (20), Bournemouth Village Bowl (21), London Roxy Theatre (26).

The Damned have pulled out of their tour with the Flamin' Groovies. The Groovies failed to arrive at London's Roundhouse on Sunday, leaving The Damned and The Troggs, who were also on the bill, without a PA. A spokesman for The Damned told *MM* this week: "We agreed to play the tour to give some modern credibility to it. But we are not interested now in supporting or bailing out living legends."

Phonogram refused to comment. Roundhouse concert promoter John Curd, however, said the Groovies told him they were suffering from flu. He dropped the admission price for the concert, which started three hours late with a replacement PA, from £1.70 to £1.20.

"The Ramones felt they weren't getting any publicity, but that's not my fault"

The Ramones in Santa Monica, California, August 1976: (l–r) Dee Dee, Tommy, Joey and Johnny Ramone



GETTY (2)

Assassination attempt

MM DEC 11 Bob Marley shot at home. Attack possibly "politically motivated".

REGGAE SUPERSTAR BOB Marley was the victim of an assassination attempt last week. Gunmen shot their way into his home in Kingston, Jamaica, on Friday night, but Marley suffered only a slight arm wound in the raid.

His manager, Don Taylor, threw himself between Marley and the gunmen as they opened fire. He was shot five times and is now on the critical list after an emergency operation. It is thought he may be permanently crippled as a result of his injuries. Marley's wife, Rita, was wounded and clubbed during the attack, but she was released from hospital after treatment.

Speculation suggests the attack was politically motivated. There will be a general election in Jamaica in three weeks' time, and Marley, despite his allegedly apolitical stance, had accepted an invitation to appear, together with The Wailers and Burning Spear, at a concert benefit for the Island's current premier, Michael Manley. The invitation followed the release of a new Marley single, "Smile Jamaica", in which he extols the virtues of the country despite its recent history of political violence.

Marley is shot

December 3, 1976: Bob Marley at the University Hospital, Kingston, Jamaica

NEWS SPECIAL
PUNK
1976

The kids are hungry

NME OCT 2 The energy in the "punk" movement should give senior rockers pause for thought. "This time next year," writes one young staffer, "they could be laughing on the other side of their faces."

"Smashing guitars used to be proper anger; it isn't any more. It's theatrical melodrama"
Pete Townshend, January 1968

"I think this whole punk thing at the moment has got too stylised. There's no such thing as punks any more. This lot are consciously making themselves out to be something they're not. They're trying to come on like little yobbos. And they're not little fucking yobbos."
Lee Brilleaux, September 1976

"Go! Geet-outa-Denver baybee
Go! Geet-outa-Denver baybee!
Go! Geet-outa-Denver baybee!!
Go! Go! Go! Go!"
Eddie & The Hot Rods, right now

SO IN THE year of our punk 1976 the veteran end of the rock world finally woke up to the nine-year-old fact that this ain't the summer of love. The kick in the teeth that savagely brought an end to its slumber was, of course, the mercurial rise and still rising of amphetamine-stimulated high-energy '70s street music played by kids for kids for the first time in maybe 12 years.

Yeah, you guessed it – the unfortunately titled punk rock. Unfortunate because punk rock is a second-hand name first used to describe American garage bands like ? And The Mysterians, The Leaves and Shadows Of Knight who started making their music after being completely won over to the cause of rocking when they first heard the bands of the mid-'60s like the Fab Four, the Stones, The Who, The Kinks, The Yardbirds and all the rest.

Unfortunate because punk rock is the term used to describe the descendants of those garage bands in the States, combos like the now defunct New York Dolls, the Ramones, Tom Verlaine's Television and the Heartbreakers.

Unfortunate because of the stance that Britain's so-called punk rock bands are taking, the Sex Pistols and Eddie & The Hot Rods being top of the crop at this moment in time is original enough to warrant a handle all of its own.

Punk rock just won't do – the name is too old, too American, too inaccurate. The teenage kids in the Hot Rods who shake the foundations of Wardour Street every week ain't "punks". That makes them sound like refugees from *West Side Story*.

They are kids who are the product of the United Kingdom in the 1970s; more specifically the teenage wasteland of the Essex Overspill. The music they play reflects their times, no more, no less. Kids rock would be more to the point than punk rock. Sure, they play a lot of material that they didn't write themselves. So did the Stones and The Who when they were 18 years old. What's so good about the scene that the Hot Rods and the Sex Pistols are in is not only is it the most exciting thing happening in this country at the moment, but also the members of the bands have time to develop as writers, which they must do if they are going to survive over any period of time, let alone Make It. That is, to do what the Feelgoods did – evolve from their stomping grounds of small clubs and pubs and make the transition to playing large venues in front of 10 times as many people without losing the essential blitzkrieg malevolence of their music, make their set a healthy mixture of original material and old masters and, ultimately, cut records as exciting as their live show.

It was the Feelgoods who blazed the trail around the pubs and clubs of London that the punk/kids-rock bands are following. They made it possible for bands like the Sex Pistols, the Hot Rods, The Wharf Rats, The Damned, The Clash and all the others to get venues twice a week or more where they can get up and play the music they want to in front of people who are getting off on it.

The Feelgoods weren't the only band on the pub-rock circuit, of course, but by using

IAN DICKSON / GETTY

November 15, 1976: the Sex Pistols at the Notre Dame Hall, Leicester Place, central London

their success to further the cause of bands like the Hot Rods, the Feelgoods can deservedly be considered the godfathers of the whole punk/kids-rock scene.

But the Feelgoods are not punks or kids; if you called Lee Brilleaux a punk he would no doubt bottle your eye out before you could say "Iggy & The Stooges". You only have to compare the old masters of the Feelgoods to the old masters of the Hot Rods to see that they are from different generations – the Feelgoods, along with the Wilko Johnson material, do songs by Chuck Berry, Rufus Thomas, Lieber/Stoller, Sonny Boy Williamson and Solomon Burke, while the Hot Rods are coming from the Stones, Who, Them and ? And The Mysterians time.

That's the point – a rock generation lasts only two or three years at the most. I'm 22 and I felt prematurely middle-aged the other day when a honey-thighed 16-year-old jailbait bud who looked like a roadie for The Runaways told me that her favourite Stones album was *Rolled Gold*.

If the punk/kids-rock bands want to survive, then they have got to come to terms with the fact that they can only trade on their youth for so long. Otherwise, there will be younger kids coming up in a year or so and the punks of today will be seen clutching their battered Fenders and Strats and floundering like beached whales all along Wardour Street, 21 and well past it.

The message is clear: trade on the fact that you are young enough to be the son of the Rolling Stones' rhythm section for as long as you can, kid, but realise that in the end you will stand or fail by the music you make.

In the meantime, though, you can sneer all you want about rock'n'roll mutton dressed up as lamb, all those tax-exile superstars of the '60s, jaded old farts the lot of them, and anything that you say about them they deserve. The main reason the punk/kids-rock scene is so healthy is because the kids who are playing it and the kids who are getting off on it are all hungry, and that breeds good rock, rock, ROCK!

They are hungry for music that they can identify with, their music, not product. Hungry to make it, to be stars. Hungry for good times and ecstasy. Hungry to burn it all down and start again. Listen, when you see Elizabeth Taylor or Princess Margaret at a Who or Stones concert drinking champagne backstage with your heroes, and you've queued for six hours for your overpriced ticket and the officials at the stadium treat you like dirt and your girl gets her head opened up by a bottle and there's the rock aristocracy up there in the clouds sipping your wages, there's only one thing you can do, no matter what age you are, there's only one thing you can do – vomit.

ROCK MUSIC IN 1976 needs middle-aged has-beens like a leper needs a dose of the clap. But to get rid of them won't be easy. When The Beatles and all the rest happened in the '60s there was literally no competition – Eddie Cochran, Buddy Holly were both dead, Gene Vincent was still recovering from the car crash that killed Eddie, Elvis was back from the army and singing ballads, Chuck Berry was doing time and Little Richard had given up rock for religion. There was a gap in rock the size of the cosmos and everyone moved in. And, of course, they were great, they had real hunger.

Pete Townshend, for instance. Pete had a big nose and when he was growing up everyone laughed at him and made his life hell. So he stayed indoors for two years, only leaving home to go to school and get laughed at because of his nose and he learned guitar so he could lead a rock band and become famous, get his face on the cover of every rock paper in the world, big nose and all, ram it back into the face of everyone who laughed at him, make a billion dollars and screw any chick he wanted. And he did. He did it all. He had real hunger, real fire inside him, and I'd rate him as the most exciting performer on stage that I ever saw.

But these days, of course, like all the other one-time greats of the '60s, the anger has gone and now, after having all the money, the glory, the girls, the drugs, the booze, what does he do now? Make home movies about Meher Baba. Well, that's not as bad as jet-set cocktail parties or inviting royalty to your concerts, but I can't help but wander off and look elsewhere for the rock'n'roll excitement that I used to get from The Who. And I'm getting it from the punk/kids-rock bands that have got as much hunger inside them as Townshend, Jagger and Lennon had when they started out.

Those bands are getting a lot of criticism from the same people who were calling out for a return to high-energy raw-power rock five years ago, and now that it's here they don't like it! But that don't matter. How many 30-year-old fans did the Stones have when they were playing at the Scene in Soho, 1964? You shouldn't call the doctor if you can't afford the pills.

A few years back I remember Bob "Whispering Grass" Harris putting down the New York Dolls after "Jet Boy" and "Looking For A Kiss" from their first album on the *OGWT*, skidding about on their platform boots (remember them?), and playing loud, brash, amateurish.

I thought they were great, but then I was never very fond of half-hour guitar solos.

"Mock rock," Whispering Grass said with an it-couldn't-happen-here smile. Well it has, and none too soon for my taste. A short while after that TV slot, Lou Reed was quoted saying about the Dolls: "I like the titles of their songs ["Pills", "Personality Crisis", "Subway Train", "Bad Girl", etc] more than the actual songs." Well, the punk/kids-rock bands are going to have to get used to those kind of comments. In a scene where ex-hippies and ex-junkies just ain't relevant, there is bound to be a lot of ill-feeling.

But it's OK. Kids are used to old men bitching. They can take it. And they can get their revenge through their music.

Punk rock is really just a lazy journalist media spiel for a genuine new wave. After all, what has Patti Smith (who is called punk rock by some rags, not *NME*), who brings together in her music such diverse influences as Burroughs/Velvets/Dylan/Ginsberg/Stones/masturbating to Arthur Rimbaud's Greatest Hits, have in common with straight-ahead nihilistic rockers like Joey Ramone, Dee Dee Ramone, Tommy Ramone and Johnny Ramone?

What does "Birdland" have in common with "Now I Wanna Sniff Some Glue?" Right first time. Nothing.

I can get off on both, but to presuppose that they are one and the same and call it punk rock along with all the new wave bands coming up over here is, if you will, bullshit.

If the young bands causing so much controversy at the moment are going to sustain themselves, then they have got to start writing the soundtrack of the lives of their audience with songs like the Sex Pistols' "Anarchy In The UK". That song could only have been written in 1976.

Imagine them doing it on *Top Of The Pops*. Tony Blackburn meets Johnny Rotten. Oh, yeah!

When a band like the Sex Pistols gets in a punch-up with members of their audience halfway through a performance, it probably gets a big laff with all those coke-snorting superstars up there on Olympus, as secure as the Tsars of Russia. Just maybe, if things work out as they should, this time next year they'll be laughing on the other side of their faces.

Tony Parsons

The kids who are playing it and the kids who are getting off on it are all hungry

Bromley Contingent mainstay and punk icon Soo Catwoman

ERICA ECHENBERG / GETTY

"Intoxication takes a lot of fuckin' work"

PATTI SMITH embarks on a European tour. Frenchmen, hecklers, bootleggers, George Melly and hash all play a part.

— NME OCTOBER 23 —

"IT'S LIKE... I'M not ever gonna be a hundred per cent cool, y'know... I mean, for you to like even try to be a hundred per cent cool to me is like just... a joke. I'm never a hundred per cent cool and look how cool I am..."

Patti Smith's movie for the night appears to be *Don't Look Back*. She showed up for the post-gig press and media binge held in the bar of her Amsterdam hotel in full regalia of the 1965 Bob Dylan. Dark suit, white shirt, the identical impenetrable heavy-rimmed shades. Now, up in her room finally doing the interview she'd been postponing all day, her voice crackles with exhaustion as she alternates NYC street-sneers and put-downs with long elliptical surrealist streams-of-consciousness (to put it politely) and spaced jive babbling (to not).

She's definitely into her role as Dylan in *Don't Look Back*.

Me, I seem to be cast as the man from *Time* magazine.

"...It's like... there's no shame in not being cool sometimes, y'know... I'm often really uncool. Back in the States they call me 'winghead' because my hair always... didj'ever notice how my hair sticks out?"

"I thought you did that on purpose," I murmur.

"It sticks out because I'm too spaced out to take care of it. I mean, why do you think they call them 'dreadlocks', man? It's all tangles, man... when you've been on the road a long time you forget what you look like, you enter a kind of monkey stage. I think we're getting to the monkey section of the tour. By the time we get to England I'm really gonna be a monkey. I want to be a really mean monkey..."

The gig was at the Paradiso, a converted church near the centre of town. It's the most famous rock venue in the country, undoubtedly the top club/small gig in town.

Like the Melkweg, a more recent and less publicised club with more or less the same setup, it's renowned for its openly sold dope. Last year at the Milky Way (I ended up there because the Paradiso was closed that night), they'd had giant slabs of hash laid out on stalls so that you could taste and try, buy however much you wanted or could afford, and then wander over to a table and smoke yourself stupid in a paranoia-free atmosphere.

Things seem to have tightened up some, though, because we're told that anybody who's buying has to go through some complicated play-acting rituals with the bloke at the pipes-and-skins stall. We're also told to watch out for dealers palming the wares and replacing the package with a seemingly identical dummy or inferior one sneaked out of a pocket. This ain't the summer of love. »

GIJSBERT HANEKROOT / GETTY

October 9, 1976: Patti Smith poses for photographs following a show at the Paradiso, a converted church in the centre of Amsterdam

There was an ominous crackle in the air. Things had gotten off to a bad start when Patti's piano player Richard Sohl – generally referred to as "DNV", an abbreviation of Death In Venice, because of his resemblance to the young boy who plays Dirk Bogarde's bête noire – had dropped out of the tour because of his dislike of heavy-duty touring and large concert halls. DNV had been with Patti longer than any of her musicians except Lenny Kaye, and therefore Andy Paley, a former member of the Sidewinders and a long-time friend of the band – had been drafted in as pinch-hitter, done two rushed rehearsals and schlepped straight off to Europe.

"Andy is real crazy, he's amazing. Amazingly crazy. He was telling me what a good soldier he was gonna be – left right left right, y'know – he was gonna be a real fascist – and he's so spaced out. You know what he put us through? The first night we're on the road, a girl comes into his room to interview him and the only word she knows is 'champagne'. Then he had a nervous breakdown and heart attack.

"Every heavy metal record happened to him on this airplane on the way to Hamburg and we had to put him in an audience… ambulance. Lenny and I had our pockets… I had so much hash on me and we were sitting in this hospital with all these people like… like nurses, y'know?… I've never been to a fuckin' hospital, man, I'd rather crawl across the floor a thousand times and bang my head against the wall than go to hospital… and there we were in this Nazi hospital in Hamburg…"

Everyone seemed tired and on edge. Downstairs in the dressing room area a young French fan called Claude was sprawled in a chair terminally drunk. He'd been hanging around all day waiting for a chance to meet Patti and the management had let him wait in exchange for a bit of amateur stagehanding. But here he was finally in front of Patti Smith and he was too drunk to recognise her. All he can do is vomit what at first looks like blood but – to everyone's relief – turns out to be wine.

Patti snaps in a one-liner, New York street style – "Hey Claude, ya want some heroin?" – then genuine concern takes over and she moves in, holding him by the shoulders and talking to him urgent and gentle, close up. His head tilts back and he heaves up some more wine. "It's OK," Patti says, "every man I've ever fucked has thrown up on me at least once."

Everyone stands around embarrassed. "It's getting a little bit too real," someone mutters. Hanging thick in the air is that peculiar mixed reaction people always get when they see some one stripped down and ugly as a result of an overdose of anything – a reaction compounded of more or less equal measures of contempt, repulsion, pity and guilt which tells them that if something drove them to hit a bottle or chemical that hard they wouldn't be presenting a much more admirable spectacle themselves, there-but-for-the-grace-of-God-go-I and don't laugh too hard or crack too wise because next time it could be me alone and incapacitated in a roomful of strangers.

Gradually the fog begins to clear and Claude realises that someone's talking to him soothingly and wiping his mouth with a damp cloth and that it's Patti Smith.

He reacts first with shame at having disgraced himself before her, then angry because he thinks she's laughing at him. He shoves her hard in the shoulder and the manager moves in to restrain him. Patti waves him away and takes Claude in her arms. He begins to cry. Everyone looks away and then wanders up for the sound check. Patti and Pennie Smith (no relation) gently lead Claude upstairs.

The support act for the evening is George Melly and the Feetwarmers. Melly strolls in looking like the Mayor of Savannah in a cowboy hat and an ostentatious check suit. He's chewing a More and leaning on an elegant white cane, which he describes as "purely an affectation, really" when questioned about his health. Someone later, rather uncharitably, ascribes it to gout.

The Feetwarmers, all immaculately costumed in Early Gangster, set up their equipment with a sulphurously phlegmatic professionalism while Patti and the band and their sound man, Mo, express various differences of opinion. "It sounds really Mickey Mouse up here," snaps Patti as the slow and painful process of adjusting each amp, mic and instrument sound winds interminably on. The Feetwarmers seem to regard rock bands struggling to sort out their mountains of gear as being inept, spoiled brats who can't work their own gadgets.

"I'm sorry that we won't be able to stay and see you," Melly tells Patti urbanely, "but we have another show to do tonight in the Hague." Patti tells him sure, she understands, she knows how it is.

By showtime the club is pretty thoroughly packed. Up in the balconies as well as down on the floor, it's like the District Line in the rush hour except that everybody's stoned as fruitbats and the train ain't leaving the station.

Lights go down, roadies loom around with torches, the troops go on to the usual preliminary clang-honk-tweets and then Patti and the band blaze into Uncle Lou's "We're Gonna Have A Real Good Time Together" as the lights go up. It's a great opener – short, sharp, appropriate without being too obvious. Ivan Kral and Lenny Kaye are already in overdrive on the guitars, Jay Dee Daugherty's lamming into his drums like a crazy man, slipping a hi-hat accent just a whisker ahead of the beat to give it just the right jet-boosting surge, with Patti leaping up and down like a demented pogo stick, her flea-market rags a constant blur of motion.

Nice applause. She calls them children of Paradise, tells 'em that she's been "sampling the local wares. I rilly like think windmills are sooooo cool, ya know."

Puzzled silence. One jovial drunk with the equivalent lung power of a mid-price PA system yells, "'Break It Op!'"

"If you take one part windmills," says Patti from the stage, "one part hashish and one part cocaine…" ragged cheers of recognition of the key words. The drunk yells, "'Break It Op!'" again and then changes his mind. He refills his lungs and bawls, "Fock! Fock!"

Patti ignores him. "…you get a rilly great drink."

They work their way through the set, through a few selections from *Radio Ethiopia* ("This is from our new album. It's a rilly coool record with a rilly great bass and drum sound"), a couple of borrowings – a great blasting version of the Stones' "Time Is On My Side", preceded as always by Patti's "*Tick tock – fuck the clock*" recitation riff, and their medley of Lou Reed's "Pale Blue Eyes" and the Punk Archivist National Anthem "Louie Louie" – and some of the material from *Horses*. Throughout it all, our stentorian friend keeps on howling for "'Break It Op!'".

"Redondo Beach" is, as ever, talked in. "Redondo! Beach! Is A Beach! Where! Women! Love Uthaaaaahhhh! Women!" staccatos Patti, then closes in on the mic to make little kissing noises.

They do a fair version of "Kimberly"; their live performances of it always pall in comparison to the album track, because Kral and Kaye are both on guitar and that magnificent bassline is therefore conspicuous by its absence. Both because of a basic shift of musical emphasis and in order to take the weight off Paley, the band is much more guitar-heavy than they were the last time I'd seen them. Paley moves to bass for "Gloria" – Kral sketches in the opening chords on piano and resumes his guitar duties as soon as the song hots up – and plays some guitar on the encores.

Patti has amp trouble during "Radio Ethiopia" and this only adds to the irritation caused by the audience's fairly subdued reaction throughout the set. By the time the set proper ends she's on the verge of losing her temper and walks straight off stage.

The first encore is the speciality version of "My Generation" with Kral singing the alternate verses and Kaye taking a nicely over the top bass solo. Patti leaves still simmering, and on her return for the second encore berates those whole dwell in the "false paradise" in a long improvised rhythmical tongue-lashing. She's into a rap about breathing and energy

and pyramids and triangles when our friend Break It Op starts broadcasting again. Without even pausing for breath she goes from pyramids and triangles and breathing and energy to "Fuck you, asshole!"

"Do you think you're really cool just standing there going, 'blecccchh'?" she snaps. "I can do that too. Why don't you take your dick out? Gowan take your dick out! Or whyncha go home and just say 'blechhhhhhh!' in front of the mirror?"

There is silence. Mr Break It Op has subsided. She gets back into her rap and steers it into "Land" and finally they really drive it in and drive it home and drive it deep and the people start dancing, but it's too little and too late to effect any kind of major reconciliation.

As the number rampages to a climax, she steps to the mic and rattles off "Andy-Paley-Ivan-Kral-Jay-Dee-Daugherty-Lenny-Kaye-the-Patti-Smith-Group!", makes a pfui-I-wash-my-hands-of-you gesture and rushes off stage. Her brother Todd, who's working with the road crew on tour, takes her arm and then they vanish.

The audience, probably brought down more by her anger than by any deficiencies in the set, leave quickly and quietly. You can tell that it's one of those occasions where it is definitely not cool to wander into the dressing room before allowing a reasonable interval of cooling-off time to elapse.

When Pennie Smith and I are finally summoned to join the assembled company, the unspoken feeling enfolding the room seems to be that they'd just blown Amsterdam pretty thoroughly. Whether it was the exhaustion, the residue of various injuries and illnesses, the sound problems, the audience or whatever, it'd been a bad gig. And while an artist of genius who does a bad gig can still be an artist of genius, a bad gig by an artist of genius is still a bad gig.

"So what's your instinctive reaction to a guy in the crowd who yells out?" I ask Patti back in the *Don't Look Back* suite. "To ignore him or cut him back or what?"

"It's the same as your instinct might be. Sometimes I'll laugh, sometimes I'll tell him to fuck off, sometimes I'll ignore him, sometimes I'll like seduce him to do it more. I'm just reacting. Like I don't have like a stage act – I don't have like a stage persona" – she pronounces it per-son-na – "I don't turn on a separate set of reflexes when I get on the stage; I'm the same person I am here. In fact often I'm better here than I am up there, y'know? I know what I can do alone as an artist, y'know, and it's rilly intoxicating and to get up on a stage, y'know, and to try and match that intoxication takes a lot of fuckin' work. A lot of fuckin' work. Your head has to be like pounding like inside the belly of a bell, be made of like concrete. But soft, rubbery concrete.

"It's just incredible what you have to do and then sometimes you don't even get off because the people are like uptight or they don't understand that they're free, y'know. I don't give a shit what people do. They can say I hate you as long as they say… anything, y'know? Sometimes I really dig people who give me a hard time because it's friction but it's reaction…"

THAT AFTERNOON WE'D all gone down the flea market. Patti bought an obviously, blatantly fake US Army shirt. She was wearing an Amelia Earhart flying cap and enormous goggle-like shades. She delightedly traded insults with a couple of very stoned and extrovert gays who asked if they could buy Ivan Kral ("I might pick you up if you were alone and wearing different coloured boots") and posed for pictures waving around copies of her three bootleg albums and a *Blue Öyster Cult* bootleg. (Two out of the three – *Turn It Up* and *Hard Nipples* – are actually the same one in different packaging, so be warned. The third, *Teenage Perversity And Ships In The Night*, is the one Patti recommends, anyway.)

The guy behind the stall doesn't understand. He thinks this crazy girl is trying to steal his records. He grabs and shouts. She turns on him.

"Fuck you, asshole – I'm Patti Smith and this is my record! I ain't getting any money for this – I oughtta call the cops on ya…"

A pinch-faced customer with horn-rimmed glasses, spots and the kind of short hair that they had before long hair, unhesitatingly sides with the stallholder and grabs the records back. They stare dumbly at this frenzied apparition in the jackboots, flapping khaki coat and shirts, goggles and flying helmet. She turns and stalks away.

"What was so good about the '60s," she'd said over dinner, "was that we had so many great dressers to copy. Every time I saw Brian Jones with some new trousers I had to get some… I remember I saw picture of Paul McCartney in some really great striped trousers. He wasn't my favourite Beatle, but those trousers were sooooo cool that even John had to get a pair. I hitch-hiked into town and I found a pair in a department store and I got them… that was such a thrill. I want to do that; I want to provide kids with something cool to copy…"

She's had her lookalike phases, her Keith Richard, her Bob Dylan, her Jeff Beck, her Jim Morrison.

"I put in a lotta work studying those cats. When you work as hard at it as I did, you really end up getting them down. I've been studying a lot of Jeanne Moreau. She is like so cool. She is sooooo heavy. She's the complete woman… complete anything, she is just complete. I've been looking at a lot of photographs of Brigitte Bardot, too…"

In the studio of a Dutch photographer, she asks him what kind of photos he wants. When he shrugs obligingly, she runs through some riffs – he gets the eye-bulging speedfreak, the blank arrogant poker-face sneer, the gamine grin, the sexy guerilla with the army shirt opened at the top to show the tops of her breasts and knotted up over her belly; he gets mock-*Vogue*, he gets wistful-little-girl… Riffs.

"So what makes the difference between a really great rock'n'roll record and one that doesn't happen?" I ask, faithfully adhering to my role as man from *Time*.

"If it makes me feel great… if it makes me laugh… like a bubble breaking in my heart. Like a really completely sincere effort to communicate and desire to connect; even if it doesn't totally come into focus, the intention is so clear that unless you're a really bitter person you'll open your heart to it and let it reach you.

"See, there's like two different great kinds of rock and roll. There's fascist rock and roll, which is like Bowie and disco and Motown… y'know, like a metronome. It's rilly great, it's perfect, I mean it gets ya. You can't help but get caught in the groove, y'know?

"The other one isn't really defined; it's like raw energy that you're trying to sensuously and rhythmatically hone – is that the right word, Lenny? Hone? – hone… you do your honing, get into different kinds of plants, kind of cup-shaped… more like bell-shaped like tulips… no, not like tulips but like lilies… you get into the horn of any flower that has a bell shape and it's a really pleasurable thing… ya know, sound. If you're really relentlessly into something and you're into sound, it gets to the point where it doesn't matter whether you're good or evil or dream or nightmare or whatever, you get into this rhythm of sound and you just have to be great no matter who you are. I mean, Karen Carpenter could be great if she'd just loosen up a little.

"It's all there. You just have to be willing to get baptised over and over again. Most people just get baptised once and they think they got everything covered. They know how they're gonna think for the rest of their lives…"

Do you want to make a fascist rock record?

"I wanna make something like *Station To Station*… something in as purposive a state as *Station To Station* and as perfect as *Black And Blue*. Those two albums are like *Sgt Pepper* and *Pet Sounds* or something… and then *Radio Ethiopia* because it's going to be really great. I really love both elements – there's more than two elements, there's three. There's like language which you don't have to deal with – I'd just as soon deal with sound, but when I'm called upon to use language in order to go a step higher or a step further to explore just for the pleasure… of man… is real cool. I forgot where this sentence was going to end… I had to say 'real cool' because I couldn't remember where the sentence should end up…

"*Radio Ethiopia* is a lot like Albert Ayler. That's not hard to understand. I don't know what people will think of our record, but how I view it is like… the first record was like a little egg, ya know… and this one is like a little chick… and then the little chick opens its mouth… and takes in a little worm… and gets nourished and gets strong and becomes…"

"A bigger bird," croons Lenny Kaye.

Charles Shaar Murray ●

> "I don't turn on a separate set of reflexes when I get on the stage"

“EMI freaked”

British record labels are doing it for themselves – and for just £400. No lawyers, no contracts, STIFF and CHISWICK are tearing up the record industry rulebook, with singles by bands such as THE DAMNED. “They really haven’t got much to lose,” says one label boss.

— NME NOVEMBER 6 —

IN JANUARY 1959, Berry Gordy Jr founded Motown Records on the strength of a £400 loan. In July 1976, Dr Feelgood’s one-time tour manager, Jake Riviera, in partnership with Graham Parker’s manager Dave Robinson, launched Stiff Records with precisely the same amount. Their £400 was advanced by the Feelgoods.

“Today’s Sound Today”, a respectful paraphrase of Phil Spector’s “Tomorrow’s Sound Today”, is Stiff’s slogan – and an accurate one for a label which in less than three months has established itself as the prime outlet for aspiring local club talent.

A shoestring operation run with boundless enthusiasm from a small converted lock-up shop in London’s Notting Hill, Stiff has built up the kind of street-level credibility that the major record companies never attain, despite their standing on the stock exchange.

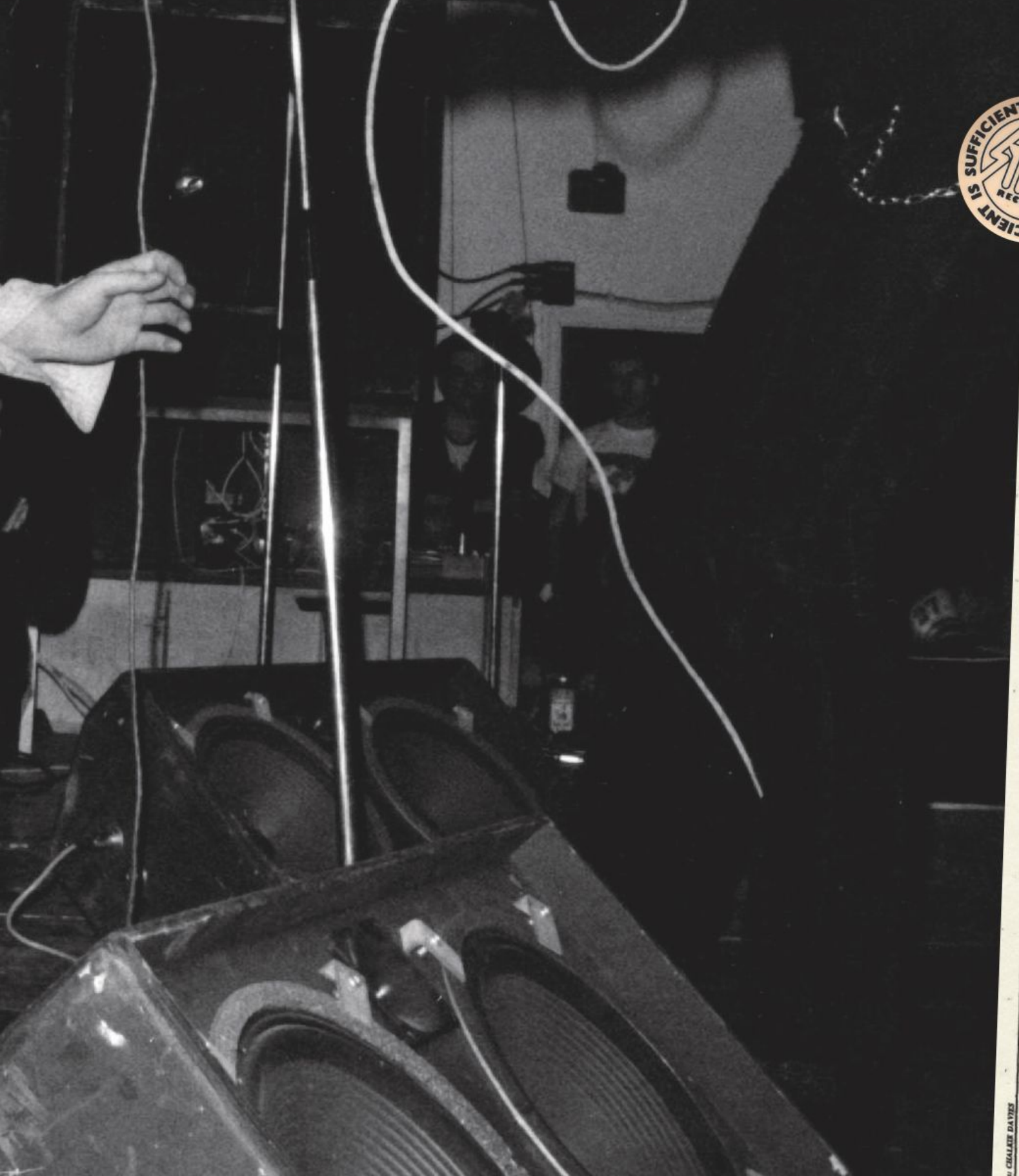
“Credibility,” Dave Robinson insists, “is even more important than actual finance at the beginning of a venture like Stiff.” White man doesn’t speak with forked tongue!

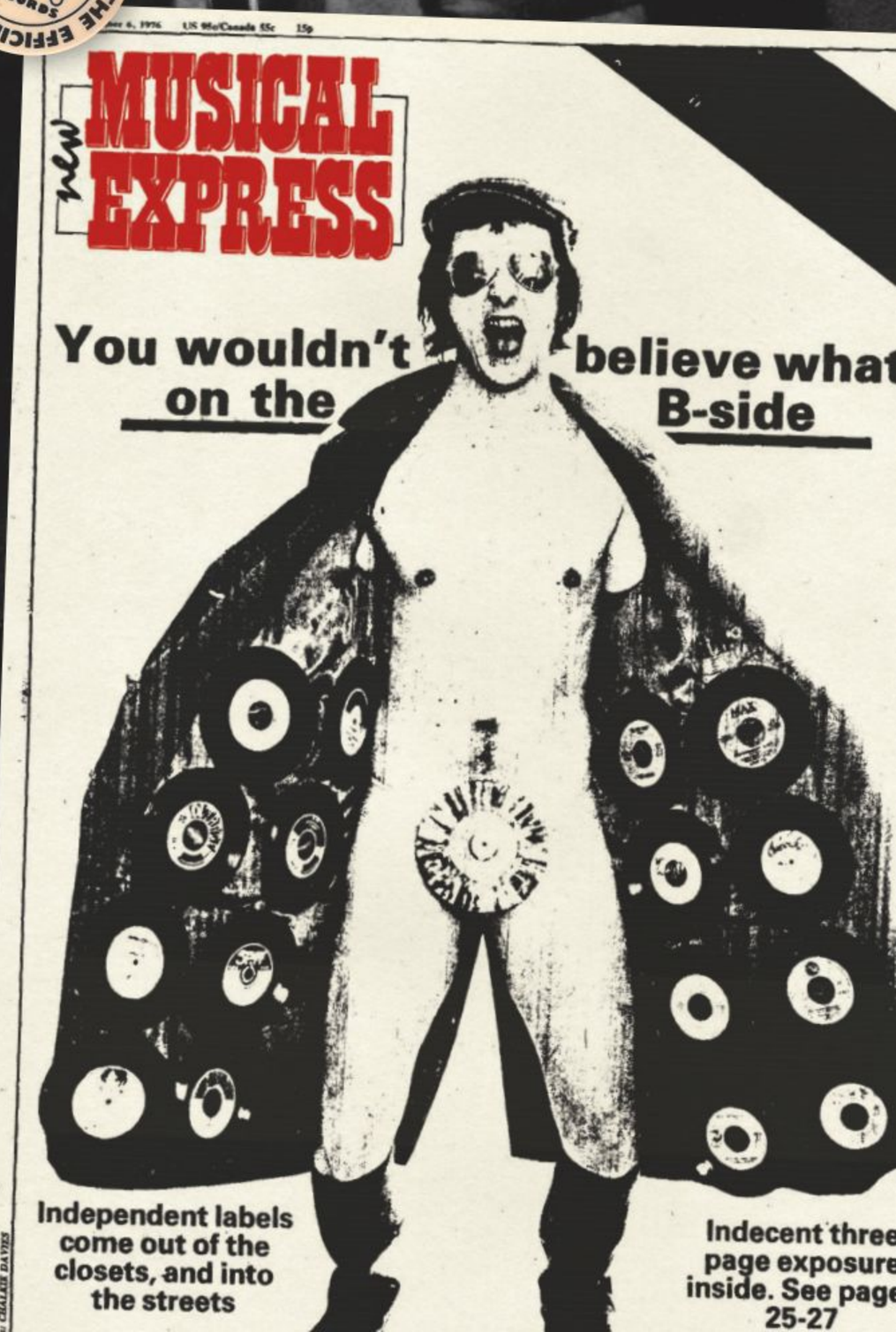
For the time being, Stiff only have sufficient cash to enter into one-off deals (with an option), but the fact that an artist of Nick Lowe’s stature (ex of Brinsley Schwarz) was prepared to inaugurate the label has meant that Riviera and Robinson have had little difficulty in attracting fresh talent to the fold.

Of the artists so far pacted, none are what could be termed “other labels’ rejects”. Primarily, they are those souls who normally don’t fit into most major record companies’ five-year investment plans. »

ERICA ECHENBERG / GETTY

The Damned: Stiff Records made them the first UK punk band to get a single out with "New Rose", released on October 22, 1976





It's the immediacy of Stiff that makes it such an attractive and exciting enterprise. For, in very much the same way as the more responsible sections of the rock press file reports on emergent talent, Stiff are recording many of these artists while they've still got hunger in their bellies, fire in their blood and an HP company on their backs. The upshot is that they get the results out on the streets while it's still happening. Despite a limited cash flow, Riviera maintains that if necessary, within two weeks of signing a letter of agreement (who can afford lawyers?), an act can have their record pressed and in the shops.

Though Riviera sometimes chooses extremes to illustrate his logic, he nevertheless makes his point. "For far too long," he says, "there has been a gap between the million-quid advance and scuffling about in a cellar. There had to be a middle ground. I believe Stiff is it."

Now £400 isn't a helluva lot of money with which to try to set the record industry on fire, but, with just svelte Suzanne Spiro to hold the fort, answer the phone, handle the paperwork and heal the sick, Stiff seems to get by without too many traumas.

The most important thing is that Stiff sells records; maybe only a few thousand copies at most, but that's still a few thousand more than most new artists can hope to sell. Along with other similar labels, Stiff has instigated its own market through an international network of specialist record shops and mail-order companies.

You have to understand that with the major labels, unless it's a specialist release, a golden oldie or a disco demand, a record either sells no more than the initial pressing order of a couple of hundred or else, if it's lucky, it makes the charts. With few exceptions, there are no in-betweens.

Stiff releases move off the company's shelf as quickly as they arrive from EMI's pressing plant. "Actually," says Riviera, "EMI freaked when we got started. They began to ask who the hell are these guys who are doing 5,000 with the Pink Fairies and other groups they've never heard of. They still can't quite get over it. They're so used to singles turkeying at 500 or selling upwards of 20,000, and here we are forever reordering 1,000 copies immediately after one lot has been pressed."

Though overheads continue to escalate, £300 will still get 2,000 copies of any record pressed and also cover the royalties. The cost of the picture sleeve is extra, but Stiff can still maintain quality control and bring their product into line with other labels by selling a single at the recommended retail price of 70p.

So apart from a picture sleeve, what else can Stiff offer an artist?

"The way things are at the moment," Riviera continues, "we can virtually guarantee to sell quite a few thousand copies of a record by a group that, for various reasons, the majors would never consider signing."

Roogalator is offered by Riviera as a prime example. "They received some exceedingly fine press coverage, every A&R man checked them out, but when it came to the crunch nobody was prepared to take a chance with them.

"Working with the kind of limited finance we have at our disposal, it can often prove to be frustrating when you know for a fact that with a band like Roogalator we can easily sell 5,000 EPs in advance, yet only have sufficient funds to place an initial pressing order of 2,000. For instance, we got 6,000 advance orders on the Pink Fairies single and 2,000 for an unknown band like The Damned."

Owing to different production budgets, each record has its own break-even sales figure; every one of Stiff's releases has not only recouped the initial outlay but they've all shown a profit.

The Lew Lewis single "Boogie On The Street" only needed to sell 800 copies before it showed a profit because the Feelgoods gave Stiff the tapes gratis. As a result, Lewis will be cutting a follow-up, probably a reworking of Manfred Mann's "5-4-3-2-1". Roogalator will go into the black at 3,000, because they received a £100 advance. One thing that does remain constant is the exceptionally high royalty of 15 per cent that Stiff pay their artists.

Says Robinson: "We're not in a position to give large advances. The hundred quid we paid Roogalator was an exception and also about as high as we could afford to go. So we ask a group to come along with us. They really haven't got that much to lose.

"To begin with, they get a record in the shops and if it sells well they are in a position to make a good profit. To a relatively unknown club band, a single is of great help with regard to getting gigs."

Though there is an option clause on both sides in Stiff's letters of agreement with their artists, there is a distinct possibility that because of the media coverage that Stiff has garnered, any one of their acts could chalk up a small hit, a big reputation and as a result be picked up by a major label who wouldn't have normally considered signing the acts that Stiff thrive on.

As Riviera points out: "Already publishers and a few astute A&R men are starting to think that if it's good enough for Stiff, then just maybe they should get in quick.

"We are a little scared of that happening," he admits. "Naturally, we want to build Stiff into a steady thing, but at the same time we don't want other labels to use us simply as a stepping stone – once we've demonstrated that there's a demand for an act, a major label comes along and reaps all the benefit from the hard work we've put into the act. I can tell you, we work our butts off."

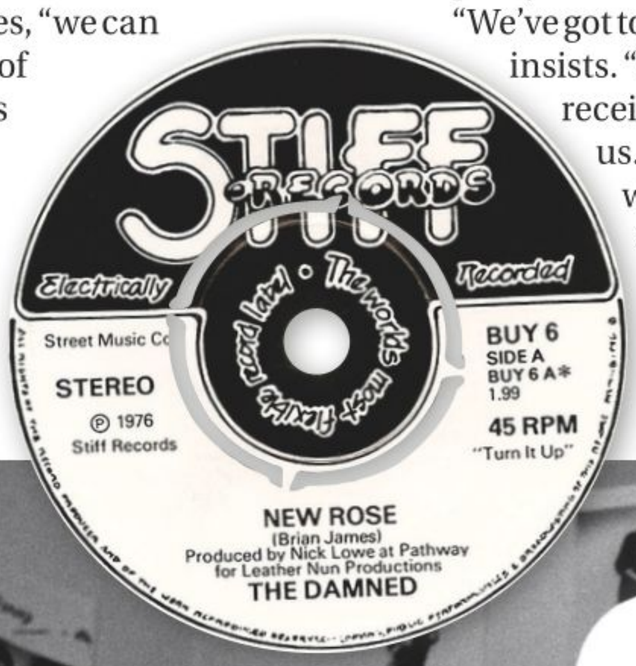
Having already admitted that as yet there isn't sufficient floating cash to lure acts with large advances, Dave Robinson hopes to put into effect a plan that will swell Stiff's coffers. At one time, Robinson used to run the recording studio at the Hope & Anchor in Islington, during which time he recorded "live" every group ever to play there.

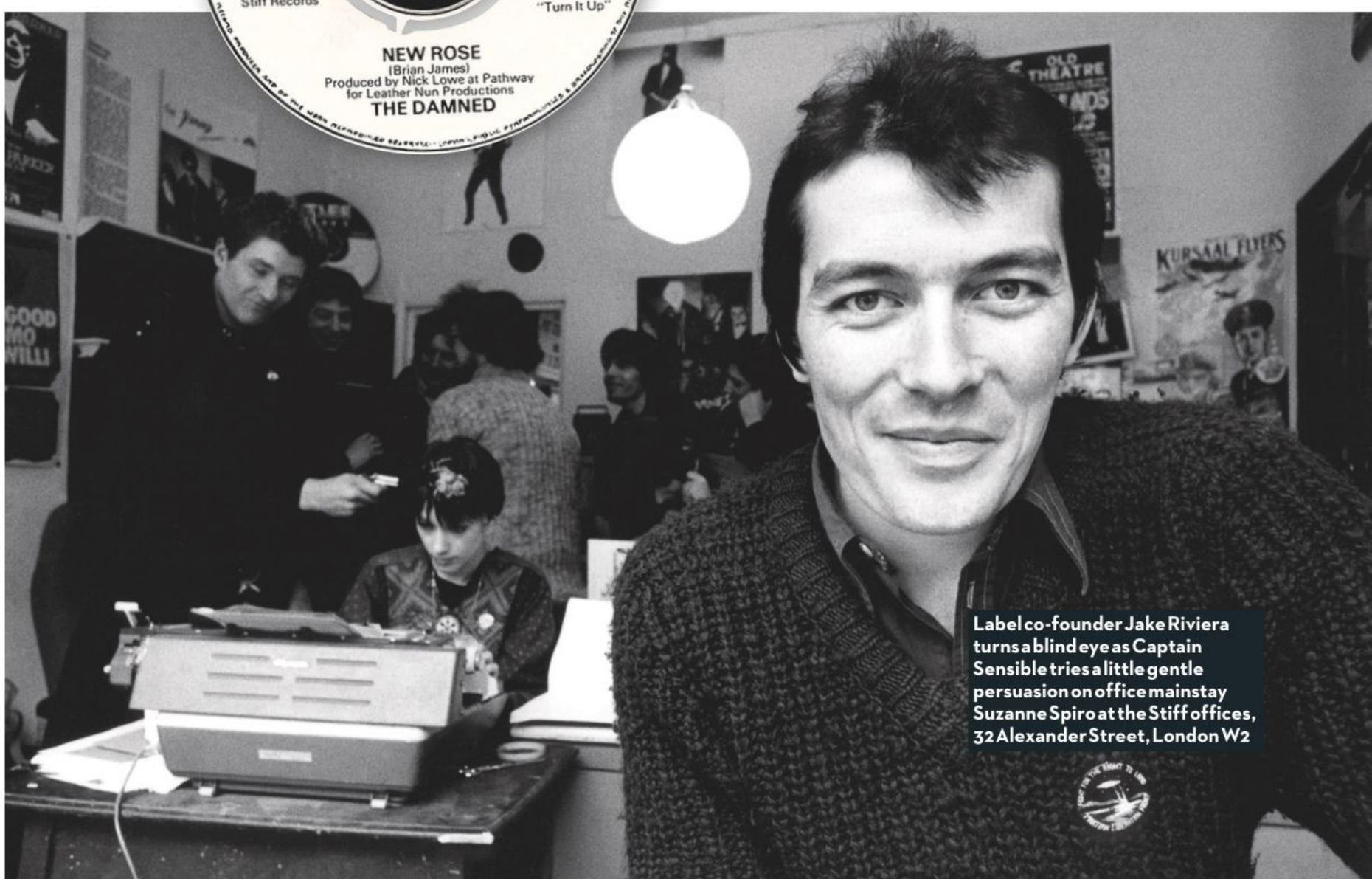
Once Robinson has secured the necessary releases from various bands, he intends to compile a double, maybe a triple album of '70s pub roots rock featuring everyone from the Feelgoods to the Brinsleys, Ace and Kokomo. Robinson and Riviera reckon that the profit from such a project would be far more amenable than having a silent financial partner.

Stiff is a sink-or-swim operation. It will succeed or fail on its principles. Whatever the outcome, the partners are determined to avoid the pitfalls that plague most labels: heavy release schedules, lack of promotion time – and apathy.

"We've got to make Stiff a self-reliant organisation," Riviera insists. "Because to be truthful, aside from the money we received from the Feelgoods, nobody is prepared to back us. They all think we're bloody mad. Don't really think we've got a chance. For instance, they know that if we suddenly found we had a chart hit on our hands we'd be forced to lease it to one of the majors like they do in America."

Neither Robinson nor Riviera were born yesterday. They are fully aware that musicians are extremely





Label co-founder Jake Riviera turns a blind eye as Captain Sensible tries a little gentle persuasion on office mainstay Suzanne Spiro at the Stiff offices, 32 Alexander Street, London W2

KEITH MORRIS / GETTY

ambitious and that loyalties can be bought for a hefty cash advance. Nevertheless, Stiff feels that there are sufficient bands to maintain the label and enable it to survive without compromise.

"Let's not kid ourselves for a minute," says Riviera, "none of our acts have secured deals with other labels as a result of recording for Stiff. So if nobody is going to pick up the Pink Fairies or Roogalator and we've got sufficient money for another single – or in the case of Nick Lowe, an album – and they want to do it, then we can keep on issuing records by them because we know in advance their minimum sales potential. Also, they know they're not stuck with us for life. I honestly think it's that kind of freedom that can often bring out the best in an artist."

However, it needs to be pointed out that Stiff's comparative minor success is also beginning to work against them. On those occasions when they've approached a major label to enquire about the possibility of leasing old master tapes they've been treated with suspicion.

"It's not so much that they're scared of us," says Robinson. "Just that they're not sure what we're up to and how we can keep on selling thousands of records by people they've never heard of or that they wouldn't want to record.

"Therefore," he concludes, "when Jake and I come around asking to lease something they automatically think its worth a fortune, but they'd never think of reissuing it themselves. They much prefer to sit on it and do nothing."

Stiff can't afford to procrastinate. As a matter of fact, neither can they afford to pay their staff wages. Robinson and Riviera earn their daily crust not from Stiff but through their management company, and then they only draw £34 apiece each week.

"It's gonna be one helluva time before we become tax exiles," quips Riviera, "but there's always the possibility."

Berry Gordy didn't do so band for himself on £400 either.

> "We don't want other labels to use us simply as a stepping stone"

TED CARROLL IS adamant. Within the next 12 months, Chiswick Records will have a hit record. A gregarious red-bearded Dubliner, Carroll exudes the kind of confidence one would expect from a man who's had his Rock On record shop immortalised in the lyrics of Thin Lizzy's "The Rocker".

The proprietor of both Rock On and Chiswick, Ted Carroll is the most respected character among British record collectors and a man who has an enviable reputation for fair trading. He'd much prefer to undersell than oversell his wares.

A visit to any of Carroll's three Rock On stalls/shops is a compulsory part of any visiting rock fan's London itinerary.

While still living in Dublin, Carroll was first baptised into rock'n'roll when he played rhythm guitar with the Caravelles before switching to bass when they mutated to The Greenbeats and recorded an obscure Jagger-Richards original for Pye. A musician by night, Carroll also held down a nine-to-five gig as a bank teller. However, when he was transferred to a border town in 1961 he quit playing and became a part-time promoter, organising weekly R&B sessions at a tearoom on the beach at Killarney. Two years later, the police closed him down for overcrowding the venue.

Soon after, Carroll got himself involved in managing an early Skid Row lineup that included Phil Lynott as lead vocalist. That kept Carroll off the streets until 1968, when he moved to Bournemouth where, for the next two years, he drove a corporation bus. On a visit to Dublin, Carroll once again met up with the Skids and immediately accepted the position of tour manager – a six-month gig that took him to America for a four-week tour. During a stop-over in Sacramento, Carroll purchased a copy of Charlie Gillett's book *Sound Of The City*.

On his return to London, he quit the Skids and, with some Decca and London-American deletions he'd picked up on the cheap from an Irish warehouse, opened his Saturday-Only record shack in the rear of an arcade in Golborne Road at the flea market end of Portobello Road in October 1971.

Though Carroll had taken over Thin Lizzy's management seven months earlier, he abdicated soon after guitarist Gary Moore quit. From there on in, Carroll devoted his energies to expanding Rock On. In 1974 he opened his stall in the Soho Market and just before Christmas of last year he not only opened a shop in Kentish Town Road, but launched Chiswick Records with The Count Bishops' "Speedball" EP.

Carroll argues that as Chiswick is a logical extension of Rock On, he couldn't compromise himself when it came to recording the Bishops. "You've got to start the way you intend to continue," Carroll theorises, with the result that he invested £150 on studio time, £400 on the pressing of 2,500 records, plus the cost of the sleeve and the labels. "I reckon," says Carroll, "that it costs £800, but we've already recouped that amount and made a profit."

The "Speedball" EP has already notched up sales of 2,500, while most of the 1,000 re-order pressing have already been accounted for. "If it wasn't for the Christmas rush, I'd have reordered 2,000, because I can get rid of them."

Chiswick almost had a minor hit with their second release, a reissue of the early-'60s British rock classic "Brand New Cadillac" by Vince Taylor & The Playboys. Had Chiswick finalised their distribution deal with President Records when the single was hot, it might have made the Top 40. Despite missing important concentrated sales action, "Brand New Cadillac" is approaching 10,000 copies and still selling steadily.

However, Carroll isn't losing sleep over the Vince Taylor near-miss, for he has little doubt that Chiswick will get a hit and hopefully it will be with Hammersmith's arcane mod power-trio, The Gorillas, the only act under exclusive contract to Chiswick.

Carroll has invested money in new equipment, a manager is being sought, a French tour supporting The Flamin' Groovies is upcoming, together with a December 5 gig at the Roundhouse.

Carroll insists that labels like Chiswick and Stiff and the French-based Skydog operation will succeed because not only do they show a genuine interest in the records they release, but they also have integrity.

"So few of the major labels," insists Carroll, "have any integrity. They are all money-making machines. It's a fact that most of the people who work in them know bugger all about the music or their artists, and truthfully they don't want to know. For all that they're contributing, they might just as well be selling beans, and the kids have got wise to it.

"The only person I know," Carroll continues, "who works for a major record company who is totally aware of what he is doing, is in a powerful position and is successful, is Andrew Lauder over at United Artists. I'm sure there are other people like Andrew in other record companies, but how often are they given an opportunity to really prove themselves?"

Though they might not have real effect on this country's balance of payments, Chiswick Records is building up a large export business – for, according to Carroll, both here and abroad a whole new record market is crystallising.

"The shops," Carroll reveals, "are a direct reaction to Boots and Smiths. Today, there are two ways of running a record shop. You either discount the Top 50 or you specialise.

"It's those shops who specialise, stock imports, cut-outs, rarities and small labels that are beginning to do good business and build up regular customers. There's a big market for individuality, and as a result these specialist shops can open up without having to take out large accounts with the majors.

"The great thing about a label like Chiswick is that unlike the majors, a record isn't dead after three weeks. The product continues to sell to people who might not have picked up on some of the releases when they were originally issued. Thankfully, the back catalogue continues to move. And now, with our distribution with President, should one of our records suddenly take off, they can handle it. They've proved themselves over and over again with hits for Hank Mizell, George McCrae and KC & The Sunshine Band.

"You know," Carroll concludes, "the first shoe-string label to score a hit will scare the shit out of the majors. You see, we're straight off the streets and are more in touch with what's happening than all those expense-account A&R men. We ain't gonna take over the entire record business, but we're gonna get by. That's for certain." *Roy Carr* •

1976

OCTOBER–DECEMBER

“Have we gone over the top?”

JIMMY PAGE ponders LED ZEPPELIN’S *The Song Remains The Same*. A fantasy sequence found him scaling a Scottish mountain (“a bit hairy, actually”), but the epic project has been worth the expense.

— MELODY MAKER NOVEMBER 20 —

A WARM HANDSHAKE, TWINKLING eyes and black hair grown thicker than he has allowed for some while – Jimmy Page arrived at his London office in the King’s Road exuding good cheer.

And he had plenty to be pleased about with the launching, after a three-year delay, of Led Zeppelin’s first plunge into the movies, with the epic *The Song Remains The Same*. Fans are currently queuing to packed cinemas in Britain, as they have in America, to watch one of our finest and longest-established groups commit themselves to the probing eye of the cinema camera.

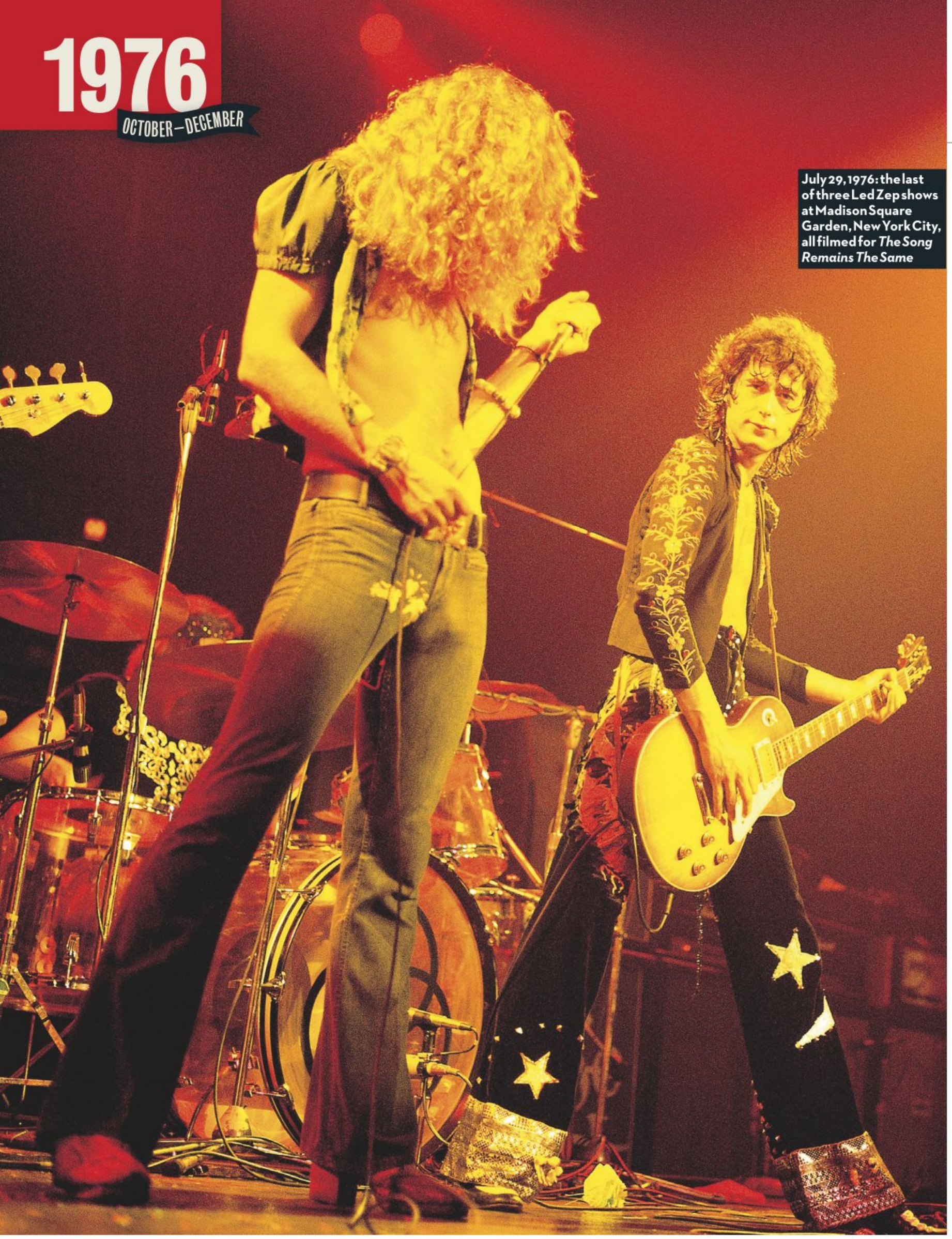
Any faults are cruelly exposed on a screen, and that Zeppelin emerge with their mystique intact shows their good sense in not attempting to become actors in a role. The nearest they get to that is in the mildly controversial fantasy sequences, where each member portrays himself in some personality-revealing situation.

The film is an accurate portrayal of Zeppelin as they were one day in Madison Square Gardens. Whether you appreciate the movie depends on how much you enjoy Led Zeppelin and their music.

The film’s release, together with a fine double album, shows just how committed Zeppelin still are in 1976. Not for them insularity or idleness. *Physical Graffiti*, *Presence* and now a double LP and film – Zeppelin are heading for even greater peaks of productivity in 1977.

Page, whose powerful solos during “Dazed And Confused” are one of the highlights of *Song…*, talked »

Jimmy Page appears as both himself and the Staff of Wisdom-wielding Hermit in *The Song Remains The Same*



July 29, 1976: the last of three Led Zep shows at Madison Square Garden, New York City, all filmed for *The Song Remains The Same*

DAVID REDFERN / GETTY

with the same youthful exuberance he showed that day back in 1968 when he walked unannounced into the *MM* office and said he had just formed a group.

Jimmy said how much he had enjoyed the London launch.

"We had two premieres in America, one in New York and in LA. They held them apart by a few days so we could check the cinemas out. It's not as easy a job as you'd think, getting the sound right for cinemas. I remember seeing *Woodstock* and they had towers of speakers."

How did it feel sitting in the audience watching his own group?

"Well, the first time in New York it was great, the first time one had sat in a real audience – every time I had seen the film before was with technicians, people with a really critical eye. Then the film lived for the first time and you could see people getting off on things, applauding and laughing at the right times, generally vibing.

"Although the project spanned three years, obviously we hadn't worked on it every week for three years. When you've been on something for that amount of time, there is always that slight reservation: have we gone over the top?"

What caused him doubts? What could have been improved?

"Er…" Jimmy paused.

"Just the length of things, but it doesn't bother me. When you have committed yourself to something, and there's a high standard to compete with, like *Woodstock* and all those other rock films, you realise there is no mucking about, no half-measures.

"Curiously enough, no, I hadn't seen many of the other rock films, except *Monterey* and *Woodstock*. I don't know what Slade's film was like, they say it was a rock'n'roll feature film. This one was just a musical really, the gig, with fantasy sequences, part-documentary. It's one sequence frozen in celluloid."

Did it achieve all the aims Jimmy had in mind when the film was first conceived?

"Yeah, pretty much. Obviously there were things which weren't quite the way one wanted them. It's a massive compromise, making films. You can just go on spending a fortune, there's no two ways about that.

"The fantasy sequences were introduced because we knew we had gaps in the film of the performance, and you can't really cut the soundtrack because so much of our stuff is improvised.

"So we thought, let's do it that way, and curiously enough, it's fair to say it built very much like a Zeppelin song or track. 'Achilles' Last Stand' grew and built in the studio, and the same with the fantasy sequences in the film, as ideas were added.

"We had complete control of the film, which was made during our non-residency [of the UK] period. We categorically stipulated what we wanted, and it was pretty much done that way."

How did each member of the band go about selecting his fantasy sequence? John Bonham drag racing, for example, Jimmy climbing a cliff face in Scotland, John Paul Jones the wild horseman and Robert Plant, a knight rescuing fair maidens.

"It was like when we each chose a symbol for the fourth album. We each went away and came up with an idea. It gave insight into each personality, whether it be tongue-in-cheek or deadly serious."

And Jimmy indulged in mountaineering?

"Yeah, it was a bit hairy, actually. It wasn't done in one take – that was the trouble. It was a very steep climb at this place in Scotland, and it didn't occur to me I'd have to go and do it again! The crew said, 'Back down there', and believe me, it's very steep, and I've got a great fear of heights.

"I wanted to get a full moon in the shot, and it came up in December. I thought it would be great in snow, so there would be a luminescent quality.

"Curiously enough, the night we arrived was a full moon, and blow me if there wasn't snow on the mountain. But they didn't get the cameras up in time and the snow had melted by the next night. It wouldn't have worked anyway. You need so much floodlighting to get that luminescent quality. It would have been nice, though."

Led Zeppelin had long fought shy of TV. Did Jimmy feel that movies were a better medium for the band?

"Well, TV has been done now by bands like Queen. You need a good range of frequencies to be able to hear what's going on in groups like ours, and you can do that now with stereo radio broadcasts along with TV sound.

"The film soundtrack was going to be in Quint, by the way, which is a form of Quad. Take stereo, for example. In the cinema, stereo isn't two tracks – it's three. This was all new to me. When they refer to Quad, they have an extra track which makes it Quint.

"We started to work to that system, but we found out that when *Tommy* went around the out-of-town cinemas, they had the music coming from four speakers and the voices coming out of the fifth speaker behind the screen, and at a lot of points in the cinema you couldn't get a complete sound picture.

"They were getting a strangled sound with the voices, so we took all this into account and settled on four-track stereo – three at the front and one at the back. It works out to give you a circle of sound.

"It's by no means an easy job to get the sound right in every venue. Cinema managers don't like it if you say, 'Your equipment isn't quite what we need, y'know, the low end, the driving basslines.' They look down their noses at you, especially if they think their stuff is tip-top."

I loved Jimmy's use of such a quaint, old-fashioned phrase, and it took on a much more cutting edge as Page beamed innocently. He warmed to his theme.

"There's no standard, you know, about the reflective quality of the screen; some have very bright images, some are very dull; same again with the speakers and amplifiers. There's just no standard. It really shocked me.

"One would have thought a chain of cinemas would have standard equipment, but no! It was a whole new world to me! Slightly frustrating, but some cinemas have put in special speakers for *Tommy, Lisztomania* and *Earthquake*."

> "There is a great feeling in the band. We'll be going on for years!"

How important was making the movie to Zeppelin's career as a whole?

"An incredible challenge, because we're not a bunch of chaps that compromise easily. When things went out of sync, for example, it just went right against the grain. Having got over the hurdle of making it, it's exhilarating to feel the response. New York was incredible. It's a great relief that it's out.

"We didn't just want the film to be an in-concert type of thing, it had to have bigger dimensions. In America they have a lot of stereo broadcasts linked with TV concerts, so with the film we had to have more than just the sound to capture the imagination."

Would Zeppelin find themselves in the strange position of having to live up to a film when they start "live" gigs again?

"No – not really. The film ends up with 'Whole Lotta Love', which we only play a couple of bars of now. It means nothing here anyway – it's the *Top Of The Pops* signature tune now! People who have beamed in on us at a later date would think, 'What's that load of rubbish?'

"On the last tour we did of America, we in fact only played eight bars of 'Whole Lotta Love' without any vocal – it was just a link and we were ending with 'Stairway', so you see, we've moved on from there. We've had two albums out since that concert was filmed – there's a wealth of new stuff.

"We have already started rehearsals and are pacing ourselves towards touring. And I'm really looking forward to it. We have so many more good epics to get into!"

Jimmy seemed as excited as a kid at the prospect of Zeppelin touring again, as if the band had formed yesterday instead of eight years ago.

"The tour of the world we were going to embark on was going to include places like Cairo, but that didn't come together. We'd still like to do that one day, because you've gotta have change, you can't stand still.

"We're rehearsing now and will start a tour in February. It'll be the States to begin with. I don't know when we'll be back to England. Obviously next year sometime, but I don't know exactly when. The main thing is, we're bursting to get back on the road, as you may well imagine."

I expressed surprise that Jimmy hadn't lost any of his enthusiasm for touring after so many gruelling years.

He laughed again and explained: "That *Presence* album really did us so much good. When you've been together that long and embark upon an LP, whatever we've got ready, we say 'Forget about that, we'll go straight in.' And the spontaneity of rehearsals in the studio brings out the best in us. To come up with all that stuff after a frustrating and emotional period, and to find it was all there, was marvellous.

"You see, we were only a week or so away from the first date of a tour when the accident happened, and suddenly we were… let down, not knowing at all what was coming in the future. There was a great amount of uncertainty. Now the group is very tight. Nobody went off to do sessions or anything like that. There is a great feeling in the band, y'know. We'll be going on for years!

"The good feelings are still there. Before our rehearsals for the last album began, we had no idea a thing like 'Achilles' would come out, and it was so exhilarating. You never know what is going to come around the corner next, and that's the whole magic of it."

Will Zeppelin start work on another album yet, or will they wait until the soundtrack has run its course?

"Well, I'm glad you called it the soundtrack and not a 'live' album, because we have so much good live stuff. Obviously we were committed to putting this album out, although it wasn't necessarily the best live stuff we have. I've been working on a lot at home. I've got a couple of long pieces that would make good albums.

"We've got six live concerts on tape which were good nights. With a computerised desk you can put your mix down, leave it in a box, put it on two years later and it's exactly as you originally planned it. And you can build it up gradually and make a lot of dramatic changes within the space of a four-minute track.

"We've got some ancient stuff – live at the Royal Albert Hall in 1970 – and it's very interesting to listen to now. You can compare different versions of tunes as they span a couple of years. A chronological compilation is the thing I've always been keen on, but the soundtrack came instead, so that can be shelved for a while."

Returning to *The Song Remains The Same*, did Jimmy feel there could have been more in the movie about the running of the band, backstage scenes, more of Peter Grant, their legendary manager at work?

"Well, we were rather dubious about putting something like that down. The scene featuring Peter was pretty honest, I thought. [This was a reference to the backstage management vs promoter hassle.] I suppose you noticed the silences, did you? I don't know if you saw that link-up broadcast to the States when they had Peter Cook on and they played part of *Derek & Clive Live* and they had the bleeps in? If you can lip read, it was a bit like Derek & Clive.

"Possibly we could have had more of that, but the thing we wanted most was the pace to build." Jimmy snapped his fingers slowly. "The film could have been another concept altogether. But it you have a helluva lot of dialogue, then you stop the music altogether, and we were trying to keep the music going as much as possible. We didn't want interviews with each member of the group. We were going to leave out the New York hotel robbery – but it was a documentary, it was all true, it happened."

It had started to be a documentary and then shied away from that – didn't it?

"Mmmm." Jimmy looked dubious. "Well, it was a montage, wasn't it?" he said quietly. "That was the challenge, to keep it from just being a concert, and I think it's a fair old balance. It could be interesting to do a full documentary on that side of the group, y'know, what goes down. But it's a taster. Get your imagination working!" *Chris Welch* •

"Democracy has collapsed"

THE STRANGLERS don't rate "paranoid clown" Johnny Rotten or "Iggy Bombom", but talk a good punk game. "The trouble with rock in the last few years," says Jean-Jacques Burnel, "is that it's become verbose, self-indulgent and safe."

— NME DECEMBER 4 —

HUGH CORNWELL AND Jean-Jacques Burnel, Stranglers lead and bass guitarists, are ready for me. The instant I walk through the door I'm assailed by their criticisms of my review of their Marquee gig, which has appeared in the morning's *NME*.

"You don't look so young yourself."

"Do you consider yourself mature, then?"

"Come on, then, tell us where we sound like 'The Doors'."

"Do you look at the audience when you review a gig?"

"Did you see how they were getting off on what we said about the Marquee?"

And so on…

This is just what I need, having leapt out of bed late, paid the earth for a cab, got soaked walking to the interview, got no cigarettes, had no breakfast, and when I'm still trying to force myself awake. It's especially galling because, apart from criticising the band's "stance", I'd given them a rare review. Musically they are one of the most exciting, adventurous combos I've heard in a long time.

Burnel, in standard issue black leather jacket, and Cornwell, swamped into an enormous, ostentatiously ripped overcoat, analyse my review point by point. It's a novel experience, not simply because I'm forced to rigorously defend every word I've written, but also because at no point during the interview/argument, or on our withdrawal to the pub, do the two Stranglers relax their suspicion of me.

They maintain that the Marquee is dead, despite the fact that two of this year's most successful new bands, AC/DC and Eddie & The Hot Rods, have launched themselves from Marquee residencies. That the club did not become a discotheque or strip joint years ago is almost enough to be thankful for.

They object to my linking the Rods with the new wave, despite the fact that the Rods are the only band remotely connected with that scene who have got nationwide exposure on TV, radio and the road, and therefore may epitomise "punk" in many people's minds.

They carp at my Doors comparison, though it's undeniable in their lineup and their keyboard and lead-guitar styles, while they claim it's coincidence that Dave Greenfield bases his playing around 3rds and 5ths (Burnel trying to blind me with science) like Ray Manzarek.

But when we get down to my criticism of their onstage rabble-rousing we quickly dead-end ourselves; "But I think you're just battering your heads against the wall."

"OK, so where's the wall?"

"Er, um, well… I dunno, I suppose it's the music-biz establishment…"

And at this point I confess to being checkmated.

But I shouldn't have let myself be. See, The Stranglers get up on stage at the Marquee and rant about its obsolescence and tell the audience to smash the place up after the gig ("It wasn't an order, it was suggestion"). This I find quite unwarranted: if you don't like it, don't play there.

The Stranglers, however, see the Marquee as a major stanchion of the system which they reckon has repressed their talent. Like most of their punk/dole queue/new wave rock cohorts, they are martyrs and rebels.

Humbug.

Let's have a look at how martyred and repressed the Stranglers are. They formed the band just a year ago. Since then they've been working constantly; they've supported Patti Smith »

REX FEATURES

Jean-Jacques Burnel in 1976: bassist, history graduate, karate expert and Triumph motorcycle enthusiast

on both her media blitz tours, and they've now landed a contract with United Artists. They've really had it tough, haven't they?

While they're on the subject, let's look at a couple of their contemporaries. The Sex Pistols have just released a blow against the empire called "Anarchy In The UK", a pretty good thunderous single which I like a lot. But in so doing these "anarchists" have signed on as minuscule fish in the colossal pond of EMI. Watch its foundations shake.

Oh, and The Damned. "Dole Queue Rock", is it? Look, mate, I was on the dole for two years trying to launch a rock band. It had no bearing whatsoever on the kind of music we played, and we didn't presume to set ourselves up as spokesmen for some great new breed of Dole Queue Kids.

The Damned claim to be society's rejects – a very lucrative business.

THE TIME HAPPENS to be right for a new youth craze, and self-styled Angry Young Men are it. It's a long time since anyone had had an easier route to a recording contract than the Pistols, Stranglers, Damned and Vibrators – none of whom have been playing in public for more than a year – and the ironic fact is that their overnight success is partly due to playing up the way the rock establishment is supposedly trying to make life difficult for them.

The Stranglers claim to be different to the other bands of the new wave – while still laying claim to a place in its hierarchy – because they are "more politically aware", and are not just into showbiz, which they reckon a lot of the other bands are. Their politics? Well, that's a tricky one – let's leave it till later.

But they spout many of the same litanies as the other bands. For instance, it's now apparently de rigueur for less mainstream punks to deny any knowledge of the Stooges before this year. The Stranglers like to be classified as psychedelic, though they're at pains to tell me exactly what psychedelia is not (hippies, of course), and disclaim any knowledge of the *Nuggets* bands who appear to be such a strong influence on them (Electric Prunes, Standells, etc, etc) I can't help thinking they are donning a mantle they've misconstrued.

Another new wave litany: they refuse to reveal what they were doing before The Stranglers. It later slips out that two have teaching experience.

And another: Jean-Jacques recites his "criteria for good rock" – "It's gotta be energetic, it's gotta rock, it's gotta be economic and it's gotta be aware. It's gotta be neo-revolutionary, even if it's just fucking people's heads about a venue, political at that low a level. And the trouble with rock in the last few years is that it's become verbose, self-indulgent and safe."

What constitutes "safe" rock? I cite The Kinks, and most major beat groups, as "safe" examples of great rock. Yet later I wind up arguing Cornwell and Burnel's cause by wondering whether in these austere times the emergence of a "new Rolling Stones" might not be a more real threat to social stability than the originals were in their heyday.

(In fact, while it may be a little complacent of me to point it out, the so-called rock revolution – which is nowadays sneered at as a failure – did, undeniably, play some kind of role in setting the social climate for, say, the legalisation of homosexuality and abortion, the end of the American presence in Vietnam, Watergate, and most non-economical leftward developments of the past 10 years, from the SLA to Women's Lib.)

Another new wave litany: "There's nothing worse than apathy or smugness at a rock gig."

This from Burnel, who does most of the talking in his jumpy, boarding school voice. Cornell, who sits, head bowed, between the two of us, occasionally fixes me quizzically and chucks in some remark.

"People are often surprised at the stances we take at gigs," he tells me. "We only take a stance because it's better than taking no stance at all. You put over the music in the best way possible," says Burnel. "So you use psychology. And that relies on the context and the situation.

"Someone told me they saw Johnny Rotten and he looked bored, and the second time he looked bored, and the fourth time, and by the fifth time they were bored because it was the same… a stereotype. We're much more organic than that."

"I think that whole new scene's being manipulated," Cornwell suddenly breaks in from nowhere.

By Malcolm?

"And other people too, who've got financial interests in it. They're manipulating the kids away from what they really, y'know…"

To what extent does your audience clash or mix with theirs?

"There's a certain amount of overlap," Hugh reckons, "but we don't attract the hard-core manipulated people…."

I ask why The Stranglers are sneered at in those circles.

"For not digging Iggy and the Stooges and telling them so," erupts Burnel. "And, er, not digging really on plastic and not going down King's Road to the Roebuck and the Sex shop. That's why we've been ignored a lot. We've been slated by the hip scene, only because we don't wanna be into that trip."

Seems to me these guys have no idea what it is to be really ignored. Later on Burnel tells me: "Maybe we're not popular because we don't sing about pleasant little meadows and flowers and 'I love you'," which is either bare-faced double talk or a complete misunderstanding of the current status quo. A realistic rephrasing would be: "maybe we are so popular because…"

The Stranglers, standing to one side within the punk explosion, can actually reap the benefits of the scene without forgoing their independence? "By the end of next week there's going to be 20 new punk bands," mocks Burnel. "And they're all going to be doing the same thing. It's just gonna be like a big melee… and we're going to come out from underneath. Because there's no direction to a lot of them; the only direction is a commercial one, which is very successful."

> "We're due for tyranny. People laugh, but I think it could happen"

Cornwell mulls this over to himself while Burnel and I discuss Steve Miller as a brief diversion, then suddenly gives me his opinion when I turn Burnel back to the Pistols, Clash and Damned.

"Well, they rely a lot on their connections with the mental sort of agoraphobia of young kids. So I think they're relying very little upon their music; they're relying much more on the way

The Stranglers: (l–r) Jean-Jacques Burnel, Jet Black, Dave Greenfield ang Hugh Cornwell

GETTY

that they're identifiable with their audiences. I think they've been manipulated."

The bands or the audience, it's not clear. I put it to him that in a way the kids may have been manipulated into that agoraphobia anyway.

"You reckon? You don't think there's any there anyway just because of disillusionment, a sign of the times?"

Having suggested it, I'm actually in no position to hazard any kind of guess as to whether I'm right or wrong – except that discontent rarely breeds unprompted. But I can suggest that had many of the new bands' current audience seen them cold a year ago, their instant reaction might well have been that it was absolute crap.

"Oh sure," Jean-Jacques agrees. "The fact that they play badly and people say, 'So what?' That's inverted snobbery, isn't it?"

"I reckon a lot of them suffer from bad musical systems," says Cornwell. "Y'know, the PA's terrible and it just comes out as a din. Once they get their musical systems together, then you'll be able to really judge if they're doing anything."

I suggest that maybe people don't pick up on rebels – they have to be told: this is a rebel for you. Burnel agrees and cites James Dean as an example of this. "We needed heroes, so pick one out." (Certainly it's amusing to think of the number of people who stuck pix of Dean on their walls during the great 20th Anniversary media madness.

"It's the same with the music scene at the moment," opines Burnel. "They're picking out old heroes because at the moment they're still trying to get new heroes together. That's why Iggy… Iggy Bombom is becoming a cult figure.

"The thing is, there aren't any heroes. Politically there are no heroes either; that's why everything's going round in circles, very directionless."

> "Rotten's too stupid to be aware of anything larger than himself"

ALTHOUGH THE STRANGLERS play totally different music from most punk bands, they are, as I've said, similar (if more articulate) in their attitude – much of it, I suspect, received from rock critics' post-Velvets punk intellectualisations.

Maybe they can shed a light on the Nazi fetishism that had crept in here somehow. "Well, it's just 'cos that is the only thing around, the only vibe, that is united and with a certain direction," Hugh reckons. "People want direction."

"Everyone is paranoid," Jean tells me fervently. "There's decay everywhere. We've always lived with the assumption that things were getting better and better materially, progress all the time, and suddenly it's like, you hear every day there's a crisis. Things being laid off, people are not working.

"Everything's coming to a grinding halt," he goes on, while I start moving toward the door to nip out to Selfridges for a gas mask. "No one sees any heroes. The politicians have lost their credibility; political philosophies are no longer relevant. Sure, they want something dynamic."

Those sort of paranoid fantasises used to entice me when I was a speed-freak, but I can't work myself into a terror these days. Still, I suggest the one about the Stones not being so dangerous, as they arrived in comparatively affluent times. The Stranglers agree. I ask if they reckon Johnny Rotten is going to be subsumed into the system in the way that Mick Jagger became tolerated as our kind of ambassador of Swingin' London freakiness.

"Definitely," Burnel asserts. "Because he's too stupid to be aware of anything larger than himself. To get to that powerful position – because rock is probably the most powerful medium in the world for young people – to get to that position, I think Rotten is too stupid, having talked to him, to be aware of anything broader than that. He's not coherent enough to sacrifice present gain for future gain."

"I feel really sorry for him," Cornwell states drily, "because he's paranoid about what he's put himself in. And he's got to maintain this stance to the sacrifice of his own head. If you ever try and talk to him you can't get any sort of, you can't rap to him about, like, what the problems are. He's always wanting to keep it going. I feel very sorry for him, because he's a paranoid clown."

They don't consider the Pistols' EMI contract a sell-out, though they do say the Sex Pistols lost credibility through it and by, for instance, staying in first-class hotels when, according to Cornwell, they had said they'd never do that. Even so, The Stranglers are reluctant to admit the future probably holds similar luxuries for them, and labour the fact that they doss around. Y'know, real and street… and boring.

Returning to Nazi fetishism, Jean tells me it's a symptom of something deeper, the country being weaker than at any time since Cromwell (hey, you can tell which one taught history). He saw *Cabaret* recently and reckons it parallels contemporary Britain.

"I think whether you're into it or not, it's gonna happen. You know Plato's theory that, um, democracy leads to oligarchy, oligarchy leads to aristocracy, and aristocracy leads to tyranny, or… there's definite progressions, systems, and they always recycle. Well, I think democracy has totally collapsed, it's lost all its credibility. So we're due for tyranny. People laugh at that, because England is the last place for that, but I really think it could happen."

But you are at the centre of that scene, more or less, with the kids that wear Nazi emblems. Obviously little boys like Eater just see it as a pretty pattern on their trousers, but do you think some of these kids are really right wing politically?

"No," says Jean. "They're not politically right wing but they're politically ripe, I reckon. Until there's another symbol to replace the swastika, or another ideal, they're gonna stick to that one. It's gotta be as strong as that… it's gotta be seen to be as strong as that, as energetic as that.

"But it'll happen within the next 10 years. Very strange things are happening, very strange undercurrents," he adds darkly, "and they're getting louder and louder."

Yes, but what I want is your attitude to it. As one of the leading bands, what would your influence be on the way these kids think?

Cornwell: "Well, they want to belong to something."

Burnel: "They want a change; they want to believe in something. And that is a very strong image. They definitely don't wanna be associated with leftist things; there aren't any leftist heroes really…"

Tell that to the Russians, Chinese, Cubans and Yugoslavs…

"They're not street-level heroes; they're all intellectuals, the leftist ones."

Come again?

"Leftist heroes were very much middle-class heroes. They want warrior heroes…"

We wander up this blind alley a while, till I realise I still haven't got a straight answer.

You're very good at doom-mongering, Jean, but which side of the barricades do you line up? He's boasting about his musical sophistication being "another weapon" in his "armoury", but… do you consider yourselves to have any sort of political message beyond, er, self-liberation?

"Well, yes," he says. Then, after we've been talking little except politics for nearly an hour, he has the nerve to tell me: "But this is neither the time nor place to get into it."

Totally bemused, I try to coerce them by suggesting that if they don't state their position themselves, they leave it up to people to make up their own minds – and with all this gush about the imminent fascist apocalypse, well…

"But we're not associating ourselves with any of the other bands," Burnel protests. "We're right out on a limb musically and philosophically…"

"Hey, that sounds a really heavy work, doesn't it?" muses the guy who's been reciting Plato.

A STRANGE INTERVIEW. THE Stranglers are possibly the most self-righteous interviewees I've met, modishly arrogant about their musical worth, and convinced they have a part to play in a social upheaval they maybe paranoiacally see evidenced in the physical trapping of an in-crowd whom, paradoxically, they sneer at for being trend followers. Yet when it comes to the crunch, for all their onstage aggression, they won't commit themselves.

They are recording live at the Nashville on December 10, and they're going into a studio at the end of the month to record a single, either "Go Buddy Go" or more likely "Grip". The single's out late January and an album, hopefully, in February.

I'm not enamoured of their spoken pronouncements, but make no mistake about it, these guys are great musicians who are going to make records that will be played till they wear out. And as The Stranglers are well aware, that means power. *Phil McNeill* •

GAI TERRELL / GETTY

The Eagles on stage in 1976, following the departure of Bernie Leadon, one of the four founders of the group

“Something has been corrupted”

As mellow as they appear to be, the EAGLES have a new album which explores a more satirical side. “We have a love-hate relationship with California,” says Glenn Frey. “Like anything you love, you’re capable of hating it, too.”

— MELODY MAKER DECEMBER 11 —

WHAT'S IT LIKE, I asked, being an Eagle? Glenn Frey, a perpetual talker, paused to consider the question and the silence lasted almost a minute. "Oh well… it's not unlike anything I've done all my life. It's not unlike being in any other band, but the world around me seems to change its perspective on me as much as I change my perspective on it. So what it is really… it's a pain in the ass."

Frey and Don Henley collapsed into laughter.

"What he means by that," said Henley, attempting to introduce an element of seriousness into an interview that had already lasted well over an hour, "is that especially over the past year we have felt a tremendous amount of pressure. It's almost harder once you get to the top of the mountain than it is climbing it. It's hard to stay up there and maintain it.

"I admire the Stones, no matter what I think about their music, because they've stuck there. I admire Paul Simon and The Who simply because they've stuck around and not burned themselves out. It's hard because you lose a lot of friends along the way."

"Being an Eagle can be a handicap," said Frey, "but only because of what other people tend to think. Your life is not your own any more, but that's a concession I'm willing to make."

"But we asked for it," added Henley.

The Beverly Hills Hotel sits elegantly at the junction of Sunset Boulevard and Beverly Drive, its pink rococo walls almost camouflaged by the pale-green palm trees that have been planted in endless rows along the grassy sidewalks of this most sumptuous Los Angelean suburb.

Stories concerning the hotel are legendary, principally because it has, over the years, housed rich and famous guests whose behaviour has made Hollywood synonymous with decadence. Nonetheless it is a discreet establishment: if the bellhops know anything they keep their lips sealed and conversations in the Polo Room Bar are deflected by the walls that surround the choice booths.

The hotel itself is probably not the one directly referred to by the Eagles in the title track of their new album *Hotel California*, though the ambience of the establishment is neatly reflected in the song's lyrics. Either way, it was the location chosen by Glenn Frey and Don Henley for one of their rare interviews last week.

Frey and Henley, the two main vocalists in the group, are the perennial spokesmen for the band, whose music has consistently reflected the sound of California in the '70s as much as The Beach Boys represented the Golden State in the '60s.

The other longest-serving member of the band, Nebraskan bass player Randy Meisner, whose soaring falsetto graces such tracks as "Take It To The Limit", is a shy, retiring man who rushes home to his wife and three children whenever the group have a free moment.

Which isn't very often these days. Throughout 1976 the Eagles have toured the US almost constantly, finally consolidating their position as one of the top few (regularly working) bands in the country.

Their year began on a shaky note with Bernie Leadon's departure and the simultaneous arrival of Joe Walsh, a partnership that seemed, on paper, to be a curious mixture of rock and harmony. It's worked, though, and the Eagles are now bigger than ever.

Their Greatest Hits album has notched up sales in the region of five million copies and, at the same time, introduced the band to a whole new audience. Joe Walsh, who doubtless had a following of his own, has probably done the same thing.

Work on *Hotel California* began in March and ended in October. The sessions were crammed into spare days when the band wasn't playing live and, like all their albums, it reflects the cautious approach that the band have towards all their albums.

It seems, at times, as if all the individual words and notes, all the intricate little harmonies and all the little background guitar chops, are carefully considered before insertion. Sometimes the results are almost too good to be true, but usually they produce the best floating harmonies, effortlessly easy-going music, since The Everly Brothers.

THE NEW ALBUM is based loosely around a concept in that the State of California represents a hotel whose guests have somehow reached the end of the day; somewhat vaguely it's supposed to chronicle the decaying morals of the '70s. Frey and Henley don't enjoy explaining the meaning, which is far less obvious than the western concept of *Desperado*, their second album.

Musically it features more extremes: the lusher cuts are as mellow as the Eagles have ever been, even to the point where one track is reprised as an instrumental with only a string section playing, while the uptempo material bounces along with a harshness that must have come from Joe Walsh. Surprisingly, Walsh's only composer credit is a slow song he wrote some time ago with Joe Vitale, onetime drummer in Walsh's defunct Barnstorm band.

"A lot of the music on this album came very easy to us," said Frey, sipping coffee in a bungalow at the Beverly Hills Hotel last week. "We worked up three of the songs for the October tour that we played and found them easy to do on stage.

"We have been playing the title track, 'Wasted Time' and 'New Kid In Town', but it's difficult to do new tunes on stage. If the people haven't heard them on the radio then they just don't pay that much attention. There has to be a repetition factor for some reason.

"When we start touring again in March the album will have been out two months or so, and by that time we'll be playing it all or most of it."

> "Joe's own songs proved to be showstoppers in the set"

Although it's been almost a year and a half since the group's last studio album, *One Of These Nights*, they didn't have the usual wealth of spare material that most bands accumulate. "We hardly ever do," said Henley. "We can usually tell when we start a song that if we get past an eighth of the way into finishing it, it'll be worth doing. If we don't get that far then we know it won't be worth finishing.

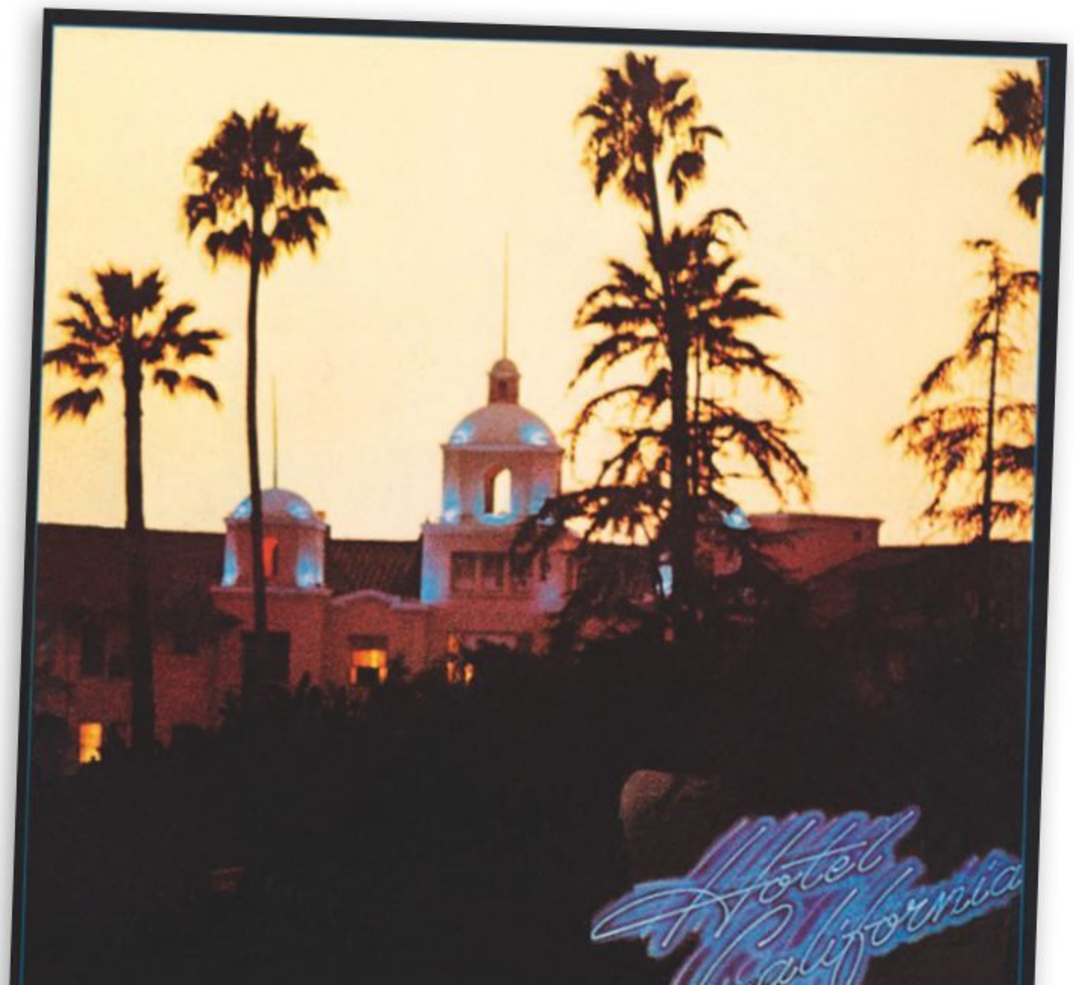
"The ones that get finished wind up on the record. I know some people write a lot of tunes, pick the best and throw the rest away, but with us they never reach that far. We do save ideas, though, especially ballads. We also try to balance an album, because we believe it's a work of art and it should have contrast and continuity at the same time."

"The rock'n'roll on this album came from Felder," said Frey, who always refers to the band's second guitarist by his surname as if to differentiate between him and Henley. "Strangely enough, Joe wrote a ballad, but me and Joe and Don here collaborated on one track together. I think Joe was saving his song because he knew something like his joining the Eagles was coming up."

The circumstances surrounding Walsh's entry into the group seemed to be almost too convenient to be true. Walsh, as a solo artist, was and is managed by Irving Azoff, who has run the Eagles since he quit as an employee of the Geffen-Roberts management team who handled the affairs of Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young at one time.

When Bernie Leadon quit the group, Walsh was between bands, so his baptism as an Eagle was a natural business move even if some sceptics doubted his musical compatibility.

"We actually knew him some time before he joined," said Frey. "Even while Bernie was still in the band we had a feeling that he might be a part of



The *Hotel California* Eagles lineup: (l–r) Don Felder, Don Henley, Joe Walsh, Glenn Frey and Randy Meisner

us before long. We had an indication a year and a half before Bernie left that he was planning to leave – or at least he wasn't going to stay with us for the duration. The duration as we saw it was a much longer period of time than he wanted it to be.

"We had talked to Joe as early as the beginning of 1975 and his attitude was that… 'If it ever happens, give me a call.' He'd spent a lot of time in his solo ballpark, but he also knew what it was like to be in a band. So we more or less knew which way things were going to go and it was more or less a matter of time. Even as far back as the last time we were in England, which was that Elton John concert, we knew something was going to happen, although we didn't want to talk about it."

"We knew for two years that Bernie wasn't happy with the road," said Henley. "He'd been doing it longer than the rest of us. He'd been in the Burrito Brothers, remember, and his road map started five or six years before we began travelling at all.

"Besides, Joe was getting tired of being the leader of a group and feeling that he just wanted to be in a group for a change. He was to be a participant rather than a chief who hired and fired people. Writing all the songs gets to be a big burden on any solo artist."

"There was never any question of trying anybody else," said Frey. "We never made any other calls because there really wasn't anybody else who could join our band, and we wanted to keep it a five-piece group instead of going back down to four again.

"We like the advantages of a five-piece band. When we got Felder it allowed me to just play rhythm guitar and still there were two guitar players, so we could have two lead guitars playing with each other, yet there is still a rhythm instrument playing with the bass and drums."

According to Henley, Walsh fitted into the band much easier than doubters suggested: "Most of the media suggested he wouldn't fit because we were a mellower band than anything he'd done before, but I read every review of our last tour and they all said how he didn't clutter or get in the way of our music and how well we played his music.

"On stage we did 'Rocky Mountain Way' and 'Funk #49' and 'Turn To Stone'. He's capable of playing the stuff we do and we're capable of playing his music. Sure he introduced some harder guitar playing, even though he didn't put it on this album in the way of songwriting, but I think he and Felder played some killer guitar for us all. To me it's like Duane Allman and Eric Clapton together."

Frey agreed. "Those boys [Felder and Walsh] really get on well together, which didn't happen with Bernie and Felder."

"Bernie had bluegrass roots," continued Henley. "He'd never really messed with rock'n'roll guitar, and he never really understood how to get that dirty rock'n'roll sound. He was just not schooled or programmed in that area. We also knew that Joe was so controlled that he could play the ballads with no problem at all and a lot of people doubted that.

"Also Felder can play the banjo and a mean mandolin, so we didn't lose anything in that area when Bernie left."

THE EAGLES' LAST concert with Leadon was in the fall of 1975 in front of 55,000 fans at Anaheim Stadium in California. Ten days later, the remaining four Eagles were rehearsing with Walsh for a tour of Australia and New Zealand and Japan.

"We didn't want any rumours to get around that Bernie had left and that was it for the Eagles," said Frey. "We wanted it out quickly that Bernie had been replaced by Joe and the group were on their way to New Zealand. Even so there were rumours that Joe wasn't staying with us and that the group was going to split up.

"Joe's contract with ABC had expired and Irving Azoff was shopping around the labels to get him another solo deal. First there was talk of Columbia, then staying with ABC and he finally wound up with Asylum, but because he was shopping for a solo deal people construed it as meaning that he couldn't have been interested in recording with the Eagles and that this was a short-term thing. All that was bullshit."

"The band is his first priority," said Henley. "I don't think he cares if he ever makes another solo album."

According to Frey, American audiences were quick to accept the new-look Eagles. "I received one letter from someone who wanted the old Eagles," he said. "He wanted those mellow Eagles."

"And that," said Henley, "was before he'd even heard the show with Joe in it. It said something like… 'How can you let Joe Walsh fuck up your harmonies', but that was before they'd even given us a chance. I don't know whether we ever wrote him back or not, but we don't need those kind of people anyway.

"Joe's own songs proved to be showstoppers in the set, and that was a great change for me. In fact they saved me, because we've been playing 'Witchy Woman' and that stuff since 1972, and to do new songs was like a shot in the arm for us. We can play that kind of material and always have been able to."

"We were kind of reticent to play that music unless we could make it sound great," said Frey. "We didn't want to make a limp-wristed attempt, because we didn't have the right kind of guitar players before. We've been working on getting the right guitar lineup for the last three years and now we feel we've got it."

"We're not about to change direction, though," said Henley. "We'll be keeping the best of the old style and not abandoning country rock or whatever you like to call it. We just want to stretch things out a little bit. »

GETTY

Joe Walsh in 1976: the road ahead will involve both a *Rocky Mountain Way* and *Life In The Fast Lane*

On this album we get into R&B a little bit, which was something that we began on *On The Border* and developed further on *One Of These Nights*. But on the tour there was a whole load of kids who were yelling for Joe, and I think there was probably a whole load of them who'd never heard his material either. It was like new songs for them."

Leadon, meanwhile, has had an easy year, though he does have plans to record a solo album in the new year. Glyn Johns, who produced the first two Eagles albums, will be producing the record in a studio that Leadon has built in his home.

"We always knew that he wouldn't just retire completely," said Henley. "He just wanted to do things at his own pace while we were caught up in a momentum and had to take it to the limit, if you'll pardon the expression."

Neither Frey nor Henley expected their Greatest Hits album to do as well as it did. "I never expected it to do five million," said Frey with genuine disbelief. "The numbers this year are staggering, and I try not to look at them any more. It's a different kind of person that buys Greatest Hits albums… people who buy them for gifts for children and not the kind who buy regular albums. I think you reach more people with them… you reach the over-25s and the under-15s a lot."

Henley seemed vaguely embarrassed by the success of the record. "Let us say that we aren't really advocates of Greatest Hits albums," he said. "They are more or less a ploy by the record company to get free sales. They don't have to spend any money to make them and they get a lot of money back. We got a couple of hate letters after the Greatest Hits album came out that said we were selling out… they said that us and Steve Miller were the last bands who were holding off selling out this way.

"But we didn't have anything to do with it. The record company put it out and we couldn't stop them. We had a say in picking the tracks, sequencing them and doing the graphics."

"I must say," said Frey, "that an eagle's skull which appeared on the sleeve is not very good karma in terms of the American Indian. By putting this shiny eagle's skull on the album we felt like we knew where the Greatest Hits thing was at."

"That was what we looked like after writing all those songs," quipped Henley. "But another reason why I didn't feel bad about putting a Greatest Hits album out was that it definitely marked the end of a phase for us. It marked the end of five years, and this new album opens up a whole new era for us. Ever since 'Best Of My Love' kicked off a whole big thing for us, moving us from the top 90 per cent of bands in America to the top 10 per cent, we've been running and I never had time to stop and think about how well the Greatest Hits record did. We just wanted to stay busy."

A pattern, coincidence perhaps, seems to be emerging with the release of *Hotel California*. The Eagles' first album contained three hit singles – "Take It Easy", "Witchy Woman" and "Peaceful Easy Feeling" – and was followed by a concept album, *Desperado*; the *One Of These Nights* album contained three hit singles – the title track, "Lyin' Eyes" and "Take It To The Limit" – and is followed by their second concept approach.

"Like *Desperado* it didn't necessarily start out to be a concept album but it became one after all," said Henley. "It's a more urbane version of *Desperado* inasmuch as the symbolism isn't set in the past but is here and now."

"We had all those hit singles off *One Of These Nights* and that gives you more room to breathe and make an album more like the kind of album we really want to make," said Frey. "We took some artistic liberties with the new record which we hadn't taken before, and part of it was because we felt a slight ease of pressure because the last album had done so damn well."

"Hit singles are no crime," said Henley. "Some people view them to be something that can't be good artistically, and that's total nonsense as far as I'm concerned. Paul Simon has hit singles, Bob Dylan has hit singles, Neil Young has hit singles, and The Beatles had lots of hit singles.

"The way the record business is structured these days… if you don't have singles you can forget it. You can work for 10 years making eclectic and artistic underground albums and maybe you'll get the recognition you deserve when you're half-dead.

"But even the FM stations here are playing singles just to stay in business. Admittedly there's a lot of fucking rubbish in the singles charts. I won't mention any names, though we all know who they are, so I think

PETER SHERMAN / GETTY

AM needs a shot in the arm and I am glad that we can contribute something that I consider quality music to the AM airwaves. God knows… it needs something.

"There'll be some singles off the new album, but they'll be long songs. None of the tracks is much under five minutes long, but we're going to release a double-sided single of 'New Kid In Town' and 'Victim Of Love'."

A **HAMMOND ORGAN MAKES** its first appearance on an Eagles album in *Hotel California*, and Walsh was also brought in on various synthesizers, a talent which came as a bonus surprise to the rest of the band. Extra keyboard instruments are now accompanying the Eagles on the road.

"We have to beef up the act to stay in there," said Henley. "We don't want to beef it up with flash and meaningless theatrics like funny clothes and flashlights, or smokebombs or any crap like that. The group has to keep growing musically on stage, even though we do have to keep playing old material.

"When Joe arrived, the older songs began sounding different. I think we were tighter and less cluttered on stage. I can still sing 'Witchy Woman' as inspired as the first time I ever sang it, because people want to hear it, and that's enough for me. Sure I can get tired of it after I've been out on the road for three weeks, but each night seems to bring out a little more inspiration in any particular song."

"For me this summer it was Joe's stuff that excited me," said Frey. "It was good to know that after three more Eagles songs we were going to do one of Joe's. And, of course, the new stuff is always more interesting. It was good to see if we could pull off 'Hotel California' and 'Wasted Time', to see if we could make them happen and make the audience dig new tunes.

"I guess 'Take It To The Limit' as well. Randy [Meisner] gets a standing ovation whenever he hits the high notes, and sometimes the applause goes on for two or three minutes.

"In the last year and a half Randy has really found himself as a vocalist. 'Take It To The Limit' and 'Too Many Hands' were sung with so much brilliance on the record that he is a changed singer in the solo vocalist category. In the group he's always been phenomenal," said Frey.

"Randy has always been the ribbon on our package. He provides all the bottom and the top, but we have to find the right song for his high voice and that usually means it must be in the ballad category. He delivers on such high intensity too… he even sounds a little like Gene Pitney."

"He's kind of a quiet, shy guy with a family, and he's also been doing it longer than we have," said Henley. "He was in a band called The Poor out here in 1968 and then in Poco, and he doesn't care about interviews and so forth. As far as he's concerned he'll just let Glenn and me shoot off our mouths and make fools of ourselves. He does his job and goes home to Nebraska when it's done."

"We've come to learn that we are different people," said Frey. "We learned through the experience of this group that you can't try to change people to the way you want them to be. Randy is a very dedicated musician and when he goes home gets to work on new ideas for the next album in a little studio he has built. Felder lives here in Malibu and he stays there in his own studio recording like a madman.

"These things are going on all the time in this group. We have been together almost non-stop for the past 11 months."

"And that's much too much togetherness," said Henley. "When we do get away we like to get away properly. We all have ladies and other friends, and this year we've neglected our relationships with other musicians like Jackson Browne, JD Souther, Linda Ronstadt and other people we would like to hang out with and write songs with a little more. In the next two or three months we'd like to reopen all those doors and think about our next album.

"John David had a great deal to do with *Hotel California*, and had Jackson Browne not been in the studio making *The Pretender*, I'm sure that he would have been involved as well. JD helped us do 'New Kid In Town' and he helped us finish 'Victim Of Love', too."

"Bill Szymczyk [the band's producer] was also very instrumental in helping us with the musical side of this album," said Frey. "He's always influenced us in the R&B direction and in the rock'n'roll side. I think that the recording technique that we developed and perfected by the time we got to *One Of These Nights* reached a conceptual peak here."

Although it appears that, as almost always, the band are writing about the State of California, Henley insists that it is just a microcosm for the rest of the country. "It's the Bicentennial Year, and this is our Bicentennial statement," he said.

"It's kind of about the demise of the '60s and the decadence and escapism we are experiencing in the '70s. It's also about the kind of limbo we're experiencing in the music business while we're waiting for the next big surge of inspiration, like The Beatles or whatever.

"It's an attempt to shake people out of the apathy they are going through, and also a comment on the destruction of the air and the planet and the ecology. I thank California represents all that because it is the vanguard of America, the farthest place you can go."

"We've often been criticised by people on the East Coast for marketing the Southern California lifestyle… the beautiful girls, the houses in the hills, the footloose people and all that kind of thing, but I think people have spoken too soon on that. We think that this album represents the whole world, not just California, as something elegant which has been corrupted," said Frey.

"This used to be a beautiful place and it still is fairly attractive, but America used to be too before we came over here and fucked it up," said Henley. "We have a love-hate relationship with California. Like anything you love, you're capable of hating it, too. On this album we're simply holding California up as an example.

"I wouldn't live anywhere else, though. I wouldn't run away, I'd rather stand here and fight. The song 'Hollywood Waltz' was about people who came here and corrupted it, then moved on somewhere else, but we're not doing that.

> "On this album we're simply holding California up as an example"

"This place has given us all we've got because we became successful here and we're proud of it, but people from the East Coast have really nailed us to the wall for something that they think we represent. I think it's really a personal vendetta rather than a criticism of the music."

Current plans are for the Eagles to play two dates in December – shows they had to cancel earlier this year because of recording commitments – and then take three months off before a European tour in April. "There needs to be a period of input after all the output," said Henley.

"Then we're going to Europe to play various countries we haven't played before," said Frey. "We've never played in Germany and never played in France, so that needs to be done. We're also planning to play in Scotland this time around. The only time we ever did that before was with Neil Young. The last time we went to London was really the only time I could enjoy it properly."

"We work so much because it's therapeutic," he added. "Sometimes it's easier to be the underdog. We have to keep changing our goals so much now. What we have to look for, what I'm doing to keep me going, is to try and get better each time. I try to make my singing a little better, and my music a little better. At this point it's either grow or stagnate, and we won't do that." *Chris Charlesworth* •

Where Eagles dare...

The Eagles, whose 'Greatest

RAY STEVENSON

On board the Anarchy Tour bus, December 1976: (front, l–r) Mick Jones, Johnny Rotten, Billy Rath (Heartbreakers bassist), Paul Simonon and Joe Strummer. At the back, Johnny Thunders sits next to photographer/tour manager Leee Black Childers (blond hair)

“We feel like prisoners”

The SEX PISTOLS’ appearance on TV has caused uproar. Radio stations won’t play their single, local councillors are banning concerts, and the band are suing. MM reports the fallout.

PUNK STORM GR

— MM DECEMBER 11 —

THE SEX PISTOLS' headlining British tour has been reduced to ruins. Just six dates from the original 19 are left following mass action by local councils and hall managements across the country. Pistols manager Malcolm McLaren plans to take legal action against everyone involved with the band's cancelled dates and claims that the Musicians' Union support him and the Pistols.

A spokesman for the Union, however, commented: "We haven't had an opportunity to assess the situation. The Sex Pistols wouldn't be regarded as different to any other band coming to us with a problem. If we felt there was a legitimate complaint we would take it up."

Dissent has broken out on the tour itself. Said McLaren: "The Clash and the Heartbreakers are behind us but we are not in sympathy with The Damned and we will ask them to leave the tour after the show at Leeds Polytechnic."

McLaren said The Damned considered playing at Derby Kings Hall on Saturday when the Pistols were refused permission to play by local councillors. "We were disgusted by this and so they will have to get off the tour."

McLaren has arranged new dates for the tour and told *MM*: "There is no way we are going to be prevented from playing in Britain. This is pure censorship and a complete denial of the principle of free speech."

Radio stations across the country are banning the Sex Pistols' debut single "Anarchy In The UK" and one major record store chain is considering this week whether they should refuse to stock the record.

One radio station was swamped with phone calls after playing the single and inviting listeners' comments. But sales of the record have rocketed in some parts of the country.

One record retailer in Manchester claimed he could have sold as many records as EMI could have supplied and blamed his lack of stock on the lightning strike by workers at EMI's pressing plant on Friday after the Pistols' controversial appearance on Thames Television.

Another punk band, The Vibrators, claim they have suffered a backlash because of people associating their music with that of the Pistols. Three of their British dates have been cancelled and a full European tour scrapped.

In Glasgow, where the Pistols were due to play the Apollo on December 15, the local council revoked the theatre's entertainment licence for just that night. Said Councillor Robert Grey, explaining the unprecedented move: "This group attracts a young element and I honestly believe we have got enough problems in Glasgow without importing yobbos."

Local councils in Derby, Newcastle, Liverpool, Bristol, Sheffield, Guildford and Birmingham all banned the Pistols from playing in their towns.

This was an unprecedented decision for Sheffield Council since they have never banned any rock group from the City Hall before now. Newcastle Councillor Arthur Stabler said: "It was decided to cancel the concert in the interests of protecting the children. We can control what happens at the City Hall but not what happens on the stage."

In Derby on Saturday the Pistols kept a 15-strong council delegation waiting for two hours at the King's Hall. The band had agreed to stage a special preview concert so that councillors could judge whether the show should go ahead or not.

The Pistols stayed in their hotel as the councillors waited, refusing to travel with a waiting police motorcade into the centre of the town. Eventually the council delegation conferred in secret at the hall and Councillor Leslie Shipley, leader of the delegation, then announced the concert was off.

He said the council was disgusted by the Pistols' lack of manners in making them wait at King's Hall for nothing – and added: "I have personally spoken to the manager of the group and he told me that they will not perform before the council unless we come here this evening and see the whole of the show.

"This we are not prepared to do. We have bent over backwards to put on this rehearsal, but in fairness to the group, the promoter and the public, the committee have decided that the Sex Pistols will not perform here tonight."

He said the rest of the package – The Clash, The Damned and The Heartbreakers – could play if they wished. The Clash and The Heartbreakers refused.

The Damned, staying at a different hotel, considered their response and, says *MM* reporter Caroline Coon, it was rumoured among the touring party that The Damned would play.

The Damned's Dave Vanian announced: "Although we do not align ourselves with the Pistols' political position we sympathise; but we are going to do all the gigs we can and any others that come along."

Said manager McLaren: "We were disgusted by this statement and we feel that The Damned have no place on this tour."

> "We'll have to have a special listen to the single to see if it is offensive"

The original opening date of the tour was to have been Norwich University on Friday, but this date was cancelled by the university authorities. The vice-chancellor, Frank Thistlethwaite, met two members of the Students' Union social committee on the morning of the show and, according to an SU spokesman, "took it upon himself to force the union to cancel the punk package concert.

"Since the university own the hall, they are legally entitled to do this by simple refusing to allow the union use of the hall. We wish it to be known that we are disgusted with the manner in which this decision was taken."

Said a spokesman for the authorities: "Because of the group's reported views on violence we felt there was a possible threat to personal safety if the concert had gone ahead."

At press time the Students' Union reported they were planning to rearrange the concert despite the university's views.

Two more dates disappeared because the owners of the venues, Rank Leisure Services, refused to be associated with the Pistols. Rank information officer Chris Moore told *MM*: "The date at Cardiff Top Rank on December 14 was never really on. We had signed no contracts with anyone connected with the Sex Pistols for that date.

"As for Bournemouth Village Bowl on December 7, the Sex Pistols' appearance on TV brought that to a head. We were concerned about the security aspect of it all. We were certainly not keen to be associated with a band of this sort."

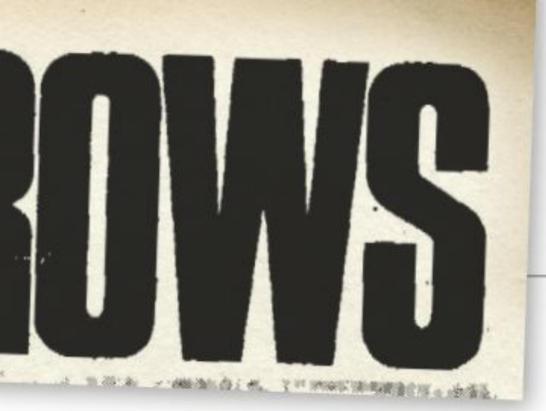
Moore added that the question of future Sex Pistols concerts had been discussed and said the company wouldn't be interested in booking them if they could not prove they had changed themselves from the current format.

The only dates remaining from the tour by press time were Leeds Polytechnic on Monday this week, Manchester on Thursday, Dundee Caird Hall (December 16). Plymouth Woods Centre (21) and London Roxy Theatre (26).

Dates were added at Leeds Polytechnic – a second booking –

"The whole thing is ridiculous": Johnny Rotten with the Pistols at Leeds Polytechnic, December 6, 1976

EVENING STANDARD / GETTY



on Wednesday, Liverpool's Eric's (December 12), Caerphilly Castle Cinema (14), Maidenhead Skindles (18), Birmingham Bingley Hall (20), Paignton Penelope's (22) and Plymouth Woods Centre, another repeat booking (23).

Radio One is refusing to play the "Anarchy In UK" single during its daytime programmes, but denies that its decision was prompted by the controversy surrounding the Pistols. Said a spokesman: "The record has been played by John Peel as a new spin on his late-night programme, which has always featured new bands of interest."

Peel will be devoting his Radio One show this coming Friday to punk rock, with The Damned making their BBC debut and records by the Pistols, Australian punks The Saints and New York punks Television.

Producer John Walters told *MM*: "It's not meant to be a history of punk, but a presentation of the music after all the words about the sociology of the players. It's not like the Beeb jumping on the punk bandwagon, but just some examples of what the controversial artists sound like."

But in Sheffield the local commercial station, Radio Hallam, has banned the Pistols' single. DJ Colin Slade told the *MM*: "It was played last week during the lunch show and then we threw the phones open to the listeners. We got 80 calls through our jammed switchboard in less than 20 minutes, and only four people said they liked it. The rest thought it was terrible. We decided this was a pretty clear mandate from our audience, and so the record is not being played."

In Manchester, Piccadilly Radio say the record is not on their playlist, and the same goes for Capital Radio in London and BRMB in Birmingham.

IN RECORD SHOPS across the country, sales of the single rocketed after the Pistols' TV appearance. One retailer in Cambridge said: "People who would never normally be seen in our shop have been coming in and asking for the single. They've been buying because of curiosity value and because of the Pistols' appearance on television."

Another retailer in Manchester told *MM* he sold every record he had in stock. "We could have sold plenty more but EMI didn't have any more in stock, which was a great shame from our point of view."

A spokesman for EMI said that sales were very healthy but refused to give figures.

"That's not our policy. But let me just say it was doing fine before that television programme, but it's doing fine now."

EMI's pressing plant in Hayes was hit by a lightning strike on Friday. Women on two shifts refused to pack the Sex Pistols single in protest over their television appearance. They handled other records. The problem was resolved and the plant was back to full production on Saturday.

A spokesman for EMI said: "We can appreciate what these ladies were upset about and I won't suggest that they were exactly delighted to have to go back and carry on packing the record. EMI itself does not condone the use of bad language, but there is no question of action being taken against the Sex Pistols."

The spokesman denied suggestions that directors of EMI were attempting to force the recording division to revoke the band's contract. "That's totally out of the question. Their contract is signed and that's all there is to it."

Boots are currently considering whether to continue stocking the Pistols single. Said a spokesman: "Some of our branches have copies of the single, but I think we will need to have a special listen to the single to see whether it is offensive before deciding on whether to continue selling it."

Pistols singer Johnny Rotten, speaking to *MM* at his hotel in Leeds, commented: "The whole thing is ridiculous. I don't see why councillors should dictate to people what kids go out and listen to any night.

"It's up to the kids who work and pay taxes just like anyone else to decide what they want to do. I'm just sick of the whole thing. We feel like a bunch of prisoners."

STOP PRESS: Sex Pistols London concert at Roxy Theatre on Boxing Day cancelled.

Sir John Read, chairman of EMI, said at the company's AGM on Tuesday that they are considering "very carefully whether to release any more Sex Pistols records".

He also told shareholders: "EMI will review its general guidelines regarding the contents of pop records. We seek to discourage records which are likely to cause offence." •

"Clever management"

Rock stars comment on the PISTOLS "outrage".

Alex Harvey

"The hypocrisy of all this staggers me – if everyone used four-letter words on TV, then nobody would object. But how can a word like fuck be offensive; one wonders what Shakespeare would have said. Yet you get a man who says the TV show offended him admitting that he would use these words to his mates, but he didn't want it coming in his home. Well, how hypocritical can you get?

"The whole of rock music breaks the rules – which is only what these kids were doing, and what the Stones did. Jazz another four-letter word, broke the rules. As for the talk of them being violent – to me, when my kids can see an advert Join The Professionals, that's far more violent – like ads to join the Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders.

"I don't think the adverse publicity will do the Sex Pistols any harm. I don't know if they can play – but if they can, then all that publicity can only do them good. This is 1976; and these kids think differently."

Eric Burdon

"This is obviously a spin-off from the Rolling Stones era. I haven't heard the Sex Pistols yet, but anything that publicises hot rock or more sex is all right with me.

"This is really a very clever piece of management and is typical of the times, which seem to throw more attention on the management than the music. Perhaps the warning aspect is the quasi-Nazi spin-off from New York. Hitler would have been very proud of *Clockwork Orange*, Andy Warhol, Kiss and the Sex Pistols. It's when this gets beyond the playful side, and youngsters could perhaps be manipulated for other reasons, that the real danger would set in.

"Hitler was very much under the influence of Wagner – and this was an unpleasant association with music. But I don't want to pre-judge the Sex Pistols; I haven't heard them play. The name, however, turns me off. But from what other people have said, their music is not that important. Let's hear something which shows ability, and then we won't care what they say."

Roger Daltrey

"The best possible hype image since The Who and the mod thing. It's not all that original. If you look back through the files of old *MM*s you'll be surprised how much the Sex Pistols sound like us.

"Swearing doesn't bother me at all; I just think they could have said something really sensational. I don't dislike what they do, but I'd like to tell them they're skating on thin ice, for the press jumped very quickly on the sensational aspect and if the group can't produce something more substantial to back them up they are going to be in for a very tough time.

"It's about time the youngsters kicked up and maybe this will lead to a more mellow attitude in people. But a lot of this is good old rock'n'roll hype.

"The Sex Pistols may now feel they won't change, but you don't see things the same at 32 as you do at 19. And only someone of 32 can tell you that. It's all like reading about The Who smashing up hotels – so what's original about that?"

Phil Collins

"I suppose their behaviour is aimed at teaching something other music can't reach. And if the public reaction is anything to go by, then they couldn't have had a better PR job done for themselves. It will arouse interest in the group, and as the main aim of a group is to get a record in the charts, then it is likely people would now buy a disc by the Sex Pistols out of curiosity. But if Johnny Rotten and his group aim to become the next Beatles, they won't do so on shock tactics alone – they'll have to produce something musically worthwhile.

"A friend video-taped the group on a *So It Goes* TV programme and following all this publicity we played it over out of curiosity. All we found was a complete lack of talent."

DAVID CORIO / GETTY, MICHAEL PUTLAND / GETTY, ANWAR HUSSEIN / GETTY, WARING ABBOTT / GETTY

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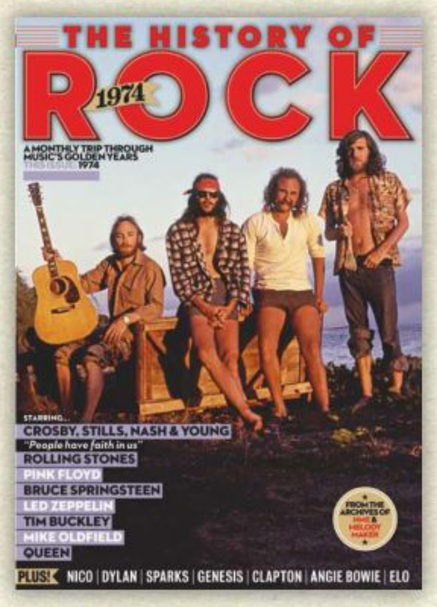

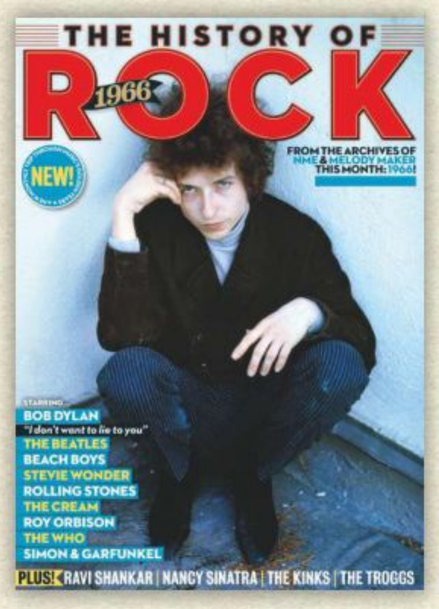

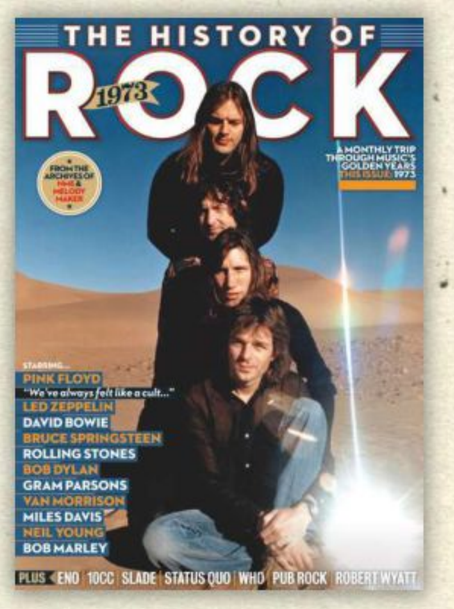

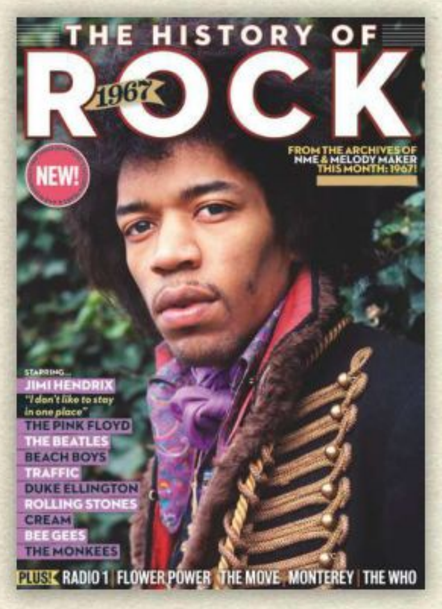

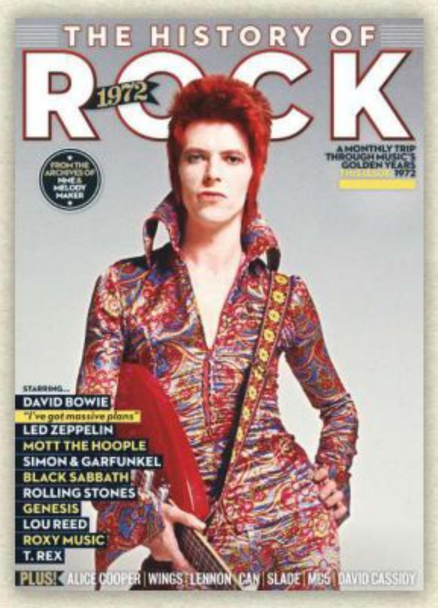

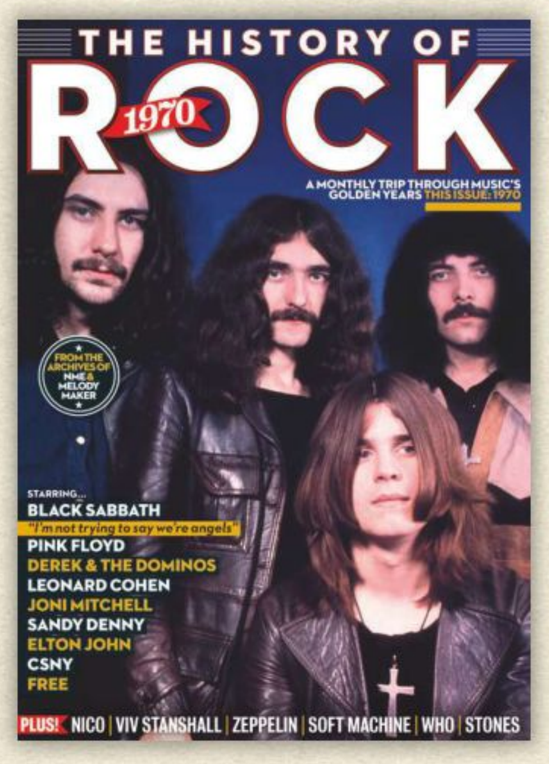

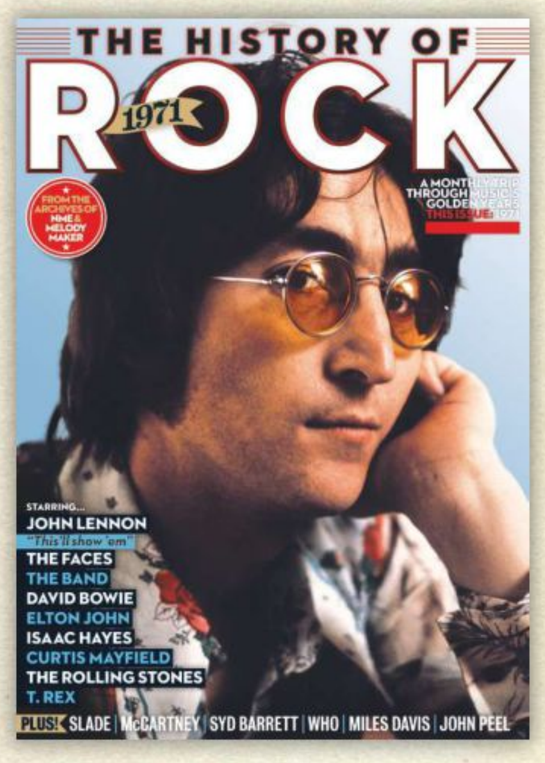

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Readers' letters

MM OCT–DEC Punk ruffles feathers, Chrysalis impresses, vinyl gets a sound kicking.

Punk? I'll drink to that

What is happening to music today that forces the *MM* every week to write reams on the so-called punk rock controversy?

For two years or more the *Melody Maker* has been printing regular (though with increasing vehemence) articles on what has been apparently accepted as the new wave in rock music.

Don't you think that perhaps this attitude amounts to the greatest form of adulation that punk rock could ever receive? Whatever caused the current "success" of these bands, it certainly was not their music.

I would be tempted to lay the blame at your feet. If you really would like punk rock to be no more, may I suggest you ignore it, and in six months it would be gone? Punk rock really does not have the popular appeal your weekly articles on it would have us believe; let those that need an aural lobotomy keep the music to themselves and let those of us who understand the real emotive power of music read about intelligent music within your pages.

The only time I have ever come across these punker-wallahs live was at a gig the Sex Pistols did at my old college. Within two minutes I and half the audience were rolling about laughing. The other half had fled for the bar; I humbly suggest you do likewise.

Whatever punk rock is supposed to be, it's certainly amusing and it's a great excuse to turn to drink. **BILL DYKE, Slaithwaite Road, Lewisham (*MM* Oct 9)**

Today's punks, tomorrow's establishment

I'd like to know why the world is so worked up and surprised by the arrival of punk rock, as it was bound to come. OK, it's a load of crap and anyone with hands can play it, but the same was true of early rock'n'roll and English reggae. Both of these types of music attracted the violent element of their generation – the rockers and the skinheads – and today punk rock attracts our violent element: the punks, I suppose they're called.

The thing is, given two to four years, the 19-year-old musicians will be 22, 23 and no longer relevant to the new violence generation. They will become the thing they despise now, the establishment. Unlike bands like the Stones, The Beatles and the Floyd, they won't survive with their own generation because they have no talent and they won't progress from punk music because they can't. So real music lovers just be patient; punk rock will kill itself with its own hate of establishment. **CHRIS WHITAKER, Ongar, Essex (*MM*, Nov 27)**

CHRIS MORPHET / GETTY

Punk: the truth

In reply to Chris Whitaker's letter. I would like to say that it's not what the punk bands are playing that matters, it's what they are saying.

I've been involved with music now for about 16 years, and one thing I've learned is that music and truth go together hand-in-hand. For too long now we've been inundated with bands who are very technical, very clever, very polished, but shy away from the important issues of life and cover them up with technical wizardry and pretentious lyrics that have no relevance.

Now I'm not knocking good music, but let's have good music and truth together. You may think punk bands lack talent; this may be true in the musical sense, but there is no lack of honesty and truthfulness in what they do, and this must surely be the rarest talent of them all.

Thank you, punk rockers; it seems the Age Of Aquarius isn't dead after all. **GEOFF GRAHAM, 2 Tudor Road, Camp Hill, Nuneaton, Warwickshire (*MM*, Dec 11)**

Pistols live, after a fashion

The likes of the Sex Pistols have yet to prove that they are only worthy of a mention in a publication dealing solely with fashion, and if the music they deliver live is anything to go by, I think that their audacious lyrics and discordant music will not hold their heads above water when their followers tire of torn jumpers and safety pins. **STEVEN MORRISSEY, Kings Road, Stretford, Manchester (*MM*, Dec 11)**

Publicity no stunt

I wonder if I may, through the columns of your magazine, express my deepest thanks to the public relations office of Chrysalis Records. On Tuesday, November 30, I sent a letter to Chrysalis requesting information on Robin Trower. As I posted the letter I thought I would receive a reply, good or bad, in a month or two.

How wrong I was, because on Friday, December 3, just three days after I sent the letter, I received a reply with the information I had asked for plus two photographs.

The speed of the reply just left me astounded. In these days when one hears so much about record companies treating the consumer in a shoddy manner, it is gratifying to find a company that does care about its customers.

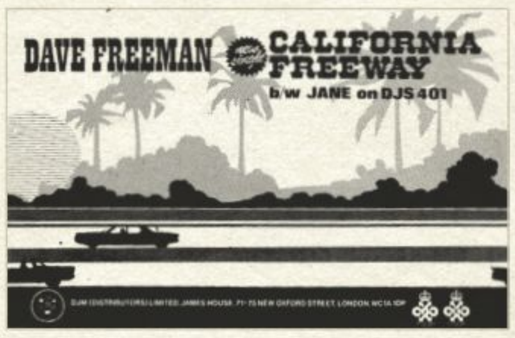
I really hope you will print this letter, not out of a desire to see my name in print, but because it is about time that the record companies that take trouble over their consumers got some favourable publicity. **GEORGE P COLE, Acland Hall, Bingley College, Bingley, Yorkshire (*MM*, Dec 25)**

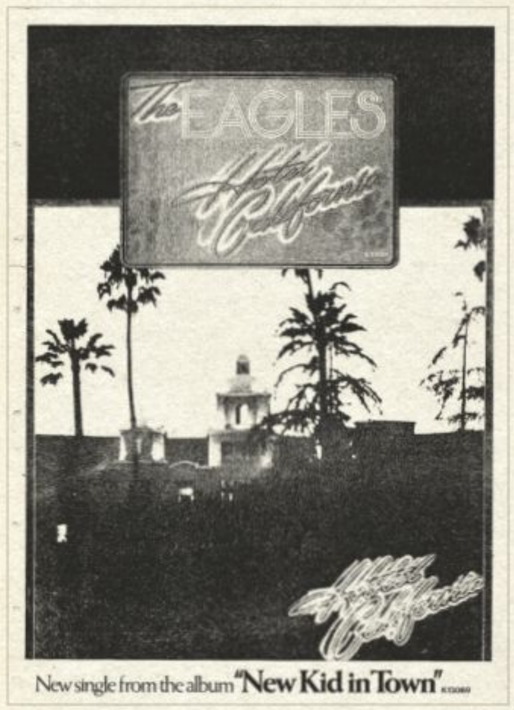
Pressing problem

The price of records continues to increase, yet the quality of pressing continues to decline. It's annoying to part with an amount approaching £4 for an album, and then play it, only to find the enjoyment of the music ruined by crackling and hissing noises.

This situation seems even more inconceivable when one considers that in recent years the improvement in hi-fi equipment means that faults on pressings become even more apparent. Surely, as sound recording and reproduction equipment improves, so should the quality of record pressings.

A return to the quality of pressings of five or 10 years ago can't be beyond the bounds of possibility. **GRAHAM GREEN, Staines Road, Twickenham, Middlesex (*MM*, Dec 25)**





Coming next... in 1977!

SO THAT WAS 1976. Hope you said something outrageous. 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, 1977!

FLEETWOOD MAC

THE DOUGHTY JOURNEYMEN of the British blues boom enjoy their transformation into a classy, enormously successful MOR act that has delivered *Rumours*. "Now we can make jokes," says Mick Fleetwood, "but it wasn't very funny at the time."

THE CLASH

IN THE CAFF and on the tube with the drummerless punks. On the agenda: violence, revolution and inferior bands. "All the new groups sound like drones," says Joe Strummer. "I ain't seen a good new group for six months."

THE SEX PISTOLS

A TRIP TO Scandinavia with the band and their new member, Sid Vicious, who Johnny Rotten calls "the philosopher in the band". "I'm a highly original thinker," says Sid. "He's just jealous because I'm really the brains of the group."

PLUS...

BOWIE!
THE JAM!
LED ZEPPELIN!
TOM PETTY!

FROM THE MAKERS OF **UNCUT**

THE HISTORY OF ROCK 1976

Every month, we revisit long-lost *NME* and *Melody Maker* interviews and piece together *The History Of Rock*. This month: 1976.

"If you get down and you quarrel every day/You're saying prayers to the devils, I say..."

Relive the year...

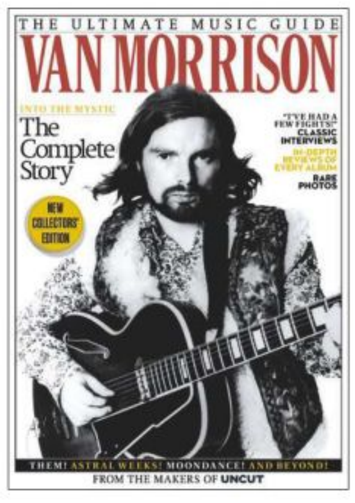
BOB MARLEY BECAME A SUPERSTAR

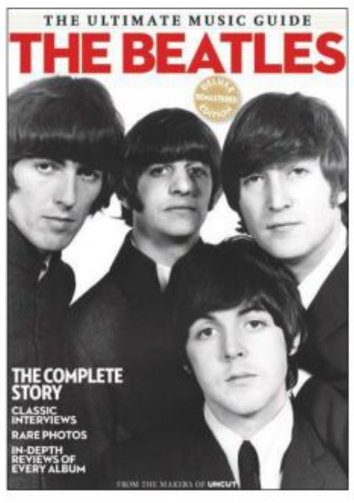
DAVID BOWIE CONQUERED STAGE AND SCREEN

PUNK ROCK OUTRAGED A NATION

...and **QUEEN, PATTI SMITH, LED ZEPPELIN** and many more shared everything with *NME* and *MELODY MAKER*

More from **UNCUT**...





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