THE HISTORY OF ROCK

1987

A MONTHLY TRIP THROUGH MUSIC’S GOLDEN YEARS
THIS ISSUE: 1987

STARRING...

THE CURE
BEASTIE BOYS
THE SMITHS
TOM WAITS
PRIMAL SCREAM
GEORGE MICHAEL
GUNS N’ ROSES
HAPPY MONDAYS
REM

PLUS!
PIXIES | BOB DYLAN | BJÖRK | THE FALL | MADONNA | THE POGUES

U2
30 years of The Joshua Tree

FROM THE ARCHIVES OF NME & MELODY MAKER
Welcome to 1987

The 1980s have given it a bit of a rough ride so far, but this year marks a spirited return for rock. The Beastie Boys have leaped to notoriety sampling Led Zeppelin, while Def Jam producer Rick Rubin has worked a powerful transformation on The Cult. Also on Def Jam, hip hop band Public Enemy are described as “the best rock group in the world”.

Energy, attitude, sedition... Rock’s abiding principles are this year to be found in plenty of different places. In the grassroots noise of small and disreputable UK bands who play something called “grebo”. In the swashbuckling, bad-reputation riffs of Guns N’ Roses. In the cathartic, political new album by REM, which provides a disturbing snapshot of America.

America is also a focus for our cover stars, U2. This year they use their mastery of extravagant gestures and stirring dynamics to deliver their hardest and most focused album yet, The Joshua Tree. It’s rock at its best: noisy, moving and politically charged.

As ever, there are magnificent exceptions to the rule. From Iceland, The Sugarcubes and their singer Björk arrive from a place completely outside the western rock tradition. From the north-west of the UK, meanwhile, originality of the most thrilling kind derives from The Fall and a faintly villainous new concern called the Happy Mondays. A pair of conceptualists called The Justified Ancients Of Mu Mu participate in music to steal from, subvert and liberate it.

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 stylish contemporary reporters were there to chronicle events. This publication reaps the benefits of their understanding for the reader decades later, one year at a time. Missed one? You can find out how to rectify that on page 138.

In the pages of this 23rd edition, dedicated to 1987, you will find verbatim articles from frontline staffers, filed from the thick of the action, wherever it may be.

With Tom Waits, in a bar with an inscrutable waiter and a stopped clock. On tour in the Bible Belt with the Beastie Boys and their inflatable stage penis. Discovering how, these days, his band’s enormous success means Bono has a whole new circle of acquaintances.

“I met Muhammad Ali,” he says. “He’s a big U2 fan.”
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Time Inc. (UK) Ltd, 3rd Floor, Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark St, London SE1 0SU | EDITOR John Mulvey, whose favourite song from 1987 is *Schizophrenia* by Sonic Youth DEPUTY EDITOR John Robinson True Faith by New Order ART EDITOR Lora Findlay Birthday by The Sugarcubes PRODUCTION EDITOR Mike Johnson Stop Me If You Think You’ve Heard This One Before by The Smiths ART DIRECTOR Marc Jones Pump Up The Volume by MARRS DESIGNER Becky Redman I Think We’re Alone Now by Tiffany PICTURE EDITOR Phil King Pristine Christine by The Sea Urchins COVER PHOTO Anton Corbijn THANKS TO Helen Spivak MARKETING Nashitha Suren SUBSCRIPTIONS Rachel Wallace GENERAL MANAGER Jo Smalley GROUP MANAGING DIRECTOR Paul Cheal COVERS AND TEXT PRINTED BY Wyndeham Group | WWW.UNCUT.CO.UK

Subscription rates: One year (12 issues) including p&p: UK £139.88; Europe €219.40; USA and Canada $203.88; Rest of World £155.75. For enquiries and orders please email help@magazinesdirect.com. Alternatively, from the UK: call 0330 333 1113, or overseas: +44 330 333 1113 (lines are open Monday–Friday GMT, 8.30am–5.30pm ex. Bank Holidays). Back issues enquiries: Tel: 01733 688 964. www.mags-uk.com
1987

JANUARY – MARCH

THE SMITHS, THE CULT, U2, BEASTIE BOYS, BIG BLACK AND MORE
Title track already a hit

PRINCE RELEASES HIS new album on Monday, his first since disbanding The Revolution. It’s a 13-track double called Sign O’ The Times and the title track is already a Top 20 hit. Recorded late last year at Paisley Park in Minneapolis, it was produced, arranged, written and performed almost solely by Prince, with a few notable exceptions.

Two former Revolution members, Dr. Fink and Eric Leeds (the latter now with the new Paisley Park outfit Madhouse) have performing and songwriting credits on the album and Sheena Easton contributes vocals on one track.

Titles includes “Starfish & Coffee”, “Slow Love”, “It’s Gonna Be A Beautiful Night” and “U Got The Look”. 

Released on March 30, 1987. Prince’s ninth album, Sign O’ The Times, ranges widely in style, reflecting the tracks’ origins in three abandoned album projects.
In the summer of 1984, Paul Simon is sent a tape of Gumboot Accordion Jive Vol 2, which he plays regularly in his car. This influences his decision to make an album inspired by African music. The tape came from South Africa. “I first thought, ‘Too bad it’s not from Zimbabwe, Zaire or Nigeria, life would have been more simple.’”

Simon then consulted the black musician Quincy Jones, who told him to “respect musicians”, and during a period in which he refused invitations to appear at Sun City in the South African homeland of Bophuthatswana, he prepared to record in Johannesburg.

After taking part in “We Are The World” for the Band Aid project, Simon books several weeks of recording time in a South African studio, where he cuts five tracks from his album using South African musicians who are reputedly paid three times the normal union rates. The recording sessions coincide with the second Sharpeville massacre and several musicians are forced to leave the sessions early to abide by South Africa’s racist pass laws.

In March 1986, some of the South African musicians are flown to New York to record more tracks and in April the Graceland album is completed. On its release in the UK, Graceland was criticised for not attacking the apartheid system, but was generally well received on a musical level. Simon told New York’s Village Voice: “I’m not good at writing politics, I’m a relationship writer, relationships and introspection.”

The extensive sleevenotes on the back of the album also contain nothing that can be construed as anti-apartheid, fuelling rumours in the music press that Simon had signed an agreement with the government of the Republic of South Africa, preventing his from criticising the Botha regime.

During a month in which the state-authorised radio stations in South Africa are playing tracks from Graceland, Simon is interviewed by SPIN magazine, apparently after checking the credentials of the magazine’s writer. He tells SPIN: “I thought it was in the guidelines of the cultural boycott, although technically I wasn’t.”

After announcing a European tour, including several dates in Britain, Simon flies to London to record with Ladysmith Black Mambazo and announces that prominent anti-apartheid musicians Hugh Masekela and Miriam Makeba will also be performing with him on the European tour. His manager agrees the NME can interview Simon, on condition that Miriam Makeba and Hugh Masekela are present. The next morning, his record company WEA withdraw the offer.

A telex sent from the African National Congress in Lusaka to their office in Sweden says: “The ANC fully support a boycott action against a Paul Simon European and American tour… He has singularly done more harm in flouting the cultural boycott against the racist regime.”

Simon’s record company arrange an emergency press conference in London. Accompanied by exiled South African musicians Miriam Makeba and Hugh Masekela and resident South African musician Ray Perry, Paul Simon opened the conference by reading a short letter he’d written to the United Nations Committee Against Apartheid. He’d drafted it after the UN had requested he clarify his position regarding the cultural boycott in light of growing criticism – from the African National Congress and related anti-apartheid bodies – of his Graceland LP and his upcoming European tour. The letter stated that in his own field Simon was working to achieve “the end of the apartheid system” and that he intended to maintain this position “in the context of the UN cultural boycott”. Since the letter had been received, Simon – through American anti-apartheid organiser Harry Belafonte – had been informed that the ANC had reversed their position over Graceland, withdrawing criticism and regarding the LP as legitimate. This position, he now said, would soon be confirmed by ANC leader Oliver Tambo at a press conference in Los Angeles. Simon said he welcomed the controversy that had accompanied the album as it allowed people “essentially on the same side to clarify their position and reach a unified standpoint”.

But hadn’t he flouted this unity by not previously consulting or making public his...
intention to record Graceland in South Africa, an action liable to cause division?
“I don’t feel, as an artist, that I have to consult with anyone. I didn’t ask for permission to do the project, nor did I want any restriction on what I might think or say or write.”

If it was his avowed intention to work for the end of apartheid, why had there not been any mention of the South African situation in the album’s songs or extensive sleevenotes?
“It is a musical album; I approached the subject from a cultural point of view that has political implications, but I am no expert on South African politics.”

Ray Perry outlined his impassioned support for Graceland (both album and tour) as it allowed South African musicians to be heard around the world; the cultural boycott was used wrongly if it prevented this.

“I know better than some person who has been away from South Africa for 20 years how to run my life. If I’m told I am not allowed certain records or to perform, then that’s as far as the government, where am I to run to? Emotionally we would die.”

Miriam Makeba underlined her credentials as an exile and apartheid opponent for over 20 years and told how persistent representations to the UN by her on Simon’s behalf revealed that he had never been put on the boycott list. However, she too felt that a cultural boycott should not deprive indigenous black musicians from being heard outside their own country, and that the whole policy was in need of clarification and redefinition. Masekela took up her point, saying the “policy” was ill-formed and put together without proper, widespread consultation with exiled musicians such as himself.

For Simon, the issue of cultural boycott seemed to rest on the decision to play or not play Sun City. He had not, for instance, requested that his album be withdrawn from the South African market. “It was made by South African musicians, why should it not be available to them?”

He denied too that he had had any personal contact with the South African government before he had been allowed to work in South Africa. Though the possibility that representations by well-placed Warners personnel could have facilitated the album’s recording still remained, Simon felt no need to forward an anti-apartheid message explicitly on the album because “the audience I am used to addressing is a sophisticated one. I assume they know what’s happening in South Africa, and if they don’t, the first time they hear about it shouldn’t be from a pop star. Pop music is not a place to argue complex political issues.”

Simon maintained that he had nothing to apologise for, and pending clarification of the ANC policy – perhaps revoking the Lusaka telex – the controversy over Graceland looks still to have some way to run. Gavin Martin

“The same mistake”

NME FEB 2 Jerry Dammers gives NME a statement about Paul Simon.

In LAST WEEK’S NME, the anti-apartheid movement was accused of a “climb-down” over Paul Simon’s tour. The movement had not announced any boycott action, so how can it have climbed down? It seems that the movement is going to take flak from some people no matter what it does on this issue.

Paul Simon must have known this tour would be controversial at a time when we need unity to fight apartheid. I can’t speak for Artists Against Apartheid, but as an individual, I think it’s very irresponsible for a pop star to walk into a country where children are being slaughtered in the streets and make a pop LP, as if nothing is going on, especially without consulting the right people (ie, the ANC) first.

Simon has said that he paid the musicians $400 a day, supposedly three times the going rate. In this country, this is the minimum Musicians Union session rate for 15 hours’ work ($262.50p). He also said he didn’t perform in South Africa, but in the Oxford dictionary to “perform” includes to “sing or play.”

At his press conference in London, he claimed that the ANC had “reversed” its policy and that the president, Oliver Tambo, would make a ruling on his individual case a few days later. No such thing happened, of course.

To get things into perspective, I’d like to quote a statement by the National Executive Committee of the ANC on the occasion of their 75th anniversary, presented by Oliver Tambo on January 8, 1987: “We can truly say that we have broken through a critical barrier in terms of both world understanding of what is to be done about the apartheid system and the unwillingness of the international community to act. The conditions therefore exist, that in the current period, this community should impose both unilateral and universal comprehensive mandatory sanctions against racist South Africa. Where governments refuse to act, the public at large should respond with people’s sanctions. Now is the time for deeds and not words.”

It seems that some people, because they quite like Graceland, keep trying to find excuses for Simon. I just wish he’d never gone to South Africa in the first place. And I think he may be making the same mistake again by carrying on with this tour.

nyeEtesPROMPTly put the squeeze on Jools Holland last Friday following a live cross-channel promotion spot, during which the Tube presenter temporarily lost his marbles and advised “all the groovy fuckers” among his school-age listeners to tune in to the pride of pop shows. Peter Moth, controller of public affairs for Tyne Tees TV, later told NME: “Jools came out with the offending word for reasons which he can’t explain… Afterwards Jools was distraught and he apologised on The Tube. However, there was no choice but to suspend Jools as far as The Tube is concerned.”

“A bit premature”

NME FEB 7 Can Terry Waite really re-form The Beatles?

erry Waite’s hopes for reuniting The Beatles (with one obvious absentee) have experienced a bit of a hiccup this week with an official denial from the Paul McCartney office. A spokesman said that Macca had heard of the plan for the One World concerts this July, but would be unable to take part: “The organisers have been a bit premature announcing lots of big names in the national press without getting any of them confirmed. Obviously, it’s given them a lot of publicity, but whether the event will actually go ahead on the scale they’d hoped is doubtful.”

NME JAN 24 Tube trouble for Jools.
“Most prison films spend the plot tunnelling...”

MM JAN 17 Director Jim Jarmusch on his Tom Waits-starring Down By Law.

ALL YEAR, JOURNALISTS returning from film festivals have been telling me I’ve gotta watch out for Jim Jarmusch’s Down By Law, it’s a movie with me in mind. I’d even started to build up a certain resistance to it and to the typecasting, when, all of a sudden, here was a sneak preview and I seemed to be laughing louder than anyone else in the theatre.

Jarmusch has called it a “neo-beat-noir-comedy”, which is as good a label as any for a movie which deliberately refuses conscription on most ground. In recent years, probably Repo Man comes closest to its wacky freewheeling spirit, and maybe, decades back, Truffaut’s Shoot The Piano.

Tom Waits, an unemployed disc-jockey, and John Lurie, a small-time pimp, both get set up by the New Orleans police. Waits is planted in a hotel room, and finally discovers a 10-year-old girl in a hotel bedroom, and the audience respond to formulas. I write backwards from the way most people write. I start with the characters and a certain atmosphere in mind, and I sit back and let the story appear to me.”

Down By Law developed out of a creative collaboration with Tom Waits on a screenplay of Franks Wild Years, which Tom finally junked, doing it on stage instead. John Lurie of the Lounge Lizards had been in a previous Jarmusch movie, Stranger Than Paradise. A chance meeting with Italian comedian Roberto Benigni, and the fact that they could communicate deeply without language, gave the director his key ingredient.

“I don’t need a lot of money to make films, since I’m not into spectacle or special effects”

but there are so many talented people not as well known that I know, I also have an aversion to movie stars. The only good movie star is a dead movie star.”

Actually, Down By Law, which was well received at Cannes, was currently No 1 at the box office in Paris, and doing good biz in the hipper US cities. Beautifully shot in black-and-white by Robby Müller in Louisiana, it has the feel of countless pulp thrillers, B-movies and swamp blues. Jarmusch is a fan of all that, of course, from Jim Thompson to Mickey Spillane, and the film that he’d really like to make – or remake, since Warner Bros made a perversity of the James M Cain novel for Mario Lanza – is Serenade.

Unlike whodunnits, pulp thrillers run on atmosphere rather than plot. What logic there is seems to come from the writer’s subconscious, so that scenes jolt into frame like events in a nightmare. Jarmusch’s screen writing follows this procedure too.

“I have faith in accidents. I like to de-emphasise the story, and that lets me get away with things the audience would never fall for if I was concentrating on the plot. For example, the fact that Tom and John and Roberto escape from prison with no explanation, you know. Most prison films spend most of the plot tunnelling. I find it annoying that most American films are so overwritten that the audience is one step ahead of the plot.

“They’re predictable – but I guess audiences respond to formulas. I write backwards from the way most people write. I start with the characters and a certain atmosphere in mind, and I sit back and let the story appear to me.”

Tom and I have a kinda kindred aesthetic, an interest in unambitious people, marginal people. Roberto, like most Italians, is very open about his emotions, and he speaks with his eyes, his hands, his gestures. A lot of the lines I wrote for him he had to memorise, and he didn’t even know why they were funny. At the start of filming he spoke even less English than his character, but by the end he was about equal.

The point of the film is that the two American characters are not in touch with themselves like Roberto is. His imagination is open, and he understands the lifeline of American culture - Whitman and Robert Frost are specific examples – even though he’s had to follow it in translation. Maybe
that’s true of Europeans in general.”
Manuel from Fowdy Towers will appear to be a blood relative to Roberto for British audiences, though Jarmusch has never heard of him. Harpo Marx and Harry Langdon, the great silent comic mimes, seemed close to him. Prison escapes across the bayou, pursued by baying bloodhounds, go all the way back to I Am A Fugitive From A Chain Gang of 1932.

“Right,” says Jarmusch, a mine of movie lore.

“I learned so much from him. Nick had studied architecture with Frank Lloyd Wright originally, and he taught me that to make a film work, each building block has to work. Each scene has a single meaning – though it may mean different things to different characters in that scene, and when you talk to your actors you don’t tell one what you told the other one.

“I think Nick was more deceptive with actors than I’m able to be. He’d intentionally throw a wrench in the works to subvert the predictability of the script.”

And Ray’s concern for teenagers? Rebel Without A Cause, They Live By Night, Knock On Any Door.

Genuine, affirmed Jarmusch.

“He wanted to reach young people at the point where they could be subverted into false values. He really felt that was a prime state to catch them in.” Brian Case

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**NME MAR 28** Bowie’s back! Now, with old school pal Peter Frampton!

**THIRTEEN YEARS AGO**, he changed his persona more often than his pants. Since that time David Bowie has transformed from a Diamond Dog into a diamond geezer, and meeting the press in London last week he came across as the head boy from the Tommy Steele School Of Charm.

His answers to the flood of banal and predictable questions from Fleet Street were punctuated with “love”, “pal”, “mate” and “chum”. He told us everything we knew already. It’s great to be back in England, he exercises regularity to keep his looks and he’s happy about touring and his new album. Oh yes, and he’s had an Aids test, will have another if he changes partners and he wants everyone to wear condoms.

The album is called Never Let Me Down, his old school “chum” Peter Frampton plays guitar on it, and judging by our live preview in the London’s Player’s Theatre (performing “87 and Cry” and the single “Day In, Day Out”), he’s still stuck in the non-creative rut that was so evident on Tonight. Frampton comes alive and kills the melodies stone dead with his heavy-handed “70s guitar wailing.

It was probably the smallest audience Bowie or Frampton had faced since their days of sharing a school-hall stage in Bromley back in the early ’60s, and the elite press posse audience were blasted to the back of the tiny theatre as the curtain drew back to reveal 1,000-watt PA speakers and half-a-dozen of the highest paid musicians in the world drowning out the sound of the trains that rattled overhead as they left Charing Cross station. The tour will put him back in the distance – it is going under the banner of The Glass Spider Concerts, named after one of the tracks on the L.P.

“It’s the pivotal song on the album. Glass spiders I see as some kind of mother figure. It’s the idea of children who eventually realise their parents are not really something they can depend upon for everything. They are on their own. It’s that kind of feeling I want to put across in the show.”

What about his relationship with his own offspring?

“We get along famously, we have a wonderful relationship and I’m very proud to have him as my son. I would like to leave it at that on that particular subject, thank you very much.”

But commercial success has eluded you of late. Like the disappointing sales for Tonight.

“Tonight, you ought to see the figures for Low, and we followed that one up. If I sell more than three albums I’m happy.

“As far as Absolute Beginners goes, I thought it was a very interesting movie and I enjoyed it a lot. I like the way Julien [Temple] works with the cinema, I think he’s got some interesting things to say. I made The Hunger with Tony Scott and it wasn’t a great success commercially, but then he went on to make Top Gun. I think the same thing will happen to Julien.”

What about directing yourself?

“It is very hard on Wim and it would’ve been, ‘Fuck you, you’re not my friend any more!’ It was very hard on Wim and I’m not playing Frank Sinatra in a film. No, I never said ‘lights, costumes and a lot of Fleet Street frivolity. How do you keep going, David? Have you ever thought of quitting?’

“I’ve got no intention of stopping. I’m in that luxurious position where I’m doing something that I absolutely and thoroughly enjoy.”

But commercial success has eluded you of late. I like the disappointing sales for Tonight.

“Tonight, you ought to see the figures for Low, and we followed that one up. If I sell more than three albums I’m happy.

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What about directing yourself?

“I would love to – as often as possible I have collaborated on my videos, but it’s kind of a quantum leap to go from four minutes to 90.”

Yes, that’s something Julien has found out himself. From then on, it’s all denials and corrections to previous press reports (“No, I’m not playing Frank Sinatra in a film. No, Mick Jagger and I are not remaking Some Like It Hot. No, I never said ‘lights, costumes and theatrical sets’”), except for a few words on image. Ziggy Stardust revisited?

“I’m really proud of all that. I think I started something that was really quite interesting and also very amusing. I’ve never seen it as an image, it’s creating characters. Take a good character actor like Robert De Niro; in Taxi Driver you know he’s not Travis. It is Robert De Niro playing Travis. It’s just as simple and naive as that with me.”

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**A TERRIFIC MOVIE**

...a beautiful, melancholy, kiddding escape fantasy.

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**DOWN BY LAW**

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**HISTORY OF ROCK 1987 | 11**
THE CULT have changed. No longer the “Muppets of goth” (© MM, 1985), their latest album has been recorded with Def Jam’s Rick Rubin. “We’ve had to go back to basics. It’s giving people less and making it sound like you’re giving them a lot more.”
eastern melody and on top of that a tambourine and on top of that, vocal harmonies. So if you’ve got 12 guitars, why not use them for 12 different songs?

“This album captures the energy of our live concerts, but with fine tuning as well. Anybody who considers themselves to be a rocker in any walk of life should go out and buy a copy when it comes out, and seriously learn, listen how to do it. This is a how-to-do-it record. We’ve finally tamed the beast.

“It’s scary in one way,” admitted Billy. “The only thing I worry about is that the kids who really like the band might be just a little freaked out by it. It’s very raw. It’s very naked. It’s abrasive. It’s not very nice sounding.

“We’ve talked at length about this record, and I think people will probably go through what we went through, a short period of absolute panic – ‘What have they done?’ But I think and I hope that the kids that have actually bought our records and supported us from day one and been to all the gigs will get over that initial panic and be able to relax and enjoy it. I don’t think anybody who sat down and thought about it would like any band to stay the same.”

“OFTHE BANDS who pre-date our initial bashings, there’s only Killing Joke and the Banshees who still exist,” said Billy. “Then from the period of ’82 to ’84, there’s only us and The Mission that have come out of it with our careers heading in an upward direction. It’s a bit sad. It’s like there was a whole crop of bands and maybe only five per cent of them are doing anything.”

“That’s the five per cent who are trying to achieve and improve, explore and originate. The diehard gothic survival bands, by contrast, are a pretty useless breed, walling dismally into an empty future that’s only empty because their heads are.

The gothic audience, however, is alive and well and as big as ever, and looking just about the same – an observation which provoked a heated response from Billy Dufy.

“There was one thing I read in the papers to do with The Cult which I didn’t like and that was a review of our Brixton Academy gig. The guy was saying he felt sorry for our audience, The Cult audience, 5,000 kids who were having a great time.

“Maybe that was the one night last year those kids really got their rocks off. And this dick feels sorry for their supposedly pathetic lifestyle. That’s one of the ugliest things I’ve ever read. It’s wrong to judge people by the way they dress. I don’t give a toss how anybody dresses.”

“You think about all those kids at home that have got absolutely shit all,” demanded Ian.

“That’s why people get into punk. It was an exclusive club. You were identifiable as a punk, you were no longer a number, you were part of a gang, part of a family. They like to feel a part of something.”

“Apart and apart,” interrupted Billy.

“If someone wants to put an upside-down crucifix on, that’s fine,” ratted Ian. “We love them all.”

“Are you saying you would discourage individuality?” asked Billy.

“In the fullness of time, they’ll find they can still enjoy music and not have to dress in such a uniform way,” reasoned Billy, already calmer.

“They probably think they’re being dead cool, and they probably are where they come from.”

“I’ve seen some gothic kids who look amazing,” countered Ian. “They’ve got it down to a tee, really looking like seriously antisocial human beings. But I think a change will probably happen soon. I think it’s happening now. You see girls who have stopped wearing black, now wearing colours. I think the classic Siouxsie Siouxsould mould is on its way out.”

“Siouxsie set the role model for girls eight years ago,” said Billy. “They’ve kept her style ever since, and it’s time for people to change. I just think they’ll develop in their own way into something else.” And the sooner the better.

It’s always cheering to meet musicians who have somehow or other remained fans. The Cult are fans in a big way. So much so that they pin posters of their personal heroes on the studio walls for inspiration while recording. So much so
that they leave the fingerprints of those same heroes all over the album, and that’s more, admit it.

“We’re wearing our influences on our foreheads,” said an unapologetic Billy Duffy of the forthcoming LP. “Oh, for sure. No doubt about it. We’ve consciously tried not to nick, we’ve made an effort not to lift too many people’s riffs, but there are only so many guitar riffs to go round. Chuck Berry made his entire career out of one riff. And that one riff’s really good.

“We just do whatever we need to make our songs work. It’s not a question of us listening to music and stealing things. It’s more the overall feel and sound that we try to get over. Just because we like AC/DC doesn’t mean we’ve nicked half of AC/DC’s stuff.”

The Cult will readily admit to the influence of the Australians. Also, Lemmy (“for sure, there’s a part of Lemmy on the album”), Free (“a great deal”), Zeppelin (“of course”) and, to my own surprise, the entire Schorcher and The Georgia Sidewalks. It’s very odd. Simple Minds and all those bands say, ‘Don’t worry about the press, it’s really happening, fuck the press, don’t let it get you down, don’t let it get you scared.’

“But we’ve seen enough to know that, in Britain, it’s very important what the papers say. The only ways to get really heard is by getting your record on Radio 1, getting yourself in the music papers or going through the video outlet, which is very limited. Kids believe the press.”

“I remember running out and buying Melody Maker when I was 16,” said an eminently sensible Ian Astbury. “I ordered it at the newsagents, and if it said a band was good, I’d go out and see them, I’d buy the records. That was my complete bible. I grew up with that. It’s the only criticism I’ve ever heard. Your friends aren’t going to say bad things about you, so when people in the press do, you have a grudging respect for it. But they just want to throw stones at us.”

IT WAS THE end of 1985 and The Cult were feeling dazed and confused. The album Love had been highly acclaimed in America and Europe but not in Britain, even though the tour, their last one, had gone brilliantly. A new album was looming up and the band were in a transition period, set on making a “straight-ahead rock LP” but not entirely sure how to go about it.

Billy: “We decided to keep our feet on the ground and go in with the same guy, Steve Brown, who did Love. We went to the Manor and started in on the project with pretty much the same approach we did on the Love album. It was just basically, ‘Dive in there and whack it onto tape as quickly as possible, make sure it’s all played in time, throw more guitars on, we can always sort it out in the mix.’

“Three-quarters of the way through, these bad vibes started rearing themselves. It was like an unspoken thing. It just wasn’t right.”

“It felt like a better version of Love. Like ‘Love II’, continued Ian. “We wanted to sound like our influences and to sound like the way we play live. We thought, ‘Let’s chop these guitars out, let’s get basic drums, guitar, vocals and rhythm guitar.’ We went into the mixing stages, but it still didn’t work.”

“There was much, much, much too much going on in the tracks,” said Billy, picking up the story.

“We failed to realise in the pre-production stage was that we didn’t do enough work on the structure of the songs. We couldn’t work out what route to take to get the record sounding the way we wanted it. We couldn’t find out where we were going wrong. So we had a real panic. It was frightening. We’d spent a lot of time and money on it. We couldn’t find out what route to take to get the record sounding the way we wanted it. We couldn’t find out where we were going wrong. So we had a real panic. It was frightening. We’d spent a lot of time and money on it.

“We went through a lot of options and the last one, to re-record the whole thing, was never even spoken of. It would’ve caused too many heart attacks all round.

“We couldn’t decide what to do. The penny was beginning to drop that you can’t polish a turd. Something was fundamentally wrong with the way we’d recorded the songs.”

The Cult had already been in touch with Rick Rubin after hearing some of his work, primarily with the Beastie Boys. They’d sent him a tape and he’d expressed interest in working with them, which surprised everybody, it seems, except for The Cult.

“I wasn’t surprised at all, because of the way we’d been talking on the phone,” said Ian. “We’d be saying to each other, ‘Do you like Led Zeppelin?’ and ‘Do you like AC/DC?’ – ‘Oh, let’s work together’. That was it. The common influences.

“You could lay some heavy Free on him,” continued Billy. “It was like a cultural exchange. It’s just nice to find somebody your own age, somebody you don’t have to explain yourself to. I never really gave any thought to the other, more major artists who wanted to produce them.

“He doesn’t have to worry about money anyway,” commented Ian. “His film company will keep him in bacon double cheeseburgers for the next 50 years. He’s just into making records he’d want to take home and play.”

Originally it was agreed that Rubin would remix two or three of the album tracks. Then, around November last year, it was decided he would remix the whole album. The Cult flew out to New York, where it was settled that Rubin would re-record three or maybe four tracks. And finally, the whole of the completed, unsatisfactory album was scrapped and re-recorded in a short few weeks at Electric Lady, with some of the original tracks dropped to make way for new ones (which may or may not include a version of “Born To Be Wild”).

“We were doing 16 to 18 hour days because the adrenalin was so high,” says Ian. “The engineers were really on the ball. It’s not ‘Excuse me, I’m going to get a cup of tea’, it’s ‘Excuse me, I’m going to work 18 hours a day for the next few weeks’. I think this was all meant to be, in a strange way. If we hadn’t made a balls-up of the album, we wouldn’t have re-recorded it and we wouldn’t have got what we’ve got now.”

One trust that the record company took the whole thing as philosophically...

“It was like God in His wisdom said, ‘Hold on, you’re going to New York and go to Electric Lady studios.’ The powers that be have decided we’re the ones that are going to break the stalemate that’s been going on for seven or eight years. We’re extremely confident in this album.”

SO IS RICK Rubin. He proclaims that this is “a classic rock record that will sell for the next 20 years”.

He said of The Cult: “I heard some of their new material and it sounded very exciting and different for them. I think they were in a transition period, verging on a rock’n’roll sound and I thought I could help them carry through that rock’n’roll feeling. They probably could have done it themselves, but I thought it would have taken them a couple more albums. This way, they skipped ahead pretty quickly.”

“They had play all the instruments dry, whereas in the past they had a lot of effects. They weren’t used to playing tight, specific parts. There were no effects to hide behind. I wanted them to achieve the sound first, without any effects, and then add the effect afterwards. It’s like starting at A and trying to get to B. We had a better A.

“I wanted to produce The Cult because of the potential of the material and because they were a young band and the timing was right, I thought, for them. I can be involved in a make-or-break album as opposed to working on, say, another Mick Jagger record. I prefer working with younger people; I’m 23.

“From what I understand, a lot of the best rock ‘n’ roll producers came from a black music background. Mutt Lange, who’s worked with Def Leppard and AC/DC was a lover of black music. Rock ‘n’ roll is rooted in the blues, which is black blues – so understanding black music is very important in attacking rock music. There’s a feeling of a groove that doesn’t often exist in a lot of rock music.

“I’m a fan of rock from a blues background. My favourite bands are AC/DC and Aerosmith and I’ve recently started listening to Led Zeppelin a lot. This Cult album will put The Cult’s name up there with groups like that. You think of rock’n’roll and you think of AC/DC, ZZ Top, Aerosmith and now you’ll probably also think of The Cult.”

Carol Clerk
“This is what we do best”

America, good and bad, profoundly informs the new U2 album, *The Joshua Tree*. Still, Bono is no preacher, he claims. “Eno said, ‘Bono has given me enough, but he hasn’t given me all he’s got.’ I’ve given him more, but there’s a lot more to come.”
December 14–16, 1986: along with album designer Steve Averill and photographer Anton Corbijn, U2 go on a three-day trip around the Mojave Desert in California to shoot images for The Joshua Tree.
Once, we were asked to set up an audience with the Pope. We were told the Pope wants to meet U2. We thought, ‘This is a good laugh – he must have heard ‘Gloria’. So we got the message and said, ‘Fair enough!’… I’ll meet anyone.

“So I thought, ‘Yeah, I’ll meet the Pope, impress the relatives.’ In one way, I’m attracted to him because he’s Polish, and I like Polish people, and he has a tender heart. But on the other hand, he’s very conservative and some would say he’s put the Catholic church back a few years… So in the end I said, ‘OK, we’ll meet him privately.’

Word came back from the Vatican… ‘No press? No publicity? But ees the whole idea!’ I said, ‘Sorry mate, join the queue with the rest of the punters.”

Bono needs a shave. It’s not a desperate need, but there is something incorrigibly Geldofian about him as he bustles about his business, showing early signs of inelegant wastage. Tossing his ponytail behind him, he grabs a mic and bends forward awkwardly, peering hard at unfamiliar lyrics heaped on the floor in front of him… “In the town of Springhill, Nova Scotia…”

He bounds over, all smiles and pumping handshakes, a kiss for Regine his publicist. “Sorry to keep you waiting… How are you? Very good of you to come over. Thanks for being patient. Can we get you anything? Tea? Coffee? Something stronger?”

A fleet of Filipino handmaidens? The freedom of Dublin? No, nothing, Bono, just an intro. And so U2 play The Dubliners’ “Springhill Mining Disaster”, a heartbreaking, deathly song the band are knocking into shape to play on Gay Byrne’s Late Late Show which goes out in Ireland at 9pm! as part of a Dubliners silver jubilee celebration show, also involving the likes of The Pogues, Planxty and The Fureys.

The Edge painstakingly explains how U2 were groomed on Coca-Cola, American television shows and Top Of The Pops, and that it wasn’t until they left to start touring that they realised they were Irish. “And it wasn’t until then we realised how special The Dubliners were.”

Bono’s back, dazzling us with anecdotes, slipping into a series of impressions for which Phil Cool might find a use. “Ronnie Drew [singer with The Dubliners] came up to Larry in a bar once and said (perfect Ronnie Drew voice), ‘Are you wid the U2?’ Larry said yes, and he said, ‘Jeezus… my boy, he loves your band. It would give him such a thrill to say that a member of the U2 bought his old man a pint.” So of course, Larry had to buy him one. That’s real class, that is.

“See, there are two sides to The Dubliners’ music. One is the Paddy at the bar swigging out of a bottle and then, when it’s finished, breaking it over somebody’s head. The other side is ‘Springhill Mining Disaster’, and that’s why we’re doing that song.”

They’re back in the fray. Their new album, The Joshua Tree, leaves the traps this week and the usual wheels of promotion and touring groan into action. Separately, they explain away the album’s ideas and motives with a unanimity that is almost uncanny. Have they been rehearsing their lines? Have they been knocking this one around for so long that they’ve finally come up with a consensus of opinion?

The album’s about America, a new-found awareness of its roots in R&B and country nestling in perfect disharmony alongside their old awareness of its political shame in Central America. They sing rendingly of the mothers of the disappeared, carrying a plug for Amnesty International on the sleeve, while deliberately leaving the flaws they all knew remained on “Trip Through Your Wires”, an anarchic shambles of a song rooted in 12-bar blues.

No accident. Bono regards it as only the second album they’ve ever made, that U2 only really started with The Unforgettable Fire. Suddenly they wanted to write songs where the lyrics weren’t scribbled down between takes. Suddenly Bono wanted to sing properly. Suddenly they wanted to become a real band.

“You have heard the new album yet?” enquires Bono in the corridor, between further bouts of startling hospitality. “Not bad, is it?” He disappears, chortling.

The Edge: “Bono’s writing words in a way he hasn’t done up until now. He’s so much better as a singer now. And we’re listening to different things now. We’re getting more interested in the classic songwriters, country singers and stuff. It’s all relative to our interest in America. It’s like we didn’t really discover our Irishness until we travelled out of Ireland. And then you go to America and find yourself totally alienated by it. Then, slowly, you realise there are different levels to it. The America of the great R&B and country performers, and in civil rights, people like Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy.

“We worked with T-Bone Burnett and Robbie Robertson, and Bono did a session with Keith Richards, people who are hooked up on that. And some of the writers, the new journalism of people like Truman Capote and Norman Mailer, the way they were able to bring you to a place – it’s almost cinematic. We tried to do that on the album.”
Bono drags me screaming to the pub round the corner, in the heart of dirty Dublin’s docks. We’d been in the management company boardroom, dicing out of the adrenalin firing the atmosphere all around as the heartbeat of the U2 operation hit peak cylinders of professional panic. *The Joshua Tree* readies itself for world domination.

“The molecules in this place,” he’d said, “they’re just flying around. You may think you won’t be affected, you’ve only just arrived, but you will – I promise you will.”

And so we perch on two stools at the bar, the nods and greetings from staff and customers and the odd bit of U2 memorabilia discreetly decorating the walls suggesting the chaps aren’t entirely unacquainted with this particular watering hole. Bono swiftly sinks an Irish whiskey in the manner of a real rock’n’roll star and bemoans the lack of good writers in the music press, while I keep half an eye on the progress of Terry Marsh on a TV in the corner. “You like boxing? I’ve got tickets for the [Marvin] Hagler fight in Las Vegas. I’m fascinated by boxing as a writer, but as a person... I met Muhammad Ali, you know, he’s a U2 fan.”

Whaaat?

“Honest injun. Dick Gregory brought him to see us. I was completely blown away by it. I just thought, ‘This is one of the greatest sportsmen who ever stepped into the spotlight. A man with real class. A man with a real sense of humour.”

Was he in a bad way?

“Listen, even when Muhammad Ali’s in a bad way, he’s still good enough for me. We have some weird fans. We had Bishop Tutu ring us up. In America, I went to one of the anti-apartheid allies, and the tour was having an effect on America—people were joining the anti-apartheid movement, which was a real thrill. The same thing happened with Amnesty International. They doubled their membership after that tour. We didn’t actually speak to Bishop Tutu, but we had a call from his daughter. She said, ‘My father wants you to know that your tour of America has consequences, and he appreciates the work you’re doing for the anti-apartheid movement.’”

A drunk has collared Larry Mullen at the bar, engaging him in an argument about Self Aid, before telling him the story of his life. U2 were sued at Self Aid, he insists. Larry regards the accusation with equanimity, explaining that, while they didn’t agree with all the principles of Self Aid and while it hadn’t worked out quite the way any of them had hoped, he had met an unemployed guy in a pub soon afterwards who’d thanked him for appearing on it and said it had given him encouragement.

That conversation alone, explains Larry, was ample justification for them playing the gig, irrespective of all the other shenanigans. They shake hands warmly and the drunk departs, impressed.

Larry Mullen is not only the youngest member of U2, he’s also the prettiest. We talk about Bono. Didn’t he ever feel the teensiest surge of envy as Bono careered around, grabbing the adoring masses and vigorously dumping them into the palm of his hand?

“No, no, NO!” he says, horrified. “Being a singer is a terrible responsibility. I sometimes get the odd twinge that I wouldn’t mind...”
The band visit former mining sites and ghost towns such as Bodie along the way: (l–r) Adam Clayton, The Edge, Bono, and Larry Mullen.
playing lead guitar, just like a couple of notes, but that’s about as near as I would want to get to the front.”

I’ll have a word with The Edge. “It looks so frightening being the singer. Especially from where I am. You know, Bono disappears into the audience and you don’t know what is happening. You just have to play on and hope for the best, but it’s very worrying. I trust his judgement, I really do, but he has an instinct for these things… but it doesn’t stop you worrying. I don’t always understand it, but I trust it.”

The Basildon fireman [Terry Marsh] has won the world title and Bono is on a rant about violence and peace and stuff like that.

“People think the reasons I’m attracted to Martin Luther King or Gandhi or Jesus Christ are that, in some way, I’m a real man of God myself. In truth, the real reason I’m attracted to these peaceful men is I’m the guy with the broken bottle. I grew up that way and I despise violence, I despise the violence in me, and that is why I’m attracted to men who’ve turned their back on it.

“There was a gig in America once where I threw Larry’s drumkit off stage and had a go at the band. And Edge, who is my ideal—he’s completely composed—he was so outraged by the violence in me that he gave me a severe dig in the mouth. It was amazing. I’ve known him all my life, and it was a really good dig in the mouth. It knocked me over. This was on stage, in front of the Talking Heads and The B-52’s. I think they all thought it was part of the show.

“You see, for me to sing on stage, the only way I can do it is if I’m really committed to it, and if I sense anything less than complete commitment from the others, then I get very antagonistic towards them, and occasionally this has led to a bit of a fracas. Larry was having a bad night and I was having a bad night and—well, some people come to see U2 and expect to see me in saffron.”

You are a bit of an icon to a lot of people.

“I think I must be a very bad icon. People mistake the music for the musician. What’s special about U2 is the music, not the musician. I and the others are just ordinary people and our trade is to make music. Somebody else’s is to build houses or work in a factory or teach. We’re just getting to grips with our trade as songwriters, that’s all.”

But surely you encourage it? All that flag waving and wading into the audience creating frenzy, don’t you feel uneasy about that?

“I do. We went on stage in front of 50,000 people at Milton Keynes and it had been raining all day and the field was like an Irish bog. We started to prod beneath the surface a little more. Asked who he is and I was appalled when, halfway through their first major US tour, he noticed that they’d adopted the first signs of American accents. Adam Clayton was appalled when, halfway through their first major US tour, he noticed that they’d adopted the first signs of American accents. He was almost flesh and blood with U2. We met him in Auckland, New Zealand. Auckland is a city set around five volcanic mounds and the smallest one is called One Tree Hill because there’s a tree at the top of it. We met Greg Carroll there and he worked with us on The Unforgettable Fire Tour. He was one of those guys you say he’s too good for this world. We haven’t, and I don’t think we ever will, get over his loss. And he died doing me a favour. I don’t know what to say. He furthered made 1986 the most paradoxical year in our lives. That’s why the desert attracted me as an image. That year was really a desert for us. It was a terrible time.

“Death is a real cold shower, and I’ve had a lot. It’s followed me around since I was a kid, and I don’t want to see anybody off.”

“One Tree Hill” is followed on the album by “Exit”, another song of violence and death. Its positioning on the album would indicate conceptual programming, but U2 insist the song is about no specific person and is purposely vague.

“The Edge, who had a band in the lyric, says it’s the prime example of their new cinematic approach to constructing songs and was partly inspired by reading Mailer’s The Executioner’s Song. Bono, on the other hand, talks of Flannery O’Connor and black comedies from the Deep South of America.

“It’s just a short story really, except I left out a few of the verses because I liked it as a sketch. It’s just about a guy who gets an idea into his head. He picks it up off a preacher on the radio or something and goes out and… I haven’t quite worked it out yet whether it was a suicide or a murder. The words just came out very quickly on the last day of the record. We had 30 songs for the album and chose 11 of them, but I wanted a song with that sense of violence in it, especially before “Mothers Of The Disappeared”.

America, America. It dominates the world and thrills and appeals U2. Adam Clayton was appalled when, halfway through their first major US tour, he noticed that they’d adopted the first signs of American accents. Panetic in, MTV and American radio was subsequently banned from their ears and an urgent SOS went out for a rescue dispatch of tapes of the John Peel and Dave Fanning shows, lest they become any more contaminated by the bile of American music. Thus freed from the taint of American media brainwashing, they started to prod beneath the surface a little more. Asked who he is...
listening to now, Edge will reply, “Hank Williams, Archie Edwards, Willie Dixon and Mel & Kim.” And Bono talks wistfully of listening to Keith Richards playing gospel songs on the piano and he, Bono, being introduced to his first John Lee Hooker record at the age of 25.

“It didn’t change my life, but it changed my attitude to music. I went home that night and wrote ‘Silver And Gold’. I met T-Bone Burnett once in a bar. He said, ‘I'm writing a song at the moment, it’s called ‘Having A Wonderful Time, Wish You Were Here’. I’m in Room Five, would you like to join me?’ How can you turn down an invitation like that?”

“How indeed?

“So we went and wrote that song. He'd then hand me the guitar and say, ‘Now you play me one of your songs’, and I'd look at the guitar, turn it over and play the beat on the back and sing it unaccompanied because U2’s music was without root. We, as a group, formed our own sound devoid of any background, because our record collections started in 1976 with Tom Verlaine and Patti Smith and The Clash and The Jam.

“‘Silver And Gold’ was my desperate attempt – and I wrote it in two hours – to write a song that belonged to a tradition. I was writing it about South Africa, about a man who was at the point of violence, which is something that fascinates me.”

Cropped hair, allied to a jaunty pair of pince-nez, gives Adam Clayton the air of an eccentric American college professor. An odd illusion for a man with such an urbane, even aristocratic manner, which itself seems at odds with a man who plays bass with U2 and uses the words “rock’n’roll” at any available pause in the conversation.

There’s no specific U2 sound, he insists, because they keep changing it. At one point, they were working on the album and Bono interrupted Edge and said he was beginning to sound like U2. Edge took the point and wiped the slate clean. They wanted to make a live-sounding album because that’s what rock’n’roll is all about. They knew the album is technically flawed, but that’s what rock’n’roll is all about. This album is rootsier because, shucks, that’s rock’n’roll. And boy, those old ‘50s records; half of them are out of tune and the playing’s awful, but it sure as hell is rock’n’roll.

One of the first things Bono greets us with, between offers of tea, coffee or perhaps something a little stronger, is a eulogy about Ben E King’s “Stand By Me” and its perfect right to be at No 1.


“For a few years, I didn’t know whether I wanted to be in a band and U2 didn’t know. We thought we might break up. It was after Boy, which I thought was a great album. I lost interest. I had less interest in being in U2 and more of an interest in other sides of me, whether I was talking to a Catholic priest in the inner city or a Pentecostal preacher, I was sucking up whatever they had to say. I was interested in that third-dimensional side of me and I thought rock’n’roll was a bit of waste of space.

“I thought, ‘OK, U2 were good at being a band, but maybe we could be better at doing other things, like getting involved in the inner city or something.’

“We were teetering on the brink of collapse. Adam was completely heartbroken about this. He was totally disillusioned, because he was more interested in other spirits like whisky or tequila or anything else he could lay his hands on. I’m alright now, I’ve come to terms with being in a band. I think now that this is what we do best.”

The next U2 single will be called “With Or Without You”, a melodic ballad that sounds like a smoochy love song but, if it is, someone’s put acid in the champagne. At the moment they’re editing the video. Bono’s face appears on the screen, harsh and cold, his hair swept cruelly back to emphasise that this is no standard standard.

Bono is uncharacteristically immodest about the song. He thinks it’s brilliant. He thinks it should go to No 1. He thinks the charts need U2 right
now a hell of a lot more than U2 could ever need the charts. He almost believes the song has turned him into a half-decent singer. “I don’t think I’ve been a good singer, but I think I’m getting to be a good one. On Unforgettable Fire, I think something broke in my voice and it’s continuing to break on The Joshua Tree, but there’s much, much, much more there. At the end of Unforgettable Fire, Eno said, ‘Bono has given me enough to get away with it, but he hasn’t given me all he’s got.’ I’ve given him more on this record, but there’s a lot more to come. I know that. “See, I’m loosening up as a person, about my position in a rock’n’roll band, about U2, but for years I really wasn’t sure about who I was or who U2 were or, really, if there was a place for us. People say that U2 are self-righteous, but if ever I pointed a finger I pointed it at myself. I was defensive about U2 and therefore I was on the attack. “When I hear U2 records, I hear my voice and I hear an uptightness. I don’t hear my real voice. A lot of it was to do with writing words on the spot, making them up as I went along. But Chrisstie Hynde said to me, ‘If you want to sing the way I think you want to sing and the way you can sing, then write words that you believe in.’ I’d never done that. I was literally writing the words as I was doing the vocals.”

Why?

“I thought writing words was almost old-fashioned. A hippy thing to do. I thought what I was doing in sketching away was… Iggy Pop had done it and he was a bit of a hero. I thought that, as soon as I had a pen in my hand, I was a dangerous man and…”

He suddenly stop dead mid-sentence and I wonder if it’s a coronary. “I hear U2? It is! It is!” He’s very excited; they’re playing his song. “It’s ‘Where The Streets Have No Name’, it must be on a radio. There. Do you hear it?”

Either he’s hallucinating or I am.

“I want to be a singer. I aspire to being a soul singer. My heroes are Van Morrison, Janis Joplin… but on the other hand, they’re Scott Walker and Elvis Presley, and trying to work in the two is where I am at the moment. The other interesting thing is that all the people that inspired me when I was growing up all had the same confusions of faith. Bob Dylan, Van Morrison, Patti Smith, Al Green, Marvin Gaye – this has been a real encouragement to me.”

He pauses to reflect on again on “With Or Without You”.

“It’s a great single. God almighty, I hope it gets into the Top 10, I really do, it’s a classic 45.”

Fighting talk, but who cares about his singles when your album is almost guaranteed to go straight into the charts at No 1? And on St Patrick’s Day.

Clayton and The Edge still cringe as they recall the last time they were on Top Of The Pops. “We were the first group that went on that show and our record went down,” says Edge, smiling. “We really felt pretty stupid doing it, though. We were on the same week as Echo And The Bunnymen – that was when Echo were still talking to us – and Mac suggested we swap guitar players. I actually thought it was a pretty funny idea, but somebody said there would be trouble from the unions, so we didn’t do it.”

But “Pride” was a hit single, and a damn good one.

“It’s the highest chart placing we’ve ever had, but we’re really terrible at producing singles. We’re never prepared to work out all that remix stuff and all those other promotional devices, it’s never been a priority with us.”

“And ultimately,” adds Clayton sagely, “I hope people will remember ‘Pride’ for what it was about rather than the fact that it was a hit. It was important for us to have a single which said something, rather than just make a nice noise on the radio.”

Bono is answering criticisms about his use of emotive phrases for easy dramatic effect. Under A Blood Red Sky, Unforgettable Fire, War; “Sunday Bloody Sunday”… “In God’s Country”.

“I guess I’m just an over-the-top kinda guy.”

Is that a plea of guilty?

“The Irish are great dramatists. The English hoard words and the Irish spend them. We’re loose. Like James Brown – ‘I’m a sex machine’ – now that’s not subtle. On one level, we’re accused of being too subtle and, on another, we’re not subtle enough. I’m interested in a certain language. On this record, I’m interested in a lot of primitive symbolism, almost biblical. Some people choose to use red, some people choose turquoise. Some people like lavender, like red.”

“During this period, I was influenced by the John Lennon handbook. I had it in my breast pocket… ‘Sunday Bloody Sunday’… after all, John Lennon wrote the first one. What upsets me is that when people see U2, they see only ‘Sunday Bloody Sunday’ and the guy with the white flag. They don’t see ‘Drowning Man’, which was on the same album. There is another side to U2. Sure, we arrived with a placard in our hands – and bold placards – but that’s just not what U2’s about.”

But you shouldn’t be surprised when that’s what the media pick up on.

“Oh, we deserve everything we get on that one. But Boy wasn’t like that. Nor was October. It was simply one album, War, which was a reaction to the new-romantic movement, the cocktail set-mentality, and deliberately we stripped our sound to bare bones and knuckles and three capital letters – WAR – and we put these prime colours in. But we’ve stood accused since then for that one album. You could say the same thing about John Lennon, he went through a similar sort of period, or Bob Dylan on his earliest work, ‘Masters Of War’ and all that. It was just a period we went through.”

Do you regret it now? “No.”

LAST YEAR, BONO went to Nicaragua and El Salvador, where he met some of the mothers of the disappeared, inspiring the album’s final track. The Amnesty International tour hit San Francisco and Lou Reed took him to Mission Street, where the walls are covered in anti-American slogans and vicious murals. There he met the Chilean artist Rene Castro.

“I was drawn towards Central America through meeting him. At first he didn’t pay me much attention, until he discovered the Amnesty connection. Amnesty saved his life. He’d been captured when Allende was killed and they had the military revolution. He was tortured. He had a hole in his chest. They bored a hole in his chest. He was in the stadium with Victor Jara when he had his fingers cut off and then, eventually, was brutally murdered.

“Amnesty International had got him out and people from the Latin American community came to our gigs and Rene Castro sent me some of his paintings and, eventually, I was asked to go to Nicaragua and El Salvador. In Nicaragua it’s, well, it’s the sexiest revolution I ever saw. Women in khaki uniforms standing on corners and, well, I don’t like anyone with an Armalite rifle, but they were standing there smoking cigarettes and looking like Miss World.

“And then going to Salvador, the difference in the air was incredible. You could feel the atmosphere of malevolence from the troops. It was awful. I wrote ‘Bullet The Blue Sky’ out of the fear I felt there, using very primitive imagery. Because Salvador looks like an ordinary city. You see McDonald’s, you see children with schoolbooks, you see what looks like a middle-class environment until you go 25 miles out of the city and see the villagers and the peasant farmers.

“I was outside on my way to a village, and the village was bombed and it scared the shit out of me. I didn’t know which way to run. They were mortar-ing the village and there were fighters overhead and it was completely… And this little farmer says to me. ‘Noorry, it’s over there.’ He was going through it every day of his life and he’d learned to live with it, whereas I was there just for a few weeks and I was really concerned with number one at that point. Troops opened fire above our heads while we were there… just flexing their muscles… and I literally felt sick.

“The idea that people at our concerts in America, their tax was paying for these instruments of torture, was something I hadn’t quite come to terms with.”

He turns to Larry Mullen. “Do you think I should be talking about this? Probably not.”

Terry Marsh is world champion. The new album is called The Joshua Tree. And they wouldn’t tell me why. Colin Irwin •
ALBUMS

U2 The Joshua Tree [ISLAND]

When I think of U2, I don't think of America, I don't think of stadia, sweat, pumping fists, auxiliary hair. I think of fresh air, fjords, snow, the sky, expanse. Only the small-minded could resent these open spaces, this size; the indie regressives or the soulboys, who both hanker for the grass roots, keep their ears fixed to the ground.

I certainly don't think of Springsteen. Springsteen is a hearth, harking back, bringing nothing new in the way of sound or of meaning, every phrase or gesture cueing our pop memories, binding us tighter or of meaning, every phrase or gesture cueing our pop memories, binding us tighter.

It's a sound, a sense of space and architecture, that wouldn't exist without Television. Tom Verlaine opened up the possibility for rock to retain acceleration and urgency while shedding its aura of masculine rowdiness, its scuffed shabbiness. He invented a kind of austere psychedelia, an abstract attack, a pure aggression with no object beyond exultation in itself. This puritan, post-R&B rock is everywhere - Verlaine gave us Echo, Go-Betweens, REM, Bodines, Meat Puppets, Hurrah!

But no one has made it resound louder and larger in global pop than U2.

U2 are massive but minimal, majestic but free of pomposity or flourish. They have no solos, power chords, curlicues even - just a weave of close-chording texture, an exhilarating shimmer. Tracks like “Where The Streets Have No Name” teem, accelerate, become inexorable, a cascade of sapphire and marble. Echo haven’t done anything as powerful since “All I Want”. U2 bring to the packed, agoraphobic confines of pop something big, something grey. That’s their valour, but also their undoing. Their music can never be as selfless as REM or Stars Of Heaven, because Bono is mixed too big, thunderously close. When he embraced that girl from the audience at Live Aid, it was touching.

Listening to this album, crushed against his bosom, deafened by his pounding heart, the intimacy, the concern is quickly intolerable. There are only ever three tracks on every U2 LP you can listen to. The other problem is that all the mystical outraging impulses in their sound get condensed down into a humanist vision, vested in the charismatic focus of Bono. Driven by the desire to articulate big truths, to wield language large enough to unite us all, U2 are drawn to

safe issues, like Amnesty International, Martin Luther King, that reach across divisions to all “decent folk”. There’s a naive hope that we can transcend politics (but Bono, there are monsters in our midst, in our own hearts), whereas at its best U2’s music suggests that we can transcend our flesh and our identities. It’s glorious make-believe.

Some say the impulse to “soar above” is a bourgeois delusion, a hygienic aversion to the “truth” of filth. Well, the good thing about being a schizophrenic rock critic is not having to choose - I can be up in the air today, down in the dirt tomorrow. U2 are out of touch, and today at least, I mean that as a compliment.

Simon Reynolds, MM/March 14

Simply Red Men And Women [WEA]

The things we do for love. Simply Red’s second album patrols nature’s longest Roman road, the eternal straight line of heterosexual intercourse, with the diligence of the AA’s keenest recruit. There’s little cheer here for those media analysts who would have the band enlarge on the political statement of “Money’s Too Tight”, defining its name in terms of socialist responsibility. Sexual and emotional policies are the issues under debate on Men And Women: its lyrical concerns suggest you’ll find Reds under the bed...

In the little under two years since Picture Book was released, Simply Red have grown together to become one of the chart mainstream’s most convincing and accomplished bands – recent live performances of that album’s material make the recorded originals sound one-dimensional in comparison. So the striking thing about Men And Women is how well producer Alex Sadkin captures that new confidence. With the basic six-man band now regularly augmented by vocalist Janette Sewell and saxist Ian Kirkman, Simply Red has a sound as energetic and muscular as any pop band around.

And, of course, it has Mick Hucknall’s voice. As a vehicle for a song it’s technically impressive, but more importantly emotionally expressive. What determines its strength in practice is the material it is asked to carry, and as writer or co-writer of most of the tracks here, the responsibility falls on Hucknall to exploit his own gift.

His judgement is good, but not infallible. On Men And Women he chooses to court the kind of image he has been at pains to dissociate himself from in recent interviews – OK, so self-written material need not necessarily be autobiographical, but there’s certainly plenty to titillate Upholders of the dog-with-two-dicks school of character appreciation.

Most affecting are those songs that put libido on hold and
wear their heart on their pyjama sleeves instead. “Suffer”, one of two tracks written in collaboration with Lamont Dozier and cheekily credited to Hucknall-Dozier-Hucknall, proves the point. “Holding Back The Years” suggested the colour range Mick Hucknall is capable of — here his high register work conjures up an infinite tenderness and vulnerability, which provides a welcome counterpoint to the cocky gait of the first single lift, “The Right Thing”.

A reverent but sufficiently personal cover of Bunny Wailer’s “Love Fire” gives him similar room to stretch out, but it’s on the self-written “Shine” that he relaxes enough to blend in with his musicians and produce a true ensemble sound. Punchy and precise, it’s the best dance music Simply Red have presented on record so far and successfully scuppers the widely cherished theory that Simply Hucknall would be a more accurate theory that Simply Hucknall-Dozier-Hucknall, to bait journalists and other detractors who would have him agonise in public about the perils of getting rich and famous.

“I Won’t Feel Bad” is strong musically, but lines like “You’ll never see me walking down a guilty middle-class street!” frequently appalled/By them pretending to be poor men…” Stop out clumsily over the beat and seem a gratuitous expression of sentiments made forcibly in just about every Simply Red interview so far. And council flat references in “Move On Out” sound suspiciously like a calculated attempt to prolong the debate, however legitimate they might be to the song’s scenario.

These idiosyncrasies aside, Men And Women is a likeable summation of Simply Red’s progress over the past two years, and one that justifies the bravura of the rogue male Hucknall. It’s probably a safe bet that, live, the band can already blow Sadkin’s cleanly recorded studio versions away, so future developments have a strong foundation in the 10 tracks here.

Emotional politics, the politics of dancing… Simply Red’s manifesto is strong enough to prove a tactical vote-winner.

Alan Jackson, NME Mar 14

SINGLES

Prince Sign O’ The Times WEA

Singles Review 1987

There’s no one operating anywhere who can contrive a similar atmosphere of excitement, of a definite “event” merely by releasing a record. Prince’s genius and understanding of pop’s ability to capture the moment, to flood the mainstream with outrageous, subliminal messages is unparalleled by any artist in his position. He clocks all the subcultural signs, the brags and the boasts of the rappers, the new shapes being carved out of old rock, but he keeps a verve and an adventure that will rarely see him usurped. “Sign O’ The Times” is a stunning re-entry after the composure of his recent celluloid fling. In every way — mood, melody, vision — it is the black downside of “Kiss”’s brilliant, open-ended sensuous fury. The former was playful and suggestive, “…Times” nails its mood with the same pared-down minimalist funk, but it bubbles to a dark anguished spooky spell of a record; matching Marvin’s inner-city sermons to Sly’s anguished riot Goin’ On comedown. He’s swapped the jangleometer for all it’s got, must, an endearing cult classic on last year’s album, this is a definitive re-entry that will rarely see him usurped. “Holding Back The Years” is a likeable effort, released as a response to the Prince heat and his own at the centre of one of the biggest. “I Had a Dream Last Night” will stick with ears everywhere. A Star is Born.

NME Feb 21

Communards You Are My World ’87 London

Didn’t really take off first time around, mainly because the “controversial” lyrics scared off the radio producers. Now Jimmy and Richard are high-profile pop stars with a No 1 behind them and are figureheads of Aids awareness campaigns. Still the best thing they’ve ever done and destined for the Top 10. About bloody time! NME Feb 14

Camper Van Beethoven Take The Skinheads Bowling Rough Trade

While it’s not the magnificent quixotic blast they arrived at on last year’s album, this is a must, an endearing cult classic from a fine bunch of inspired Californian crazies. They hit the jangleometer for all it’s got, but their gift is to get the chords that matter, offset it with careening fiddle and clever harmonies, and for all their wry nonchalance, there’s a warm heart beating at the centre of their music. Besides, the line “I had a dream last night I want to lick your knees” will stick with me to the grave, if not beyond.

NME Mar 7

LIGHT A BIG FIRE UNDER FEET AND EARS EVERYWHERE. A STAR IS BORN.
March 27, 1987: wearing one of his four sets of Lewis Leathers, Julian Cope poses for publicity shots at 36–40 West Street, London WC2.
“My image, is it crass?”

Leather trousers, banter with Mark E Smith, and even a hit single – never mind “Julian Cope Is Dead”, JULIAN COPE is back on top. So can anything derail this toy-collecting family man? “He pulled out his dick and it had a huge ring through it,” says Cope, “and I just went, ‘WOW!’”

— NME JANUARY 24 —

JULIAN LOVES CARS. The one we’re in now is quite nice. Our driver eases the rented Mercedes limo through inner-city Paris on a wet Monday morning. The smoke-glass windows keep the snob value in as we gently overtake around the boulevards and avenues.

The leather Julian lounges easily in the rear seat. He too enjoys the ride, but he has another four wheels on his mind. Today he wants to buy a car, but his desire is no ordinary auto. It’s a 1959 Lincoln Premiere, a presidential marque, long and low, a cool machine. The French version has rare wheels – he must have it! But Julian will never drive this beautiful benchmark of Detroit boomtime, for this Lincoln is a Dinky Toy. And this is a serious trip.

We have escaped the traffic, and are doing as the Parisians do – sitting in a cafe. The one we’re in now is quite nice. It’s the Café Costes, a chic rendezvous. Around us, a thousand films are being made for whatever-is-French-for-Channel 4, while Julian and Cally discuss The Car. Cally is Julian’s manager. He too favours the leather look, and they both dig ’60s acid-punk and toy vehicles. Today, Cally will pose as a model dealer and pay a surprise visit to the Paris fanatic who has offered the Lincoln. The pose should cut the price. Julian will hang out here – he dislikes haggling for toys. But what’s so special about this model? “They did two different sets of wheels, and I haven’t got this set. It sounds really stupid, but you’ll see it. I just hope we get it.”
They’re in Paris expressly to secure The Toy. To underestimate Julian’s passion for toy cars is to underestimate his well-documented obsession for the finest rock’n’roll. He even has his own toy firm, Copoco-Callitoy (they import and export for the benefit of their collections) and—at his uncle’s house near Tamworth—a sunshine playroom overflowing with his beloved scale models.

“When I go into the toy room it’s just completely magical,” he glows. “You go through a 60-foot corridor to get to it, and you come out into a Peter Pan yard. Yeah, just like The Lion, The Witch And The Wardrobe. It’s a retreat. I’ve written a lot of songs in there.”

What does your toy car collection mean to you?

“It’s special to me. I like toy cars more than I like real cars; it’s a perfect miniature, nothing can go wrong, a toy isn’t going to rust and fall to pieces.”

“When I started collecting them about five years ago, the prices were really low, and I bought most of them then. But there’s certain gaps, like the one we’re going for today. It’s an important toy to me, very brutal!”

We discuss the imminent bullshit potential of any such collecting. Julian knows his limits; he shakes his head as he tells nonfiction stories from the cut-throat world of toy collecting. At this point, Cally departs on the Dinky odyssey. Julian wishes him luck, and stays on the edge of his seat…

“He’s back in our lives because: ‘Someone’s got to be prepared to get up there and make a cream-faced loon of themselves.”

Julian has never been scared to open his mouth so wide that both his motorbike boots could climb in, kickstart his tonsils, and fall out again. But surely we have more than enough room for him, in a pop-time when no one is prepared to peer outside their wallet. Pop music has dug its grave… but thank God there’s someone leaping the hole wearing only a turtle shell.

“Having on for dear life at the edge of his stage world—as is defined by the swing of that stand thing—Julian smirks at his audience, and it is definitely his crowd. They wear their fandom as a hip badge; many of them are too young to have caught on for Wilder but they’re back-tracking, and Julian would certainly approve. How many reached The Stooges through “The Passenger”? Whereas Julian was once a minor character in those speckled post-punk days, he has grown into a legend. Gone are the hesitant, quasi-post-punk plays of “Pure Toy”, “Seven Views of Jerusalem”, “Colours, Fly Away”; Julian is relishing the Second Time Around, he’s kicked the habits, and he’s rocking out. Be there or be one of those “dabblers”.

He had been consigned to the Barrett home—turning vegetables in his mum’s front garden—even before the Fries’d sleeve. Julian Cope was at his lowest at the time of the first solo album, he felt like death after The Teardrop Experience—even the songs on World Shut Your Mouth were virtually run-ins of the group’s lost third album. But through the hyseric mists drifted the wondrous, anthemic “Strasbourg”, the stark beauty of “Head Hang Low” and “Elegant Chaos”; and on the last one, even zonked out in the max, he saw what lay ahead: ”It’s a big teenage death.” Julian Cope was at his lowest at the time of the first solo album, he felt like death after The Teardrop Experience—even the songs on World Shut Your Mouth were virtually run-ins of the group's lost third album. But through the hyseric mists drifted the wondrous, anthemic “Strasbourg”, the stark beauty of “Head Hang Low” and “Elegant Chaos”; and on the last one, even zonked out in the max, he saw what lay ahead: ”It’s a big teenage death.”

The public guffawed and the critics pulled out their incident at the Creation Christmas party. In an over-festive attempt to put the gross sides of me are appealing.
flung it at Mr Drummond while he was onstage performing “Julian Cope Is Dead”. Regrettably, my good-natured actions were interpreted as direct insult, and I barely escaped with my life. Er, sorry to embarrass you, Bill, no offence intended (I haven’t had the nerve to taste the jam you posted here by return).

But of course, there’s two in every crowd, and as the whipped cream dripped from the reddening face of the artist, a shocked stranger turned to me and hissed, “What are you doing? Don’t you know he made Julian?”

We low-rider in the limo towards a photo session, earlier in the day. Julian keeps cool; that Dinky’s playing wonderful tricks with his mind. He does have a real vehicle. He shows us, removing his wallet from a crumpled jacket and handing up a heart-worn Instamatic picture of Dorian and doggy, posing against his VW Karmann-Ghia. Regular guy!

He met Dorian at a Teardrops gig in the Midwest. She was blissing out looking at him. He, likewise. “I looked down and went, Karmann-Ghia. Regular guy!”

And soon, she was. It was a Greek Orthodox wedding, for her folks; “two ’59 Cadillacs, real Deer Hunter stuff”. Oh, to have that on video…” I wanted to, but Dorian said that’d be really tacky, ‘AWWWLLLRRRIIIDE! She looks like my wife.’”

He was a hit with her folks, but they weren’t quite what he was expecting. “I felt a bit of a straight when I first went there, her dad used to be a real big speed-freak!”

“Julian’s eyes light up. He’s working on another strange brew, with Trouble Funk, whose main man James Avery remixed “World Shut Your Mouth”. He met them as “the weirdest person in the world”. He recounts: “Sleazy Christopherson went, ‘Oh yeah? Take a look at this then’, and he pulled out his dick and it had a huge ring through it, and I just went, ‘WOW!’ I was freaking out! I was just freaked out!”

Christopherson went, “Oh yeah? Take a look at this then”, and he pulled out his dick and it had a huge ring through it, and I just went, “WOW!” I was down there on the floor inches from it, just freaked out!”

He ponders; “What is my image, is it crass?”

Some say, everyone loves a clown, and he was wearing his reddest nose the time he was fully fired and on all fours, being dragged to a Psychic TV recording session by Stevo of Some Bizzare. Julian was introduced to them as “the weirdest person in the world”. He recounts: “Sleazy Christopherson went, ‘Oh yeah? Take a look at this then’, and he pulled out his dick and it had a huge ring through it, and I just went, ‘WOW!’ I was down there on the floor inches from it, just freaked out!”

Back in the cafe, he tells the story without wonder, as if it was some other booby. He’s packed away the funny face now, for the most part, because no one loves an old joke and he’s seen that. Even the exclamations are a little less frequent in ’86.

And Buckley again. We’re doing a Buckley song called ‘Pleasant Street’, and combining it with Funkadelic’s ‘I’ll Stay’, it’s really beautiful.”

Cally smiles. “AWWWLLLRRRIIIDEEEEE!!!”

Cally slowly opens his bag, teasing the excited one… “Silver wheels, two rings…”

(We could interrupt, and tell how Julian was sent a massive Mercedes model by post from a Japanese fan, or how he took a 1955 Buick Roadmaster Dinky as royalties for his Rabbi Joseph Gordan “bootleg” 45). Cally hands a small block of tissue to Julian, who unwraps it with pure joy in his eyes. The original box is revealed, and within it, the 1959 Lincoln Premiere Dinky slips and slides to its new owner’s caresses… Trumpets Cally. “I made out there were chips on the wings, but they’re not chips, they’re paint splatters!”

They whoop andoller in delight! And Julian pulls the toy from its box… “AAAAWWLLLRRRRRIIIDEEDDDDEEE!!!” He holds his prize aloft.

It would be an insignificant sight to the non-collector. Rather drab even, but what do I know? Cally reveals the price – 575 francs (about £60). He enthuses, “It’s absolutely mint, brilliant. You should have seen his face when I turned up, he never expected us to.”

Julian: “What a period piece!”

They bask in the glow of their success. The 1959 Lincoln Premiere now sits in the sunshine playroom, and Julian Cope starts 1987 with his fullest house in years. I love you, you big dummy. David Swift •

“Julian Cope starts 1987 with his fullest house in years. I love you, you big dummy.”

David Swift
“Small talk, bribes, the whole number”

THE RESTROOM of Tony Visconti’s studio beneath the pavements of Soho, Johnny Marr ignores the veggieburger in favour of the trifle, opens a can of lager and settles himself into a settee. A magazine lying open beside him confirms that “Shoplifters Of The World Unite” has crashed into the Top 10, and through the wall behind him comes the faint sound of laughter – Morrissey, Mike Joyce, Andy Rourke and Stephen Street – and the strains of their next single, mixed without bother this very afternoon…

These are happy Smiths, Smiths dreamily ironing their frock in readiness for their arranged marriage to EMI Records. And these are Smiths still catching their breath, having survived 12 months that would’ve tested the resolve of an Iranian commando.

In that year, before they reached their current oasis of content, they were trapped in a seemingly endless jungle of controversy, accusation, overwork and violence. Above the familiar howls of the band’s usual critics came new voices, and new words – “traitors”, “sell-out”, “rockist”. And before the dark days ended, one Smith had booked himself an Awayday to oblivion…

For Johnny Marr, the passing of a couple of months, and the stabilisation of The Smiths’ lineup, have allowed him to come to terms with these events. The changes in him, he admits, go beyond his new Elvis haircut.

“We’d all become too committed to the band. I was a Smith every second of every waking hour and it was doing me no good. It isn’t easy to change, though, because my personal life is so closely wrapped up with the band; Morrissey’s my best friend.

“I’m consciously spending more time with Angie, my wife, but she’s deeply involved with the band too. But things did have to change. With me it was a matter of saving myself…”

The painful knowledge that things were, for the first time, badly out of hand and that changes (including the endlessly
"We’d all become too committed to the band": Morrissey and Johnny Marr in 1987.
threatened severance from Rough Trade’s apron strings) would have to be made, hit The Smiths during last year’s seemingly triumphant tour of America. Frustration had set in with the realisation that their obvious and growing popularity in the USA remained stubbornly unreflected in the charts. In LA, for instance, they sold out successive nights in an 8,000-seater which, the previous week, A-Ha had barely half-filled – but A-Ha had had a Stateside No 1, and a Top 20 album…

Morale wasn’t helped either when MTV showed up. Astounded by the sight of this limey band without a proper record deal selling out huge halls, they dispatched a reporting team to jet-hop from one venue to the next. The Smiths would arrive hours after them. In their van.

“And later,” Johnny rolls his eyes, “it got worse and worse. Organisationally, we had so many people pulling and pushing at us; the pressure built up unbelievably. The only way to deal with it, to motivate yourself to go out and be ‘big’ in front of 10 or 15 thousand people, was to get completely plastered. I found myself doing a bottle of Remy Martin each evening. And after 25 nights of that…

‘Worse for wear’ wasn’t the half of it; I was extremely ill. By the time the tour actually finished it was all getting a little bit… dangerous. I was just drinking more than I could handle. It was then that I really began to resent, y’know, the thing with the label, the press, all of it. When it starts having a damaging effect on your health, it’s all gone too far…”

And how did Morrissey, used to having everything under fingertip control, to being the centre of attention, cope with all this?

“I don’t know whether he really did come to terms with it, or what. It’s so much more difficult for him anyway; at the end of the day I’ve got someone I love, someone with whom I can be just totally myself and lock the world out. But Morrissey…”

The Smiths returned to their native fog convinced that a long-promised day could be put off no longer; it was time to talk numbered Swiss bank accounts with the majors.

“Every single label came to see us. It was small talk, bribes, the whole number. I really enjoyed it. The decision to join EMI was only made after massive consideration. We listened carefully to each offer, though I always thought EMI would be the one. They’re an institution in the English music scene, which is very in keeping with The Smiths.”

Johnny Marr was, and is, delighted with his betrothal to EMI. To some of their more ardent admirers, though, they might just as well have announced that their next single featured backing vocals by the South African SPG!

“The fanatics,” begins a weary pop star “were, and still are, genuinely upset about our leaving Rough Trade. I’d have thought they’d be more concerned with a record’s grooves than its label, but…

‘And surely it’s obvious that Morrissey and I wouldn’t have put ourselves into a position where we’d inevitably be branded the villains of the piece, where we’d be presented as a pair of commercially opportunistic charlatans, unless there was a damn good reason for doing so…”

Like, shall we say, the million quid EMI are supposed to have bunged yourself and Morrissey to be getting on with?

“That figure is just people making assumptions, and as it happens, neither Morrissey nor myself has yet seen a penny. But I’m not going to get defensive about it – why should I? Obviously the money’s part of the reason we signed…”

There’s an unworthy suspicion abroad that EMI, having gone to the bother of opening their piggy bank, might not be quite as tolerant of The Smiths’ lovingly attended collection of eccentricities as were Rough Trade, may not be as readily galvanised by Morrissey’s iron whim, and may, when the subject is broached, think that Artistic Control is the name of their new dance signing.

“That’s all dealt with. ‘Artistic Control’ – down in writing. In any case, EMI realise how desperately they need a good pop group, a great pop group, and that we were successful off our own bat; they won’t want to change us…

“That’s why the labels were queuing up – they know full well they’d be getting a ready-made, fully self-contained unit, a self-sufficient success…”

If the Curse Of EMI had provided a reliable stream of Smiths-baiting material, the release of their “Panic” single threatened a flood. Morrissey is no innocent, and he’d make the Olympic shit-stirring squad any day, but even he must have been taken aback by the shockwave of anger unleashed by his general invitation to “burn down the disco” and “hang the blessed DJ”…
The incident at Newcastle, then, where Morrissey had to seek shelter from a storm of gob, was minor by comparison.

“Well, yes and no. We just hate all that shit, a minority ruining the show for the rest, the cool ones. I don’t mean this in any patronising, pop-star way, but our audience is incredibly important to us. I look from the stage and I see a mass of people, mostly guys, who look absolutely incredible, certainly more interesting than the types you get at gigs by The Communards or most mid-’80s groups. We’re impressed to hell with our audience.”

**WITHIN 10 MINUTES** of the tour’s final curtain, the nun-eating rock-monster five-piece edition of The Smiths was, with the departure of Craig Gannon, back to the original foursome. Gannon’s original introduction to the band, from out of nowhere, had precipitated speculation of rosette-winning intensity. Earlier, Johnny Marr had repeated the party line that Gannon was recruited because Andy Rourke had been “unwell”.

This is loyal, but not entirely frank. Bassist Rourke had indeed been “unwell”, but we’re not talking head cold here. Rourke’s health problems were rooted in his increasing involvement with heroin.

“Yeah,” Marr nods, “that’s true…”

The Smiths’ legion of detractors will no doubt celebrate this sad little moment, use it to besmirch, by association, Morrissey’s whiter-than-white stance. Inadequates love a victory, however small.

Did Rourke have to go (for what proved to be only a few weeks) because he couldn’t fulfil his obligations, or because Johnny Marr, or Morrissey, couldn’t, ahem, handle it?

“The issue never came up in that form, but we personally were all devastated by it. Andy and I have been friends since we were 13 or 14. He couldn’t keep going. That was aOpted for a white stance. Inadequates love a victory, however small.

Did Rourke have to go (for what proved to be only a few weeks) because he couldn’t fulfil his obligations, or because Johnny Marr, or Morrissey, couldn’t, ahem, handle it?

“The issue never came up in that form, but we personally were all devastated by it. Andy and I have been friends since we were 13 or 14. He couldn’t keep going. That was a miserably silly reason to pluck Andy Rourke out of the Smiths. He played on Bragg’s ‘Taxman…’ is going to be The Smiths’ biggest hit, America beckons, till they’re as old as Sigue Sigue Sputnik), Johnny Marr is in clover.

“Andy’s fine now and I guess something positive has come out of it, particularly in relation to that ‘Morrissey, Marr and the session guys’ shit. We found we really missed him, and he discovered just how important he is…”

No, it’s not like the old days any more. At 23 (which used to be rock’s compulsory retirement age, though now people are allowed to work till they’re as old as Sigue Sigue Sputnik), Johnny Marr is in clover.

“Shoplifters…” is going to be The Smiths’ biggest hit. America beckons, and the deal with EMI means that he can spend the rest of his life hanging out in recording studios. That, to him, translates roughly as Christmas every day!

Most of his social time, too, is spent in the company of musicians, and he’s just started to spread tentative wings beyond the confines of The Smiths. He played on Bragg’s ‘Taxman…’ last year and is involved now, “in a lowest-possible-profile sort of way”, in upcoming projects with Bobby Womack. ACR’s Donald Johnson and some old north country busking hermit he’s discovered named Bryan Ferry.

But for now, I reckon, he should concentrate on The Smiths, and the upstarts who’ll be looking to unperch them.
May 28, 1987: the Beastie Boys at Brixton Academy in South London. (l-r) Ad-Rock, Mike D, and MCA.
“We’re gonna get shot one day”

Yo Columbus, let’s see some tits!”

And so it began.

In Georgia, home of hot Tabasco sauce and even hotter apple pie.

Imagine the Beastie Boys – just for the (raising) hell of it. Imagine the tranquil, conservative buckle of the Bible Belt – just for the (burning) hell of it. Imagine two hells colliding head-on.

The Beastie Boys stopped imagining and started playing the starring role in their own fantasy – a dream with more phallus than fallacy as apple pie was smeared across the face of the Southern states.

The chaos cauldron almost boiled over when the band arrived at the hotel – the very same hotel that was holding the Annual Miss Georgia Beauty Queen Competition somewhere – Beauty And The Beasties.

Anything could have happened. Almost everything did.

The band leave the hotel for the venue carrying the only two books they own – *Hammer Of The Gods*, the graphic tour of Led Zeppelin’s nefarious acts of indulgence, and *Extended Sexual Orgasm*, a literary delay spray. The Beasties intend to outlive and outlast each page of each book until they either die or hit the index. Meanwhile back at the gig…

On stage: a go-go cage, the giant six-pack of Budweiser where DJ Hurricane sniffs and scratches, and a plethora of empty cans thrown on by the roadies during the show. Also on show – 163 nipples, two people breast-dancing (!), 39 people headbanging, 52 limbs slam-dancing, and an entire arena being pulverised by a harrowing onslaught of metal, mania and mayhem.

By the time the band bulldozed their way through “No Sleep Till Brooklyn”, a few officers of the law were also on show. As “Brass Monkey” and “Girls” toppled the Southern criss-cross, the police ranks swelled and edged closer to the stage. With all that blue, it became clear that something was afoot-and-mouth. Too late to extract that Adidas from that molar now. The trio entered the limelight again for their encore, “Fight For Your Right” – the one where the giant 10-foot cock erupts from the stage. Ad-Rock and Mike D shower the audience with ale while Adam Yauch (MCA) pours beer over some naked nubile’s breasts and the crowd foam at the mouth. That was it. The noise was so devastating, no one heard the camel’s back break. Snap. Halfway through the third chorus the road crew tackled the trashcan kids, hurling them toward the discreet side exit where a revved car was waiting to accelerate the band away from jail. The police raced to block their impromptu departure, but they were too late.

“What you trying to arrest the band for, man?” an agitated Russell Simmons (the manager) asked a nearby sergeant.

“This is Georgia. We don’t need a reason.”

The police started milling around the backstage area searching for anyone with gold chains or baseball caps. Time to change the celluloid stage directions.

Take Three. Exit one photographer and one journalist to the relative sanctity of the hotel. Peace, quiet, and room service.

The Beastie Boys had other ideas. There were still all those Miss Apple Pies to terrify. A score of Southern Beastie Belles had yet other ideas.

Must be something in the water. “Can I-all come up to yaw rooem?”

“Yo.”

Take Four and take four more.

T

he Beastie Boys were the name on everyone’s forked tongues following their obtrusive appearance on TV during the American Grammy Awards two days earlier. The band that put the “c” into rap and the “s” into punk arrived on the nation’s screens swearing at the audience, insulting the pop nominees, drowning out the scheduled music with their Third World briefcase and falling over one another trying to do handstands. With a predictably unpredictable performance, they instantly became Public Enema No 1.

“The rules were that you had to wear a tuxedo,” says Yauch, scratching his stubble. “Ours were at the cleaners, so we jumped around and grabbed our dicks a lot and laughed a lot.”

“We got more press out of it than any of the winners,” Mike D gloats. “When you’re there meeting all these legends you almost don’t want to diss [trans: slag off] anybody. But then we thought, ‘What the hell. I hate Barbra Streisand more than anyone in the world!’”

Robert Palmer was the lucky winner of the award for Best Male Vocalist, but for the first time in living memory, a winner stayed rooted to his chair.
looking anxious rather than elated. He just didn’t want to collect his glittering prize from the rabid announcers. I wonder why? “I think he was scared like shit.”

Thank you, Mike.

MCA: “Backstage there were all these Mafia-type promoters offering us blow, but we told them to fuck off and laugh at them, you know. We don’t do that shit any more. Then Billy Idol walked in, so we said, ‘Yo, what’s happening?’ and he just turned around and said, ‘My album’s No 7 in the charts.’ Can you believe it! He didn’t even say hello. He left because we were laughing so hard at him. Then the organisers asked us to leave. What a prick!”

The Beasties are laughing all the way to the (next) bank. Without warning, without any promotion, and without a care in the world, their album *Licensed To Ill* is No 1 in America. No one could believe it, least of all the band.

“The cool thing about being No 1 is that no one else is No 1,” explains Mike “call me Aristotle” Diamond. “So everyone has to sit on your dick. Atonce. It’s so cold!”

Adam Horovitz (Ad-Rock) starts grinning: “The guys at The Grammies all thanked us for coming, whereas a month before they’d have called the police. The thing is, it was obvious we weren’t going to suddenly open bottles of champagne when we reached No 1, because we never worked to get there. We never made the album in order to do it. It just happened. We were breaking bottles of champagne five years ago.”

Simmons puts it more succinctly: “They’re just dicks. Being this successful won’t change them. They’ll always be dicks.”

“But dicks that suddenly everyone has to respect,” says Mike, stepping out of his toga. “All those assholes that want to throw you out of the back door now have to find us the best table in the house. There are still more people who hate us than are into us, but who cares? It’s the fun that counts.”

Bringing Cecil B De Mille.

One hundred and fifty million viewers (dressed in white-belt checked pants, and speaking in unison): “They can’t play, they can’t sing, they can’t write, they can’t act, they’re just shit.”

The Beasties: “We’re just def.”

The Verdict: the Beastie Boys are happening because 150 million people can tell them that they’re shit and yet they still believe they’re def.

From New York’s to household names – just like on TV. No, exactly like TV. No, the Beastie Boys are TV – so fantastic their reality is TV, and here in the ’80s TV is reality. Their tour even has commercial breaks…

Ad-Rock: “I’m hungry. Let’s stop at a 7-11 at the next town. No, look, there goes a Wendy’s!”

And now, back to the movie: a splintering of Porky’s Revenge and Nightmare On St Elmo’s Street. The B-boys are every high school kid’s illusion come true – a jerk turned rich celebrity watching the bully eat his heart out and swallowing hard.

Mike D: “People think because we act like jerks we couldn’t possibly do anything creative. What they don’t know is that we get paid a lot of money for acting the way they do.”

And even more dollar signs for doing the way they act. Not one of the hotel walls that are lined with guests and tinsel crowns waiting to get there. We never made the album in order to do it. It just happened. We were breaking bottles of champagne five years ago.”

The band look at each other and then carefully inspect the jacket to see what else is in the teenagers pocket. Like they say – anything can happen. There’s a golden rule for bands constantly receiving death threats: never trust an evangelist. They’ll pray for your soul and then blow you away just to see if their prayers have been answered.

In Jacksonville, Florida, the previous day, a man who’d been arrested threatened to have his best friend blow up the Beastie Boys concert. The boys have learnt to expect the worst from people, but now is not the time to cause more trouble. Park benches in Georgia are notoriously uncomfortable and there are few hotels this side of Murmansk that will now accept their custom or their costume.

They’ve already been banned from Eastern Airlines, all Holiday Inn, and most of the boys are now phoning the band’s next port of call to warn them of the impending cyclone. Even during their brief stay in England last year, they managed to put a hotel’s nose permanently out of joint. A small matter of drilling through the floor of their room with jackhammers so they could pass down cans of beer to their friends in the vertically adjacent room. And there’s more… much more. Embroidering the unreleenting legend...

MCA: “Just before this tour we got thrown out of the Sunset Marquis, which was probably one of the most awesome stories ever…”

That is, until the rest of this story.

“We got all these villas which cost about $10,000 dollars a night because they screwed up our reservation in ordinary rooms. These villas were huge, even the shower room was at least half the size of our tourbus. We had them for one night, so we did it all. We closed the glass shower door and sealed the bottom with towels and filled the marble room up like a swimming pool. It was so def. Then we got in over the door – there were these girls and bottles of champagne floating in the water. It was awesome. I realise this is difficult to believe, but it’s true…”

Ad-Rock: “I was with a girl underwater. Unfortunately, her foot slipped and she kicked the door open…”

MCA: “We all tumbled out with the water which flooded the whole villa. Part of the floor even collapsed. It was so incredible.”

Class with a capital K.

Mike D: “The strange thing was they didn’t believe us when we said we had a small accident with the shower unit!”

Now there’s a surprise. The hotel then claimed the erstwhile swimmers had an orgy out on the lawn and invited a troop of Hell’s Angels to the party. In fact, Paul Simonon and Steve Jones came around for tea.

The boys can’t even get from A to B without inflicting at least minor damage. The last flight they took almost ended with them being arrested by the FBI after a passenger asked Ad-Rock’s girlfriend (Molly Ringwald) for her autograph when they were all “twisted on free liquor”. Ad-Rock, upset that he hadn’t been recognised, got angry, which led to a food fight, which led to a fist fight, which led to some bizarre in-flight entertainment...

Alone and isolated from each other, the trio are calm, caring and (almost) considerate. En masse, one eggs on the other, eggs on the other, until oneelette drips off the ceiling, oozes out of the air conditioning vent and the police are called.

The pleasure palace rollercoaster the Beastie Boys frequent is more exotic, but most of the rides are forbidden. The police are just dying for the opportunity to kick the kids out of the playground and teach them a lesson.

Mike D: “They’re definitely out for us, man. In Texas, there were nars at every single show. All these dicks walking around saying, ‘Hey, you want some blow? You need something to pep you up?’”

Ad-Rock: “You can usually tell who they are. They’re the only guys in the world that ask for nose candy. That went out with fat faces! You gotta remember we’re in KKK bible country now. It doesn’t take much. The last thing in the world they want is sit on stage.”

MCA: “If I ever got that shit thrown at me in New York, no one would give a damn. In New York, I’ve seen stuff that offends even me. Forget Karen Findlay and the yums. I’ve seen a guy at the Cat Club shooting up, throwing up all over himself, and then covering himself with lighter fluid and setting light to himself. When he pulled the needle out of his arm, there was blood and stuff pouring out everywhere. That was serious stuff.”
Mike D: "I can’t see that going down too well in Alabama! There are a lot of people doing far more offensive things than we’d ever do, but they’re not No 1 and they’ve not been on national TV doing it."

The Beastie Boys are clowns, but they are nobody’s fool. Take three, four, five and six. Take anything, but take it. Another day, another state, another state of confusion.

"Yo look, they got graffiti in Alabama!"

"Yo, real hip-hop stuff, dude. What’s it say?"

"Jesus saves."

"God, I hate this place," Mike D shakes his head. "I just know we’re gonna get shot one day in a place like this."

He looks rueful, staring at a dart that was thrown on stage last night. "Look at this. Where the hell do these people think they are? An English football match?"

Five minutes after arriving in the hotel, Dave Scilken, the Beasties’ part-time tour coordinator and full-time pimp, prowls the lobby searching for a candidate for the Beastie cage that night.

Ad-Rock has other ideas: "I’ve got half an hour before the soundcheck, you wanna come upstairs? No? Your father’s a Baptist preacher? You’ve gotta go to church? No shit. I was saved last night."

Mike has ideas other than the other ideas: "I think the most important thing with this tour and with life in general is to have as much sex in public as you possibly can. When there are 250 girls every night showing you their tits and wanting to get down with you, what the hell are you supposed to do?"

"Feed the budgerigar? Take up raffia-work? Say no?"

"Besides, being well behaved on tour really sucks. Who would want to be with Duran Duran?"

Cue Ad-Rock’s def(t) Rik Mayall impressions.

“Simon, your hair looked just awful tonight. Who’s nicked my Aquanet?"

"I feel I’ve been here before. Either that or I’ve started the same feature twice."

"We hear in Birmingham you love the mayor."

No, same feature. Same story, same excitement, different police. Bad business is good for business. Restraint from last night soon begins to tell after the show. Back at the hotel, the scenes of carnage are all too apparent. A layer of cotton, rubber, and glass carpet the floor as various females try and convince the Beastlike entourage of the virtues of Southern hospitality. One girl runs up the corridor screaming, AC/DC is on sale 24 hours a day and ideology can be purchased at below-market prices.

Advance ticket sales for the Birmingham, Alabama, show were the lowest on the tour, all because some teenage girl rung up a local radio station and told the world that she had heard the Beastie Boys say on MTV that they didn’t want blacks at their concerts. Anywhere else and this situation would have been so good to me, he pulled me outta dem cotton fields and told me to stop pickin’ and start scratching records. That’s what he done told me. He been good to us niggers...

Great. Cane was talking to people who couldn’t tell irony from an iron bar. After the interview, one executive finally summoned up the courage to ask Mike D if the band were, um… jokin.

"This whole town’s a joke."

Hurricane carries a loaded piece in his pocket at all times. It’s a water pistol which he uses all too frequently. This may tell you something about the Beastie Boys. Russell Simmons tells them something else.

"Now remember, boys, we don’t want any repeat of last night. It’s Alabama, it’s Sunday, so let’s ease up a little…"

And so it started, again.

"Yo, Birmingham, let’s see some breasts!"

I feel I’ve been here before. Either that or I’ve started the same feature twice."

"We hear in Birmingham you love the mayor."

"I never touched her!"

"She’s no more than 15. Do you know what the penalty for this kind of thing is in Alabama? I’m going to have to take all your names."

Oh dear. The tragic irony was that the screamer was probably the only girl on the floor who wasn’t being given the benefit of ABC-B-boy tuition. The Beasties are amateur naturalists and can spot a fruit bat in the dark at 50 paces.

Sean, the tour manager, takes charge of the situation.

"Right, I’m taking charge of the situation. We’ve got two hours before that bloke’s incident report becomes a warrant for our arrest. That gives us two hours to cross the state line…"

Oh dear, oh dear. Just like on the movies—a B-boy B-movie.

Take the money and run. Just the accountant and a couple of the road crew left in the hotel now, but things move from bad to worse as another
patrol car pulls alongside the bus. By now Russell had checked his cool into the left-luggage department at the airport.

“My god, they’ve got their pieces out! Shit, man, let’s get out of here!”

Understatement of the year! Scared and scarred, the bus pulls off to the strains of Sam Cooke and the Ramones as everyone waits for the sound of the siren.

“I’m never coming here again,” MCA sighs. “The place is filled with Mormons.”

“I’ve got a cold idea,” Ad-Rock interrupts with pupils that misspell mischief. “Let’s stop at the first truck stop across the state line, get something to eat and then we can wave at the police on the other side.”

Great idea, Horovitz. Why not erect a burning cross and piss on it too?

Now MCA’s eyes light up.

“Have we passed the line? Where are we now?”

“O, BAD NEWS is the best video ever!” The boys have trouble containing their rampant enthusiasm. “The Young Ones are so def. Rik Mayall’s a fuckin’ genius. Megadeth are the most bogus band we’ve ever seen. They actually cried when they were heckled in New York last year. It was pathetic. Public Enemy are the most cold, though.”

The tourbus stops, but Russell’s mouth is still moving into overdrive. The chosen “safe” truck stop was filled with plaid shirts, braces and biceps—all of which expanded upon our arrival. The good ‘ol boys didn’t look too pleased to see us. Even the toilet was plastered with Klan memorabilia.

“How d’y a think a nigger like me likes all that shit you’ve got on the walls in there,” Simmons smiles at the waitress.

“Please keep your voice down, sir.”

“Oh, so you got the Klan in here, huh? Is that right? Is that what you’re saying?” MCA shakes his head, Ad-Rock shifts uncomfortably in his seat, and everyone else desperately tries to disassociate themselves from Russell’s rant.

“Please keep your voice DOWN, sir.”

Clink. The penny finally dropped as the shaken manager slowly lifted his jaw off the Formica table.

“You mean...”

“Can I take your order now, sir?”

MCA: “I’ll take a burger... to go.”

The bus: three Jews, four blacks and three limeys.

The verdict: move.

The trio magnify and amplify the US way of life to such proportions, it appears frightening because it’s uncontrollable and monstrous, and monstrous because it’s grotesque, and grotesque because it’s true yet disfigured.

Several Hollywood film companies have already made out contracts with dotted signature lines, but the band want to limit the budget and heighten their control over the project—like their absolute control over the making of the film. There’s only one problem now. Scriptwriter and neighbourhood wastrel Tom Cushman can’t think of an ending for the movie.

“It’s so much more American that way.”

And the Beastie Boys are all-American boys.

“Of course, the ending involves the down-and-well-out Beasties travelling to a ghost-ridden house to hear the reading of a will following a death in the family. Ad-Rock is still under the impression that Robert De Niro will leap at the chance to play a cameo part as Bobby and Adam’s dad (celebrated New York playwright Israel Horovitz) go back a long way. Probably not long enough.

MCA: “This film will launch the Beastie Boys into something that’ll top The Beatles by megabucks. The film’s not going to be a bullshit thing like Hard Day’s Night. The movie will stand out on its own and will contain some music so we can pick videos from it for MTV to use as advertising.

“I’d say without hesitation that it’ll be the media event of the century. The three of us are going to change the structure of government in this country. We’re going to turn the presidency of the US into a puppet figure...”

You’re too late.

“The Beastie Boys will actually be running the country.”

Can’t wait.

Mike D: “We’re going to have lotsa barbecues on the White House lawn—24 hours a day.”

MCA: “And legalise opium and LSD...”

Ad-Rock: “And then there’s the legalising of all pornography...”

Mike D: “And I want to make pro-wrestling more violent. So you can actually see death.”

“Great idea, Horovitz. Why not erect a burning cross and piss on it too?”

Now MCA’s eyes light up.

“Have we passed the line? Where are we now?”

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“You mean...”

“Can I take your order now, sir?”

MCA: “I’ll take a burger... to go.”

The bus: three Jews, four blacks and three limeys.

The verdict: move.

And we went, just like A Haunting We Will Go and involves the
“We’re losers. We’re puds. We’re pathetic!”

BIG BLACK are the best of America’s new guitar bands, writing brutal songs about damaged humanity. “Our lives would be just so much worse without Big Black,” says one. “Without Big Black we might turn into the sickos we write about.”
"Recognising that you have no power is a step to stability"
S

omeone else.

was printed under his name, 90 per cent of which had been written by
Forced Exposure

and finds at least two or three detailed messages of abuse. He's left
work (as a photo retoucher in Chicago), checks his answering machine

won him notoriety, even persecution. Each day he returns home from

than that is misleading. We start from the same

are all inspired by punk rock. Anything more specific

that we're all American, all like electric guitars, and

messing where professionals should be.”

TV Beats

or maybe a year in

dies. The amazing thing is that the guy doesn't get sent to jail forever, he's

the maternity ward, grabs the baby and bounces it off the floor until it

asked to be killed. They were so fucked up, so unable to cope with what

life just slept away. And all these people either committed suicide or

No big deal, I'm probably the best at it. So, what annoyed me was amateurs

with Big Black want to make us feel awe. The paradox of Big

Black is that they immerse us, deluge us in defilement

and desecration, and yet product sacred feelings. I feel

small before the scale of the experiences they deal in,

the terror of beauty.

Sounds like the classic course of development for rock musicians, rock

critics, fanzine writers, and indeed anyone who gets into “difficult” or

“alternative” music.

Dave: “Yeah, you’re a loner, you want to be one-up over everyone else.

Plus, you want to belong, somewhere. I mean, I never met anyone who

had a good adolescence that I even wanna associate with!”

So, life's losers achieve a strange kind of triumph on stage, reinvent

themselves through rock noise.

Santiago: “Our lives would be just so much worse without Big Black.

Without Big Black we might turn into the sickos we write about.”

STEVE ALBINI LOOKS like a fanzine editor – stoop-shouldered,

with arms as thin as twigs and an air of bespectacled intensity

about him. His writing for US hardcore rag Forced Exposure has

won him notoriety, even persecution. Each day he returns home from

work (as a photo retoucher in Chicago), checks his answering machine

and finds at least two or three detailed messages of abuse. He's left
Forced Exposure now, after a piece entitled “Guide For Social Tards”

was printed under his name, 90 per cent of which had been written by

someone else.

“It was a crap piece of writing. I don't mind making myself look stupid.

In fact, I'm probably the best at it. So, what annoyed me was amateurs

messing where professionals should be.”

Albini resents and resists any idea that there is an American

“movement” of noise bands, groups like Scratch Acid, Sonic Youth, Butthole Surfers, Swans, Live Skull... 

“Sure, everyone knows everyone else, has each

other's phone numbers, plays the same clubs. But

musically, all you can say that we have in common is

that we’re all American, all like electric guitars, and

are all inspired by punk rock. Anything more specific

than that is misleading. We start from the same

Big Black want to make us feel awe. The paradox of Big

Black is that they immerse us, deluge us in defilement

and desecration, and yet product sacred feelings. I feel

small before the scale of the experiences they deal in,

small and religious in the face of the beauty of terror,

the terror of beauty.

Live, when Steve Albini plays guitar with his teeth,

I think I see God. Simon Reynolds •
1987

APRIL – JUNE

GEORGE MICHAEL, THE CURE, PRIMAL SCREAM, HÜSKER DÜ AND MORE
“Buying a house outside Bristol”

July 21, 1987: The Mission’s Wayne Hussey at the third annual Pukkelpop festival near Hasselt in Belgium

[Image -605x-10 to 605x852]

Phil Nicholls


The Mission, meanwhile, went off to America this week for a six-week headline tour following their recent British dates. They return to Britain in the summer to go into the studio and begin work on a new album. The projected Reading date would be their only appearance in this country for the rest of the year, apart from a fan club-only show which has yet to be arranged.

Wayne Hussey left a typically flippant message behind in England for anyone who might enquire about his activities: “Tell them I’m buying a house outside of Bristol and I’m having a secret affair with a married woman.”
Free to continue touring: MM JUN 6 Beastie Boy Ad-Rock bailed, tabloid rags rejoice...

** Beastie Boy Ad-Rock ** was this week accused of injuring a girl fan during the group’s headlining show at the Liverpool Royal Court on Saturday. Ad-Rock, charged under his real name of Adam Horowitz, pleaded not guilty at Merseyside City Magistrates Court on Monday to unlawfully and maliciously causing grievous bodily harm to Joanne Marie Clark.

The case was remanded to a date in July and Ad-Rock granted bail on a surety of £10,000. Permitted to keep his passport, he is now free to continue touring with the Beastie Boys, whose next dates are in Japan. Ad-Rock, who had returned to London with the rest of the band after a “near riot” at Liverpool, was arrested and taken to Notting Hill police station. He was held there until Merseyside police arrived to take him back to Liverpool.

According to eyewitnesses, the trouble at the Royal Court erupted when a “large minority” of the 1,600-capacity crowd bombarded the two support acts with missiles and abuse. The Beastie Boys came on stage to be showered with an assortment of objects, including beer cans and bottles smuggled into the gig. By the time they’d reached the end of the first number, they’d already appealed to the audience to calm down.

A witness said: “The band were the voice of reason, unlike their image and unlike their audience. But it became clear that they were themselves in danger, and the show had to stop after 15 minutes. Until the last minute, when they began fielding cans with a baseball bat, they had done nothing to incite any trouble.”

When the show was stopped, a battle broke out between punters in the stalls and the balcony, with chairs smashed and speakers being pulled over. Panic grew as a tear-gas canister exploded, and by the time the police arrived the legitimate fans had all left the venue. An estimated 150 “ringleaders” were left in the building, still causing trouble. Five arrests were made and five injuries reported.

There are reports of weapons being confiscated at the door of the venue, and of arrests being made in the city later that night. Local radio was meanwhile broadcasting a recording of braying louts shouting, “We got the Beasties.”

The theatre, which had sent representatives to check out the Beasties’ trouble-free Manchester concert, had doubled its security for the event. They are now urging fans to hold on to their tickets until an announcement is made regarding refunds.

Witnesses all agree that there was a “terrace mentality” about the behaviour of a certain section of the audience – a section that had never heard of the Beastie Boys until Fleet Street launched its sensationalist “shock horror” campaign, thus encouraging a hooligan element to come to the gig in search of trouble.

The Fleet Street hysteria over the Beasties’ presence at the Montreux Rock Festival continued with their arrival in Britain for the Run-DMC tour. Despite reports of “mayhem and trouble” at the gigs, there had, until Liverpool, been no incidents at all. Nor had there been any of the reported problems connected with hotels. The dailies, however, were determined to wring every last drop of sensation from the band’s visit. A Def Jam press officer was followed to and from her home by journalists who believed she would lead them to the Beastie Boys. And a story in *The Sun* of May 27, which said that “newsgirl Laura Walsh was captured by rock’s Beastie Boys and locked up in a cage on stage”, has been dismissed as a set-up job. The Sun said that Walsh was kidnapped by two of the band’s minders, forced to go into the cage, stripped and humiliated by the band.

A Def Jam spokeswoman said: “This reporter used to work on *The Sun*, apparently. Now she’s a freelancer. I was talking to the person who was supposed to have kidnapped her. And what happened was she came along and said she wanted to dance in the cage. They asked her about four times, ‘Are you sure you really want to do this?’ As soon as she got out, she went on the phone and sold her story. The whole band are fed up about all these stories. They are supposed to have come into the airport shouting, ‘We hate Britain,’ and the group are saying, ‘How can the papers say that when there were so many people around who knew we weren’t saying that at all?’ They just can’t believe how they’ve been hounded.”

One story, however, turned out to be quite wrong on ethical grounds to sell John Merrick’s remains to the public. The London Medical College, where the remains are on display, said Jacko wouldn’t be allowed to buy the skeleton no matter how much money he offered. “There is a very strong feeling that it would be quite wrong on ethical grounds to sell John Merrick’s remains for money,” said college secretary David Edwards.

Jacko’s heart is apparently set on acquiring the skeleton of the one-time human freak show, who died in 1890, for the private museum at his home in LA. The weird 28-year-old singer has been to the college twice to see the remains, and is reported to be fascinated by their “ethical, medical and historical significance.” He doubled his offer for the remains after his original bid of $500,000 was rejected out of hand.

** Vinyl’s days numbered? **

**MM MAY 16** Virgin raises LP prices as CDs get cheaper.

The demise of the conventional vinyl LP came a step closer this week with the news that Virgin have raised the prices of their albums – a move that traditionally inspires other majors to follow suit. The price hike will mean that Virgin LPs will now sell for around £7.40 before discount, and many believe that £7.40 for a piece of plastic invariably covered in surface noise will not endear itself as CD prices continue to fall below a tenner.

With the proposed launch of the cassette single in July, it looks as if vinyl’s days are numbered. As singles sales drop, Polygram chief Maurice Oberstein has “strongly urged” all BPI member record companies to produce their Top 50 singles in cassette format. Dealer price will be the same as a normal 12-inch, meaning improved profits for the manufacturers because cassettes are vastly cheaper to make.

** “It would be quite wrong” **

**NME JUN 27** Michael Jackson cannot buy John Merrick....

**Michael Jackson** has been thwarted in his $1 million bid to buy the remains of Elephant Man John Merrick. The London Medical College, where the remains are on display, said Jacko wouldn’t be allowed to buy the skeleton no matter how much money he offered. “There is a very strong feeling that it would be quite wrong on ethical grounds to sell John Merrick’s remains for money,” said college secretary David Edwards.

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Paul Simon was due to be handed a letter from Jerry Dammers on Tuesday, calling for him to make a public apology to the United Nations for breaking the cultural boycott of South Africa by recording part of his 'Graceland' album in the country.

The letter, signed by Dammers along with Paul Weller and Billy Bragg, was due to be handed to Simon just hours before the first London concert of the 'Graceland' tour at the Royal Albert Hall.

The opening part reads: “As fellow musicians we ask you to give a complete and heartfelt public apology to the United Nations General Assembly for breaching the cultural, academic and other boycotts of South Africa, which they called for on the recommendation of the United Nations Special Committee on Apartheid on December 16, 1980. We also call on you to give an assurance that you will not breach these boycotts in any way in the future.”

It goes on to point out how Simon broke the boycott by his own definition and implores him to reconsider his current silence on the matter.

Simon’s first British concert, at the Birmingham NEC on Saturday, was picketed by the city’s branch of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, and the London committee was expected to do the same at the Royal Albert Hall this week.

**NME APR 11** Jerry Dammers will not let Paul Simon’s 'Graceland' lie.

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“Untouchable”

From a recipe of cassette demos and football, THE CURE return with a new album that’s “half Pornography, half Head On The Door”. “It’s just how I want the group to be,” says Robert Smith. “I honestly don’t think there’s anything The Cure couldn’t do now.”
The Cure between eight dates in Brazil in March 1987: (l–r) Simon Gallup, Boris Williams, Robert Smith, Lol Tolhurst and Porl Thompson.
I

THOUGHT I WAS destined for great things,” says Robert Smith. “And just look at me now. I’m in the scruffiest, laziest group in the world, dressed in a bloody animal suit!”

It’s true, Robert’s at Mary Tyler Moore’s TV studio in Bray, Southern Ireland. He’s making a video for “Why Can’t I Be You?”, The Cure’s first single in over a year, and he’s dressed as… a polar bear?

“More like a gay Viking,” says Simon. He can talk. He’s dressed as a crow or something—black cape, big-yellow beak and ball-crusher tights. "I feel like Spider-Man," he moans, "when he had on the alien suit and it started attacking him."

"Sorry," Robert apologizes. "Next time we’ll do a video somewhere really hot, just strumming…"

"Yeah," says Lol, "or in a pub, drinking."

It must have seemed a good idea at the time, sitting over local Guinness in a castle retreat, discussing plans to present The Cure in an ever more ludicrous light with Tim Pope, the man behind their other infamous video fiascos and the extraordinary Cure In Orange film, about to go on general release – a live set shot in the Roman amphitheatre in Orange, Southern France, which gives the dual impression that you’re there watching and playing the set simultaneously.

Now no one seems quite so sure what’s going on. Boris has rather worryingly taken to his schoolgirl costume. Lol’s blacked-up like “Prince’s ugly brother” or “Blind Lemon Tolhurst”, Porti is alternately a Scotsman and a floozy, and even Robert’s gone and put a dress on.

"This is it," he shouts, “the grand finale, the climax. Drunken Schoolgirl In Gay Sex Orgy!"

It’s noted, too late, that in swapping his crow costume for that of a Morris dancer, Simon is the only one who hasn’t gone bi. “Ah ha,” he beams. “When the newspapers pick up on this, I’ll be like the drummer in The Housemartins, the non-gay one!”

“Oh no, I’m beginning to feel guilty,” it’s Pope. He’s already had Lol inside a Humpty Dumpty with a strobe strapped to his chest, and now he’s dressed him up as a bumble bee and is about to fly him on wires. Long convinced that all Cure videos are vindictive attacks on poor Lol, Pope’s now telling him he has nothing to worry about.

"Sure," says Lol. “See you chaps in the next world.”

We haven’t heard or seem much of The Cure over the past year, but what news has reached us has all been good. Apart from the film, the band have re-signed through Fiction to Polydor, a deal has all been good. Apart from the film, the band have re-signed through Fiction to Polydor, a deal has all been good. Apart from the film, the band have re-signed through Fiction to Polydor, a deal has all been good. Apart from the film, the band have re-signed through Fiction to Polydor, a deal has all been good. Apart from the film, the band have re-signed through Fiction to Polydor, a deal has all been good.

Released in May, it’s The Cure’s richest, most exotic and most accessible album to date, a veritable treasure trove of becoming important and yet still be that weird group. We will never have to step into the arena. Next time round, some claim, it’s

"The whole element of competition I will always find absurd”

“Why Can’t I Be You?”, is a razzmatazz brass quadrille, absurd, joyous and loud.

The Cure are in Ireland just prior to setting off to conquer South America and I wonder whether, like me, they consider they’ve reached some sort of peak?

"It’s funny,” says Lol. “I never see us in peaks. I see us in levels all the time. I’ve yet to find, in my mind, a level where we’d come right to the top. There are more levels yet. Whatever happens, you have to ride on the crest of the wave and that precipitates the next thing. If you sat there and analysed it too much, you’d lose what it was that would make the next thing better."

So, with a million in the bank and a song in your hearts, what’s the motivation these days?

"I’ve always maintained that I’m doing it for selfish reasons, and I still do. The main reason I do it is because I enjoy it,” says Robert. “I don’t give a fuck—I like making records and I like going on stage and singing, and there’s a part of me, really, that’s a show-off, there must be. I always consider it to be really out of character, but it can’t be really—I wouldn’t do it otherwise. I enjoy it… I almost feel guilty about enjoying it, I don’t think it’s right…"

"I don’t like the idea of fame, I’ve never accepted that. I’ve experienced it to a small degree in France and it’s cack, not being able to go out without people coming up and going, ‘You’re Robert Smith.’ You become less than human. The reason, more and more, that I continue is that it has become more important that I see myself from a third person’s point of view as someone I can look up towards, that I can respect."

"My motivation now is to try to make The Cure not more popular but to harden the whole thing up so we are untouchable almost. That’s what I’m hoping this record will do, so we won’t be able to suffer the more cynical Smash Hits sort of jibes. And what I think we’ll achieve without me having to step into the arena. Next time round, some claim, it’s Wogan and the dailies for me. Well, I don’t accept that. We will reach the point of becoming important and yet still be that weird group. We will never be accepted but we will be important, which is perfect.”

“Mean, anyone with half a brain hates you if you’re in the media all the time – the less you’re in the public eye, I think, the better off you are. All the people who are gods in the field, like Jack Nicholson or Robert De Niro, aren’t in the public eye, and when they do something, you think it’s brilliant they’re so good, but they don’t waste time building up their public image. I can’t think of anyone who’s constantly in the news who’s any good at all."

“We’ve got where we are almost by accident in one sense, although it’s been designed, not for success but for longevity. One thing doesn’t follow the other. If this record bombed, I would be surprised, upset in a way, but I wouldn’t think it wasn’t worth making – that’s the difference. Now it’s been made and I’ve heard it, I’m happy. Once it’s released, it’s gone into a different world. I don’t need to justify it, or argue with people who say it’s rubbish. I can’t be bothered. I think it’s really good, so it’s being released."

“The whole element of competition I still, and always will, find absurd. The horse race. Are we going to be No 1 or are Queen? It doesn’t matter at all because, if I look at the Top 50, I see there are no records I like, so it’s a false accolade to be No 1 anyway. The album should be No 1, that’s all."

“The more we go on, the more I think we’re unique. I don’t mean that in a big-headed way, but the longer we go on, the less similarities there are between what we’re doing and what anyone else has ever done. The stage we’re at the moment is so absurd, the public image of the group
and of me is so... Well, just reading through American reviews, they say we play “compellingly sad music”, and on the same page there will be a write-up of our latest video, which is maybe.

“I think we’ve overcome the dinosaur tag the NME tried to put on us last year. I keep repeating it, but I am horrified by the lack of competition. I wanted some records sent over and was reduced to having to listen to the new Deep Purple album. [He smashed it after two tracks.] There are literally only three or four records in the Top 50 that I could even think about listening to, and probably only one that I know I’d enjoy: the Kate Bush singles album.”

“I see it as a means to an end,” says Lol of The Cure’s special purpose. “A way to live your life the way you want to, because in the end that’s one of the things music offers and reflects. It offers people away to live their life the way they want to, not tied to things... I mean, there are things that tie us, but they’re probably less than most people ever have. That is my goal – to be rid, in the end, of all the fetters.”

“The most cack thing I ever read was something The Thompson Twins said,” says Simon. “They said, when they released a single, they used to sweat every Tuesday morning, waiting to hear the chart positions and that they hated every band above them. That’s such a cack attitude to take. I mean, we’ll probably get in the charts with this single, but we joke about it. Like, it’s true – as soon as we go on Top Of The Pops we go down, and it’s never worried us at all. If we get in the charts, fine. If we don’t, fine. We’re not competing or anything like that, and we don’t hate the bands above us, we hate all bands in the charts!”

“It’s good for us to get in among them on Top Of The Pops, though, because if I wasn’t in the band, I’d like to see us there. Every other band is so serious about it all, but when we go on we treat it as a piss-up. I can never decide where we fit in. Like, our popularity in France – I think we deserve it, but for the kind of adulation we get we’re not the right stereotypes. We don’t go, ‘Oh shit, I’m worried ‘cos I had a lot of beers last night and now I look cack!’ When people rush to us, I think they MUST think we look dreadful. It’s really odd – I really honestly have no idea how or where we fit in.”

T
o some, THE Cure are still Shelleyan victims of their own sensitivity, romantics heroically wounded out there in the big, harsh world. In other words, gloriously miserable bastards.

“Oh, that never goes away,” says Lol. “But what probably distinguishes us from bands who might be our contemporaries is that we reached a point where we realised that you can think about things so much, you end up destroying yourself. Perhaps the way we work now is a bit more... well, not cynical – cynicism is personified by The Smiths, who I hate.

“We are more... fatalistic. We may seem flippant on the single, but I think anybody who liked us for the other, deeper side will still like us. It’s still there – you don’t really change that way of thinking. Maybe it’s an age thing; you can say to yourself, ‘Well, I can be angst-ridden and tortured about it, or I can get on with it and find some humour in it.’ I think that’s what’s happened to us – we don’t take ourselves so seriously because there aren’t that many things completely serious in the world.”

“It still feels the same as it did in the beginning, when we were just playing little clubs,” says Porl. “It’s bigger now, but the fact that we can still go up there and laugh about it is important. I think people feel that, people can understand if you mean it rather than just playing for effect or because you think you’re going to sell a lot of records.”

“If I was 15 again,” says Lol, “we’d be my favourite band, because we reflect that certain frame of mind you have when you’re younger and you suddenly start to think about things in a certain way. We’re probably a lot of young people’s older brothers in some way. We still don’t have any reasons or answers 10 years on, but at least we can be a bit more lucid about the questions. That’s what I was like when I was younger – in my room, listening to music or reading a book and thinking, ‘I wish I’d written that.’

“Maybe we do that for something for people because we’ve all come through our particular traumas or whatever that have made the songs and now we’ve come to reflect on it, giving back to other people what we’ve felt about things and how you can express yourself. Maybe we’re a bit more objective. I mean, the album reminds me of when I was 15 and I went to school and then the summer holidays come and I went to France for the first time, and then I came back – it’s a catalogue of things like that. When I listen to it, I take it as a little diary of the things I went through in the nine months it took to make it. Sometimes I think a lot of it is us pretending to be younger.”

I wondered, with the album being so diverse, whether Robert found himself acting now, adopting personas to suit each song?

“I definitely adopt a persona for the more up, wayward ones, but when we’re doing the slow, quieter ones, I’m much the same as I’ve always been. I mean, there doesn’t have to be any emotion in ‘Hot Hot Hot’ or ‘Why Can’t I Be You?’, because there’s no emotion in the lyrics, but I would never allow us to release a song that had emotion in the words and was interpreted like, say, Paul Young would... A complete waste of time. If I’m not in the mood, I may as well just hold the song over until, or if, I ever get round to feeling like that.

“I mean, obviously, I feel less like that the more I go on. I feel less despondent because there’s less to feel despondent about, both in the...”
1987

The Cure’s Robert Smith: “I threw off the mantle of professional moaner a long time ago.”

Robert Smith, vocalist and guitarist of British post-punk band The Cure, has been a fixture of the alternative rock scene since the late 1970s. In this excerpt from the HISTORY OF ROCK 1987 issue, Smith reflects on the group’s history and his own personal life.

“Jim”

The Cure has been several groups,” says Robert. “It’s becoming unique with the reintroduction of people. It’s really weird, but it’s like this particular lineup has been inevitable for years, with the exception of Boris, but I can’t imagine him not being here now. The way he fits in and contributes towards the atmosphere of the group is immeasurable.

“I wrote Head On The Door on my own at home and we interpreted it like an orchestra would, but with this album I insisted that the others gave me a cassette of music and I got six or seven songs from each one. Even Boris made a tape of interesting drum patterns, which I appreciated because I didn’t expect to get anything from him and it just showed that everyone wanted to be really involved in it.

“They gave me all the cassettes early last summer when we started doing demos at Beethoven in London. I put all the tapes on and everyone listened to them cold and I didn’t say whose was whose and no one was allowed to comment on their own stuff. We gave each a score out of 20 and commented and, at the end, we’d listened to 60 pieces of music and compared notes. We then took the ones that were most immediately impressive, put them on two cassettes and went into John Costa’s studio in Provence.

“We demoed there for two weeks – it was really good fun, they had a football pitch and we played the locals every day – and then we drove across to Mirabelle where we recorded at least a song a day, sometimes two. Most of them were first takes, almost jamming the songs to get the feel right. We spent a couple of hours playing each song so we became familiar with it and then recorded it in one go and it worked! It was a delight to record, a joy.”

“I don’t suppose that’s got anything to do with the studio having its own vineyards!

“Oh, that and the fact that I had loads of words. Usually I get really stuck, but I had words for 23 songs and I think they’re easily the best I’ve ever written. I astounded myself. I wrote the songs the way I wrote ‘The Walk’. I had a mood for each song and I sifted back through what I’d already done, and a couple of songs even refer to incidents I’ve already written songs about but they actually capture the spirit of them far more.

“How Beautiful You Are’ owes a lot to a Baudelaire one-page short story which had such a good idea in it. It’s about how you think you’re really close to somebody, that you think the same way and enjoy the same things, but suddenly an incident will happen which makes you realise the person thinks a completely way about things that you think are really important and yet you can still get on with them really well.

“No one really knows anyone else, or really loves anyone else in the purest sense of the word, because it is utterly impossible. If you did, it would just be yourself.

“Those sort of ideas, taking specifics like that and writing songs about them, was far more challenging for me than writing ‘I’m not feeling very well’ sort of songs. It’s the easy way out to write about mood, but once you pin yourself down, it’s kind of criticism because you’re looking at something really hard to get the essence from it.

“Then again, ‘Hot Hot Hot’ is almost like a Louis Armstrong record, which I would never have tried before. On The Top, I started trying to change my voice to give different expressions, which I’d have considered sacrilegious before. Most people that you hear in pop change their voices to make them more acceptable, nicer, more...”
American or whatever. Very few singers will try to become more difficult or worse. But again, I thought, ‘Why not?’”

Boris also felt different about doing Kiss Me Kiss Me Kiss Me to doing Head On The Door.

“I didn’t particularly like the way I played on Head. I played parts that were set down, whereas with this album I really thought out all the parts. It was more of a group effort. It gave me the chance to express my own personality within the group.”

“I’m 100 per cent satisfied with the group,” says Simon, “and without putting too much emphasis on it, I think this album now is perfect.”

It’s well known that Robert has always treated criticism of self-indulgence as accolades, as if there couldn’t possibly be any other sane way of going about things, but surely the hacks will have a field day with Kiss Me being a double.

“The main doubt, a stupid one, was the precedent set by other people’s double albums. There are so few in the history of pop that have worked – a couple of Beatles albums, the Prince album… I think Unmasgumunavas worthwhile, and Porl maintains that a Led Zeppelin album was too…”

What makes you think this one works?

“Because it’s two good single albums for less than the cost of two single albums. Why buy the new Cure album and the new Echo And The Bunnymen album when you can buy two Cure albums for less? It wouldn’t have been a double if I thought we couldn’t get away with it. But you could play any of these songs on the radio and say it’s from the new Cure LP – there’s not a weak song on it. A good five songs on Head On The Door would struggle to get on this album. I’m really pleased with the strength of it all the way through.”

“Honestly, I think it’s a cracker,” Simon insists. “It’s like a mix between Pornography and Head On The Door – the best elements of both. It works really well because one moment you’re elated and the next you’re flung into despair.”

“Perverse enough, in direct opposition to the unwritten law which seems to govern the creative careers of most groups, the Cure haven’t grown more muso and mystical and lost for direction. On the contrary, they’ve grown more tactile, more huggable, more sexy, more poppy. They’ve created their own environment instead of falling foul of fashion, and any track from Kiss Me could conceivably be a single, even the groovy, druggy-sounding seven-minute wonders. ‘Hey You!!!’, a ransacking of ‘The Man From UNCLE Theme’ bludgeoned by wild sax courtesy of some geezer he found blowing with a cabaret band in a grotty American bar at Compass Point.

“I would never have dreamed of doing something like that a few years ago, but I think I was a bit more precious about what we were doing then. Now I think, ‘If it doesn’t work, it doesn’t matter.’

“We could, if we didn’t bother about it, make an album of Cure cliches,” says Lol, “and there’d be an audience for it. But you have to remember that anyone who hears or sees you, does so on face value. Maybe it’s a bit confusing sometimes when we change it round, but I think that’s more honest, trying to scrape a few raw nerves.”

“If we’d done this album three or four years ago, people who were trying to sell the records would have moaned because I wasn’t capitalising on an image, which we still retain,” says Robert. “In France, there’s an inordinate amount of people who arrive at the concerts dressed in black with a certain look despite the fact that I never wear black. I’ve never liked wearing it – I don’t think there’s ever been a photo of me wearing a black top, so it’s a myth that’s arisen.

“Not capitalising on the past would have been seen as being a dumb move, but that went by the wayside a long time ago. It’s more difficult now trying to escape the quirky corner, like ‘Here comes The Cure, that funny bloke with the hair’. That’s why I cut it when we went to America, to be far more sullen and aggressive than people expected. It was calculated and crucial, because I didn’t want to end up in Star Hits. Once I start seeing adjectives like ‘cuddly’, I think it’s going to fuck what we’re going to do next time round.

“It’s not that I ever actually spend real time thinking about it, I never sit down and plan what the group is going to do next, but when we’re involved in something, I always consider what effect it’s going to have on what we do next and what effect it will have on me, the way it will bounce back, the way I’m going to be seen. Ultimately, I’m an easy target, and if I’m hit too many times, the group suffers. It doesn’t matter if Lol looks 100 years old, we can still do something!”

Steve Sutherland
They referred to gals as “chicks” so, of course, they deserve to die like dogs, but there was enough about the stalking swagger and grinning sweat of Guns N’ Roses during their London debut to convince that their tiny controversy hasn’t all been hype.

They’re alien, they can all hang a fag like Bogart, sheet-metal screecher Axl Rose has affected a rather winning Neanderthal lumber, they’re more tattoo than flesh and, if there are degrees of sexism, theirs is marginally less absurd than their lingering forebears considering their absence of beer-guts, beards and wrinkles. At least in reclaiming heavy rock from the bottle and male menopause and reintroducing it to dizzy youth and dust, you can imagine Guns N’ Roses actually doing all the screwing their songs claim – something Ozzy or Coverdale could do less barely remember.

Indeed, it may well have been the female following – steeped, it seems, in some groupie’s fantasy circa ’74 judging by the predominance of lurex slacks, fake leather, panda eyeliner and perfect curls – that so disturbed the porcine HM contingent herded near the back muttering that “the Yankee crap” wasn’t heavy enough. Others, evidently, were disappointed by what they claimed was a lack of glamour, and there was much bemoaning poor Hanoi Rocks who, apparently, did it bolder and better and far more beautiful a few years back.

But that’s Guns N’ Roses’ sole trump card – their timing is immaculate, so the look and action and sound (weak AC/DC) may be the same but the era is generous not to insist their every gesture be pickled in irony. Certainly Guns N’ Roses aren’t an explosion in the quarry of rock, but neither are they a chip off the old block – they appear to follow instinct rather than tradition or style, and that such throwbacks have been thrown up at the forefront in ’87 isn’t so surprising since the upsurge of extreme black music has deemed the current pop currency be loud and proud and egocentric.

But, for all their noise, when the static dissipates, nothing granite remains.
All their stuff, even the single, “It’s So Easy”, lacks anything monumental – a hook or riff or, dammit, a song – though “Night Train” almost got by on Stonesy bluster alone. Significant, then, that Guns N’ Roses’ best-received number all night was Dylan’s “Knockin’ On Heaven’s Door”. But more significant still was surely the fact that the Marquee crowd largely loathed them. They must be doing something right.

Steve Sutherland

Happy Mondays is where the repetition-repetition-repetition of post-Velvets jangle-drone meets the repetition-repetition-repetition of ‘70s funk. Imagine a cross between the Blue Orchids and Hamilton Bohannon, The Fall and The Fatback Band, James and JB. The wah-wah on “Freaky Dancin’” cues memories of both The Stooges’ “Ann” and Isaac Hayes’ “Shaft” simultaneously. I’d like them to take this hybrid further still, bring in a clavinet and some John Cale viola.

What Happy Mondays do (quite unintentionally, I’m sure) is take the steamy stupor of the dancefloor and, through some cryogenic process of alchemy, create an unearthly frost-funk; a sound that seems newborn and yet ancient as a fossil. With its granite basslines and guitars that twinkle like stalactites and icicles, it’s a sound that’s streaming with glistening rivulets of the stuff we rock critics call “magic”, when we’re at a loss for words. Shaun Ryder is like a goblin in the midst of this enchanted ice palace, unsavoury, snarling like a hobo – you can practically see the flecks of spittle in the corners of his mouth. However, as a good reporter, I feel duty-bound to tell you that this was not, in fact, a great gig. Happy Mondays lumbered when they should have shimmered. The burnished precision of Cale’s production was traded in for a coarse and sloppy tumult. The band seemed to apply themselves to the task in hand with an offhand listlessness. The percussionist’s dancing was a perfect representation of their stiff utogeneity. It was not groovy. It was not dreamy. Happy Mondays came across as shabby and awkward, when they should have come across as grave and intense apostles of the cryptic beauty that has somehow come into their possession. Buy the record, and keep your fingers crossed for next time.

Simon Reynolds
“I’m being hailed as an anti-Christ”

So it goes for 23-year-old **George Michael.** In the UK, he’s a monogamy-promoting, mature star, while the US assumes he’s still in Wham!. Will public perception catch him before the press does? “People think I’m an arsehole,” he says. “It’s not difficult to give them a pleasant surprise.”

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1987

April–June

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**JUST THREE YEARS** ago, the Frankie Goes To Hollywood single “Relax” was banned by the BBC on the grounds that its explicit sexual content rendered it unsuitable for broadcast on a national TV or radio channel. Predictably enough, the ensuing controversy helped the record to ease comfortably into the No 1 spot on British and international charts.

Yet if you’ve turned on your television during peak viewing hours in the last week or two you may have found yourself surprised to hear the same offending Frankie track in a new context. Forget that it was ever thought too hot for your ears—now it helps to hawk suntan oil, with a bronzed hunk applying the product in question to his girlfriend’s hind quarters.

To George Michael, suntanned beyond any telly-ad director’s wildest dreams, this anomaly is as a red rag to a bull. George’s current single, “I Want Your Sex”, and its accompanying video, have both been “blacklisted” — broadcasting networks have at least wised up to the fact that the word “banned” acts as a positive marketing aid — by both the BBC and independent channels. As a result, of course, he’s languishing in Frankie territory atop world charts.

“I mean, if I was rubbing oil into my girlfriend’s arse in my video there might be something to talk about,” he fumes over a Lucozade, before slotting the VHS in question into a conveniently placed recorder. »
“I think people are going to find this incredibly tame.” George Michael filming the video for his soon-to-be-blacklisted single “I Want Your Sex”
“After all that’s been written, I think people are going to find this incredibly tame.”

And so, when George’s decision to underwrite part of the production costs enables it to be sold nationally from next week for something just above the cost of a 12-inch single, they are. It may begin with the vision of Kathy Jueng’s cami-clad rear retreating from camera and it may end, several satin sheets later, with the words “Explore Monogamy” being written across her back in lipstick, but corrupt the nation’s youth it will not.

That doesn’t mean I’m rushing to the defence of the George Michael nude-frolic-sex-shocker or the record it’s promoting. For a start, if this world were turned upside down and records were banned when they proved to be poor reflections of their maker’s talent, then “I Want Your Sex” would find the boy from Bushey in serious trouble – it’s a largely uninspired slice of softcore funk, the sort of thing Prince can do so much better, and gives no hint of the pop sensibility that brought us near-perfect tracks like “Careless Whisper” and “Everything She Wants”.

And then there’s the blatant desire-me narcissism of George’s presentation – he’s got it all of course, but a little modesty and discretion might suit him better.

Yet if the George of “I Want Your Sex” comes on a bit of a tart, at least he’s a tart with a heart. Despite the provocative wrappings, he’s got more than just one thing on his mind… From the depths of the upholstery in his London hotel suite he explains: “The single has plenty to do with sex but it was absolutely nothing to do with promiscuity. I feel that there’s a horrible atmosphere surrounding sex at the moment, post Aids, which needs to be calmed down and redirected. The sense of fear had got to be made more specific, and directed at promiscuity.”

To elaborate, he points out that he, as a show-business figure based in London, is fortunate enough to be able to say he knows no one personally who has died of Aids. “That’s just me, but I know it’s out there and I know how huge it is. But if I’m a young kid living somewhere in suburbia it’s going to seem far more remote, and I’m not going to feel that frightened of it. People will be bombarding me with all these instructions not to have sex, but I’m going to be wondering why on earth not. Where’s the danger?”

“I can’t be specific here, but there’s a fair amount of evidence to conclude that somebody – we know who but can’t say – from the BBC raised the matter at the IBA to encourage them to ban it as well, so it wasn’t just a one-network thing. Now, I think that’s totally out of order. I’m sure Capital wouldn’t have had any problem playing it, and neither would a lot of similar stations up and down the country. “So, the situation in Britain isn’t what I was expecting and isn’t what I wanted. I don’t see how the record can go to No 1 now. You get your initial sales from that section of the public that always buys your records; you get a few people buying it because of the controversy, but not that many; and after that you need people to hear the record and like it enough to buy it. Nobody’s hearing it – simple as that.”

“Yeah, but I wouldn’t think it was bad,” says George, who sometimes listens to the radio after nine to see if they’re playing my record, I don’t see why anybody else should.”

Or maybe the whole thing has been a carefully thought-out marketing strategy to ensure maximum sales for an otherwise lacklustre single? After all, banned records have a pretty successful history when you think about it, haven’t they?

“Yes, they have,” admits George, “but then think about the sales pattern my records usually have. Because of my grassroots following, they automatically go in very high and then tend to go down quickly, whereas most banned records build slowly and stay in the charts longer. In Britain, this single went in at four, and in a couple of weeks it’ll be old news.

“Now, in America it’s different. In some parts of the country I’m being hailed as an anti-Christ, which I think is hysterical, but there are no overall ruling bodies like the IBA to bring in a ban, and the record is being played a lot. So there it’s true that the controversy is actually helping sales. But I think it should be known that we are the only country in the world to have banned it.”

Maybe. But given the BBC’s habitual jitters about S-E-X, it’s none too surprising, is it? “Well perhaps not,” he allows, “but I really didn’t expect the IBA ban. I can’t be specific here, but there’s a fair amount of evidence to conclude that somebody – we know who but can’t say – from the BBC raised the matter at the IBA to encourage them to ban it as well, so it wasn’t just a one-network thing. Now, I think that’s totally out of order. I’m sure Capital wouldn’t have had any problem playing it, and neither would a lot of similar stations up and down the country. “So, the situation in Britain isn’t what I was expecting and isn’t what I wanted. I don’t see how the record can go to No 1 now. You get your initial sales from that section of the public that always buys your records; you get a few people buying it because of the controversy, but not that many; and after that you need people to hear the record and like it enough to buy it. Nobody’s hearing it – simple as that.”

“Yeah, but I wouldn’t think it was bad,” says George, who sometimes seems to be courting global assurance that he’s as gorgeous as he thinks he is. “I don’t think there’s anything wrong in marketing yourself sexually at all. People are sometimes uncomfortable when they see men doing it,
but part of what makes certain men stars is the way they promote themselves in the manner that women do all the time.

“Women are allowed to project sexuality as part of their personalities; it’s seen as something beautiful. If a guy does it, on a day-to-day level, there’s normally a ‘medallion-man’ type of reaction, but up on screen it’s more acceptable. If you do it well, do it with a certain conviction, I think it can be very appealing. In my case, people don’t seem to have found it a turn-off.”

Britain’s most famous combination of teeth and tan and stubble, the undeniably handsome George Michael, shifts in his seat and contemplates the silver-tipped toes of his boots. Isn’t it a bit off-putting for people meeting him for the first time though, I ask, remembering the moment earlier on when he walked in the room to meet me looking as if he’d just stepped out of a fashion plate.

“Nah,” he says easily. “It’s not a problem in real life. People think I’m going to be such an arsehole that it’s not difficult to give them a pleasant surprise. All I have to do is be myself. Even though that may not be the most wonderful person in the world, it’s a hell of a lot better than the person they’re expecting to meet.”

I’m the only one of that whole band of 1984 stars who hasn’t done a year out of the country for tax reasons. And what does that mean? It means I pride myself on not doing things simply to further my career. “That’s not to say I’m in step too, though. As a person, I feel I’m out of sync with things. I’ve always maintained that being successful isn’t a right-wing act in itself—I don’t think there’s anything wrong with wanting huge amounts of success for yourself in terms of what you do, but I find it sad that it becomes lumped in with that whole Thatcherist emphasis on money. I never make decisions just for monetary reasons. I pride myself on not doing things simply to further my career.”

“Tory upstart simply on the basis of your dental work and your suntan, let alone the scandal and you’ll have people writing you off as a money-grabbing p**st on a day-to-day level, there’s normally a s**lent”

The Sun

“I’m the only one of that whole band of 1984 stars who hasn’t done a year out of the country for tax reasons. And what does that mean? It means I have to be aware of what they’re saying about me, but otherwise they don’t exist for me.”

“I realise that because they follow me around all the time they keep me in the public eye, and I can’t pretend I’m not glad about that. At one time I thought, ‘F**k it, I can do without them’, but now I actually concede that they’re one of the reasons that I’m still here in this position. To that extent, I have to be aware of what they’re saying about me, but otherwise they don’t exist for me.”

“If The Sun decides to run a story tomorrow saying I’m a child molester, I’m not going to spend four weeks in court fighting them when the case comes up in 18 months’ time. You’ll be put through it on the front pages, day by day, inch by inch, for as long as it lasts, and in the end the public won’t even remember who was in the right. All they’ll remember is the scandal. So what’s the point of dealing with an amoral entity purely on a point of principle?”

“Nah,” he says easily. “It’s not a problem in real life. People think I’m going to be such an arsehole that it’s not difficult to give them a pleasant surprise. All I have to do is be myself. Even though that may not be the most wonderful person in the world, it’s a hell of a lot better than the person they’re expecting to meet.”

“I’m the only one of that whole band of 1984 stars who hasn’t done a year out of the country for tax reasons. And what does that mean? It means I have to be aware of what they’re saying about me, but otherwise they don’t exist for me.”

“Yeah. I do take credit for my career. I’m not going to say it’s all been down to luck, but certain things do make me think that someone up there’s been guiding it somehow…”

Shame they didn’t take the same care with Andrew, huh?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” grins George. “He’s recording in Nassau at the moment. He’s not exactly suffering either.”

When the black-clad body relaxes back into the cushions and the face breaks into its most dazzling smile, it’s almost possible to believe that being George Michael is as much fun as it ought to be. Alan Jackson.
“Music for human beings”

HÜSKER DÜ are now an important band. But how can they reach more people? “I don’t think you associate a clothing style or a lifestyle with what we do,” explains Bob Mould. “In that sense we’re not exclusive to anyone, we don’t exclude.”

— MM JUNE 27 —

In ATLANTA, GEORGIA, The Replacements play me a tape of Hüsker Dü’s live appearance on The Joan Rivers Show. It’s more than a little mindblowing. The band unleash the great grey gust that is “Could You Be The One”, then troop over for a “chat” with the lady herself.

It’s one of the most embarrassing pieces of television I’ve ever seen. Rivers is clearly terrified of the band, doesn’t know how to place or approach them, stammers out something to the effect that they used to be kind of radical and underground, but now aren’t quite so radical and underground, isn’t that so? What’s unnerving her is that the band aren’t selling themselves on any level, either as outrage or as light entertainment, aren’t making anything of this opportunity to project themselves. They’re polite, awkward, somehow not-there. It’s not so much that they’re deliberately aloof as that they’re irretrievably apart. Rivers asks a question and I think she’s saying, “Which one of you is the wild member of the group and which is the commie one?” – turns out she said “calming”. Then they traipse off again, to play “She’s A Woman”, having left an irreparable crease in the sleek fabric of the show.

It made me wonder whether a group like Hüsker Dü can interact with this thing, pop. The Smiths, at least, make a drama of their exile – their anti-glamer can be consumed as glamour.

But Hüsker Dü refuse to act up – the “outrage” they perpetrated on Joan Rivers was of an altogether quieter, less ostentatious order – they didn’t play...
up to the role of Misfit, they just failed to connect, to communicate on Pop’s terms at all – an eloquent incoherence. How then, do they cope with things like videos?

Grant Hart: “The videos are of straight performances of the songs. Seeing as none of our songs are particularly etched in fantasy, they’re best portrayed naturalistically.”

Like the other American thinking rock bands I’ve encountered (Throwing Muses and The Replacements), Hüsker Dü loathe the exigencies of presentation and marketing, have a chronic fear of anything that suggests contrivance. American rock has never seen “image” and “packaging” as a means of expression in the way that much British rock has.

Perhaps this is because American daily life is more heavily saturated with showbiz glitz and advertising pizzazz than British life, and so it seems more urgent to escape the all-pervasive environment of kitsch, escape from the escapist, into the authentic, the “real”. Probably, it has a lot to do with the absence in America of the art school/art rock interface that’s has been so hugely important in British pop history.

Either way, American rock (outside New York) has no notion of glamour as something you can radicalise:Throwing Muses will turn up for photo sessions in their tattiest, most everyday clothes, The Replacements will refuse to throw shapes for the camera and Hüsker Dü will resist anything in the way of video presentation that’s redolent of advertising and its manipulation of the consumer.

Bob Mould: “The problem with videos is that, before they existed, you’d make up your own story, your own mental pictures, to go with a song. That’s what music’s for – attaching your own meanings to.”

Somewhere along the way, pop ceased to be something that gave people a heightened sense of their own agency, and became something that programmed desires. What Hüsker Dü hate above all is when things get fixed – they like to leave things open, in a flux. Maybe they’d get on better if they did give people one easy handle, if they weren’t so keen to leave things up to people’s imagination. Maybe the only way to get a hit is to work from the premise that most people’s imaginations are enfeebled, through underuse. As it is, they’re not even let near those kind of people.

Bob: “Our videos don’t get heavy rotation. Our records get played on college radio and on the progressive commercial radio stations. Whereas all the people in here (gestures at Billboard) get played several times a day on every radio station in America.”

Ah, Billboard – whenever I look at magazines like Billboard or Music Week, it does my head in: I think of all the things that music means to me – dissension, speculation, complex pleasures, never-ever dreams, the criss-cross currents of making sacred and sacrilege – and then look at how these people discuss pop – crossover between different radio sectors, aggressive marketing, instore promotion…

Who knows which kind of talk is more out of touch with the “reality” of pop?

“Hell, yes, it all depends on whether your conception of success is related to the outside world or to your art. With us it’s the latter, so every song is a ‘hit’.”

Quite. What is a “hit” these days? Something that wreaks havoc in the private lives of a few people, or something that resounds widely and weakly across the surfaces of the globe? We’re back with Stubbs’ dichotomy between the small and significant and “huge insignificances” like Moyet or Curiosity [Killed The Cat]. Two rival definitions of impact – purity of vision or breadth of effect.

All I know is that Hüsker Dü hit me – this feels like the elusive “perfect pop”, the swoon and the surge. In one sense (sales) Hüsker Dü are a “small” band – in every other sense they are massive – in the scale and reach of their music, in the way they give a grandeur to mundane tribulations and quandaries – a musical equivalent of “the pathetic fallacy” (thunder and lightning as the dramatic externalisation of inner turmoil).

What is it about this “perfect pop” that dooms it to be as distant from real ‘80s pop as the moon? That the music is too imposing, while the band, as individuals, are too self-effacing, hiding behind the noise? That the music’s too violent, while the feelings that inspire it are too sensitive? That the songs deal with the loose ends of life but refuse to tie things up satisfactorily, instead confronting the listener again and again with the insoluble?

ALL THESE THINGS distance Hüsker Dü from today’s secular pop, with its twin poles of levity and sentimentality. But there are more material reasons why they don’t belong. The very fabric of their sound has no place in pop ‘87, a blizzard that makes no appeal to the dancing body, but dances in the head.

Move in close and you see activity too furious for pop – flurry-hurry chords, febrile drumming. Step back 10 paces and you can take in the sweep and curve of the cloud shapes stirred up by the by the frenzy. Only AR Kane come close as sublime choreographers of harmonic haze. The stricken voices, the almost unbearable candour of their bewilderment and desolation, jar with pop’s soul-derived universal voice of self-possession and narcissism.

“Ice Cold Ice”, the fabulous new single off the Warehouse double, says it all – the chill of ave instead of the fire of passion, frost instead of flesh, the ghost of folk instead of the residue of R&B. Pop ‘87’s aerobic humanism can’t take on this kind of enchantment.

But what do they think is the most unique thing they offer?

Grant: “The outlook, I guess… We’re creating music for human beings, not pop idols.”

Bob: “I don’t see many people trying to be as honest as we are… I think the lyrics are enlightening without being too philosophical… I don’t think you associate a clothing style or a lifestyle with what we do… In that sense we’re not exclusive to anyone, we don’t exclude.”

Do you agree that part of the appeal of being a band is the chance to prolong adolescence, to leave things open a little longer, to avoid the closures of adulthood?

Grant: “Well, there’s growing up and there’s growing boring, and the two are not necessarily inseparable. Generally, though, as a person gets established in their life, and the things that surround them are theirs rather than their parents’, they start to settle down. I see friends that are worrying about their bank overdrafts – all the things I worry about too, but not to the exclusion of everything else. And the next
step is that you start playing the game, kissing up to the boss, all to ensure the security you’re afraid to lose. But what you do lose is the ability to live for the moment, because life gets so bound up with planning and providence. People get conservative as they look to preserving their life investment.”

One of the first things to go when this settling down sets in is music, or at least rock of the Hüsker Dü ilk. People cease to be able to take on such music. It’s too demanding—literally, in terms of investment of energy and attention; but also in the sense that rock is like a reproach, can get to be an unwanted nagging reminder of dreams that have been foregone. It becomes unbearable to listen to music, after a while. Bob: “Well, almost everyone does give up music, sooner or later—it’s a matter of when…”

Grant: “But there are those who give every thing up all the time and right from the start. So even to hold out for a while is not so bad.”

Who do they feel are their kindred spirits in rock? Bob: “Who’s at Number 186 in the Billboard Chart this week, ha ha ha ha! No, there are some like-minded groups about, groups that have abandoned the idea of pop stardom—we’ve even been accused of triggering that off… Bands like REM, Meat Puppets, Black Flag… Bands who can be widely successful in their own minds because of the psychic rewards of what they do. A band like REM that has a very internally run programme—they’ve got a manager that’s been with them since day one, they’re very homebase-oriented, having refused to move to New York or L.A. Similarly, we decided to stay in Minneapolis right from the start. Now things are turned around so that a friend of a friend knows a musician who moved from Hollywood to Minneapolis, in order to be discovered!”

“Like the fact that we’re self-sufficient, that we look after our own finances, that we don’t have a set regiment dictated by a corporation or anybody. One of the results of the life we lead is that we don’t divide work and play. When I’m not working on music or doing specific administrative tasks, I’m writing or reading or drawing, but all these things have an input into the music.”

How do you want people to be affected by the music?

Grant: “This may sound a little overwhelming, but I’d like them to come out a better person than when they came in, as a result of an effort by both audience and the performers. We’re appreciated by a different enough range of people—rednecks, hippies, punks, 50-year-old jazz buffs—that I personally am really satisfied that there’s so much love going down. I’m also proud of the pride we take in what we do… I wish they made drums like that!”

Is there a kind of politics in Hüsker Dü, in that you deal with the discrepancy between the promise of America and most people’s lived reality of deadlock and impasse?

“There’s politics in the sense of people trying to gain control of their own destiny. Life is too short to worry about who’s on top at any given time—politics is like advertising, the basic products beneath the map-reference reside solely in the sound, a pressurised melodrama of electric savagery and celestial harmony which for want of a better world I’ll call zonk-rock. It also preoccupies the voice. Hüsker Dü sing of a breed of frustration so pent-up and refined that it achieves a strange nobility. You applaud a self-control so steel-ed and lofty that it can forge something positive, rhapsodic even, from white-hot anger. Anger at what? What is the focus for so much rage? Hüsker Dü’s is an unrequited world, a world without fulfillment; a world of problems but no solutions. The only way out of this headbanging claustrophobia is, as Hüsker Dü sing in their most beautifully uplifting number to date, “Up In The Air.” Up, away, into the clear blue yonder of ineffably transcendent feeling. Turn on, tune in, bliss out.”

Simon Reynolds

A benchmark for rock

Hüsker Dü

WAREHOUSE: SONGS AND STORIES

WARNER BROS

There are several reasons why I’d like to backtrack a decade to my teenage years, but right now I can think of none better than Hüsker Dü’s Warehouse: Songs And Stories. Even now when my taste in rock inclines increasingly away from the mainstream towards the maverick and retro-rootsy margins, this intensely traditional rock records blows my mind. Ten years ago it would have changed my life.

Traditional rock? In what tradition is that? In a tradition of adolescent angst clenching to a tight knot, only to burst into an incandescent revelation of life’s rich possibilities. It’s the tension and release embodied in two 20-year-old chestnuts: “Love Or Confusion” by The Jimi Hendrix Experience and The Who’s “I Can See For Miles”. Nor does that map-reference reside in the sound, a pressurised melodrama of electric savagery and celestial harmony which for want of a better world I’ll call zonk-rock. It also preoccupies the voice. Hüsker Dü sing of a breed of frustration so pent-up and refined that it achieves a strange nobility. You applaud a self-control so steel-ed and lofty that it can forge something positive, rhapsodic even, from white-hot anger. Anger at what? What is the focus for so much rage? Hüsker Dü’s is an unrequited world, a world without fulfillment; a world of problems but no solutions. The only way out of this headbanging claustrophobia is, as Hüsker Dü sing in their most beautifully uplifting number to date, “Up In The Air.” Up, away, into the clear blue yonder of ineffably transcendent feeling. Turn on, tune in, bliss out.

An old story, you might think: music for bedroom boys with steam to blow off. Yet there is a quality of honesty in Hüsker Dü that is heroically anti-heroic. Listen to their words: they have no answers, and they suspect no one else does either. Certainly, there’s no messiah to follow, no perfect past to be retrieved, no Utopia to aim for. And agitating yourself over such things can only enchant you. Happiness and harmony come through a celebration of the freedom of disbeliefing. This is, oddly enough, an upbeat album: peace through release. By the Hüskers, like Elvis Costello, appeal to a rarefied breed of rock intellectual because they share and so flatten our sense of pop literacy? Is it because I can cross-pollinate Hendrix and The Who—and indeed The Byrds and The Yardbirds, Blue Oyster Cult and Buzzcocks— that I love them? Or because “Bed Of Nails” is Led Zeppelin’s “Achilles’ Last Stand” gone through hardcore’s mincer? Or indeed because Hüsker Dü’s “She’s A Woman” bears absolutely no resemblance whatsoever to The Beatles’ song of the same title?

But while golden threads may be traced in Hüsker Dü’s fabric, so could you hear Tamla Motown, The Everley Brothers and Buddy Holly in The Beatles. Likewise, Hüsker Dü force you into their own way of listening: they command their own soundscape as authoritatively as did the pioneers who influenced them. A consistently rich, varied and powerful 70-minutes’ worth, Warehouse not only exceeds Hüsker Dü’s previous zenith, Flip Your Wig, but it sets a new benchmark for rock in general. It is the most exciting zonk-rock (ahem) album since Hendrix’s Are You Experienced, and that came out before some of us were even born. Warehouse is music of today, music which for once has nothing to fear from comparisons with the past. An absolute masterpiece. — Mat Snow

—review—

ALBUMS

1987

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“We want to affect people”

PRIMAL SCREAM are classicists and passionate rock enthusiasts – and certainly not part of the C86 scene. “We stood out from all those bands,” explains Bobby Gillespie. “We were better songwriters, better dressed…”

“I’ll tell you ‘bout the magic that’ll free your soul! But it’s like trying to tell a stranger ‘bout rock’n’roll! Do you believe in magic?...” The Lovin’ Spoonful

A year ago, they stuck out from the effervescent hammer-it-down-and-turn-it-up of their C86 contemporaries by having the temerity to attempt something that was carefully constructed, lovingly polished. And now their insistence that whatever it is that turns Rock to Magic can be found in crafted quietness, in harmony and melody, puts them at odds with the Cult Missionaries On Acid Will Eat Themselves, and the designer dandruff brigade.

On stage, too, they’re downright strange, the nervous static intensity of guitarists Jim Beattie and Robert Young, and singer Bobby Gillespie (his fringe a hiding place, his mic-stand a crutch) contrasting with the eyes-front arrogance of Martin St John, a tambourine-flaying skeleton in leather gloves. Primal Scream truly are the sore thumb of British pop.

And yet for those who, like me, still cling to the battered belief that guitars, bass and drums can free your soul, this uncomfortable, unpromising mixture has been the subject of a prolonged act of faith, of a blind investment of hope. Based on just two slivers of evidence (their “All Fall Down” debut and “Velocity Girl”), Primal Scream have been landed with the “Most Likely To” albatross. Mind you, there have been plenty of others who see...”
“Don’t make our thighs look fat”: Primal Scream at the Pergola on Hampstead Heath, North London, in 1987: (l-r) Bobby Gillespie, Jim Beattie, Martin St John (on balustrade) and Robert Young.
them as little more than a joke, an overdeveloped sense of pop's past grafted onto the body of a musical jellyfish.

This week sees the issue, on Warners' Elevation outcrop, of their third single, “Gentle Tuesday”, which will be followed by another, “Imperial”, and a late-summer, as yet unnamed, I.P. For Primal Scream, the moment of truth is just “round the corner, the moment when we’ll see whether the last laugh will rest with the believers or the belittlers.”

Whether or not they can fulfill them remains to be seen, but if any band were ever equipped to understand the expectations of fans, then it is Primal Scream. They are pop fanatics. Their early interviews were characterised by a Stalinist credo that excluded all but a sainted few (The Beatles, a handful of American garage punks, Cope, you know the names). They've widened their net since then, but the passion remains. The band's keyword is “master”…

“...It's difficult to define,” Bobby Gillespie's soft Glasgow tones maintain, “but for us it's all about having a certain spirit. All the best things I've seen this year had it. The Weather Prophets in Edinburgh… Neil Young the other night at Wembley. He was a total genius… and Chuck Brown on The Tube—the man! Those skateskin boots! It doesn't matter about age… you've either got it or you haven't.”

This stuff is no convenient, glamour-by-association exercise in name-drop; it runs deep. Primal Scream take their vision of rock/pop—a dodgy cocktail of myth, exaggeration, wishful thinking, more myth and isolated moments of incandescent music—and gleefully gulp it down.

“There's a fairly sane, self-deprecating vein in the group” agrees Bobby, “but we do love all those rock 'n' roll outrage stories, you know, about the Stones, or the one about Led Zeppelin whipping a groupie with a dead shark! That level of complete debauchery is really funny. And there was a story about Love taking some music journalist prisoner and keeping her as some sort of sex slave for a week…”

That level of complete debauchery isn't funny at all...

“Oh, don't get me wrong—I think she was quite willing. Myself, I'd love to have been Fucked stupid by all the members of Love in the '60s! Even now! If I saw Bryan McLean in the street I'd tell him, 'Take me, Bryan, I'm yours…'”

This is hardly what we expect from the frontman (now collapsed in fits of helpless laughter) of a group constantly associated with all manner of sexless wimpery, but like I said, this stuff goes deep…

And it's their obsessive devotion to their icons—especially the '60s guitar giants—that's fuelled the disdain of Primal Scream's fiercest detractors. They focus on the band's line in relentlessly authentic beat guitars and lyrical hints of hatred) suggests that my memory of those weeks in Rockfield brought tears to his eyes.

“...It was like nothing I've ever experienced before,” he told me. “They're nice enough lads, but you can't work with them. It all came to a head when I found myself arguing with Bobby about a solitary cymbal crash in the triple-strength vitriol and my sneer-glands working overtime. The excesses, the unquestioned heroes and the attention to quite ridiculous detail (they refused to turn side-on for our photographer, in case their thighs looked fat”) are habitually the stuff of nightmares…”

This is a man, don't forget, used to dealing with the far-from-understanding likes of Messrs Morrissey and Marr, and I swear that the memory of those weeks in Rockfield brought tears to his eyes.

Nine times out of 10, a band like Primal Scream would have me reaching for the triple-strength vitriol and my sneer-glands working overtime. The excesses, the unquestioned heroes and the attention to quite ridiculous detail (they refused to turn side-on for our photographer, in case their “thighs looked fat”) are habitually the stuff of nightmares…”

But nightmarers are never host to the angelically spiralling guitar of “Velocity Girl”. First time round, it gave me that hit—indefinable but unmistakable—of which only very few pieces of music are each year capable. It was proof that in all their care and craft and calculation, Primal Scream left room for that chemical thrill-rush sought, but seldom attained, in 30 years of pop. And since then I've nursed a hunch—somewhere between a wish and a hope, well short of a belief—that they will do it all again.

To be honest, “Gentle Tuesday” failed, for me at least, to deliver, but an advance earful of an unfinished “Imperial” (resplendent with backwards guitars and lyrical hints of hatred) suggests that my wait will not be in vain...

Primal Scream—by refusing to accept the self-imposed limitations and all-bin-done defeatism—swim against the tide of 99 per cent of modern pop...

Primal Scream—as self-appointed carriers of a torch many think long extinguished—still believe in magic.

Primal Scream—until it's been proven impossible beyond doubt—are expecting to fly… Danny Kelly •

children of municipal Glasgow, they aren't prone to misty-eyed illusions about anything.

They choose their romantic vision of the rock 'n' roll world and of their place in it; they choose to jettison the seen-it-all cynicism others use to justify ambitionless money-magnet pop; they choose to view their music—for which, don't forget, Gillespie gave up a secure and lucrative post as the Mary Chain's drummer—as part of a crusade, and themselves as inheritors of a gift.

“We want to affect people wi’ our music the same way that other people’s has affected us…” begins Bobby, “…to sweep them away with it… And, sure, it would be good fun to be a pop star as well, but the important thing would be to be a good pop star. We wouldn't be like George Michael or Mel & Kim—that's tasteless, without class, faceless, emotionless, corporate pop. People deserve better than that.

“And you want your pop star to look good, don't you? Put it this way— if Johnny Rotten had looked like Rick Wakeman, it would never have happened, would it? But he looked like a total master God-star, and I think we look good enough to be on people's walls.

“That's part of the reason we stood out last year from all those bands. Not only were we good songwriters, we were also much more tasteful, better dressed, cooler. I know it's sheer narrow-minded arrogance, but it's true—we're just far superior to most groups around, probably a great group. And like other great groups, we give people—how can I put this?—we give people that glimpse, that glimpse of beauty. That, in 1987, is what makes us important…”

If you need any further evidence of Primal Scream's perfectionism and “sheer narrow-minded arrogance” (or, if you prefer, of the spoiled brattiness that's indulged when your label boss just happens to be your singer’s lifelong bosom buddy), look no further than the recording of their new material. The original sessions, at Dave Edmunds' Rockfield Studio in Wales, involved six weeks’ hard labour, the loss of one drummer and a small matter of £40,000.”

Then they were unceremoniously scrapped, just like that, and their producer, highly rated Smiths engineer Stephen Street, elbowed to make way for Mayo Thompson. Some weeks afterwards, back with the relative sanity of The Smiths, Street was still shaking his head in amused disbelief.

“This is a man, don’t forget, used to dealing with the far-from-understanding likes of Messrs Morrissey and Marr, and I swear that the memory of those weeks in Rockfield brought tears to his eyes.

“...It was like nothing I’ve ever experienced before,” he told me. “They’re nice enough lads, but you can’t work with them. It all came to a head when I found myself arguing with Bobby about a solitary cymbal crash in the rhythm track of one song, arguing fiercely for two solid hours…”

This is a man, don’t forget, used to dealing with the far-from-understanding likes of Messrs Morrissey and Marr, and I swear that the memory of those weeks in Rockfield brought tears to his eyes.

Nine times out of 10, a band like Primal Scream would have me reaching for the triple-strength vitriol and my sneer-glands working overtime. The excesses, the unquestioned heroes and the attention to quite ridiculous detail (they refused to turn side-on for our photographer, in case their “thighs looked fat”) are habitually the stuff of nightmares…”

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Wimpy vs McDonald’s
I eat junk food because I can’t be bothered to make anything else. I used to know how, I used to make cakes and things when I took cooking at school. But I’ve lost the art now, and I just get a frozen dinner from the supermarket and stick it in the oven. Or when I go out, I reckon McDonald’s has the edge over Wimpy because they do Chicken Nuggets, and because Wimpy tastes like rotten cardboard. And Casey Jones is even worse.

Baby Amphetamine
I never, ever liked that record, and I never thought the girls were good-looking, either. I never thought, “Oh, yeah, I’d like to fuck one of those girls.” Just thought, “They look really ugly,” and thought the music was ugly as well. It was a scam by McGee; he did it for a complete laugh, just to see how far it would go. A lot of people went for it, but when they heard the record and read the interviews with the girls, they realised they had no brains at all.

Prostitutes
I think prostitutes are a good thing. I don’t want to be patronising, but I think it’s a shame that somebody’s gotta lie down and be fucked by these horrible guys to make a living, but I suppose it’s a sort of safety valve for men. It’s better than having loads of people raped. I don’t think being a prostitute is any worse than being the head of a record company or a journalist.

Obesity
We were coming down on the train the other day, and there was a guy on the train – I don’t know how he fitted into his seat. He had to turn sideways to get through the door. He had urine stains and white trousers on, and he was sweating. He was fucking gross. That was the biggest person I ever saw in my life.

The suburbs
You can walk down the street wearing leather trousers – which, to me, is offensive – and people wanna beat fuck out of you. It happens a lot in the suburbs, but I was on a train the other day, wearing my leather trousers, and I walked by these guys who were obviously in the army, and they were blowing me kisses and saying, “Come here, darling.” I felt like turning around and saying, “I can’t wait till you get posted to Northern Ireland and the IRA blows your fucking head off”, but if I said it they probably would have thrown me off the train.

Hard drugs
Heroin is sort of legalised in places like Liverpool, where addicts can go to – I don’t know what the group is, it’s some council group – and they can get much better heroin and clean syringes, whereas if they get it off dealers in the street it’s been stepped on so many times; it’s got aspirin and glass in it, and it really fucks up their veins. If someone wants to take heroin, you can’t stop them from doing it. It’s just too bad addicts have to get it from some scummy guy in the street. I hate someone making a living from someone else’s misery.

Twenty years ago today
It must have been much more exciting to be alive then than it is now, because music is so dead now. Patti Smith once said that the only thing that kept her alive as a teenager was waiting for the next Stones album to come out, because she had a crush on Keith. I don’t want to destroy anyone’s dreams today, but who can 13-year-old girls look up to? There’s nothing coming out today that makes me go, “Wow, I must have that record!”

Girlfriends
I only have one girlfriend. I don’t like talking about her.
1987

April – June

**ALBUMS**

**The Proclaimers** *This Is The Story*

CHRYSALIS

“I’m not gonna talk about doubts and confusion/On a night when I can see with my eyes shut.”

And I’m not gonna talk about the state of pop when The Proclaimers start a song like that. It’s called “Kilmarnock Blues” and it makes me want to shout and throw stuff and do all those things I’d almost forgotten a record could make me want to do. I have so many words to praise the beautifully stark simplicity of *This Is The Story* and each one flatters to deceive. Bloody clichés! In the face of such a fervently original achievement as this album, I’m ashamed of the critical language we’ve devalued through laziness and/or frustration. So, please believe me when I say *This Is The Story* supersedes style, cleanses me of such bigoted notions as folk or country & western or gospel or soul, and stands reborn in the basic, moving impact of words sung, hollered, whined and yodelled to the accompaniment of an acoustic guitar.

*This Is The Story* comes from within; you can feel it in the rakishly strained harmonies of brothers Craig and Charles Reid and you can keep all your U2s and their pompous open tuning, this is passionate music, living music, documentary, hymnal and, I believe, honest. Sung, or rather spat, in a defiantly untutored Scots brogue (the single, “Throw The ‘R’ Away”, makes light of unwanted advice to tone it down to make it), ballads such as “Beautiful Truth” and “Misty Blue” are hugely, aggressively sentimental, the kind of unashamedly masculine tear-in-the-eye homilies you often encounter (or indulge in) at closing time. “The First Attack” and “Kilmarnock Blues” are imbued with fighting, dignified religion and “It Broke My Heart” and “Letter From America” shake and rattle and roll with anger, shame and regret at families being split apart by unemployment.

“Letter…” especially, like Big Country’s “Field Of Fire”, is a joyous anthem, a true epic that mounts a bitter protest, manages to mourn “Bathgate no more… Sutherland no more… Lewis no more… Skye no more” and still sound defiant and celebratory and strong.

Not through fancy did The Bros Reid call themselves The Proclaimers - This *Is The Story* is a glorious record, recorded in a week and performed with a thuggish, sensitive, personal missionary zeal. It’s a holy hootenanny. Get yourself saved. Steve Sutherland, MM Apr 25

**Happy Mondays**

*Twenty Four Hour Party People Carnt Smile (White Out)*

FACTORY

Blur. The boys from Happy Mondays skitter past us on the rob down the Arndale. Loose limbs and flares kick dust into everybody’s eyes.

Friday night turned into Saturday morning in a rubber bubble near the Hacienda. Percussionist Bez bobbed a lot and hit things and hugged people while the rest of the boys hid behind the sofa slapping their thighs and giggling to each other. The soundtrack to Happy Mondays’ raggedy existence is available for your pleasure on Factory Records, the most shamabolically loveable record of the year and just about the only justification for independent music as the decade hobbles into insufferable politeness.

*Squirrel...* finds Happy Mondays taking the awoddely messy rock of their “Delightful” debut and the bastard funk of their “Freaky Dancin’” follow-up into 10 songs of discord and vitriol quite unlike anything else being currently hurled into the fray. The new single “Tart Tart” is as good a pointer as any, like The Four Tops and James dropping acid in a cupboard with words about blood tests and maggots that never quite say what you expect.

Through it all there’s a surprising discipline where drunkards’ logic splashes across the group and herds them into a rigorously executed tunefulness that separates them from the rest of the dirty dance pack. Sometimes there’s five or six tunes going on at once, but somewhere inside it all there’s a shared vision that sparkles without having to take too many clothes off.

The words remain a source of haphazardly magical beauty, mixing bluntness and oblique suggestion with a certain shuffled cliche. The opening “Kuff Dam”, for example, swells through a first verse all about cheese and fluff and total incomprehension before barking out, “Jesus is a cunt and never helped you with things that you do.” At times you feel like you’re listening to someone’s confession tangled up in psychopatic longing. It’s not an easy record by any means. “Desmond” takes the bare bones of “Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da” and clothes it with stories of dealing draw and the school sprinter who spends most of the time bombed out of his head back at the flat. At least it could be about that, or it could be about trying to get a cup of tea in Chorley after seven.

A dangerous, deeply disturbing record that John Cale, who produced, has thankfully resisted smartening up, the result being never less than captivating. If Mike Leigh had written all his plays on speed and set them to music, he might just have come close to Happy Mondays’ brutal charm. Astounding. Paul Mathur, MM April 18

**Public Enemy**

*Yo! Bum Rush The Show*

DEF JAM

Before the blast the last thing I remember was staring down the finely ground barrel of a Smith &
His words are ammunition. Education and liberation. means of black agitation, anything other than a committed to use rap as. not boasts at all. well echo. In fact, they’re aren’t a hollow wishing- But Chuck D’s boasts fast. Sure, his venom can that will rattle loud and any other skeletons dealers, cabbage, carnage, street posses, crack icons like ‘98 Oldsmobiles, Sure, he collects ghetto a car to mask his pulpit. Chuck D uses the hood of set of limbs and trainers. head and suture on a new hip hop’s grotesque decay. amputate the old preconceptions of hard-core Black Panther core Black Panther life after death. I mean, Public Enemy are just too mean, matching all the means of black agitation, anything other than a committed to use rap as. not boasts at all. well echo. In fact, they’re aren’t a hollow wishing- But Chuck D’s boasts fast. 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Readers’ letters

Talent borrows, genius shoplifts

Why does Johnny Marr condemn The Housemartins for ripping off “I Want The One I Can’t Have”? Whatever happened to “Shoplifters Of The World Unite?”

PATTENDEN, Twickenham (MM/NE Feb 28)

“Shoplifters Of The World Unite”: Five Reasons why it doesn’t mean anything.

Morrissey has never shoplifted. Morrissey can afford not to steal things.

If Morrissey got caught shoplifting, he would benefit from the publicity.

What is “cultural shoplifting”? What is “spiritual shoplifting”?

If we all stole a copy of the single each, do you think The Smiths would approve really?

A BASTARD, A Bedroom, Manchester (MM/NE Feb 28)

Barthes worse than his bite

I have a message for all of Simon Reynolds’ critics: “Fiss off!” I am sick of seeing the pages of Backlash waxed upon the monosyllabic criticisms of an ignorant and extremely bigoted minority of MM readers. It is quite plain to me and to several thousand other ex-MM readers that Simon and co have done more to lift music journalism out of the doldrums of ugly banality than the Sex Pistols did to the whole music business in 1976.

The music scene in 1987 is complicated and consequently calls for complex explanations and interpretations if its essence is to be captured. If Simon’s critics would rather be patronised and talked down to, if they would rather read interviews packed full of questions about sock colours, sex lives and guitar strings, then I suggest they buy Jackie or Smash Hits for their pop news. Return to your intellectual fleapit, dullards, Reynolds rules, OK?

THE ANGRY WOMAN OF WATFORD (MM Jan 3)

Simon Reynolds’ review of U2’s new album was the worst record review I’ve ever heard. 1) He only mentioned one song from the album; 2) The review was full of pretentious rubbish such as “…all the mystical outreaching impulses in their sound get condensed down into a humanist vision…”; 3) It doesn’t really tell us anything about the album – surely the point of a review?

PS Read the NME review to see what I mean?

ALAN HYDE, Raynes Park (MM/NE Mar 28)

Wouldn’t touch it

I write to you from America with a heavy heart and a saddened soul, for I have just heard Samantha Fox’s “Touch Me” on the radio. I had been praying that our country could have been saved from her music, but it seems it is not to be. To put it bluntly, I think her record stinks and compare her singing to a sea lion choking on a piece of fish.

Please! Keep Mrs Fox and her records to yourself – we don’t want ‘em!

EMILY BECKER, Virginia (MM Jan 17)

Mainly white reader writes

Another Cure feature! Why oh why do you give so much space to the fattest and ugliest group in pop?

Also, why do you give so much space to black artists? All black music today is meaningless tosh. Most rappers, etc, show an alarming lack of talent, and their music (if you can call it that?) must seem irrelevant to your mainly white readership.

STANLEY ACCRINGTON, Lancashire (MM Jun 13)

There but for the Graceland

Paul Simon came to South Africa and together with Azanian people created Graceland, which in turn put himself, and more importantly the Azanian people, on an international platform. These Azanian people, who have lived under appalling conditions for most of their lives, are now given a chance of a lifetime to tour the world, make themselves known, and possibly enjoy themselves for five minutes.

But what happens? These fat bastards from the UN want to deprive them of this pleasure. Just when these Azanians manage to stand up for the first time in their lives, these Botha-type clones kick their legs out from under them.

Simon, as far as I know, has never done anything in support of the Botha regime, and although Graceland is not directly political, he has opened up a new channel for Azanians (who have difficulty getting passports) to speak to the rest of the world. I have worked with black musicians in SA. I have seen a wealth of musicians who could set the world alight. I have black friends in Soweto, I visit their homes…

GRAHAM CLIFFORD, Joburg (MM/NE Mar 28)

Blue Mondays

Recently the paper has started to fall into the “Who’ll be hip this week?” mentality, and some of the better writers have become guilty of trying to make things more than they are. When people pick up the MM these days, they find frustrated youth-culture sociologists who think they’re music journalists mouthing off myth-making rubbish.

Perhaps they should review artists on their vinyl output instead of pigeonholing them and arguing about street-credibility.

Take Paul Mathur’s recent review of Happy Mondays’ album – instead of a detailed and constructive analysis of the record, it was sociologist’s Jackanory time. The fact that he offered a nod of approval was a surprise, as it would appear he’d previously written off the band as a pig-ignorant bunch of beer-swilling football hooligans.

Such attitudes are typical. Happy Mondays, like a lot of northern bands, have never been given their fair share of coverage through the seeming indifference of those who are supposed to recognise excellence before anyone else.

The fact is that people up here have known for over two years that the Mondays are above and beyond the rest of the pretenders, no-hopers and copyists that pass for present-day indie pop. MM had better get its act together pretty quick, because it’s fast becoming a garish downmarket comic for slow readers.

PETER SIDDAL, Manchester (MM/May 16)
The Smiths look likely to call it a day after the release of their next album in September, and insiders are blaming a personality clash between Morrissey and Johnny Marr – the group’s nucleus and songwriting partnership – for the split. There’s no official word from Rough Trade, apart from a rather flippant dismissal from Mozzer, but NME understands that relations between the two main men are so bad that they won’t even enter the same studio together. Promoters have been instructed not to arrange any live shows, either in Europe or America, to promote the new material, it is believed.

Morrissey, when approached via his press office for a comment, said: “Whoever says The Smiths have split shall be severely spanked by me with a wet plimsoll.”
The Smiths outside an evocatively named shop on Oldham Road in Manchester, February 1987, as tensions rise between the band’s two songwriters.
While NME's newshounds await the arrival of young Steven armed with soggy footwear, sources in both London and Manchester continue to feed us with snippets which point towards the decline of the nation's top indie band.

Marr has reportedly told friends in Manchester that he and Morrissey are no longer pals, and that he is sick of the singer acting the self-centred star. He says the working relationship has also suffered considerably.

Morrissey is not pleased with the company Marr is keeping, acting the guitar hero and playing on albums by Keith Richards, Bobby Womack and Bryan Ferry. While he says the press hadn't got hold of this earlier. It's been brewing for months – Marr declared it was the end of The Smiths, and that he never wanted to work with Marr again.

In Manchester last weekend, a friend of Johnny Marr's told an NME mole: “I'm surprised that the press hadn’t got hold of this earlier. It’s been brewing for months – Marr and Morrissey haven’t spoken to each other for three-and-a-half months. There’s a situation where they now see it as backing down to do so.”

Rough Trade have said next to nothing, and EMI (who are due to release Smiths material in 1988) are none the wiser. But what about the secondary characters in the band? In/out bass player Andy Rourke could not be contacted, but a series of calls to drummer Mike Joyce hinted that all was not well.

The phone was answered by a young woman who, discovering it was the NME, said Joyce wasn’t in and wouldn’t be back for a few days. When told we wanted to ask Joyce about the break-up of the band, she said: “He doesn’t want to comment on that. He has nothing to say.” No surprised reaction, no flat denial.

Meanwhile, The Smiths’ next single, “Girlfriend In A Coma”, will be released by Rough Trade on August 10. The album, Strangeways, Here We Come, follows on September 28.

The single is backed with “Work Is A Four Letter Word”, a cover of a Cilla Black song from the 1968 movie of the same name. The 12-inch features an extra Morrissey/Marr track, “I Keep Mine Hidden”. Shelagh Delaney is the sleeve cover star.

Strangeways, Here We Come is The Smiths’ last studio album for Rough Trade – and their last ever – before the planned move to EMI. It was recorded in Bath, produced by Morrissey, Marr and Stephen Street, though not necessarily all at the same time.

A South Bank Show on The Smiths, which could turn out to be their swansong, will be screened in the autumn.

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There was no truth in the idea that Morrissey has any problem with the company I keep

NME AUG 8 “Massively proud” Johnny Marr responds to the split

The Smiths announce that Johnny Marr has left the group. However, they would like to confirm that other guitarists are being considered to replace him.

It must be stressed that the concept of ‘The Smiths’ will remain the same and the group will continue to promote their forthcoming single and album releases and are eager to plan live dates once a new guitarist has been selected.

The Smiths would like to state although Johnny’s departure is sad they wish him every happiness and success with his future projects.

The obvious questions thrown up by this statement (What exactly constitutes “the concept” of The Smiths? Can that concept possibly survive the departure of half of the band’s creative force? Who are those “other guitarists”? ) remain unanswered. Some of the mysteries surrounding the break-up of Britain’s biggest independent band were, however, cleared up when Marr himself rang NME to put his side of the case.

“First of all,” he said, “it’s very important to me to clear up some of the inaccuracies that were in your story last week. There is nothing even approaching ‘acrimony’ between myself and the other members of the band. I’ve known them all a long time and I love’ em.

“Nor was there any truth in the idea that Morrissey has any problem with the company I keep, personally or work-wise; we’re very different people and lead different kinds of lives, but that stuff is just
spent so much time in with other musicians.

regardless of the situation year at the latest,
dates set up by the new
I want to have some live
about that. But I definitely
little early to be too certain
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using it, but contented himself, when pressed
informed that Morrissey intended to continue
Smiths”. Marr was genuinely surprised when
emerge from the split is the use of the name “The
of The Smiths.”

One potential source of acrimony yet to
emerge from the split is the use of the name “The
Smiths”. Marr was genuinely surprised when
informed that Morrissey intended to continue
using it, but contented himself, when pressed
for a response, with “I think that’s probably tied
up in a whole load of legal things…”

Although understandably uncertain about
his immediate plans, Marr intends getting back
into public view as soon as possible.

“I’ve already recorded some stuff and it’s gone
really well. There’s every
chance that I’ll be forming
a permanent group,
though obviously it’s a
little early to be too certain
about that. But I definitely
want to have some live
dates set up by the new
year at the latest,
regardless of the situation
with other musicians.

“Part of the reason I’ve
spent so much time in
America recently is to get exposed to some
different music. The stuff in this country at the
moment has got me baffled; I can’t find much
in any of it. But it’s a pleasure listening to new
ideas and trying to use them. I’ve not been
unhappy with the things
I’ve done up to now – far
from it – so don’t expect
me to explode off into
some crazy new direction,
but there will be some
changes…”

Any further thoughts on
the parting of the ways?
“I don’t want to get too
overemotional about this,
but I really am massively
proud of all the things that The Smiths have
done and achieved, and so from that point of
view, of course, it’s all really sad, especially for
the group’s fans, who’ve always been brilliant.

“But on the other hand, I’m looking forward
to doing new things, and to hearing what
Morrissey will come up with. I think the change
will actually do him a lot of good. I certainly
hope so. But, in the final analysis, the thing that
used to make me happy was making me
miserable, and so I just had to get out.

“But I never, ever wanted to turn The Smiths
up into the Rolling Stones. That was just more lazy
jokey bullshit.”

That may be so, but with
The Smiths split right down the middle, who can
guarantee there will be positive creative results
from either camp? And what of the name?
Morrissey intends to continue under the
banner of “The Smiths”, but he could face new
legal obstacles along the way.

NME AUG 15 Smiths about
to reveal Marr’s replacement?

THE SMITHS likely to announce the
name of their new guitarist within the next
couple of weeks. NME understands that
Morrissey, Joyce and Rourke have been
auditioning replacements for Johnny Marr
for the last month, and have now whittled it
down to a shortlist of two.

A spokesman for the group could not be more
forthcoming, but hinted that both pretenders
to the throne are people the record-buying
public would be familiar with.

Meanwhile, another whisper making its
way round Soho is that Johnny Marr will be
unveiling his new band with a low-key show at
the London Marquee. But don’t form a queue
yet, the prospective bash is not until December.
The acrimonious dispute between Bruce Springsteen and a number of his former associates is now accelerating down a path that my well result in The Boss having to account for himself from the witness box of a public court.

This scenario has emerged with the news that Mike Batlan and Doug Sutphin (Bruce’s instrument-minders for 12 and 10 years respectively) have brought a six-count civil action against their former employer, his production company Thrill Hill Productions Inc, and his LA-based accountants Breslauer, Jacobson & Rutman. The action was lodged at the end of July with the Superior Court Of New Jersey, in Trenton, with Batlan and Sutphin requesting jury trial on all six counts. That, of course, is unlikely to worry an organisation as large as Springsteen’s, though the possibility of an inconvenient, embarrassing courtroom drama must concern them. However, as NME goes to press, no response (required within 14 days of the action being brought) has been forthcoming from the Springsteen camp, perhaps indicating a readiness to do battle. That response having failed to materialise, the wheels of American civil justice (infinitely slicker than our own) will whirl into action in the next couple of weeks and a hearing date will be set in the foreseeable future, perhaps even coinciding with the release of Springsteen’s new Tunnel Of Love album.

For Batlan’s transgression, Bruce required that he forfeit a week’s wages.

The details of the grounds on which the action is being pursued offer further glimpses behind the Springsteen image that’s projected to the public. The first two counts revolve around the complex legal and financial arrangement made between the complainants and Springsteen when they parted company. In November 1985, Batlan and Sutphin were offered, and accepted, severance pay of $120,000 and $100,000 respectively ($10,000 for each year of service). In order to ensure the maximum tax benefits, these payments were to be made to two companies (Mike Batlan Technical Inc and Sutphin Sound Consultant Inc) set up for the purpose. Springsteen, it is alleged, personally guaranteed these arrangements, assuring his long-term employees that they had “nothing to worry about”.

In February 1986, however, Batlan and Sutphin received cheques that not only showed large deductions but were also made out as though both men were still employed by Springsteen, thus negating the agreed tax benefits and costing the complainants what their lawyer describes as “tens of thousands of dollars”.

In the fourth, Batlan and Sutphin are seeking the return of $311.11 each (the now-infamous “canoe” levy, incurred when the pair lost Springsteen’s prized canoe when he moved house. This they claim was “illegal and improper”), but it’s the fifth complaint, involving, it is alleged, the forging of Mike Batlan’s signature – that’s most serious, and most revealing.

During the Born In The USA Tour, the complaint states, Batlan was fined for “an alleged infraction of unwritten laws made up by Bruce Springsteen”. Said “infraction” involved the cold-air blowers that Springsteen, it seems, has set in the stage flooring to cool him off during marathon shows. Batlan – busy, he asserts, attending a more urgent guitar malfunction – missed his cue to activate certain of these machines.

For this transgression, he was informed by an unnamed minion, Bruce required that he forfeit a week’s wages to a local charity. Batlan protested his innocence and offered to make a donation, but to no avail: that week’s pay cheque did not materialise.

Unwilling to let the matter rest, Batlan’s enquiries about his money eventually revealed, he alleges, that his pay cheque (for $698.81, drawn against the Chase Manhattan bank) had been sent to a local food bank with Batlan’s signature forged on it by a person within the Springsteen organisation.

The state of New Jersey, unlike others, doesn’t deal with claims for specific amounts of money. Instead, Batlan and Sutphin’s action seeks “damages, treble damages, interest and legal costs”, a formula that will – if the action (or a significant part of it) is successful – be translated into what their lawyer calls “a substantial amount of money”.

That, of course, is unlikely to worry an organisation as large as Springsteen’s, though the possibility of an inconvenient, embarrassing and perhaps damaging courtroom drama must concern them. However, as NME goes to press, no response (required within 14 days of the action being brought) has been forthcoming from the Springsteen camp, perhaps indicating a readiness to do battle. That response having failed to materialise, the wheels of American civil justice (infinitely slicker than our own) will whirl into action in the next couple of weeks and a hearing date will be set in the foreseeable future, perhaps even coinciding with the release of Springsteen’s new Tunnel Of Love album.
Shot dead at home

NME SEPT 9 RIP, founding Wailer Peter Tosh.

Peter Tosh, (1944-1987) on stage in 1975

PETER TOSHI, a founding member of The Wailers with Bob Marley, was shot dead in his home in Jamaica late last week. A second, unnamed person was also killed in the attack, and five others, including Tosh's wife Marlene, were also wounded.

Three armed men forced their way into the 42-year-old singer's Kingston home, demanding money. When Tosh and his guest resisted, the shots were fired.

Tosh has had a stuttering solo career since leaving The Wailers in 1973, reaching a commercial, if not critical, peak in the late '70s when he collaborated with Mick Jagger. Ironically, another Wailer, drummer Carlton Barrett, was shot dead in similar circumstances earlier this year.

Censorship bites

CENSORSHIP IS BEGINNING to bite in the pop world with the news this week that the Big Black album Songs About Fucking is not being stocked by either HMV or Virgin. HMV have objected to the title of the Blast First album, but Virgin have taken exception to the inner sleeve notes, in which singer and guitarist Steve Albini advocates the use of heroin. Blast First claim that Albini's comments are a "wind-up" not to be taken seriously.

Albini is no stranger to controversy. He had had to move his studio to the US, where a record shop was confiscated, complete with their "Penis Landscape" posters.

The NME news desk is also appealing to readers to offer any information regarding incidents of censorship in their local record stores.

Aerosmith

They're a tradition I grew up with. They were the only band that the people who lived in my city in Indiana would accept wearing makeup and dressing cool. These people thought the Stones were fags, but everybody liked Aerosmith. We're coming to England with them this fall. It's something we always wanted. We are influenced by them, but it goes deeper than that - we're also influenced by, like, Muddy Waters, Howling Wolf, old blues things, various black artists. One of my band's favourite albums is the new Cameo record.

Policemen

There's no such thing as a cool cop. The incident in Los Angeles just kinda happened real quickly. I got hit on the head by a cop and I guess I was just blacked out and was still raging and fighting. Two days later, I woke up in hospital tied to the bed with electrodes over me. I guess they had to give me electro-shock. I don't know a whole lot about what happened.

Bad Reputation

At least we've got a reputation. It's better than being unknown. I've been really tame over here. It's better than being unknown. At least we've got a reputation. We're coming to England with them this fall. I've been really tame over here in England because I've been worried about the shows and the interviews. Slash has been going out and getting thrown out of nightclubs and smashing windows. He hasn't had to concentrate as much as I have.

Drugs

Drugs were a major part of the early thing. A lot of people just could not break their heroin habits, and a lot of them had to leave California altogether to break their drug habits. Sometimes if I do something bad and I look like I'm having fun, I then find it plays on my conscience for a long time.

Sean Penn

He's great. Bad Boys is one of my favourite films of all time. I've got nothing against hitting a photographer if he's being an asshole.

"My Michelle"

It's a true story. Slash went out with this girl when he was 13. I met her and I went out with her for a long time. Her name's Michelle, her mother OD'd on heroin and she runs around doing a lot of coke. I wrote this nice cosy little song about it not working out and I thought, "That's nice and cute, but that's not how it is." So, right off the top of my head, I wrote this cruncher of a song, the true story, and the rest of the band said, "You can't use that, man, Michelle is going to freak out." After a few weeks I just shelved it, but it kept bothering me. So I asked Michelle's opinion, she read it and she loved it.
“There’s no manifesto”

MELODY MAKER JULY 4

WE HAVE TO have something, some devilish poke around the breach birth, death rattle or even growing pains of pop, and it could come a good deal less cheekily than The Justified Ancients Of Mu Mu. A crunchy cacophony of a single, “All You Need Is Love”, and an equally noisy LP, 1987 What The F**k Is Going On, have taken the genre’s usual reticence and shaken it into some sort of rattly ecstasy. It sounds sort of, er…

“When you reviewed our album, it looked like you were just writing the first thing that came into your head without thinking about it.”

Is that good or bad?

“That’s good. It’s exactly the way we work, so who are we to condemn it?”

King Boy D and Rockman Rock are the playful Zenarchists at the core of The JAMs’ sneaky desire, wishing to remain anonymous despite the fact that most people on the face of the Earth know who they are by now. (Don’t you read the music comics?) George and Andy, right? Morecambe and Wise? Flanagan and Allen with that old ¾ schizophrenia. No? Oh dear.

Pick a card, any card

“The Thing About JAM that annoys a lot of journalists is that there’s no theories, no manifesto. Manifestos are usually for people to hide behind when they don’t know what to do. So many people come along to us and try to get us to be something that we’re not.”

So, what are you?

“We don’t really know ourselves. Things just happen and we kind of watch it all.”

The Justified Ancients Of Mu Mu were the result of two people having the same idea at the same time, an idea involving lots of all those brilliant bits from records and…”

THE JUSTIFIED ANCIENTS OF MU MU are on a mission to bring about a revolution through sampling. But is it a suicide mission?

“You’re aware what you’re doing is illegal,” they confess.

“But it’s not the most criminal thing we’ve ever done.”
Tricky situationists: King Boy D and Rockman Rock (aka managers/musicians Bill Drummond and Jimmy Cauty) drum up business for their new JAMs project.
haphazardly dull ones from others crammed into a big hip-hop apocalypse bin liner and emptied over people’s laps. Incredibly, they were, if not the first to think of it, the first to take it towards an end, to lead it away from the lumbering concept of what a rock-pop record ought to be.

King Boy D, who has spent quite a few years dallying with more conventional vistas of pop, is getting very excited.

“Out of all the things I’ve done before in my life, this has given me the biggest thrill. It’s the first time I’ve made a record where I didn’t have to think of it in terms of carefully planned consistency—it just came out over five days in the studio like one long, mad party and now it’s a record. It’s the first time I’ve ever worked that way, and I have to admit, it does get difficult to do things like what I’m doing at the moment [producing one of the King Grebos]. Fortunately he’s a good bloke, so I can go back to that more conventional approach, but I certainly find it difficult to actually sit down and listen to records like I used to.”

It is difficult. Once you’ve heard The JAMs, with their snatched noises from Sam Fox, MC5, Julie Andrews, Scott Walker, The Fall and about a million others, you’ll either love them or hate them, but still never have the tolerance again to sit through four minutes of one polite idea. JAMs boys kick to kill. Does it get scary, this anarchistic means without an end, tearing down the statues and building them into ragged new shapes?

“It’s not scary, but I know what you mean. We’re doing all this and originally it was just going to be one single, then it turned into an album as well. Now there’ll be another one. It’s like when you have a crap and you squeeze it out and think, ‘I’m never going to need another one.’ Then half an hour later, you’re thinking that maybe you will.”

Does the criminality of it all appeal?

“There is that. While you’re taking all these things and throwing them into the noise, you’re aware that what you’re doing is illegal, and that can be exciting. It’s not the most criminal thing we’ve ever done, though.”

What is?

King Boy D: “When I was young, they were building all these Barratt Homes near us and I managed to push a bulldozer into a house. The
double sixes. There’s a fairly
damy record. It’s quite an outpouring of emotions.”

Which is the dominant one?

“I’m a lover rather than a hater, so I suppose love wins through in the end. Then again, it might not. We’re less idea than anyone about what we’re doing.”

What keeps it going?

“The excitement, the feeling of not knowing what’s going to happen next. We’re both addicts, basically, for just about anything. At one time, it was rock, all that feedback guitar and stuff, but that’s not enough anymore. We’ve made it impossible for us to ever listen again to things like that, and we might even do the same for other people. We’re very wary about setting ourselves up as the start of something new, but you can’t help asking yourself why other people aren’t all making records this way.”

Can it be done badly?

“Ohyes definitely. I mean, in the noise and everything there’s still quite carefully worked out songs. We’ve probably got a few minor chords in there. The main problem comes from the practicality of making the records when you have people around you who desperately stick to the old way of doing things.”

“If [King Boy D] haven’t a clue about technology, but Rockman has, and between us we spend lots of time touching things and seeing if it hurts, whereas we have people like the engineer who get all stroppy about us putting a Phil Collins bass drum on the record, like it was sacred or something.

This isn’t one big wind-up. We’re not doing it to take the piss.”
"A glitter-crusted charity Christmas card"

**NME JUN 20** Can The JAMs’ first album live up to the sampletastic delights of its outrider single?

The Justified Ancients Of Mu Mu 1987 What The F**k Is Going On? SOUNDS OF MU

**SOME FACTS:** Sampling is the new sorcery, the process that allows you to isolate any available sound and superimpose it on any other. Sampling is the electro-magic wand that zapped the tired old carcass of fag-end electro/scratch and unleashed hip hop. Sampling is the grim reaper for conventional songs, and the armoured liberator of the imagination.

**SOME MORE FACTS:** 1987... is Britain’s first stab at conspicuously sampled pop. 1987... is primarily the work of one King Boy D, the enigma who as former hutch-keeper to the Bunyfens and acid-taster for Julian Cope, boasts some of Europe’s most seriously widened braincells. 1987... comes hot on the tail of (and centrally features) The JAMs’ mighty ‘All You Need Is Love’, single, recently legitimised after a hectic period as a desperado white label... A QUESTION: And so, given all these verities, is 1987... the runaway juggernaut hyperbrill monster crack that the outriding 45 threatened? AN ANSWER: No.

I can’t understand why people get so worried by samplers and what we do with them. They wouldn’t have been invented if they weren’t for doing that.

**Think of a number; now double it**

“PEOPLE HAVE GOT TO understand that this isn’t all one big trivial wind-up. We’re not doing it to take the piss, we’re trying to suggest that records can quite easily be made in a totally different way. It’s a question of throwing out all the preconceptions and opening yourself up to the kind of freedom and audacity you get from doing something like we’re doing. We’re not hoarding it for ourselves, we want to tell EVERYBODY about it.”

“It’s easy to dismiss The JAMs’ frolics as little more than a brightly coloured sideshow to the shabbiest circus in town, and their claims that ‘it’s not a record, it’s more of a happening’ give the impression of the whole being a lot less affecting than it actually is. Don’t give in to what your elders and dullers tell you, though. Believe me, it’s far more than a gimmick. The Slinky and the deely-boppers have been well and truly trampled on by The JAMs’ machete-wielding love stories.

The future is about as predictable as a trout with legs, and the only career-embracing involved is when the stolen car crashes into the odd bus queue. I didn’t want to ask, but I knew you readers would get uptight if I didn’t, so... When are the live gigs, boys?

“We’re going to have to play them, but the only problem is that as soon as we’ve finished doing something, we’re itching to get onto something else. We’re not doing it to take the piss, we’re not hoarding it for ourselves, we want to tell EVERYBODY about it.” The Justified Ancients Of Mu Mu are tickling all the right places. Kick out The JAMs? Well, they’re welcome round our house anytime.

**AN EH?: Eh?**

THE BITTER TRUTH: Sampling is going to render pop’s smug face unrecognisable, but it cannot make you, me and next door’s cat into instant musical behemoths. Just as the world’s snazziest word processor won’t turn your note to the milkman into a Shakespearean sonnet, so even the most ultra-mod sampling feat is only as creative as the carbon-based organism (you, me or next door’s cat) sat behind it. Audacity, completely unfounded self-confidence, utter ruthlessness and a fast car will, of course, be useful attributes to the go-ahead noise-pirate of the ‘90s, but skill, feel, instinct, vision – y’know, boring old talent – will still be bottom-line compulsories.

And it’s in these latter commodities that The JAMs seem convincingly under-tooled. With the entire sonic universe to choose from, 1987... actually manages, in places, to run short of ideas. So, while “Rockman Rock” – Hamilton Bohannon worried hairless by CCG’s toytown Zepplings – approaches the 21-gun-and-four-kitchen-sinks standard of “All You Need...”, “Queen And I” dribbles off into what seems like seven consecutive editions of Top Of The Pops, and “Next” (despite a surreal joust between Julie Andrews and The Fall!) dies nailed to a saxophone of stupefying tediosity.

A (totally unfair) comparison between King Boy D’s worthy but strained wrestling and the output of the current masters of sample-pop (Schoolly D’s soundwiz DJ Code Money, for example, or LL Cool J’s tape titan, Cut Creator) clinches the case. Theirs – all humour, vibrancy and colour – is an aerosoled version of The Book Of Kells; his is a glitter-crusted charity Christmas card.

**AN END:** 1987... isn’t a bad record, just disappointing, the sound of one good idea spread very thin, of novelty wearing off.

Danny Kelly

Pointless, revolutionary or just plain fun, The Justified Ancients Of Mu Mu have run into serious trouble over their 1987 LP with 1970s pop giants Abba over the inclusion of “Dancing Queen” on the album. The album, which features heavily sampled sections from ‘70s and ‘80s megahits, has until now escaped legal action. But the Mechanical Copyright Protection Society, following a complaint from Abba, has told the Justified Ancients to “cease all manufacture and distribution” of the album, which features heavily sampled sections from ‘70s and ‘80s megahits. The MCPS says subsequent damages could include “infringed copyright laws. The MCPS says subsequent damages could include “all of the record production company” and “all of the records and albums.”

Bill Drummond, the Ancients’ manager, has been told that he has infringed copyright laws. The MCPS says subsequent damages could include “all of the record production company” and “all of the records and albums.”
“America in 1987 is Disneyland”

REM return with the political Document. Mike Mills loses his glasses, while Michael Stipe escapes the burden of profundity and gets it out of his system. “I just vomit, and if you’re there you can catch the little chunks,” he says.

YOU CAN’T TELL anyone you came here.”

Michael Stipe mutters this as we pull up in the drive of his house, the humid night air alive with the chatter of crickets, brown recluse spiders and rattlesnakes. Stipe has learned the importance of protecting himself from the inquisitive glare of the unhappy, imbalanced and downright undesirables who turn up on his porch from nowhere, seeking words of wisdom or comfort from someone they see as the closest we’ve got to an ‘80s rock’n’roll guru.

For that reason the house is now strictly off limits, and if it’s possible to hint fuck off, then a notice, pinned on the door, does so with characteristic Stipean charm. Once inside, it’s easy to see why. Common courtesy and respect for his privacy forbids any description of the interior – suffice to say it’s a magical place. An REM LP cover brought to life.

THE LAST TRAIN to Disneyland left the station just as REM guitarist Peter Buck was waking that morning. Blinking his way across the bedroom, he switched on the TV and was, once again, confronted by the Reverend Ike, who, as usual, was frothing at the mouth.

“I want you to send me your money! And I don’t mean that jingling kind, ‘cos that only makes me nervous. I want the folding...”
REM: “We do things that are unpleasant to us, photosessions and the like”
“Every record is a process of reacting against the prior one”

 cash! ‘Cos I need a new Cadillac. God told me, I need a new Cadillac! I don’t want my pie in the sky – I want my pie now!”

That was when Buck knew that REM had to make an album about America, 1987. America ‘87 and its surreal madness. Its attempts to revive the spirit of McCarthyism, its clandestine operations in Nicaragua and the blatant ones in the Gulf. The insatiable desire for money, murder and madness—everything that, to him, a young American, meant one thing—Disneyworld.

“It’s a sideways look at the world and us. It has a kind of Orwellian wry humour. It’s not that we’re making light of America, it’s just that I can’t look at it the way Bruce Springsteen does. To me, America in 1987 is Disneyworld.”

Buck pulls apart the slats on a Venetian blind and peers out into the Athens sun, which is nudging 100 degrees. He surveys the quiet streets around the REM office, a last bastion of sanity in a country gone bonkers.

The evening before we arrived in Athens, REM had played an unannounced gig at the neighbouring 40 Watt Club—rumours of which had shot round the close-knit community like a synapse, ensuring that the club was overflowing by the time they took the stage. According to eyewitnesses, they tore through a selection of new material and just one old song, “Begin The Begin” from *Lifes Rich Pageant*.

The experience had left them excited and obviously eager to talk. Even the infamously hard to pin down Stipe appeared relaxed, almost eager to please, if somewhat distracted by his friend’s dog Joey, who he was looking after for the day.

REM’s last studio LP, *Lifes Rich Pageant*, was characterised as much by the directness of the songs themselves as by Don Gehman’s lushly textured production. The man behind John Cougar and The Blasters, Gehman grabbed REM’s intangible, intransitory meanderings by where their balls should be, and sculpted them into something very nearly approaching pop.

Surprising, then, that *Document*, the revised title for Disneyworld, should be an almost complete about-face, if anything, capturing the band in even heavier sepia tones than their pre-*Pageant* days. Was this desire to strip it all down and get back to basics a reaction against the highly polished sheen of *Pageant*, an unhappiness with a direction they’d not envisaged being pushed in, perhaps?

“No, not at all,” Buck explains, walking away from the window as the blinds snap shut. “Every record is a process of reacting against the prior one. I was really happy with *Pageant*, but none of us wanted to make that record again. I think we made the perfect record we could in that style, and the new songs, because of the way we wrote them, wouldn’t have lent themselves to that big AOR thing.

“We always go into the studio with a set idea, but it never comes out that way. It’s hard to write to order. I think this time we wanted a really big sound with lots of chaotic stuff on top. Big in a way that a Peter Gabriel record would be, but not as clear—full of weirdness, backwards stuff and noise.”

*Document* is, at times, both more violent and more whimsical than any other REM LP to date, yet is less exact in the way it executes its intentions, displaying an almost cavalier attitude to any notion of conventional songwriting or playing.

“Well, we’ve been trying to write songs lately that are a little less form-following,” Mike Mills explains. “We’re trying to write a little more musically nonsensical.”

“Yeah,” Buck interrupts, “I’m probably the worst for this, I’m the one who has to have a chorus in each song. But there are three or four songs on this LP...
which just don’t have a chorus in the accepted sense, which is neat. Van Morrison has a lot of songs that don’t have choruses, and it’s hard to work that into a rock’n’roll perspective, but we wanted the songs to flow a little bit more and be divided less into anything like verse-bridge chorus. Where’s the bridge? Well the bridge is where the verse and chorus aren’t.

So there was absolutely no intention of making a commercial LP, then?

“I don’t have a clue what commercial means,” Michael Stipe deadpans as he yanked into the room by Joey. “To me, commercial is ‘Sledgehammer’ or Gang Of Four.”

Stipe’s vocals are pared down almost to a shout on “Document”, while Buck’s guitar screech and soar against them, defying the gravity of each particular song. In a way, Buck’s guitar work plays much the same role on “Document” as Stipe’s voice did on “P ersteant”, and what few layers there are on the LP are stacked by him.

“It is our most male record,” Stipe says, tongue-in-cheek as he disappears to fetch a bowl of water for his canine companion, never to be seen again that afternoon. Buck takes up the conversation.

“It seemed that on the last record there was very little room for me, commercial is ‘Sledgehammer’ or Gang Of Four.”

Fables Of The Reconstruction

Document was recorded in Nashville with Scott Litt, who Buck admired for his “Dare I admit it? Big modern drum sound.” For all its music-biz connections, Buck claims that Nashville was essentially a quiet town which soon succumbed to the REM way of doing things. “Every night we’d finish at around one, go to a bar and meet the same five people.”

The band describe the sessions as easygoing, a far cry from those for “Fables Of The Reconstruction” which, from a safe distance, they now admit came close to causing a split within the band as well as a personal crisis for Buck.

“I think we were all kind of miserable,” the guitarist explains. “I hate to say, but it was raining every day in England and we were all going through these weird pressures, and I think that every band goes through these times when you think, ‘Do I want to be in a rock’n’roll band?’ We were at the point where we could feel ourselves getting sucked into the business. I was pretty much a wreck for most of that time.

“I was just drunk all the time. It’s not that I didn’t care; I was just depressed a hell of a lot and it showed within the band. I think we were thinking, ‘Why can’t we just be hippies and say, ‘Fuck the record. We don’t want to do it—we’re going home’?” In the end, we worked through it.

“If we were to record those songs now, in a similar mental state to what we were in at the time, they would be very different. I do like that record. I’m not saying it was a failure. I mean, rock’n’roll isn’t showbiz, we don’t have to be happy. Fuck it. As weird as that album can get, that’s how I felt every day. The thing that sums it up is that bit at the end of ‘Feeling Gravity’s Pull’ where the strings come in and it goes down… ‘Nearth! I probably looked like that, too.’

Document shares a similar intensity, but by and large, it’s developed into an intrinsic theme rather than a state of mind. From the unstoppable droning folk of the LP’s opening tour de force, “Finest Worksong”, to the ‘30s WPA-style social-realist murals which adorn the cover, its central themes can scarcely be denied. Much later that same night, in his favourite pizza parlour, Stipe puts it all into perspective.

“In America, if you can’t make money, they think it’s because you’re a failure. The work ethic is really intrinsic to American thought, and that has a lot to do with this LP. The idea that you can work and work and get what you want and then try for even more. It’s the American dream, but it’s a pipe dream that’s been exploited for years. I could get by without money, I’ve done it before. You can get by in this town without money, it’s not a necessity. But it’s kinda gross what money does to you. Businessmen say ‘hello’ to me on the street now. They acknowledge me when I go into a nice restaurant. They let me put my bike in the kitchen at the best restaurant in town. I can wear a smelly T-shirt and they’ll take me to the best table. It’s really gross.”

The likes of the Reverend like and his ilk, offering the promised land at a price, also meet with due disdain, this time from Buck.

“That whole faith thing is something that goes through American culture like a knife. It has done for years. At the turn of the century, I guess it was a big thing, Aimee McPherson and Father, er, what’s that bastard’s name? But he was a crook too. They all were. There’s this American evangelical, hucksterism; America’s full of religious nuts. They all come here for that reason. They got kicked out of their own countries. My family came over from Sweden because they were agnostics and atheists. They came here to get away from that.

“That’s why, when you compare our songs to writers like Flannery O’Connor and Carson McCullers, I’m flattered that don’t quite make the connection. Flannery’s characters are all struggling to reconcile their faith to a modern world where faith doesn’t play any apparent part. In our case I’d say none of us have got any faith anyway. I don’t believe in God.”

In the past, many of REM’s finest songs have walked the fine line between patriotism and a gentle celebration of certain elements of American culture. Yet, over the last year, Buck claims to have derived most pleasure from the tinted visions held by Big Black and Sonic Youth. Was there a view he’d been tempted to share?

“I dunno. I’m certainly not an apologist for America, though it would be a nice piece of land if you could wipe out most of the people. I think Sonic Youth’s vision is very tongue-in-cheek. I don’t think you can take all this American culture. Yet, over the last year, Buck claims to have derived most pleasure from the tinted visions held by Big Black and Sonic Youth. Was there a view he’d been tempted to share?

"I dunno. I’m certainly not an apologist for America, though it would be a nice piece of land if you could wipe out most of the people. I think Sonic Youth’s vision is very tongue-in-cheek. I don’t think you can take all this America 1969 blood and Manson stuff at all seriously. I mean, they haven’t killed anyone yet. It’s real Alice Cooperish. They’re probably just a lot more comfortable with that imagery than I would be. I’m not a blood-and-guts type guy. All the clothes that I like have skulls on them, but if I wore them I’d look a dork. I just look at it all differently to them."

Nevertheless, the songs on Document are more overtly political and damning than anything they’ve put their name to before. “Welcome To The Occupation”, “Exhuming McCarthy” and “It’s The End Of The World As We Know It” all rage with a seemingly uncontrollable anger. It’s almost as if the passion and poignancy so prevalent on Fables, stirred by the spread of inhumanity and decay, had festered and boiled over into blind hatred.

“Well, generally, Michael is really worried about this conservative trend that’s going on and the way that people in power seem to look at things,” Buck ventures. “Right now, Russia has the most sensible leader they’ve ever had and Reagan is just keeping the door open for more war. Reagan is a moron and that’s all there is to it. I get upset when I think about him.”

“End Of The World” and “Strange”, a cover of the old Wire classic, are also among the most powerful and strange vocal performances Stipe has ever laid down. Both are delivered in a speed-crazy rush of emotion.

“I wrote the words to ‘End Of The World’ as I sang it. When they showed me that song in the studio I just said, ‘It’s the end of the world as we know it and I feel fine.’ I wanted it to be the most bombastic vocal that I could possibly muster. Something that would completely overwhelm you and drip off your shoulders and stick in your hair like bubblegum."

“‘Strange’ was a scratch vocal. I went in and sang it and I don’t quite know what I meant. ‘That’s it.’ I didn’t listen to it after that. They took it away and mixed it up and put some reverb on it. I just couldn’t be bothered with it. I put a whole load of energy into the other songs and that one was just, ‘Ugh!’ It’s like spitting—you don’t want to get it over your shirt, but you wanna get it out and keep walking.”
“W
E’VE NEVER PLAYED
before. It’s gonna be awful
—I can’t wait!”

Michael Stipe is musing on the evening’s
entertainment. Athens’ two rock clubs, The 40
Watt and The Uptown Lounge, offer the kind of
nightly entertainment and guest appearances
that, two or three years ago, would have had the
average Brit rock critic salivating for more.

Tonight, Stipe and a couple of friends are
opening for his sister’s band, Cowface.

Unfortunately they are awful. Stipe whacking
out a guitar drone while two beefeckes bash
sheet metal with 10lb hammers — a more testing
Test Department.

A tortuous 30 minutes after it begins, an end is abruptly called and
Athens’ youth drifts back to the bar, unsure whether to laugh or mourn
the loss of their eardrums.

In the early hours of the morning, in a parking lot adjacent to The
40 Watt, Stipe unveils his reasons for all the recent extracurricular
activities. This last year has seen him extending his work with The Golden
Palominos as well as producing an LP by Hugo Largo, the bassist he met
when interviewed by him in New York.

“As a band, what REM are capable of is still pretty limited when it comes to
down to it. There’s a very set position where I exist. I could never get a
sledgehammer on stage and hit metal with REM. I’ve done it in the early
days when we used to play biker bars. I’d wear this glob as a hat and I’d
take it off and pound it on stage. The bikers thought I was insane, so they
left me alone. I think they kinda admired me ‘cos I was this real skinny kid
with funny hair.

“It’s not really a frustration with REM. If anything, it’s been opened up
so wide to us that it’s actually beneficial. But we’re able to keep things
intact and stay on top of each other. REM now is kinda like the statues that
look out on Easter Island.” His voice trails away, a trifle embarrassed at
the veracity of the comment.

“I don’t know why that came to me,” he says. “It just did. I can’t
explain that one. I was trying to make some connection and it
didn’t happen.”

Do you feel there’s a responsibility as Michael Stipe to always
try and be profound?

“No, I don’t care. I’ve dealt with that all my life. I don’t think anybody can hurt me really. I think
they’re disappointed when they find out how
normal I really am. ‘Cos I’m not weird.”

The memory of a cold night in Glasgow two years ago flashed into my
head. An everlasting vision of Stipe careering frantically across the
Apollo stage, wearing watches all over his body and with the word “DOG”
written in felt-tip across his forehead. This is normal behaviour?

“Oh, I was so sick that night,” he protests. “I couldn’t stand up. I hadn’t
eaten anything but potatoes for a whole week ‘cos the food is so bad
in England. All I could eat was a sprig of parsley before I went on stage and
I was vomiting and shitting. It was just awful. I felt like a dog, so I took
a felt-tip and wrote it on my face. But I started sweating off while I was
on stage, which looked weird.”

There are other rumours, though, sightings of him reading books
upside down for one. Could he remember the first time that someone
remarked that what he was doing was strange or odd?

“You know, my earliest memory as a child was when I was two years
old and I had scarlet fever. I was hallucinating and I was having my
picture taken. I had a sweater on and I was really miserable and there
was this guy zooming in and out. To me that was weird, but I can’t
remember people remarking that I was weird. I don’t know… I think
you block those things out.”
he’s up bright and early and already sitting by the phone in the REM office when we call. A pair of plastic sunglasses sit awkwardly on his head, held together with a wad of Sellotape over the bridge of the nose. Along the sides he’s glued strips of cardboard, giving him the appearance of an Athens Terminator. In a truck parked in the street two storeys below, 18 globes of the world are stacked neatly, ready to be burned and the street two storeys below, 18 globes of the world are stacked neatly, ready to be burned and the street two storeys below, 18 globes of the world are stacked neatly, ready to be burned and...
"He's become a recluse and I've become the pushy bastard": The Jesus And Mary Chain's Jim Reid (left) on his older brother William.
"We thought we were wonderful songwriters and everybody would recognise that, but nobody’s taken us that way," complain THE JESUS AND MARY CHAIN. Now drug and riot-free, surely the new LP, *Darklands*, will bring people around?
Jim: “I thought it was a bit insane, but it was just the sort of thing that I expected him to say.”

William: “I’ve never felt comfortable on stage, never. Playing live is the biggest contradiction; everything we do in the studio may sound spontaneous, but it’s not, it takes time. I’ve always hated other people’s songs played live too. I just hate gigs. When I tour I just become a zombie, I can’t do anything a normal human being can, I can’t get any grasp of a thread of humanity. Don’t try and tell me it’s any better than sitting at home and watching TV; you don’t even get different types of food, you just get the same old shit. We were in Italy for a week and nobody even got any pasta or pizza, it was all fish and chips.”

What do you fear most about being on tour?


Jim: “I quite like the idea of that. We went to New York and everybody wanted to go out. He’s locking himself in a room with a gun or something.”

William: “What’s really scary about New York is that there’s all these fires escapes outside the hotel window. I’m always afraid that someone’s going to break in.”

_Psycho candy_ may still stand as a delicious mix of disgust, anger and molten awe, but for both William and Jim, the wide-eyed innocence and raw thrills that launched it have now encountered ugly reality.

Jim: “When you get into this business, a lot of the mystery is blown. A lot of my favourite records I listen to in a different way now. I see them all sitting in a studio saying, ‘Let’s go home now, let’s get a taxi.’ I absolutely hate that – I’ll never hear a record again in the same way I did three years ago.”

William: “I’d like to make four or five albums and have enough money to say, ‘Right, that’s it.’ I’d have just one massive-selling LP, I would quit. I hate this business. I’d like to just write songs, but there’s always the feeling now that everything you do is part of your job. Every piece of art or film that you look at, every record you listen to, is going to inspire all your lyrics and music; it’s a pretty horrible feeling.”

This week, The Jesus And Mary Chain release a new single, “Happy When It Rains”. With an upbeat swagger cut from the same cloth as “April Skies”, it is but a taster for the panorama of foreboding and beauty to be found on the soon-to-come second album _Darklands_.

There has been no radical formula change, the innate talent for combining sweet, resonant melodies with a harshness of tone is still there, but gone is the feedback of old, allowing the Brothers Reid to explore new vistas in their soundscape. Emphasis now switches to William’s genius guitar and some of the strangest lyrics in rock’n’roll. There’s the celestial orgasm described in “Cherry Came Too”, and the psychological and emotional entrapment of “On The Wall”, a song built around a metronome of bass and cymbal, exploring parts of the Velvets other bands can’t reach, with its powerful, punishing simplicity and central character who feels like a dog, or “a clock on the wall”. Both “On The Wall” and the title track are sung, and I’d wager solely composed by, William Reid.

These songs alone set the recalcitrant, reclusive elder Reid apart from his contemporaries as perhaps the only present-day composer willing to use the pop song as a place for exorcising and confronting listeners with inner dread and personal demons. “Darklands” may be the finest song the Mary Chain have ever composed, and typically it’s built around a paradox. As the guitar reaches the pinnacle of euphoric release, a voice breathes, “I’m dying…”

Whatever else you may think, it’s a far cry from the benefit-minded, buoyantly optimistic strain presently enshrined in the pop charts and the stadium citadels of rock. We’re sitting in a city pub, the Reids having a rare drink together. William claims he never drinks, and after two pints he starts to get tongue-tied. Jim, on the other hand, is on a bender: “I get pissed all the time. It’s getting embarrassing, I’m turning into one of those people who have a drink problem.”

Douglas Hart, the Mary Chain’s third man who’s been with them from the beginning but who has minimal creative input, uses the break in rehearsal time to hunt down a copy of Elvis Presley’s “Reconsider Baby”. Circumstances have changed for the band since _Psycho candy_. They’ve moved to London, ditched Creation Records boss Alan McGee as their manager (his role partly being taken by the avuncular Geoff Travis, owner of both Rough Trade and their Warners-distributed label Blanco...
expected, so they get their advance. That’s why two separated and seldom seeing each other.

“You might say, why did it take two years for this album? The answer is, why shouldn’t it? Do people not think it’s strange how everybody in the music business writes the same amount of songs each year? They do it because it’s what’s expected, so they get their advance. That’s why so many LPs only have about four good songs and the rest is filler.

“We could have done that, but if you’re going to do something you should think about it and take time over it. To us, Psychocandy was like a greatest-hits LP. I hate saying this because I’ve said it millions of times, but to my taste it’s the best record anybody has made in the past 15, maybe 20 years. Nobody has made anything like it before or since.”

Such modesty must have had a bearing on releasing a follow-up. Jim: “We started to get screwed up about not wanting to sound the same, that was the problem. It was so obvious what we were trying to do on Psychocandy that I knew what it was going to sound like before we’d done it; this time it wasn’t clear what it was going to end up like. So we were chipping away at each other’s ideas all the time and we recorded totally different versions of some of the songs. "On The Wall" was done half-a-dozen different ways and what we ended up with was reasonably unconventional for us.”

They are loath to talk about their songs directly, but Jim admits that they often write separately, though the non-participant always gets a credit: “It’s easier and it’s the way we like to do it. We’re brothers – if we weren’t we’d probably peck each other’s eyes out and demand publishing money.”

William: “Sometimes I’ll come to him with half an idea, like the way The Beatles used to work in the early days, John would write a song but couldn’t get a chorus, so Paul would come up with something catchy.”

Jim: “That’s us, the Lennon and McCartney of the ‘80s. Actually, we’ve always been fucked up by that. We thought we were wonderful songwriters and everybody would recognise that, but nobody’s taken us that way, people have focused on the guitars and the way the records were so out of the ordinary rather than considering the songs. We don’t make records until there’s something to record. I think a lot of people go into the studio with a producer, a few half-baked ideas and bash something out. What’s really bad about that is that it works; it’s successful for those people. You hear records that obviously haven’t a song but God knows how many people are raving about it. That’s kind of sad.”

The dark climate of the new LP he puts down to their continued isolation and his brother’s bouts of depression.

“When we lived in Scotland, my dad was made redundant, my mum worked in a shop. I really like my dad and all that, but it started to get really insane, with the three of us cooped up in a small house all day. If the group hadn’t happened when it did, something very dramatic and nasty would have happened. It’s horrible to say it, but we looked at them and said, whatever happens to us it won’t be that. It may be as bad but it won’t be the same. “All through my life I’ve only had one or two close friends. Even now, I don’t know that many people. It’s not the way I want it to be either, it’s true.

“We spent a nine-month period doing absolutely nothing to do with the group; it was a really depressing time, we contemplated giving up.”

William: “I think he can speak about the group better than me. There must be a psychological reason for it, but when somebody asks me what I think of myself I clam up. That must be the hardest question in the world to answer, and I feel the same way about the music. “This isn’t usual, I read interviews with songwriters every week and they’re all queuing up to tell you what a song’s about, how they wrote it, what they were doing at the time, what they were eating. I think, how can they do that, how can they analyse their songs?”

Jim: “ANYBODY WHO sits down and listens to the LP and reads the lyrics and has half an imagination will be able to figure out the sort of people we are.”

In the meantime, we can surmise; words like serious, stubborn, confrontational spring to mind. But sexy? Are you sure, lads?

Jim: “On stage we’re one of the sexiest groups you can imagine. Three or four reasonably young guys in leather rolling around showing their backsides to the audience. All I know is that we get tons of screaming young girls. If a gig doesn’t have sex, there’s something wrong, I think we’re refined in our sexiness, huh huh. We’re not pin-ups, but you don’t have to be sexy.”

William: “I never feel sexy on stage. I think you can only be sexy when you mime on a TV show – you can get your makeup on, do your hair and you don’t even have to look at your guitar.”

Darklands’ release will be accompanied by a tour. William will be there, but all he’s looking forward to is going to Bradford – “because it’s got the most comprehensive photographic museum in Europe”.

Jim regrets that the old 15-minute shambolc riots on which their early infamy was based are no longer viable: “In a perfect world, gigs would end when we were fed up. But there’s a promoter backstage with an iron bar and if you don’t play 35 minutes he’ll smash you over the head with it. I’ve been beaten with an iron bar, I’ve had the shit kicked out of me by security men. You begin to wonder what’s the point.

“When we make a record, we do it solely to please ourselves; the compromise comes on stage when you have to take into account that you’ve got an audience to please. To me, some of our shows have been fantastic, we look exactly how groups should look. Groups shouldn’t look sober or stand at the mikes and sing. Singers should roll on the ground and kick guitars. But that attitude isn’t practical any more.”

William: “I was watching that thing about U2 coming back to Ireland the other night. If we’d just played 40 dates in America and everyone was going, ‘I love you, I love you’, I’d just say fuck off. It’s a human reaction. I don’t ever want to become a perfect being to someone who likes our music. People like U2 have become saints to their fans, but I’m as shitty as anyone else, I couldn’t ever be that responsible.”

Jim: “If I got enough money, I’d like to build myself a big empire. I’m quite into power, to tell you the truth; I’ve got the energy for that. I don’t mean like a small record company; I mean something at least as big as Rough Trade where I could bring out the sort of bands I liked and do my own stuff when I felt like it.”

Perhaps The Jesus And Mary Chain’s bedroom rock dream of a music that takes disaffection and alienation as its keynote is now hopelessly outmoded, in a world where pop music is all-pervasive and rock thrives on community populism. Their entry into mainstream acceptance has been accompanied by much doubt and disillusion.

“We always had this idea that lots of groups would start after us and they’d be brilliant. Instead there’s half-a-dozen groups who’ve come along and sound like we did two years ago except not as good.

“I don’t really know what position I’d like to be in. The funny thing is that you don’t really know what it’s going to be like until you’ve tried it. What I’m doing now is certainly a lot less fun than I thought it would be.” — Gavin Martin
“I live for adventure”

Once a song, now a play and an album, *Franks Wild Years* occasions the return of **TOM WAITS**. “I subscribe to my own personal mythology. I prefer to create my own country and live in it.”

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**MELODY MAKER** **AUGUST 22**

**THIS IS** a mystery story that could be told here and now:

**THE SET:** A seedy and once elegant deserted bar in East L.A.

**THE CHARACTERS:** Tom Waits, a Chinese bartender, and me.

**THE DIALOGUE:** “You waiting for Tom?” asked the bartender. “He says he’s coming real soon.”

**THE DESCRIPTION:** The bartender, Leon, looks like a character from a Tom Waits song. The one where Charlie Chan’s younger brother finds his sibling drunk in the gutter, pulls his socks up, and together they watch *Pinocchio* six times and solve a missing persons case.

**THE ACTION:** Leon tells me Tom drinks here all the time. He cleans the bar constantly without caring if the process will attract custom or not. I asked the bearded fellow for a story, some snippet about Waits that could be useful. His eyes lit up with excitement. He wanted to reveal something to me, something deep and dark, something secret. Just as he was about to divulge his priceless jewel, the door swung open…

**The story**

HE WALKED IN limping. No, not limping, but it’s painful, as though someone had overdone the starch in
"The ritual of music is like snake-charming. It's a delicate operation."
Tom Waits in 1987
his black jeans or his knees had been ossified by some exotic disease contracted in Southern Borneo.

**HE LOOKED** white, undercooked, almost raw, but still healthily clean shaven and bright-eyed.

**HE SAT** at an empty booth (not a difficult feat amidst the desolation), and immediately blended in perfectly with the surrounding scenery—the nicotine-stained wallpaper, the peeling stucco pillars, the hairline-fractured ceiling.

HE SPOKE just like the song—with a Woodbine unfiltered growl, sucking in the atmosphere and glowing out intrigue.

“You’re sitting where Jayne Mansfield used to sit,” he mused, until the bottle of beer arrived. “In the good old days, this used to be quite a place—they all used to come here. It was the place to be.”

I had, of course, planned this story weeks ago, long before I met the central character. But isn’t that always true of classic fiction—a cross between futile misery and happy accident? Now there was no need for it anyway. It was all actually happening. My imagination could slumber while the rest of me went to the movies.

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**Downtown visions**

**MM AUG 29** Tom traces Franks Wild Years in song.

The bar’s empty, the clock’s working again and the lunatic Mico, despite rather too much egg nog, has resisted saying, “Tom Waits for no man.” All that’s left is an album, some songs, a little sleaze-flecked beauty.

These days when Island release a record it comes wrapped in a thousand attendant signifiers. This time round, the promotional pack includes a record, a 10-minute video and enough bits of paper to make you think they were applying for planning permission for a shed or something. At least there weren’t any chicken bones dipped in blood.

The album’s subtitle, “Un Operachi Romantico In Two Acts”, sounds like it’s going to be the first part of Linguaphone’s Esperanto course, and indeed it’s far-reaching vagueness begins to suggest that they wouldn’t be far wrong. Tom sings, “Kick me up Mount Baldy,” and you know it’s going to be brilliant.

**Franks Wild Years** is an apostrophe-free story about Frank’s rise from bar-room to cocktail lounge and all the way back again. Shorn of the visual assistance of the play, it’s full of broken glass.

As Frank staggers up the ladder, the songs become at once an entertainment shot through with a frighteningly assured fervour. “Way Down In The Hole” is the Man With X-Ray Eyes at his evangelical meeting, knowing that fame needs something to cling on to. Inevitably “Straight To The Top” takes on its Vegas shroud, all finger clicks and words as ways of filling up the silence. It’s here that Waits gets to the dichotomy of his own motivations; does the luscious twist of language actually mean anything when you’re parading this grandly grubby self-mythology?

“I’ll Take New York” is the summit, recalling another Frank taking Hoboken dreams and smothering them with equally tragic misguided importance. “Someday they’ll have to name a street after me.” Is that all there is to the sweetness of fame? Heaven becomes a metropolis, the country starts to fade and the only good mountain is .40 floors of air-conditioning. You just know somebody’s going to start crying. “I fell down at the derby/And now the night’s black as a crow.” So Frank finds himself a bum again, using a language of languid nostalgia that Waits seems most comfortable with. **Franks Wild Years** is the end of the trilogy and the start of a new road.

Whether Waits will stick to the downtown visions or embellish his character with the surreal obsessions that seem to envelop his world these days is going to be a significant decision. He’s up where the air is clear but somewhere under the clouds there’s a long drop. Wild years indeed. **Paul Mathur**

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**The storyteller’s story** (also titled “The End Of Bold Type”).

**LAST YEAR WAITS** performed a play, **Franks Wild Years**, at the Steppenwolf Theatre, Chicago. This much we know. The play, written by Waits and his wife, Kathleen, described the odyssey of Frank from bum to glittering star and back to bum again, with Tom playing and singing the lead role. The play was apparently not without its traumas: 10 days before opening night, they had to sack the director and junk the sets. Once up and running, one of the female leads kept free-associating and telling a different story “in the amusement park of her own imagination”, and Waits had to pull the play back into shape by improvising in front of the nightly audience.

Now Waits has re-recorded the songs from the play on his new album—a theatrical interpretation of the music, or vice versa. The songs have been radically altered, but the essence of the drama remains the same. “I was trying to write a dozen eggs to fit the story. Now the way the music has been worked on for the album is sort of a Frankenstein cannibalisation of the play’s music. In some cases I tried to take at least pieces of the process of doing a play, and season the material—so I cut the songs open and installed a portion of the play. I hope they hang together—like chickens in the window. This plans to tour around the world, though not performing exclusively the new material.

“One day I’d like to tour with the play, but it creates huge problems. The machinery of a play is so intricate to do a whistle-stop tour; folding everything into a box every night is almost impossible. Just touring with the very fundamental elements of design is a problem. At the moment, I plan to go out on the road with kind of a Cuban nightmare band.

“It’s strange, you write something down in a dark room and then people ask you to go to 50 cities and say what you said that night and over again. It makes you very careful about what you say.

“There’s something very old about the storytelling culture. In Sudan, people still make a living setting up in the marketplace. Even here, in a court, it’s always the best storyteller who wins the case.

“The road is really hard, because you try and do roughly the same thing every night but you’re always encountering inconsistencies. It makes me grumble a lot. It makes me impossible to live with.”

Stories emanating from the studio maintain that Waits is not impossible, but extremely demanding…

“Yeah, to a degree I am. If you’re working on something and you all feel part of the discovery process, it feels like an expedition. It’s ‘Dr Livingstone, I presume’, and not ‘Gentlemen, you’ll be here at 9.30 in the morning with haircuts and ties’. All I ask for is a commitment to discovery, OOPS.”

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**REVIEW 1986**
Waits discovers part of the booth coming away in his hand.

“Oh dear, what would Jayne say?”

“Oh dear, my chair is collapsing”, probably.

What a woman!

He keeps a notebook of other recent discoveries in his pocket. The names scribbled down include Ted Hughes’ *Crow*, John McCormick, Brave Combo, Gene McDaniels, Irma Thomas, Mahalia Jackson, Brunello Del Montochino (“He does a whole thing with snakes and lighter fluid”) and Augustina Lowra (“sort of a Mexican Chopin”).

“You just look for something you recognise. If you recognise it, you gotta figure there’s something in it of you, that maybe you broke off the same log. When I get into a studio, I get interested in what Keith Richards calls the hair in the gate – like when you’re watching a movie. The ritual of music is like snake-charming. It’s a delicate operation, to not pull the wings off the butterfly. You can own something that doesn’t really belong to you. You can be in charge of something and have absolutely no control over it whatsoever.”

*Franks Wild Years* follows the same serpentine trail of *Swordfish Trombones* and *Rain Dogs*, but moves in even more surreal, oblique orbits, transcribing dreams of innocence into palpable nightmares of experience, leaving the scent of melancholy hot under the collar. It is the closest thing to sipping Jack Daniel’s spiked with nitro-glycerine.

“The albums are different, but they’re also the same, a part of each other.” He pauses and leans forward to stress the importance of what’s to come.

“These songs all belong to me. All the other songs belong to two guys in the Bronx.”

Sorry?

“I think I’d better just leave it at that.”

At what?

“Stromboli. The others belong to Stromboli.”

The owner of the freak show Pinocchio was forced to work in?

“Uh-huh.”

The door slams shut, still riddled with riddles.

Waits’ heroes derive from what used to be treated as the disposable class, the cannon fodder.

“Who is the fodder of that cannon?”

Now, like cans of Coke, these people are seen to be recyclable. In the harsh light of middle-American consumerism, they are the refuse side-effects of a buoyant economy; yet in the twilight vistas of *The Waitsland*, these characters shine with the individuality that marks the outsider.

“We’re all going to be dirt in the ground. Globally, I keep waiting for the world to rear up and scrape us all off its back. I believe it’s really a living thing, but things aren’t over until the fat lady sings. Until you’ve really got to know people, you can’t tell what they’ve lost or found, or located, or dismissed, or embrace. I deal in the things I see, then fracture, dismantle, and then reorganise them.”

Even the tattoos on Waits’ arm bear testimony to the idea of beauty through pain: the bad bird he had done when he was drunk in LA and touched up when sober in Singapore, the words written in Buffalo, the heart, and the name of his wife, all reinforce the idea of ritual.

“I’m a citizen of the world,” he offers with sarcastic relish.

“I live for adventure and to hear the lamentations of the women. I subscribe to my own personal mythology. I prefer to create my own country and live in it.”

In this land, time can be telescoped, inverted, dismembered, tortured and restored. Waits has moved backwards to move forwards – moving from blues, through samba, rhumba, Ferris-wheel cha-cha, spaghetti western, gospel, conjuring up an atmosphere of wind-up gramophones, opulent decadence and tragic glamour. His sources have become more distant, yet the music is more intimate.

“I didn’t really think of it as anything nostalgic,” he retorts, lighting another cigarette. Frank, however, does delve into the well of history and exhumes a myriad of ghosts from the past.

“If a ghost ever gets inside you, do you know what to do?”

Can’t say that I do.

“Pee your pants.”

The albums are different but also the same, a part of each other”

IN THE WAITSLAND, characters must lose something to find something, be stripped of clothes before finding their suit of salvation. It is, in fact, the very religious idea of baptism by fire, paradise through purgatory.

“If you go looking for something, in many cases you come back with something very different than you set out to find. I try to contemplate the many mysteries of life, but in most cases they remain mysteries. I discover a lot of things by making the wrong turn and getting lost. I like to be disorientated.”
Thanks.
“Remember I told you that. Could be useful one day. Ghosts don’t like it when you pee.”

Something about urine that offends them?
“No, I’m serious. They won’t stay in you.” His eyes looked wounded, before wielding a hint of mischief.

“If you see a ghost, then you can go behind a tree.”
Saves on the laundry bills.

“Are you taking this seriously?”

Of course, LA is like an obese 40-year-old sprawled across a leather waterbed. I had just travelled from the toenail to the left armpit in a state of petrified horror. There’s been at least one freeway shooting per day since the third week of June, the crazies are everywhere. Now we’re alone, safe, and I’m prepared to believe anything.

“That’s the pressure of modern urban living. I’ve seen a couple of ghosts. They’re like pooper-scoopers—they come to the surface of whatever dimension they live in and then dive back. Almost like sewing with a needle. Once I saw a Spanish galleon when I was a boy, with a full crew. It was off the coast of Mexico and no one else saw it but me. It came dangerously close to me and then disappeared into a fog bank.

“One night when I was driving and was lost, I was making all these wrong turns and I saw a warrior on a horse. I was trying to get found again when this Napoleon-type figure reared up in front of my car with a sabre and then vanished into the forest.”

Waits has gone to bed dreaming of ghosts, sabres and galleons, but only wakes up in a cold sweat when thinking about lawyers, life insurance and whether or not to make a will.

“I’m also afraid of air turbulence, sensible shoes and fountain pens.”
What’s wrong with fountain pens?

“Have you got one?” He edges away from the edge until I tell him no.

“See? You’re afraid of them too.”

Frank bears a resemblance to Tom, but it is only fleeting. There is a part of Frank in all of us, but not much of Tom in anyone. In telling Frank’s story, Waits has hit on a central nerve of the American nightmare—going broke. In a land where money maketh man, not having money is literally a fate worse than death.

It is hardy surprising that people find a song like “I’ll Take New York” annoying, disturbing. It stretches from the underbelly of Vegas Sinatra and sounds like Jerry Lewis on the Titanic; a narcotic nightmare with its pants round its ankles. Yet, as the reprise of “Innocent When You Dream” chimes through Time Square, there is hope, the cycle has recycled and money can show where you are. We don’t

“I was going to give you 20 minutes, but well… I caught a mustang when I was 17 years old. It was a dare. It’s all

“Alright, start saving guitar strings and pigeon feathers.” He looks around at the clock and starts motioning with his hands. “I’m just checking the time… because, well, I’ve got to check the time.”

The time was 4.27pm.

“I was going to give you 20 minutes, but well… I caught a mustang when I was seven. I was struck by lightning when I was 10 years old. It burned my underpants right off, but everything else stayed intact. Where are we?”

I’m completely lost.

“Oh yeah, broke. When I was little, my dad and I used to go fishing out on the rocks. One day he cut open an oyster and inside found a black pearl. He put it in his cheek to keep it safe. We fished all day. We’d just lost the house and he had a business that had gone sour and we had no money, and I was taken out of school and we were moving around a lot. I thought it would be worth half-a-million dollars. As we fished throughout the day, I quietly reconstructed our future.

“When we got back to the shore at the end of the day, my dad took the pearl out of his cheek and it had shrivelled to nothing. It was just a seed, it hadn’t formed properly. That was rough.

“Frank, let’s just talk about metal. When you pee.”

“I’m part of the Black Jockey Foundation. It’s an organisation kind of like the boy scouts.”

Waits is a natural witness with a novelist’s eye. The key to his success is anonymity. After his previous forays in the world of film—Rumblefish, The Cotton Club and last year’s surprisingly successful Down By Law—Waits was able to remain invisible, but now he is starring in William Kennedy’s Ironweed—a major Hollywood extravaganzia directed by Hector Kiss Of The Spiderwoman Bebenco and starring luminaries like Meryl “Actress” Streep and Jack “Method” Nicholson. Waits plays Rud, the terminally ill cancer hobo, a part seasoned thespians like Dennis Hopper and Harry Dean Stanton also auditioned for, and were turned down.

“I went to New York under my own steam. They thought I was right for the part, so I got it.”
He looks down at his legs, examining the starch.

“If it’s a bit choppy, it could be time for an operation. Plastic surgery, so I could look like Joe Louis.

“There are people that go heavily into the metaphysics of shape shifting and character exploration, to the point where it’s almost like summoning up the dead. I just work on relaxation. You gotta love the film business. You have to do it like you need the money. It’s like being in an orchestra.

“I worked with some great people. Jack in particular helped me a lot. I was so nervous. I learnt a lot from the experience, though it takes some time to get acclimatised. It’s like school—they give you a towel and a locker and you get on with it. In plays you actually take off and leave the ground. You don’t get that feeling doing film. The drama process is very long but you’re dealing with basic things—light, words, wood. There’s no prestidigitation.”

Waits looks up to see if I understand the word. I wonder how a word claiming to mean sleight-of-hand can be such a mouthful.

“I caught a bullet in my teeth when I was 17”

—William Shakespeare

“I’d been to Majorca one time before, and you can’t beat the climate. I was seventeen, and I used to hang out in a place called Los Poblanos. It was a bit of a rip off, but I did something dangerous. Oh yeah, I stole a black jockey off someone’s lawn. I took it to the tailor and he put it in his cheek to keep it safe. We fished all day. We’d just lost the house and he had a business that had gone sour and we had no money, and I was taken out of school and we were moving around a lot. I thought it would be worth half-a-million dollars. As we fished throughout the day, I quietly reconstructed our future.

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**Show of the year**

**MM NOV 28** Waits rolls into town, dispenses non sequiturs to blindly adoring crowds.

**ENGLAND’S THE ONLY** place where you can buy wigs and novelties." He says this with his head upside down and his feet the right way up. This is the best bit. Oh, the stories, the stories. He’s sitting at the piano like he’s just about to lead it into the bathroom or the bedroom or the marriage guidance counsellors, and he’s telling us about a soldier in the Civil War.

"Someone shot him and the bullet went right through his testicles and into this 18-year-old girl’s ovaries, impregnating her. They never knew each other’s names. Some call it intercourse, but I wouldn’t."

I don’t know whether I’d really call Tom Waits’ show intercourse, although by the waving of heads and earnest nods from the folk around me, there’s a huge audience for his peep-show teases. The young fellow next to me looked like the sort of chap who’d think that Wild Turkey was what you had at a hick Christmas dinner, but wept at Waits’ cleverly concealed dramas. Curious.

It’s hard to get caught up in the tales. As someone whose life is getting increasingly like a Tom Waits song, I warmed to the line about “fast women and slow horses and other unreliable sources”, but found most of the appeal in the detachment, the vicarious pleasure of seeing all these nasty things happen to somebody else. No one would want to be Waits, not even Waits himself.

The set hovered mainly around the Franks Wild Years concept, roughly shadowing the album and play’s storyline. Halfway through, he dons a tux and splatters moist irony inevitably being lost on most of the dolts. When he mentioned free cigars, a whole row throbbed with restless anticipation. “A Christmas Card From A Hooker In Minneapolis” was as touching a moment as any, investing all those romantically degenerate references with a genuine beauty. You wonder whether he ever cries at night, then you wonder whether it matters. He probably does and it probably doesn’t, but caught up in the character of his own making, he’s not letting on. The necessity of playing to such a large venue meant that any sense of intimacy had to be caricatured, magnified, into a slurry unreality. He plays the fool and the bum and the prophet somewhere down the end of the tunnel, waving his arms about and scraping the spittle from his neatly messy shirt. “I’ve been raking leaves all day, I’ve never seen so many fucking leaves in all my life.”

The backing band maintain a polite discipline as the focus flips into stupor. He raises his head to the heavens and grins that grin, then he’s gone. Show of the year, in case you’re worried. Paul Mathur

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**WE’RE BACK TO** the mystery of the two guys and Stromboli. Still no answers. Waits’ own future remains uncertain. There are no plans for future films, future plays or future albums (although “it’ll be something with feathers”). “I don’t want to rest on my laurels. There are things I’ve done that I don’t mind too much. I can use them… some of them. There are things that are like mosquitoes. Some songs are made of mud, some are made of iron, and some of wood. When it rains, they react differently. When I start to know what I’m doing I start to get nervous. Eventually you arrive at an impasse. The records up to Swordfish… left me that way. I had to put on scuba gear and find a way out. I think this new album marks the end of another phase.”

Waits then tells me he can open a beer bottle with his eye, but I can’t afford his performance fee.

Yeah, Tom Waits — everything you wanted him to be and more: circus freak, ringmaster, clown, verbal acrobat, outlaw, outsider, and… the mystery remains unsolved, for the moment. Or maybe it’s here somewhere, hidden between the dashes and dairies. The bar is still vacant as Waits gets up to leave, hat in hand, hand on heart. I gaze up at the clock, which has stopped, probably in sympathy with the rest of the furniture. When I look up again, he’s vanished, into the ozone. The door had been bolted, and still was. It works! Leon the bartender stops polishing the bar for a moment and shrugs his shoulders as if to say, “I told you so. You people never listen.”

That’s the trouble with storytelling these days. No one ever believes them. Ted Mico •
The greatest array of images in pop

Ever been to the pictures with 80,000 people and the biggest carry-out in the history of Hollywood? Well this was it. The golden years of cinema drowned in a sea of Tetley’s, as Madonna – the Halliwell’s Guide to pop - swaggered through a meticulously scripted set that was more to do with musicals than music.

Marlene Dietrich, George Raft and even Dorothy from The Wizard Of Oz came to Leeds, desperately seeking Susan, and dutifully performing bit parts in a pop extravaganza which sent soundwaves round the massive Roundhay Park.

It was a night for familiar entertainment rather than experiment. One of those comforting concerts where most people know the songs and are glad they sound the way they do on record. But a series of back projections, including a patriarchal portrait of the Pope during “Papa Don’t Preach” and a barrage of Coney Island trivia during the finale of “Holiday”, showed Madonna to be a woman of substance, who can manipulate the codes of visual music. Look before you leap to conclusions, because this show used images to defamiliarise the music. She opened the proceedings with “Open Your Heart”, “Lucky Star” and “True Blue”, emphasising her hi-energy nasal drawl, a vocal posture which is meant to signify the sassy attitudes of New York City, but may well be the result of touring the world in that painful leotard. With the hyper-ironic “Dress You Up”, Madonna threw on an outfit that looked like jumble-sale gear stolen from the back of Edna Everage’s closet, and immediately turned meaning on its head.

Bursting into “Material Girl” and a burlesque dance routine which featured a Nazi salute, some comic goose-stepping and a pair of panto knickers, her self-lacerating voice was having a dig at the critics and her public image. Suddenly, dollars were thrown into the air and she shifted frommock materialism to welfare socialism, interrupting the flow of her songs to calm the audience down. As more people fainted at the front, the pleas for peace became increasingly more desperate. All the theories about the material tart with the diminishing heart of gold disintegrated, the momentum of the concert wavered and a star was brought down to earth. For a few brief seconds, Madonna became Louise Ciccone, an ordinary woman seriously scared that there might be a death. Madonna may have the greatest array of visual images in modern pop, but she’s not particularly good singer. On the contrary, the further she moves away from her origins, the more she trembles. She is at her best when dealing with the languages of dance, music, creating persistent musical highs, posing like a Funhouse baby, urging the Yamaha syn-drums to faster and more energetic beats.

She comes alive when the disco power of “Into The Groove” recreates Madonna as the club girl and suppresses all those film characters she imagines we want her to be. The triumph of Madonna comes packaged in echoing vocoder chants of “Take it to the bridge”, the nagging salsa percussion, and the neat way that “Like A Virgin” segues into The Four Tops’ “I Can’t Help Myself”.

So how come she deluded herself that the melodramatic ballad “Live To Tell” is her scene? Crumpling around in a heap of spent emotions, weird noises and abstract shapes, this is the Madonna I can do without. Who’s That Girl? The one who’s writhing about like a street kid in search of East Village arthouse emotions.

Give me the real Madonna, the dance Madonna, the one who stampedes her way through hi-energy, the one who rapes the whole of Hollywood in the name of club music and the one who can coax the drawers off a monk.

You can cast doubt on her voice, but never the strength of her identity; the flirting disco poser who’s writhing about like a street kid in search of East Village arthouse emotions. The lads at the front of the stage kept chanting, “Get your tits out for the boys”, which in the circumstances was a fairly dull and unimaginative fantasy. But the domiatrix of pop teased them, then suddenly flexed her wit and screamed back, “Forget my tits, they belong to me.”

Castration Junction. With one vicious flash of her Stanley knife Madonna won the fight, and Leeds united – the crew we love to fear – were on an express train to Castraction Junction.

Stuart Cosgrove
“The myths you know are true”


--- MELODY MAKER SEPTEMBER 5 ---

HELLO?
“Thin White Duck here.”
Who?
“Andy.”
...Andy?
“Eldritch.”
Oh... uh... hi, Eldritch.
“Come for drinks.”
When?
“Now.”
I can't, I'm asleep. It's seven in the morning.
“Is it?... Oh... Coffee then.”
Later.
OK... Uh, you haven't been to sleep yet, have you?
“When... this week? This month?”
After the gig.
“Uh... no. Went to Dingwalls with Lemmy and these Hell's Angels and...”
Save it, Eldritch. Save it. See you later. »
Andrew Eldritch and his most recent recruit to The Sisters Of Mercy, Californian Patricia Morrison, formerly of The Gun Club.
A

H, THOSE WERE the days. Cryptic phonecalls at all hours. The Sisters Of Mercy at the Royal Albert Hall, a heavy black nectar of irony that looked certain to choke goth on its own bittersweet excesses. First And Last And Always, the album out on Merciful Release through Warners and nights sat up in hotels with Eldritch in his manky black leather cowboy hat doing wilful bodily harm to our fragile metabolisms and rattling on at mutual cross-purposes; me about life’n’love’n’that, Eldritch, of course, about harm to our fragile metabolisms and rattling on at mutual cross-

Eldritch is in a photographic studio, glistening with baby oil and draped all over Patricia, ex of The Gun Club and now his “right-hand man”. He’s here to pose with cigarettes and prove The Sisters Of Mercy are still a force to get wrecked with. He doesn’t talk of resurrection, but of continuation, and as if to insist megalomania is alive and well and ready to pistol-whip pop, his new single is called “Corrosion”, lasts 11 minutes, features a 40-piece choir multitracked 10 times and was produced by Meat Loaf’s old buddy and master of the Wagnerian, Jim Steinman. I’m about to ask him why but I’m laughing too much. The Bad News [A Spinal Tap-style band featuring members of BBC comedy The Young Ones] mondo-metal version of “Bohemian Rhapsody” has just come on the in-house cassette and Patricia thinks it’s The Cult! Let’s talk over eats, Eldritch, Where d’you fancy? “Oh, anything but Indian.” Really? I thought you’d be a man for a ruby. “No, I refuse to eat anywhere they beat us at cricket.” Italian then? “Italian.” Where have you been since you last appeared in the hallowed pages of the Maker? “Well, we went through the corporate wars in my familiar Jonathan E-type role and we did OK. A lot of untruths have been bandied about those times, but unfortunately the way we won makes it tricky for us to explain how we did it, and therefore prove that we did. It was basically over the name – the people that are now The Mission and myself had an agreement no one would use the name when the band went its separate ways. But after they’d been touting their demos round getting nowhere under all sorts of other names, they began to claim rights to it, which patently had to be stopped. “And when they wanted to be called The Sisterhood, there was nothing I could do but be The Sisterhood before them – the only way to kill that name was to use it, then kill it. I think that reflected rather badly on the name The Sisters Of Mercy; and it’s probably due for reinstatement for that reason if no other. “Then there was a little disagreement with the publishers, RCA Music, over what would happen to the money. Effectively it all kept us out of action.” Was it frustrating to see The Mission become successful in the meantime? “No, because they’re not doing something I’d like to do, and they’re certainly not doing it in the way I’d like to do it. Anybody could go out and be The Alarm or The Cult, which is exactly what they’ve done.” You don’t see them as a legacy of The Sisters Of Mercy at all, then? “No… I mean, they took the interest and capitalised on that, but musically, no. It was noticeable for about a year that they couldn’t get press unless they mentioned my name. I saw interviews with myself so many times by proxy – that got irritating because… well, Wayne has a remarkable way with the truth.” Is there bitterness between you, then? “Yeah. Yeah, there is.” Personal or corporate? “Personal.” You suggest there’s a fundamental difference in attitude between The Sisters Of Mercy and The Mission. “Yeah, their ability to bend over forwards in order to make progress appals me. The way they’ve bent over contracts and been appropriately assaulted for it – which, again, is something they’ve not really been prepared to let on about. “Musically, too. I never sang a lyric of Wayne’s. I never found one I could sing.”
History has proved that, when the Sisters disappeared from public view, was exactly the time you should have been reaping your greatest rewards. What, other than legalities, prompted your inaction? “Well, I wasn’t well. I’d done three tours that year and I thought we’d come to the end of a logical course. I titled that Royal Albert Hall gig ‘Wake’ about four months before it actually happened, and the band are probably still wondering why. I mean, I thought it should still have gone on, but I knew it wasn’t going to.”

“The last time we actually spent any time together, at the end of the tour before the Albert Hall, we had some time playing in America and then we had a week off in Los Angeles. I went to Mexico for the day and the other two couldn’t think of anything better to do than go to Disneyland. And when I got back from Mexico a week later, having got somewhat… uh… distracted, I thought, ‘God, what are these people whingeing about, really?’ They just got so feeble. Then they said, ‘Well, OK, what are we gonna do for new songs?’ And I said, ‘How about this, this and this’, and unfortunately the first ‘this’ I cited had too many chords per minute and Craig said, ‘If that’s the guitar line, I’m not playing it’ and walked out. That was really that.”

“But Wayne had already become a problem because he wanted to do more of his own songs and I thought they were particularly vacuous. I used to have to fight with him to get the songs to make any sort of grammatical sense, let alone be sharp with it. ”

“I mean, you’ve gotta know grammar before you can work away from it. The guy didn’t have a clue – he’d just string buzz words together.”

“Strangely enough, someone from the Maker was around Wayne while he was writing recently and he had a book of aphorisms with all the mystical-type ones underlined in red.”

“That’s how most people do it. I can’t bring myself to work that way. That’s what passes for revolution these days. I’m glad I wasn’t around in ’86, because it wasn’t just The Mission, it was a bad year all over and anyone who broke then will be tainted with it for a long, long time.”

“But surely you’re responsible. You introduced a generation of synth-pop fashion fops to the thrill of anti-fashion, ‘When The Levee Breaks’, and wipe the floor with the Beastie Boys and The Cult’s because they haven’t got a grip on what is great about Led Zeppelin. It’s like The Mission going out and covering Sisters’ music, they just make it sound like bad Echo And The Bunnymen.”

“I remember I want to see The Alarm when they were knee-high to Big Country and I thought, ‘These people have completely misunderstood Mott The Hoople’, and it’s been happening ever since. I’m now used to people misunderstanding me, though it’s weird when you get all these ersatz Eldritch clones out there treading the boards.”

“You’ve never seen Fields Of The Nephilim?”

“No. I’m told we played with them once in San Francisco, but I wasn’t actually there when they played.”

Patricia: “They knew I was there and afterwards they came up and started talking to people next to me. I just left, I wasn’t even going to speak to them. I mean, for a moment when they were on, I turned and thought, ‘This is familiar, what’s this?’”

“The only reason that people like that embarrass me so much is that, if they’re really that hooked on me, they must be tasteless. It gets to the stage where you think, ‘I’m not that good, and anyone who thinks I am must be an idiot.”

“They haven’t got a grip, but there’s an inner integrity and authority in ‘Corrosion’ which comes of pain, grief and suffering. I couldn’t do what Madonna is doing, I couldn’t do what The Mission are doing, I couldn’t do what the Beastie Boys are doing, I couldn’t do what Led Zeppelin is doing, I couldn’t do what Alice Cooper did, but I’m not extrovert enough. I would have no scruples about doing it if I were able to. There’s an acknowledgement there that you don’t find in other, smaller vulgarisms. “And if it takes a year fighting corporate wars in order to be able to do it with integrity, then I’ll do it… or not at all. I don’t have to do this.”

Don’t you have a touching belief that the role of a recording artist is a reason to be intelligent and communicative, and isn’t that belief extraordinarily old-fashioned?”

“Yeah, and self-destructive.”

“Okay, I am trying to sell ‘Corrosion’ to Steinman, we told him it was like the high point of a Borgias disco evening and he went for it.”

“Ha! When we were trying to sell ‘Corrosion’ to Steinman, we told him it was the most high point of a Borgias disco evening and he went for it. Nobody makes gloriously stupid records nowadays.”

“Then again, I thought it should still have gone on, but I knew it wasn’t going to.”

“A lot of old Sisters fans will say, ‘He’s taking the piss.’”

“Well, of course I’m taking the piss – it’s the only way to be serious about it. Same as it ever was.”
Don’t we need a new era of innocence? Don’t we need to unlearn how to progress? “No, we need a new era of cynicism. The reason the NME, for instance, can’t comprehend this sort of things is that they don’t have that cynicism. They still believe that rock ‘n’ roll is supposed to be naive and wonderful, and if you give them irony they say, ‘Oh dear, that’s distasteful. Let’s forget about it. Let’s pretend it’s not humorous.’ That’s a very primitive cynicism born out of a very vulgar and naive ideology.”

Has pop music let you down? “No. I know what it’s capable of because when I grew up it was blatantly capable of it and it was delivering. Expectations have been lowered since and deliveries have been faltering. It’s just a question of raising people’s expectations again. “We can do it. I’ll make the records if you’ll raise the expectations. It’s a long war, but ‘Corrosion’ might win one battle and, after all, it’s the only war worth fighting.”

How much is revenge the motive? “Gift was revenge, a weapon very specifically pointed. This is the gloating, much more widespread, more general.”

Why did you go to live in Hamburg? “It’s the largest city in the Federal Republic, which is the most powerful country in Europe. It’s just such a cool place, because it’s not populated by cool people like Berlin. Love the people.”

Do you feel badly done in by Britain, then, by the press… “Yeah. Not so much these days, because I’ve got a reasonable amount of goodwill stored up, but one knows it’s only goodwill as long as you don’t start going on about aesthetics when they ask you what your favourite colour is.”

Perhaps you were better off as goth’s missing man, the ‘80s’ own Jim Morrison. I can just hear the headlines – “Eldritch spotted gunrunning in South America”. As soon as you come back, you’re just part of… “The circus! I don’t think so, because this record is so far off what people expect, especially after Gift. And I mean apologies to Slough, but we ain’t gonna be out there playing next week. Or the week after. Or the week…”

What are your writing impulses now? Considering that you’ve cleaned up and look fit(ter) and happy, can we really expect the traumatised, fucked, and if they haven’t then they’re the people you score the drugs off. “I’m only this fit because I’m about to be tortured all over again. I’m not gonna do it to myself by touring but this business takes an awful lot out of you. As for all the myths about me – well, the ones you know are perfectly true.”

Of course. You feed off your myth. “If someone’s come up with a good idea, I don’t think, ‘Hmm, better go out and live that one’, not like Wayne.”

So the drug-taking, womanising rock ‘n’ roll rebel isn’t that important? “No. I have a body of work built up that is so substantial that it will eventually get Dylanologised. I have total faith in the ability of history to judge, which is why the gloating of ‘Corrosion’ is so non-specific. I don’t feel the need to say, ‘Hey, I’m being vindicated now.’”

All the while we’re talking, incidentally (or maybe not so incidentally), Eldritch has three pairs of shades arranged before him on the table – two wire-framed bike-cop models and a vaguely Ray-Ban number…

Has your lay-off changed your attitude at all? “It’s confirmed my unwillingness to pay attention to anybody else. I overhear things, but I make no effort to listen. We don’t really figure to re-enter the arena; we figure to sit in the emperor’s seat for a while, then go on holiday, then sit in the emperor’s seat for a while, then go on holiday, then sit in the emperor’s seat for a while… We’re not interested in being

I expect it to go on. I’d find it pretty weird, in fact, if I had seen any light… or darkness.”

Control seems important to you, while all around others are relinquishing theirs. “Yeah. But you see, although I put my sole existence into making records, I don’t need to make records. I mean, if I hadn’t gone off and been a little degenerate in the meantime, I daresay I’d have joined the Diplomatic Corps – that’s what I’m trained for. Or MI6.”

So what do you think of Spycatcher? “That’s pretty damn irrelevant – that’s all to do with the Home Office, isn’t it? I haven’t read it, but I believed Harold when he said it the first time. I was pretty young then, but I figured, ‘Sure, that’s the way the world is.’ I can’t see what the surprise is all about. And then there was Nixon – what the hell did they expect? It’s just politics.”

So was Nixon hard done by or was he just dumb to get caught? “I thought Nixon was a great president. He got the Americans out of Vietnam, he made friends – to some extent – with the Russians and he certainly made friends with the Chinese. He was the best president in terms of foreign policy that nation had in a long time, and I thought they were very stupid to get rid of him. He was very stupid to make a mess of covering up Watergate – I mean, Reagan survived Iranateg.”

Patrick: “I was over there when that happened and, you know, Reagan called up Richard Nixon and asked him how to survive it.”

Eldritch is supposed to be a pretty ruthless character himself. “Not really. I’m a counter-attacker by nature. I’m not a pre-emptive-strike man.”

Most people in your position, if they’re interested in maintaining control, tend to make a point of confounding (Robert Smith) or confirming (John Lydon) their public image. You tend to do neither. “That’s where the hardship comes in. It’s a lot of extra work and a lot of extra worry and it’s dreadful publicity. Anecdotes? I just don’t have them.”

Will “Corrosion” chart? “I’m told it will. I don’t care. It’s a good record now, it’ll be a good record in five years’ time. I don’t care when people buy it, though I think it’s more accessible to people; it has a more accessible top layer than maybe records we’ve had out in the past. That’s just a function of the way it’s recorded, I don’t think it’s a function of the song.”

So the song’s a wolf in sheep’s clothing. Or… uh… a wolf in… what? Brontosaurus’ clothing? I dunno, I’ll cheat and put in something really witty and apposite when I write this. “Ha! I think it’s a shark in wolf’s clothing. That was a pretty duff metaphor to start with. Forget about that one…”

But it is devious. “Not deceitfully so. It’s just crafty. Whatever level you take it on, I hope it makes sense. I mean, I’d like people to go for everything they can get out of it and all at once – that’s what symbolism and obscuration are all about – but I don’t expect that.”

It’s the only thing I get off on, though. It’s the only thing that would make me wanna sing the same song two nights running on tour. It’s gotta have that overwhelming panoply of effects.”


Films? “I don’t have a television in Hamburg. That’s one of the reasons for not writing in Leeds, because I’d spend 24 hours – well, 25 hours a day by the
time I'd taken some medicine—watching TV. I was very pleased to be forced to catch the Rutger Hauer season while we were in the studio. Patricia was renting anything with Rutger Hauer in it. Some of them are real stinkers, but he's so funny in The Hitcher—it's a brilliant comic performance. You'll love it.

"It really makes you wanna go out and do it. There's not a lot of films in which the character is so obviously deranged but, at the same time, makes it look like such fun that even the sanest person could imagine doing it. I mean, to go out and wanna be The Terminator you've gotta be a moron basically—it's great to watch but you'd never do it yourself. This is different."

So what makes you happy, Eldritch?

"Cats still make me ludicrously happy."

What makes you sad?

"Nothing makes me sad, because I think there has to be some element of surprise in order to feel sad."

What else?

"Well, I'm thinking of learning to drive. The thing is, whenever I go abroad, I invariably end up driving and I don't have a licence or anything, which is probably not the thing to do. Then, you see, what happens after that is I buy a car. At the moment I just can't figure out how to enjoy that, because I don't particularly like cars for their own sake and I don't particularly like driving.

"I'm very bad at it. I get these urges. I see these things and wonder, 'What if...?' That's why I don't really enjoy it—because I'm responsible enough not to do what I feel the urge to do. I don't get the urge to drive fast, I just get the urge to drive off the road, especially when there's nothing on either side of me.

"It's got nothing to do with suicide; it's just got to do with driving a car off the edge of a cliff."

How would you kill someone?

"It would depend whether it was someone I liked or someone I didn't like."

OK, someone you like.

"It depends whether I think they'd appreciate something spectacular or something just very sedate. I thought the self-destruct programme in Soylent Green was pretty good for the sedate. I think if it was someone I really, really liked and they'd appreciate the spectacular, it would involve an expanse of scenery and an extraordinarily fast car."

And those you don't like?

"I'd always want it to take longer. It's best to kill someone they really like, I think."

You suggest in what you just said that you like and dislike but not love and hate.

"I'm very wary of it. I have to be very careful because I think I'm probably a bit obsessive by nature. I had to totally stop drinking in order to maintain any business whatever. I don't gamble. I don't do smack."

And love?

"Absolutely not. I only ever really did it once and I don't think I'm likely to do it again."

Because you don't like losing your personality in someone else, or because you don't like inflicting it?

"Both. We were just dreadful for each other. It didn't stop it being brilliant, but it's marginally better that it doesn't happen any more. That's tough. It still hangs over to the extent that I couldn't do it again."

What would induce you to lose your self-control, to endanger yourself in passion?

"I've only ever done that when I wasn't quite... Well, on stage I've done things that afterwards I've thought, 'No! Eldritch, that was just beyond the pale.'"

Because you could or because you were out of it?

"Because I could. Because I was out of it and because I had to. If you're in front of a crowd, you're in a position of responsibility, and if they're all waiting for you to sort out one moron, then you have to do it."

Did you feel pissed off being put in that position?

"Yeah. I mean, the last time it happened, I spent half an hour trying to talk the crowd into sorting out their own problem and then, eventually, I just dived. It was really sad. I felt very ashamed on their behalf that they let me do it."

OK, that's it. Was it good for you?

"I never know. I always go away thinking, 'Well, I haven't said enough about post-war dramatic theory or fencing or Chinese philology', which are, y'know, the things I really care about. And then someone always comes up to me and says, 'Well? Did you tell them how the record is?' and I go, 'Oh, actually that never occurred to me.'"

Mission accomplished, I think.

"Well, I don't feel the urge to express myself outside the songs. I'm useless at small talk and I'm really a pretty boring person."

It's only that you've never sat across a table from Wet Wet Wet that allows you to say such things.

"So really, I can never remember a joke and I don't feel the need. The only conversations I quite get off on these days are the ones I have with you where we discuss how crap conversation is. I'm not socially honed and I don't feel the need to be: I was pretty cruel when I was. It got to be beyond a joke. Once you convince yourself you're the all-time best at it, where do you go from there?"

How enigmatic.

"I don't feel enigmatic. Enigmatic is being deliberately obscure and I'm not. I might be oblique, but that's only because, to me, obliqueness is a clearer way of expressing something in its entirety."

Could this be the Oxford University training—the art of leaving oneself least open to attack, or are we talking about truth here?

"Truth. I can do the other as well, but I'm too out of training to be able to do that, and when I got really good at it I began to despise myself for it. In the songs, that crops up again and again, the contempt of oneself when one finds oneself on the verge of getting involved with all that."

So you're talking about a search for communication or a loathing of not wanting to communicate?

"I really don't know, but aside from the bit about Roy Kinnear, I stand by everything I've ever said to you."

Even the stuff about Norman Wisdom?

"Yeah."

Gods will be gods.

Steve Sutherland

“I think there has to be some element of surprise to feel sad”
ALBUMS

Guns N' Roses Appetite For Destruction GEFFEN

Of course they’re dreadful. What’s more surprising is that so many members of the press, who on most other days of the week could be trusted to understand things, seemed to be surprised that Guns N’ Roses aren’t fun. How, one wonders, could they ever have expected that five LA skinannies with tattoos and tight trousers would have offered any hope or even fear for rock? Guns N’ Roses, perhaps more than any other limp cock rockers, do exactly, exactly, exactly what you expect.

The inside cover has a picture of an android selling toy robots next to a rape victim with her knickers round her knees. Above them a monster that might have come from one of Hieronymus Bosch’s оф days waggles its tongue in what I suppose is meant to be a gesture of lasciviousness.

This is Guns N’ Roses’ idea of depravity, the furthest they can take the sleaze towards outrage. Now obviously only someone who’s been living in a small box for their entire lives would ever feel even the slightest twinge of horror at all the studied disgust. The rest of the population of the world will snicker. A lot.

The best thing about Guns N’ Roses is that they have a guitarist called Slash and another called Izzy Stradlin. The worst thing is the first song in what I suppose is meant to be an almost filmic sense that their noise. “Welcome To The Jungle” is the first song and as good a demonstration as any of what the band like to do with their noise. Basically this consists of playing all the instruments very loud and very carefully along the kick-ass school of things, nodding towards sentimentality but never so much that people might think they’re soft. It sounds like someone’s spooning broken glass and custard into your ears. “Sweet Child O’ Mine” and “Rocket Queen” fill other bits of the record up with pretty much more of the same, giving new whole depths to the concept of variety.

It’s a gruelling business wading through their creations, trying to think of some world where what they do could be seen as having even the slightest point, looking for signs that beneath the skulls and the shades there’s a suggestion they can do something to thrill. The world is probably their house and the thrill, splitting up. The rest, as they say, is crap. When the great book of pop comes to be written, Guns N’ Roses will have forgotten their library ticket.

Paul Mathar, MM Jul 25

The Bhundu Boys Tsimbodzemo DISCAFRIQUE

They are, of course, an out-and-out pop group. It’s important to remember that. The success of The Bhundu Boys – both with their exhilarating live shows and their refreshing Shabini LP – has been one of the more gratifying things, seemed to be surprised that Guns N’ Roses aren’t fun. They are supposedly “exotic”, but those patronising them should consider the reason they are obviously more interesting than their western counterparts is that their terms of reference are much wider.

Contrary to popular belief, they don’t parade before us draped in the flag of Zimbabwe, self-consciously promoting their own culture; they’ve freely absorbed and learned from all the influence around them and they use them intuitively. They complete under their own terms and by their own definition as a pop group per se and they’re a damn good one.

Of course, the African elements are the overriding characteristics of the band, but it’s what they don’t do with those influences, rather than what they do, that makes them special. They are sparing and understated almost to the point of being a tease, painlessly settling into a rhythmic groove that is disarming in its unerring accuracy. And yes, they are a dance band – it’s your part and you can sweat if you want to – but it’s not as crucial to their appeal as you might first assume.

In everything they touch there is a rare vitality and warmth, personified by the smile on Biggie Tembo’s face.

The title means “Stick Of Fire” and in Zimbabwe they are as famous for their political comment as they are for their persuasiveness on a dancefloor, and subjects covered during the course of the record include a discourse on the struggle for independence in Zimbabwe, the foolishness of greed and the importance of the family.

One of the tracks is called “Yakaparei” and I’ve been singing it all morning. Join the Bhundu celebration or have a grey day. Colin Irwin, MM Jul 4

Marianne Faithfull Strange Weather ISLAND

There are a few people who have flickered through pop’s endless night with the grace, dignity and beauty of Marianne Faithfull. Strangely, apart from her early dalliance with Jagger and the rest of the ’60s sirens, her best work has come in the ’80s. Broken English was the best attempt by a female British singer to articulate the fragility of obsession and the true precursor for what was to be bastardised into Suzanne Vega’s witless simpering.

Strange Weather finds Faithfull managing to make something new out of what could have been the most hackneyed of ventures, an album of cover versions of old songs. The emphasis is on jazz and blues semi-standards, each teased out through her distinctive jewellery-gravelled voice, taking things outside rock and closer to Lotte Lenya or Marlene Dietrich than Nico or the aforementioned Vega.

“Boulevard Of Broken Dreams” sets the tone of deep regret that never tumbles into maudlin self-pity. It’s necessarily melodramatic, possessing an almost filmic sense that
coming home.

stranger on earth

I prove my worth

as "of the things, a drunken regret

fitting in with the style of the rest

provides the title track, cleverly

specially for the record and it

strength that misery rarely brings.

to communicate an ironic

And Money" where, despite the

of "Yesterdays" or "Love, Life

seems far happier with the likes

from its studied distance. She

authenticity and actually gains

that never really considers

through Leadbelly's original

moments, an a capella ramble

of the record's most curious

Down The Well No Mo" is one

ditched in favour of aural car

contemporary writers have

further, making you wonder

takes the disaffection even

sadness. "A Stranger On Earth"

tiring of the little cracks and

can only listen to this version a

bitterness for the important

Whether the

seeped

Whether the

frightening.

becomes almost

self-contempt

who

reassembles

very

it

and "Across My Shoulder" and

ravenous B-sides of

But buy it anyway for the

BERK, even if it is more tame

answer is: of course it is, you

actually any good? And the

So is "Thru The Flowers"

THERES A PHOENIX

DIE IN THE SEA

47TH TIME, I'M NOT SO SURE…

Sometimes." Playing this for the

the other day, "Yeah, but I know

the space age. This is a remix,

Eurovision Song Contest in

inanities and sadly reminiscent

finger-bobs, ballooning brass

of Johnny Logan winning the

this is not the wild dark horse

superglue a leech to my navel if

Adorable, deplorable, oh
superglue a leech to my navel if

this is not the wild dark horse

that came streaming past the

pack to give Icelandic surrealist

pop its first single of the week

since Jaz Coleman’s Eurovision

winner “Boom Bang-A-

Whoops! (I’m On Fire)”. The

Sugar Cubes are a phoenix from

the defunct Kukl, but

waste no wit on

socialism or tourist

attractions. With

a dangerously

cross-eyed

chanteuse

who

resembles

both Denis

Lavant

and the little girl

who cuts your

lips off in your

nightmares, they

head straight and

bittersweet for the important

things in life – “She’s got one

friend, he lives next door…” They

listen to the weather, he knows

how many freckles she’s got…

She’s painting huge books…

They saw a big raven… She

touched it… Today is her

birthday, they’re sucking cigars…

He got a chain of flowers, and

sows a bird in her knickers…

They lie in the bathtub…”

Quite

the most

astonishing

apposite

brood

of sound

(sort of)

accompanies

these tortured

sobs. Balloons of
double bass and

whisks of wanton

campanology sway her

into increasingly suspect Gaudi

playgrounds. The most sinister

swirl of sinuosities.

For some absurd reason, I

observed myself saying in a pub

the other day, “Yeah, but I know

a good record when I hear one.”

Then I thought, “Christ, you say

some preposterous things

sometimes.” Playing this for the

47th time, I’m not so sure…

It breathes, melts, billows,

changes shape. Die in the sea

with the one you love. MM Aug 22

The Primitives

Thru The Flowers

Lazy

So is “Thru The Flowers”

actually any good? And the

answer is: of course it is, you

berk, even if it is more tame

and tuneful than their others!

But buy it anyway for the

ravenous B-sides of

“Everything Shining Bright”

and “Across My Shoulder” and

because, if you don’t, everyone

in the class will laugh at you and

by hell you don’t want to spend

the rest of your adolescence

over-reacting against popular

opinion, do you now?

The daughter of “Blind Among

The Flowers” by The Tourists,

led astray by Edith Piaf’s dealer,

locked in an “Eat To The Beat”

video (possibly “Shayla”), and

kept on a diet of pink grapes and

cinnamon.

Artifice of

sax, Feline,
sirloin,

parallel

loins, that’ll

do nicely.

MM Aug 22

Prince

U Got The Look

WEA

Bouncing

brilliantly

off the breathless,

plastic lust of

Sheena Easton,

Prince continues

to explore and

extend the

textures of sex.

“U Got The Look” is a self-

adoring tussle among wet

sheets, a singular musical

simulation of the gush, the

dreams, the penetrable.

Submitive, velvety, the fruit to

sink teeth into. Why he lifts his

head halfway through with an

inan grín and a silly baseball

commentary I have, deliciously,

no idea. But who’s got the look?

The girl? Certainly not. It’s

Prince! MM Aug 8

Roland S Howard & Nikki Sudden

Girl Without A Name

CREATION

Arched, excruciatingly slow and

measured tread, more bleary

than bleary, through a ghost

town of collapsed morals and

purpose. Bleached reflections

and wheeling, screeching guitar

shapes, a history of rocks and

bones. DESERTS. MM Aug 8

New Order

True Faith

FACTORY

New Order have always

flickered along a fine line

between the exquisitely

resolute and the tinny. “True

Faith”, I’m afraid, is all trite

finger-bobs, ballooning brass

inanities and sadly reminiscent

of Johnny Logan winning the

Eurovision Song Contest in

the space age. This is a remix,

by the way, if you’re still

interested. MM Aug 8

The Sugarcubes

Birthday One

LITTLE INDIAN

Adorable, deplorable, oh
“Not likely to be a disappointment”

MM OCT 24 Former Smiths frontman Morrissey is feeling confident in the studio.

Morrissey is on the way back! The former Smiths frontman has been working with Stephen Street and Durutti Column’s Vini Reilly at Tears For Fears’ studio in Bath, and 18 tracks are now reported to be complete. They are described as “sounding very lush and not likely to be a disappointment to Smiths fans”.

In the meantime, guitarist Johnny Marr has been taking time off from his rehearsals with The Pretenders for their American tour. He has been making a number of unannounced guest appearances with various bands in London and Manchester.

The remaining members of the old Smiths lineup, Andy Rourke and Mike Joyce, were due to appear at the London ICA on October 20 as part of Brix Smith’s Adult Net, making their debut appearance.
Morrissey in a still from a South Bank Show episode about The Smiths. Filmed shortly before the band breakup, it will be aired on October 18, 1987.
“A pretty lazy bunch”

MM OCT 24 Introducing a monosyllabic new group from the USA, Dinosaur:

A 5 IF 1987 had not already yielded a mountainous backlog of crucial rock listening, SST have descended upon England, via the good offices of Roland Hyams, with a cargo of assorted sub-art, post-thrash, bleary and blaring American releases hitherto unavailable over here. It’s a probable mixture of rough diamonds and pebbles which, to investigate fully, would require a year’s sabbatical. Names range from Black Flag to the Meat Puppets via Angst, Blind Idiot God and Das Damen. To save time, I can but heed hearsay and state for your information that the Black Flag stuff is awful, the Meat Puppets are as fine as ever and Angst, Blind Idiot God and Das Damen are, at a blind touch, worth a gamble. As for Dinosaur, however, I can state urgently and unequivocally that their You’re Living All Over Me is one of this year’s finest, roughest tumbles.

Dinosaur, at some instinctual level, understand the value of inertia, of apathy, the creed that dares, but can’t be bothered, to speak its name. They regress, correctly, into a supine aphasia. Theirs is a music of sublime wistful and visionary, Dinosaur deliver their cream with all the languor of a yawn. Dinosaur use wah-wah guitar and seem to exist, like a great deal of American indie rock, at an interface between thrash and hippiedom. So, J Mascis, vocalist, guitarist and largely songwriter, why the “Dinosaur” moniker? “…It’s thinking of all those West Coast people…”

J Mascis, vocalist, guitarist and largely songwriter, why the “Dinosaur” moniker? “…It’s thinking of all those West Coast people… Jefferson Airplane, people that have been around for years…” People you have any respect for? “…”No!” But there are ‘60s antecedents in the weathered, careless, ancient blur of Dinosaur. I’m thinking of Neil Young. Do you listen to Neil Young? Who do you listen to? “Uh…everybody.”

Now, this may not seem much of an answer. This is not Quote Of The Year and wants for a reference to domestic claustrophobia. Dinosaur, however, do not so much burst out into fresh spaces as retreat further into the house, into the bedroom. “Paleo”, their last track, is made up of cut-up tapes from TV so densely enmeshed between a forlorn, acoustic ramble that it’s like the release of stuffy air into the atmosphere, the stench of a funeral. We were into Oi!, people like The 4-Skins. I guess all that English stuff was originally, and we were all into Oi!, people like The 4-Skins. I guess all that English stuff was pretty stupid, but I still have the T-shirts.”

Dinosaur’s thrash and white noise are poorly fused, thankfully: more of an intervention, like to use the best of them on the album.” I’ve yet to address the thrash, the abstract abstraction of Dinosaur.

“We all came from hardcore bands. We were into Oil, like The 4-Skins”

APATHY & ECSTASY

great swathes of rock history in which Dinosaur are soaked. The pause that precedes this answer is like the death of the word. It encapsulates the (dis)spirit of Dinosaur, their non-commitment, the anti-urge that prompted them to fail to meet up with Simon Reynolds for a recent interview. Simon, whose aesthetic is in part based around the failure to meet appointments, around a celebration of inefficiency and delinquency, was undoubtedly gladdened by this show of apathy as he stood on the street corner in New York for 45 minutes in vain.

Another story goes that Dinosaur were once so unable to be bothered to turn up at a concert they were due to play that they sent along another band instead to take their place as Dinosaur for a night. Is this true, J? “Yeah, well, they only told us about it the day before…”

What do you do with yourselves? From whence do you derive the will to live? “…We sit around all day and watch TV…” Do you drink? “…No…” Do drugs? “…No…” Are you miserable? “No!”

The title, You’re Living All Over Me is a reference to domestic claustrophobia. Dinosaur, however, do not so much burst out into fresh spaces as retreat further into the house, into the bedroom. “Paleo”, their last track, is made up of cut-up tapes from TV so densely enmeshed between a forlorn, acoustic ramble that it’s like the release of stuffy air into the atmosphere, the stench of a TV OD. “Our bass player has been making up these collages since he was 14. He figured he’d like to use the best of them on the album.”

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I’ve yet to address the thrash, the abstract abstraction of Dinosaur.

“We all came from hardcore bands. We were into Oil, like The 4-Skins.”
The Justified Ancients Of MuMu release a castrated version of their controversial album 1987: What The Fuck Is Going On? this week. The de-sampled album is entitled 1987: The Edits. The record now includes large amounts of silence where copyright-infringing material used to be. The band were forced to take such action after being threatened with prosecution by ABBA, who took exception to The JAMs’ sampling of their mega hit “Dancing Queen”.

“No, we don’t think we’re ripping the public off with this record,” said Rockman of The JAMs. “The gaps in the record just show up the idiocy of the copyright laws as far as we’re concerned.” On the sleeve notes of the new album are instructions for restoring the edited version of 1987... to its full illegal glory, including a list of the records The JAMs sampled. The band are currently busy recording a single with the London Community Gospel Choir, which is being rush released in three weeks’ time.

A de-sampled album planned

NME NOV 7 The new JAMs album will contain silences.

Not fit for daytime

NME OCT 17 John Peel acts on “sexist” PWEI single.

JOHN PEEL, PROTECTOR of the nation’s morals? That’s the whisper doing the rounds at Broadcasting House, where it is believed Peelie lobbied producers to prevent Pop Will Eat Itself’s “Beaver Patrol” from reaching the Radio 1 “A” playlist.

A regular visitor to the station tells the NME that the single was favoured by a number of producers who decide on what’s to be played, but Peel approached them individually asking them not to play the “sexist” single. Richard Poppie said: “We’ve heard these rumours, but it’s not really up to us to comment on them. We can’t say they’re true or false. It just happens, I suppose.” Attempts to contact Peel were fruitless, but a spokesman for Radio 1 said: “We didn’t like the single. It was given fair consideration, but we didn’t think it was fit for day time playlisting. DJs’ remarks are taken into account, and if John Peel didn’t feel the record was right to be played, we would have taken note of his comments.”

However, the record was played frequently on Janice Long’s evening show.

Music (past)

Stones
Doors
Velvet Underground
Iggy And The Stooges
Bowie
Roxy
Lou Reed
Howling Wolf
John Lee Hooker
Kraftwerk
Dannned
Buzzcocks
Undertones
Banshees
Motorhead

Music (present)

The Bunnymen
New Order
Jesus And Mary Chain
The The
Talk Talk
Kate Bush
Cameo
Prince
Smiths
Pil
Pet Shop Boys

Reading
General biographies
The Stones by Philip Norman
No One Gets Out Of Here Alive by Jerry Hopkins and Danny Sugerman
James Dean by David Dalton
NME

Television
Brookside
Bread
Network 7
I hate all quiz shows, anything to do with Paul Daniels and TV in general. But I watch most of the junk that everyone else pretends they don’t watch.

Films
Cruising
Taxi Driver
Apocalypse Now
Deer Hunter
Midnight Express
The Killing Fields
Blade Runner
Spinal Tap

The Comic Strip
Carry On
I hate sci-fi (with the exception of Blade Runner)

Drink
Lager
Brandy
Water
Tea

Clothes
Leather
Black boots
Levi’s
White T-shirts
Gaultier

Cars
Aston Martin
Porsche
Mercedes

Places
Paris
Berlin
California
Italy

Food
Italian
French
Indonesian
Any junk

Hates
Most DJs (and the people who control them).
Datsun and Toyota cars.
Journalists who review records and don’t even play them.
The bastard that kicked my dog in the guts.
People who say, “Is it him? It isn’t, it is!” and they’re standing next to you in the supermarket.

Garlic breath.
Ignorance in general.

Flat
Five-bed house
in Essex/Studio flat in London on the river
IN A BAR above Boston’s grainy Rat Club, there’s a war going on. On the TV. On the ceiling. I don’t know which war it is. At least I know that’s the ceiling. How can I make sure it is? I know. I’ll ask a Pixie. Here’s one. What’s he saying? “You have music, but you have, like, your own life. You have the big questions, but you still say to your buddies: ‘Have you heard about that?’” It’s like baseball cards.

Sure, but is that the ceiling? “Rock music is an entertainment, but it’s noise. And all these extremes of volume. The human body was not designed to hear these things, not even with advanced science. Even in Chuck Berry’s day it had this negative effect on the body. It’s just so loud. Can you imagine someone from about 200 years ago hearing that kind of noise? It’s like thunder. They’d think it was like God speaking to them or something. It’s like lightning. What else is it like? What else is there? Can you think of anything else?”

Uuh… rushes of blood to the heads of dromedaries. Can I get you a drink?

These Pixies know when to scream and when to giggle. They formed somewhere (guitarist Joey and frontman Black were college roommates), they’ve been going for a little while. They answer “Yeah, sure” if you ask if they’re hip sexy Zulus, and they are three boys and one girl. I don’t meet Mrs John Murphy, the bassist, because she had a family tragedy the day before. I just meet the three – Charles “Black” Francis (pure voice, guitar, raconteur), Joey Santiago (feedback, handsome) and David Lovering (drums, gleaming grin to match his shirt) – who are a family tragedy. Or comedy. Whatever. They have a small eight-song album out in October called Come On Pilgrim, which will incongruously enough (some might say) be on 4AD. Black Charles is a chubby salt-of-the-earth avuncular poet who talks nine to the dozen and answers questions and just answer back. Joey is a Filipino who has trouble reading, but is so lean and pretty it couldn’t even matter. David looks anything but decadent, which judging by my observational prowess means he’s probably the Marquis De Sade. The Pixies sing about incest a lot, but first here’s what Joey thinks about holidays.

“I hate fucking holidays. Everyone gets neurotic. You get drunk and make flames. Like, New Year’s Eve is just a day to me.”

When Joey was at high school he named his second computer program Pop. His teacher said: “Why don’t you name them after trees like everybody else?” Joey thinks if he gets famous in America playing noisy guitars he’ll be able to go home (he left when he was seven) and have big fun with lots of lovely Filipino girls.

You could describe Joey as “healthy”. When the Pixies come over to support Throwing Muses on their British tour around February, me and Joey are going to open a bar called Cold Beer On Sale Inside. I doubt very much that this was just a drunken fancy.

David claims to be contradictory but isn’t, is into Rush, A Certain Ratio, mysticism, and magnetised contraptions, wants the Pixies to be on The Young Ones (God, how passé), mentions Rutger Hauer, and is some sort of electronics wizard. I don’t understand the mechanics of this, but it seems he’s invented some illegal pirate dish which can pick up private conversations from miles away. It can also track the mating sounds of wild bobcats, and he assures me these sound very much like a baby being axed. Another thing he can do is wire gaming machines so they start without being touched, so “folks get freaked”. Alternatively, he can blow them up. When I put forward the suggestion that he could work out a way of making large money from his sabotage, he looks confused and says it’s more fun to just blow them up. “Right,” I say. “Right.”

Joey once biked across the state of Massachusetts to raise money for charity, but when he got back he was too lazy to collect the funds. “So many damn customers. Sponsors. What you call them.” He pretended he never got back. If anyone asks, he’s still pedalling across a beach somewhere, OK? I think it’s time we asked Black why he sings about incest so much. “It’s all those characters in the Old Testament. I’m obsessed with them. You need to read it.”

CRANK THE VOLUME, DISTORTION, SCREAM – THAT’S ROCK

Introducing an exciting, oddball new band from Boston... the Pixies.
Why it comes out so much I don’t know. Look, I don’t have any sisters, OK? All brothers. And we’re all very hetero. I use the word ‘motherfucker’ in the way it was used 200 years ago; it’s been devalued since. I love insults and put-downs. Especially Spanish ones; I’m particularly impressed with those. When you ask Puerto Ricans what they mean, you always get a long explanation with detailed information. English put-downs don’t reflect culture or class. No style.

“N (I’ve Been Tired) disease – just kidding… I’m a humble guy…”

fears? I said losing my penis to a whore with why don’t you tell me one of your biggest fears?/And I live with it every day long. La la la la, life goes on. The Beatles broke up his local church rang out with people singing “Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da” all day long. La la la, life goes on. David interrupts to say that if you play Pixies’ “Elevator lady, elevator lady, elevator lady,” it goes: “Elevator lady, elevator lady, elevator lady, Elevator lady, elevator lady, elevator lady.”

Charles is terrified of being compared to Lou Reed and this is why he always sings in a very high voice. He knows rock’n’roll is supposed to be groinal. “That’s why everyone who listens to it can at least remember puberty. I hate to sound anti-old, but people don’t have sex after 50, also by the time you’re 50 you accept that all this singing about frustration is just bullshit. The oldest rock stars are about 48 now, so it’s gonna be interesting…”

“New market could open up,” says David. “We’re all laying back in our nursing home kinda stuff…”

Sorry, what did you say rock was? The readers might want to know. “Oh, suck, crank the volume, distortion, rock was? The readers might want to know. “It’s stolen from a Californian Christian folk singer called Larry Norman, who always says: ‘Come on pilgrim, you know he loves you.’ That’s such a cool line. I phoned his girlfriend to see if it was cool to steal it and he never phoned back, so fuck it. If I get sued, I’ll say I stole it from John Wayne. Say, does America seem like a bizarre wasteland to you? The world and his wife and their mediocrity?”

Tell me about “Ed is Dead.” Black. “There was this hideous weird girl at my high school who wore a burlap sack, cords and rubber shoes. I’d talk to her, but no one else would. Didn’t know what was wrong, he then later I found out she’s been mentally affected after a car accident. “Five years later I went back and saw her riding a bike around, exactly the same as she ever was. Except… she was really sunburned.” And her name was Ed? Shit no. It just rhymes.

“I just keep saying ‘repent’ as a joke… You just do images from deep within your soul”

“I just keep saying ‘repent’ as a joke… You just do images from deep within your soul”

“Imagine after the nuclear holocaust,” says Joey Santiago, “there’s just this heap of rocks. And one guy will come along and bang two together and he’ll be the first star! Wow! Hey, I got a friend who brings me crystals from Stockholm. They’re really wild. Also, she brings me pomegranates.”

Black went on an archaeological dig not long ago. He found jewels stuck in the ribs of babies, and pearls in their teeth. “And there was this one pearl that had, over the years, made it all the way from the bottom of the Pacific Ocean to the middle of the Arizona desert. By itself.”

Ladies and gentlemen, do I have no choice but to give you the Pixies or what? Get off of your toadstool for the loudest new prayers in The West. Slipshod and imminent. There is no ceiling. Chris Roberts

The artist is not credited

NME NOV 28 Second Prince album of ’87 is strictly on the down-low.

Prince will have a new album in the shops in the first week of December, his second release of the year. The eight-track LP comes in a completely black sleeve, except for the catalogue number which appears in small peach print. The artist is not credited and the album has no title to speak of, but insiders say it is likely to become known as “The Black Album.”

There is no official word from WEA, who distribute Paisley Park, although they did say there were strong rumours of a release before the end of the year.

But, with the help of The Revolution, an unofficial Prince information service in the UK, NME has learned that the album will be sneaked out on December 7 with the minimum of fuss and no advertising. The tracks were all recorded in the last 18 months, some from the “Sign O’ The Times” sessions and earlier material.

The full track listing is “Le Grind,” “Cindy C.,” “Dead On It,” “When 2 R In Love,” “Bob George,” “Superfunkycalifragisexi,” “2 Nigs United 4 West Compton” and “Hard Rock In A Funky Place.”

Plans are also afoot for a live album next year to coincide with the release of the Sign O’The Times concert movie.

Prince at the First Avenue nightclub in Minneapolis.

March 21, 1987: Prince on stage at First Avenue nightclub in Minneapolis.
“Bits of words stuck together”

You’re a right bunch of plastic-faced bastards, you lot are. Twenty-four-hour party folk, can’t smile, just plastic-faced bastards.”

Happy Mondays’ mate Minnie crashed into the room, spat a load of drug-induced hate in their faces and his words ended up as the title of their debut album.

Now he’s asking for royalties.

When the album Squirrel And G-Man Twenty Four Hour Party People Plastic Face Can’t Smile (White Out) was released on Factory in April, it had no title track, but now, with the release of the recently written “Twenty Four Hour Party People”, it has.

The single pinches like no other 45 will this year. The video is as strong and stunning as The Smiths’ three “Queen Is Dead” promo films, which it’s makers, The Bailey Brothers of Newcastle, assisted Derek Jarman on.

In amidst the careerists, the famous by association, the whiners, the bleaters, the dull, the day-glo dull, the psychedelic dull, the disco brothers, the chart heavyweights, the samplers, the rappers, the theme tunes, the flys, the waiters, the people who grinned themselves to death, the SAWs, the JAMMs, the AOCs, the DMCs, the GBOAs, the poets, the know its, the rusty egos and the Antony Price suits, Happy Mondays are the sanest band in the world. They pull my mind out from beneath the ocean and nail it to a plank of wood.

Introducing the HAPPY MONDAYS.

After a gripping couple of singles, we join Shaun Ryder, Bez and the rest to hear outlandish tales of crack cocaine and policemen who read the NME. “I don’t shout when I’m not shouting,” says Shaun, “but I always end up shouting.”

— NME NOVEMBER 14 —

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Things are going to be OK, baby, you can calm down now.

Earlier tonight, before the gig, Shaun Ryder, the singer, scraped last week’s shaving scab off with the same blunt razor he cut himself with in the first place. Blood is edging out slowly from the sore. The sides of his face are almost smooth, but his chin is covered in inch-long corn-coloured whiskers.

Crouching on top of a steel-rimmed desk chair, he’s recognising us in slow motion. His brain hits it in a millisecond, but his body is suffering stage-lag. His eyelids open to speak, and between them they fold into a welcoming smile.

His long-crooked nose with its large nostrils bends dramatically to the right and the insides of his ears turn orange. He drags his words through his impish grin like he’s struggling with a psychiatric disorder.

“Hey Dave. That review, pretty good that,” he tells his press officer.

“Yes, James did that.”

“Oh, you’re him, you did that review? I thought you were black.”

Ha ha ha ha. The ice is shattered and I step inside Happy Mondays.

We meet in The Ellesmere pub, Walkden, North Manchester. Bez, percussion, the man with the wildest eyes and strongest facial structure this side of Easter Island, pulls a Laura Ashley-covered sofa across the pub floor so our alcove is impenetrable.

Bez is the lynchpin of the band’s live performance. Far more than just an onstage dancer with percussion, he is a Powerball, an attraction point; he eases the pressure on the others, and channels the musical and physical tension off the stage and into the audience.

And there is a tension, buckets of it; it’s a sense of intimidation and character that forms when the band comes together on stage.

“It’s not that we’re intimidating,” says Bez. “It’s just that we’re normal, and that scares people.”

“Yeah, fucking hell, of course. Mainly with just each other. It could have been something that’s been going on in the dressing room or something could just snap.”

Something could just snap. Happy Mondays, Shaun Ryder, Bez, Paul Ryder on bass, Paul Davies on keyboards, Mark Shaw on guitar, and Gary Whelan on drums, are the only independent band in Britain. They play gigs, and release records, and wish Factory would advertise their releases, but as far as the intense careerism that all the other plastic shit-eaters we promote stink of, it doesn’t exist here.

Any chance of traditional careers or futures have been demolished by unemployment or ignored for its lack of excitement, so the unrealistic idea of becoming pop stars, which is still the carrot for most young bands, is just part of another world. Happy Mondays don’t constantly “think band”, they haven’t been infected with desperation, and they haven’t had the comfort to remain naive.

They have the band, and the unity of the band is security. They all have their own things they get off on, but with Happy Mondays they have identity.

“Ugh, we would have to sit near a pig,” laughs Shaun pointing to the 6ft 5in-tall bloke with his black crop, moustache and sideburns, and his very plain clothes, eating his pub grub with wife (WPC Pork?) and mother (Inspector Grunter?). Before I have the chance to ask whether they are using David Bellamy’s definition or Charles Manson’s, Shaun blurts: “The pigs read the NME round here, man, I’m not lying. I know they do, man. Because he (pointing to his brother, Paul, the band’s

“We were good but shit. Something had to come out of it”
bass player) fucking gives it them is to read.
And there’s us lot in it going, ‘Oh yeah, speed, dope.’ And this pig’s reading it.”

“That’s why I moved out of my last house,” says Paul, “the squad moved in downstairs.”

Happy Mondays started out with that same light-fingered Manchester guitar sound that James, The Railway Children, and The Bodines have used, but by learning to interpret, not imitate, their influences they’ve built a far more versatile and challenging style than any of their Mancunian contemporaries can come up with.

They’ve been wiring so many hooks to their music that by the time their last single “Tart Tart” caught me fast in March it was sharp enough to nearly rip my stomach out.

The groups they mention when asked come thick and fast: The Beatles, Stones, funk, electro, Mamas & Papas, Frank Zappa, Vicious Rumour Club. But unlike other bands who namedrop as a way of getting on and off bandwagons, the Happy Mondays don’t sound like any of the music they quote as personal taste. Shaun had never heard an ACR or Fall LP until 14 months ago. Paul Davies didn’t know who Mark E Smith was until he saw Hey! Luciani at Christmas and Gaz’s hero is Ringo Starr.

If you scraped away the surface layers, beyond the one or two mediocre and old songs on the LP, then you’ll know what competent songwriters Happy Mondays are. If you don’t, then the powerful spanking sounds that break out of “Twenty Four Hour Party People” – Gaz’s crisp drum intro, Paul’s keyboards that blast like a horn section – will re-educate you.

The band’s songs don’t scuttle, or shuttle, or throttle, or thrust, they aren’t castrated by an embarrassment of rock or fear of funk, they take their time, they show off their construction, they are splendid in their brilliance. I ask them how they ended up sounding like they do and Shaun tells me, “It’s probably because when we started we were all shit, good but shit. Something had to come out of it.”

The band, probably unwittingly, have taken the tensions and disciplines from different styles of music, not the tunes. But their music, be it delicate (“Olive Oil” on the LP), or tough (“Tart Tart”), or a mixture of the two (“24 Hour Party People”) is only a bedding for Shaun Ryder to lay his world-weary battered lyrics over.

“Most of the songs are just bits of words stuck together,” he tells me over his final Saturday-lunchtime pint. “It’s lucky that they mean something at the end. They’re just phrases, or three-liners that people come up with. Then another three-liner will come into my head and I’ll start throwing it all around together. If it starts to sound right, that’s when I’ll write it down.”

Shaun’s drawling vocals nag against the flow of the music, they etch themselves into it. The pain he expresses through his pronunciation, the way he slurs one minute and is rounding his O’s and spitting his T’s the next, is reminiscent of the emotion and contempt the young Bob Dylan used to pour into his songs.

But it’s probably more to do with the size of their noses and the substances that go up them than a common talent that makes them sound similar.

“My singing style is shouty,” he says.

“You don’t shout on that new song you sing. I don’t think you shout that much,” replies Paul Davies.

“Oh, I do,” replies Shaun, as confident as a wronged washerwoman.

“I don’t shout when I’m not shouting, but I always end up shouting.”

You know what he means. You always know what Shaun Ryder means.

He might sound like he’s got more beer than brains in his head, but I can assure you Shaun Ryder is a very wise, amusing and cunning Dole City hobgoblin indeed.

Ryder’s lyrics are as colourful as Tom Wolfe’s The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby, yet his subject matter, his delivery and the band’s own lifestyle is more in tune with the turd-underfoot alcoholic minimalist writings of Charles Bukowski.

They are chiselled with alliteration and half-bitter slang, they repeat, they grate, and if you, like the Observer critic, think they “fight for artificlacy”, then at the end of the scrap at least you know they are saying something.

“Tart Tart”, the last single, was about a drug dealer who died of a brain haemorrhage, but the lyrics only hinted at this. “Twenty Four Hour Party People” is about just that, 24-hour party people, people for whom freedom of choice or unemployment has cleared the way of job obstacles. As Minnie puts it, “They’re just twenty-four-hour party people, plastic face can’t smile.”

They’re nearly all on the dole, they get in The Hacienda free, and they’re known to travel to parties by foot whatever the distance. Paul cracks jokes about the Job Club adverts (“I’m going along to get my free pen and stamps”) and Bez wants to become a full-time blagger like his hero Emmett Grogan.

Not that the party is always a good one, as Paul Davies puts it: “Most people look for a reward from their jobs, but we get a reward from our music. It is the rest of the time, after you’ve come out of the practice room and you’ve got nothing to go to, that’s when it’s bad.”

They’ve got dodgy pasts, they know the number and prices of the cheapest taxis in North Manchester, and they argue most vociferously about the distance to Gaz’s house from the pub, whether white bread has more fat in it than brown, and whether or not, like a survey put in the Mirror, 60-year-old men in the south are fitter than 13-year-old lads in Salford.

Shaun Ryder is speaking to the Corn Beard himself he was about to go down the Housing Benefit, and yet Gaz drives around in his dad’s brand-new Ford Cortina.

The catches, contradictions, beauty and despair of Happy Mondays are a thousandfold, so don’t tell me their lyrics are inarticulate and meaningless, because most of you will never understand anything about their lifestyles apart from what you see on cliched documentaries and read in left-wing papers written by sons of right-wing businessmen.

B A C K I N T H E P U B, Mark can hear the radio and wants to know if it’s the racing results, Paul Ryder has been looking at the racing results, Paul Ryder has been looking at the Laura Ashley wallpaper too long and is seeing pink dots all over Gaz’s face, Paul Davies is telling me about how he really wants the band to do well, and Bez and Shaun have dropped their conversation to a whispered hush. Naturally everyone shuts up and listens.

“When we were out in New York, right, for the new Music Seminar,” he wheezes. “Me and Bez were with these black guys who were doing crack and one of them turns to me suddenly and goes, ‘Hey man, you just spat at me.’”

Shaun has screwed up his face, stuck out his finger, and snarled the sentence. All the time, Bez is rocking slightly backwards and forwards on the sofa, his giant granite carved head nodding.

Shaun continues: “And then a minute later he said, ‘Hey man, you’re doing it again.’ And then he turned round a third time, and you could tell he was coming down off the hit and he was really mad, and he said, ‘Right, you’re English and you’re spitting on me and I fucking hate you.’”

“So Bez started snarling at him and we were surrounded by 20 of them and they were really going to do us. And then the first black guy we had met came over and said, ‘Hey, they’re with me, cool it,’ and they let it go.

But what it was was Bez was so pissed, he was spitting while he was talking and it kept landing on this guy who thought it was me.”

It’s 1987 and we’ve ended up with all sorts of rubbish around us, militant miserabilism and extreme escapism is now forced fashion, you spit on them but they still suck you in.

Six rat heads stagger, their fashions snag, their stubble is craggy. Noses are bent, jackets bought at Afflecks, sentences fed on F-words. Mondays are too good to be blue. Something could still snap.
“God is a bathtub”

A meeting with an absurdist new Icelandic band THE SUGARCUBES – and their remarkable singer, Björk. Cats, zombies and sex with God are all on the agenda. “You know,” they say, “we can knock anybody into the ground with this brilliant normality of ours.”

— MELODY MAKER OCTOBER 24 —

It must be the full moon.
It was all going along quite comfortably for, ooh, about nine seconds. I’d asked what the album will be like, like it tells me to in the manual. And Björk had replied, “All sorts of things”, just like pop stars are supposed to, hereby suggesting a diverse and colourful spectrum of conversational topics. It was around now I opened the floodgates of chaos, perhaps, by saying “What sort of all sorts of things?”

“How it would be to sleep with God,” says Einar [Órn Benediktsson, vocalist]. It helps, once again, if you do the Icelandic accents.
“I don’t know, because He’s never done it to me. If God is a stud with sideburns, I wouldn’t fancy Him. But if…”

“It started out like this,” interrupts Björk, who wrote the lyric under discussion. “I was walking down a street in Iceland and I just felt in the kind of mood that – as has always been my belief – that God does not exist. But then I thought, if He would, He would be this figure in the sky, sitting in the fattest cloud, keeping it very tidy and clean. In a white shirt, and always very perfect. And so when I been walking down the street – if He did exist – He would come down from His cloud, with marsupial fingers and marble hands. And they would glide over my shoulders, into my dress, and go down and down and down and down, and then… the song ends.” »
The Sugarcubes in London, 1986: (l–r) Þór Eldon, Einar, Bragi Ólafsson, Sigtryggur Baldursson and Björk
Is this a fantasy of yours?

“It just fell into my mind. I wouldn’t pick it to happen to me. I don’t think it would be very nice.”

Today Björk is wearing an orange dress shaped like a bell. She is a bit sulky because she is fed up with everyone saying she’s some kind of freak. So, when Einar, today wearing a plastic-looking jacket of many colours, begins a long monologue about violence, she takes out her sewing and pursues it diligently.

Later, when we’re at the flat where The Sugarcubes are staying in London, she goes across to the kitchen, sets up the ironing board, and begins ironing.

“Irony,” comments the drummer, and I think about linguistics. Björk thinks she is perfectly normal. What I wish someone would explain to her is that “as one should be” is not the same as “normal.” You only have to see the “Birthday” video in the middle of any party-balloons-crap pop programme to know that next to the way The Sugarcubes are, most else in the medium is worthless. But sadly, it does not define “normal.” This I know. The Sugarcubes are positively super-normal. Like Leos Carax films. Like sunshine in winter. Like getting married at your own funeral.

“Birthday” has “done” rather well, which must mean that some of you have a degree of sensibility, know that being naked is always a serious matter, know that to wait is to be and to weep is to do.

Non-smokers may be cowards, but Björk, as it happens, hates drinking. She says so. “I hate to drink.” Unless she’s dancing. The other night she danced to James Brown records for three hours. Someone points at me as a singer. Björk: “I don’t look at me as a person who sings. I look at me as a singers”

“The incredible force of our wonderful songs.”

It’s Sigtryggur talking now. Sigtryggur has one day off from thinking each week. Usually Monday, but that’s not a hard-and-fast rule. The last time Einar got in a fight, Sigtryggur was watching from his car and just drove away, because it was his day off from thinking. Einar respects this.

Sigtryggur: “Create or not create? It’s just the physical result of our physical presence. You see? To check that we exist. Something comes out of it, instead of just fucking having babies. OK, some band members have fucked and have babies, but at least two members have not fucked yet. We are just rearranging the world around us to fit our non-concept of what the world should be like.”

Um. Hang on. One thing at a time. Non-concept, you say?

“Yes, because we don’t have any concepts, any philosophy as such. But then it starts creating a life of its own. Like, The Sugarcubes they are alive now. ‘Birthday’ is breathing, and it would still do so if we died today. So for the two band members who haven’t fucked, it will be considered that that’s our children. I’m sorry. I mean it.”

Björk: “This is his theory, alright? People who haven’t had babies have never fucked.”

Einar: “Yes! You only have if you have the babies!”

Björk: “Have you got a baby?”

Oh, scattered all over 17 continents. I mean, no.

“I haven’t got a baby!” Einar is leaning forward and breathing into my face. “You don’t know what sex is!”

Björk: “Are you busy just now, Einar? Because I could take you in a room and I could tell about the birds and the bees.”

“I could tell about the birds and the bees.”

Björk: “Have you got a baby?”

Oh, scattered all over 17 continents. I mean, no.

“Then you haven’t fucked!” Einar is leaning forward and breathing into my face. “You don’t know what sex is!”

Björk: “You don’t know what sex is!”

I must say I found this interview rather more eventful than most. Björk saves me from having to think of a razor-sharp spontaneous answer, which is probably just as well.

“Are you busy just now, Einar? Because I could take you in a room and I could tell about the birds and the bees.”

Bragi [Bragi Olafsson, bass]: “I think this home-made philosophy of his is a bit related to a slogan we had when we were playing in a group years ago. It went: ‘It doesn’t matter what you can do, but what you do.’”

Another popular Icelandic group: Mezzoforte.

“When I was 15, we went once to a séances. Thor and Odin came through.”

John Triumph, Iceland’s premier novelist (honestly!) and friend and manager of The Sugarcubes, is having his say. “And the room was full of flower perfume. That’s how young kids in Iceland entertain themselves. Go to séances. Between fights.”

John Triumph, Iceland’s premier novelist (honestly!) and friend and manager of The Sugarcubes, is having his say. “And the room was full of flower perfume. That’s how young kids in Iceland entertain themselves. Go to séances. Between fights.”
“This frightens me,” Einar continues, as he is wont to do. “I don’t want anyone from the beyond talking to me. Unless I ask, ‘Am I born? Do I exist? I don’t know that! I don’t!”

Yes you do.

“No! I don’t! For all we know, we could be dead right now and dreaming this. So, I don’t know if I’m here, and why.”

But you’ll sleep tonight. You’ll wake up tomorrow.

“I’m not sure. Honestly, Mr Chris. I AM NOT SURE.”

So, if I watched you snore all night, and proved it?

“Then I would say, ‘Are you sure you were here the whole night? You might have started dreaming. I take nothing for granted.”

But, Einar, isn’t it all complicated enough as it is?

“I know, yes, it is. It’s just… I am not sure. The only proof I want now is money. I want to be able to buy compact discs, then I know it’s happening now, because from history I know they haven’t been previously available.”

Yeah. Every time I see a new Bruce Springsteen live remixed B-side I take it as confirmation of my identity.

“Alcohol has been previously available. So by drinking I am maybe re-confirming that I have already existed in the past. You know? I am not a sugarcube! Jesus was conceived in a squeaky-clean bathtub!”

I’m lost. But not in the way you mean.

“I am a singers,” contributes Björk. “A singers. I don’t look at me as a person who sings, I look at me as a singers. I’m sorry but I have to admit this.”

Why do The Sugarcubes try to destroy their songs on stage?

Björk: “I don’t know what you’re talking about?”

Sigtryggur: “It’s the presence of malice. Which is everywhere of course. If you’re doing sweet music, the presence of malice gives it another degree.”

Einar: “Music is not God. But when music is just music it becomes boring.”

Much inter-Icelandic debate ensues.

Björk: “The songs wouldn’t work if they were in tune.”

Do you ever worry about alienating people?

Einar: “No no, you can’t run after that. It’s not our fault that our own development is not a developing thing. We are not behind or ahead of people.”

Just… outside?

“No, no, we are the present state of things. We are really very ordinary, even though we drink a lot. It’s not our fault everybody else is fucked up. We are the mainstream. The others are the subversives, the perverts. Not us. I am very happy with my video machine. I am very happy with everything. I owe a lot of money, but I am happy with being what I am. Because I don’t know what I’m not. If I did, then I’d be unhappy.”

“In every television situation comedy, they try and portray how things are, so all the other people see that they lack a semi-detached house, big kitchen, big TV set, and the looks. But I’m so silly that I don’t know that I lack that. And therefore I’m happy.”

“We are not intellectuals. We are very naive. But the intellectual capacity of people is getting shorter. They demand hooks. The ability for understanding things not as usual is getting lazy. The range is always closing down… conforming… Soon we only will use words like shoot shoot piss fuck fuck stab stab.”

If you had a slogan for The Sugarcubes, would it be SNIFFIT?

“Yeah! How did you know? Or – lick it. Because you’d get a direct connection into us. Bragi buys books to smell them.”

Bragi: “There is a strange habit in Iceland of dipping sugarcubes into the coffee and then we suck them.”

Einar: “Yes – sniff, lick, suck, whatever. And not in sexual connotations. I don’t want to get rude.”

Could a deaf person enjoy The Sugarcubes?

“Yeah! Yeah!”

Could a blind person?

“They wouldn’t see a multi-coloured event. It’s not like taking drugs: none of us take drugs. If you are blind, sniff and listen. If deaf, sniff and feel. It doesn’t matter. We don’t care. Nothing is more rubbish than when people say, ‘Oh well, the sound was a bit dodgy: We’re into yes or no or again.”

Björk: “We never need a second opinion. We know.”

Last week, The Sugarcubes played with Swans at the Town & Country Club: “We simply got a phone call. But we never ‘support’ anybody. We only play ‘alongside’. We exist in our own right.”

Björk has gone polite but quiet again.

“I am getting pretty bored with everybody thinking that we are weird. People watch me, curiously, with the feeling I’m some kind of freak. Yes, well that’s the only thing I don’t like.”

Sigtryggur: “It’s a catch-22. They expect us to act like freaks now.”

Einar: “Not just like, Eskimos in disguise, but surrealists… like, let’s shit into this teacup, heh heh heh… What disgusted me was the audience at our first concert here, gazping at her. I saw a very definite masculine voyeurism at work.”

Björk: “Well – I don’t really know, really. There’s being here, talking about ourselves, behaving like we’re in a band, then there’s going back to Iceland, to my boy, and being that again. So, it’s two lives! Yes, it’s interesting.”

Einar: “You want to know who’s the biggest bastard in Iceland?”

I was just about to ask…

“Kristján Loftsson, The Whale-killer. We want his name in print. Skip the rest of the interview – this is it. I’ll write it down for you. He is slowly and surely shitting into his own pants without a nappy.”

WHALEMEAT AGAIN: SOMEWHERE around here I should reiterate that The Sugarcubes’ first album, Life’s Too Good, will be out when they’ve finished the extra five tracks they’re recording for it now. This will make 16 songs, all short. “It’ll be vaudeville.”

Somewhere, too, I should go on about how The Sugarcubes make the adjective “brilliant” mean something again, but that’s already clear as a frosty night.

“It’s not in our nature to publicly protest. Dubious grounds, we could easily fall into a hot spring.”

It’s cliché, too.

“Oh, pure death, yes. It means a group is not intellectually but intellectually unsound. Then you get labelled. I ask you now a favour. Can you put a label on The Sugarcubes?”

No. That’s the point!

“Exactly. We might be ignorant, we might be morons, but we’re not stupid. We do think. Except for him, on Mondays.”

What about full moons?

“We turn into cats. Or zombies.”

Björk is allergic to cats.

“Because of the Icelandic girl being Miss World, our biggest pop star has his latest song called ‘Does Beauty Create Happiness?’ It’s his job to be vaudeville.”

Some what?

Einar: “OK. Let’s go to our place and have some Brenivin.”

What?

“I don’t know what you’re talking about?”

Sigtryggur: “You know, we can knock anybody into the ground with this biggest bastard in Iceland?”

If I did, then I’d be unhappy.”

“Some people might think it’s silly, but they go… playing golf”
October 14–17, 1987: Dylan’s Temple of Flames Tour concludes with four nights at London’s Wembley Arena.
Now think about what it must be like to be Bob Dylan; that’s when things start to get really weird. What we’re talking about here, after all, is someone whose music has made him the most important voice in the lives of millions, nothing less. For more than a quarter of a century, Dylan has been revered, adored, by people for whom he has never been allowed to be ordinary, whose expectations, which have usually been massive, he has had to live up to.

To his credit, Dylan has carried this burden testily. And at an age when he might even be forgiven for merely relaxing in the retrospective admiration for what he has already achieved, he still keeps coming out of his corner fighting. Nostalgists will hopefully have been helplessly confused by the opening show of this Wembley series.

After reassuring sets by Roger McGuinn and the charming Tom Petty, Dylan came rumbling out of the wings like a storm cloud; black, misty, threatening a downpour, a vicious, trembling presence. He looked like something out of Ulzana’s Raid, a startling comanchero phantom, a bandana wrapped around his head, gaunt-featured, mad-eyed, grubby silk shirt tied in a knot around his waist, boot-heels thumping the stage, side-sweeping chords from an electric guitar as he led The Heartbreakers through a pummelling, broken-veined “Like A Rolling Stone”.

This, as an opening shot, a blood-red bullet, fired into the night, Petty and his commendable henchmen matching Dylan ricochet for ricochet, never too reverential, but giving him lots of room, on their toes from the off, ready for anything, which would quickly turn out to be plenty, Benmont Tench on keyboards and drummer Stan Lynch consistently outstanding. Dylan’s apparent unpredictability made for a lot of tension. I couldn’t take my eyes off him, neither could the band, as a fierce “Maggie’s Farm” swelled suddenly into the gospel roar of “Forever Young” (heart-tugging, a bruised, delicious hymn), and quickly followed by a rollicking, honky-tonk reading of “I’ll Be Your Baby Tonight”.

“I Want You” built from a cautious start, just a sketch really, into a torrent of whirling rhymes; “The Ballad Of Frankie Lee And Judas Priest” was amused, amusing, a spinning of outlandish tales, Dylan crouched, ready for takeoff, The Heartbreakers hanging on his every twisting nuance, wondering where the hell he was going next, which turned out to be a version of “Don’t Think Twice, It’s Alright”, startling in its feral beauty.

After just about an hour, Dylan brought an abrupt halt to everything with a raging, delirious “Shot Of Love”, which ended with a momentous acceleration into something that resembled the apocalyptic ballroom rumble of the Stones’ “Gimme Shelter”. There were two encores. A version of “Chimes Of Freedom” with McGuinn’s harmonies, still celestial after all these years, supporting Dylan’s howling, and a version of the nightmarish “In The Garden” that for sheer two-chord intensity and riffing calamity could’ve rivalled “Sister Ray”.

This had been a fiercely confrontational performance that took no prisoners, refused to pander to the past, addressed itself to a surprisingly young audience – there were women dancing here, mesmerised by Dylan – and which confounded reports that the great man was currently operating on some kind of remote control. At Wembley, last Wednesday, Dylan seemed determined to take everything to the limit and beyond, to screw preconceptions about what he is still capable of to the table. If it were possible for Dylan and this band to have arrived unannounced for a gig at the Mean Fiddler or the Town & Country, there would be a queue of young writers on this paper clamouring for them to be front-paged, probably pronto. Astonishing is a word that comes to mind, reflecting on this show, and for once it’s justified. Allan Jones
“Brix has added some form of sense to my life,” says Mark E Smith of his US-born, guitar-playing wife (right).
“I’ve never met anybody like me”

THE FALL release “Hit The North”, and Mark E Smith steps into character as rock’s most interesting curmudgeon in this revealing “at home” interview. “The people I dislike I can take the piss out of,” he says, “which gives me as much pleasure as if they were someone I did get on with.”

SUNDAY NIGHT WITH Mark and Brix at their home in Prestwich, North Manchester, three roads away from James Anderton’s police training centre. A gun-metal-grey Mercedes shines in the drive. Claus Castenskiold paintings stare down from the walls, and husband and wife relax in their black V-neck Armani jumper and big fun Mickey Mouse slippers respectively.

On the television, a bag of pontificating pretension called Morrissey is blathering on about “how weird” life is, how sad it must be to be working class and normal, and how amazingly talented his band were. It is like watching a tribute to Shakin’ Stevens with Elvis Presley at your side.”
Morrissey may be winning the hearts of the Observer Magazine—reading “intellectuals” with his sluggish facial twitches and pseudo-sophisticated pauses for thought, but in the fish-and-chip-eating world of Mark E Smith and James K H Brown he is unwittingly burying the memory of The Smiths as an interesting band under a mud-pile of embarrassment.

The two of us are in stitches, Brix, who is two days later to perform a stunning live set at London’s ICA with ex-Smiths Mike Joyce, Andy Rourke and Craig Gannon as part of her Adult Net, has already left the room in disgust at our continuing contempt for the Chubby Bard of Whalley Range, who now resides in Chelsea.

Unlike Morrissey, who has become a professional Mancunian, Mark Smith will never lose his sense of realism to the grabbing hands of romantic escapism. His washerwoman bitching (“You think I’m like an old woman?” “Yes, Mark, I think you’re like an old woman”), his fierce pride, his ever-increasing degrees of integrity and maturity, and his sense of humour will always see to that. If they fail, there is always the possibility of insanity.

Despite a public image that makes Rudolph Hess look like Mother Teresa, Smith has continued, for a decade, to write lyrics which tower above the short-sighted attempts of his contemporaries, of whom he recognises only Kevin Rowland and Pete Wylie as being any good.

His exhaustive hunger for literature, and his equally demanding thirst for contemporary information, have created a style which, if freed from the ropes of rock music, would horrify the book world. That the first four volumes on his shelves are Wyndham Lewis’s Blast 1 and Blast 2, a historical biography, and the Georgie Best Soccer Annual 1975, sums up his literary influences acutely.

Ever since The Fall’s inception in 1977, Smith has been continually collecting lyric-worthy information and channelling physical and mental creative energy into building the band’s musical character. Whether it be the sixth-of-a-ton sonic attack of The Fall’s numerous highly rated drummers, MES’s own vocal screeches, or the tormented silences that so often pre-empted both of these, Fall songs have always been wracked by an intimidating and uncontrollable sense of extremity.

The Fall as a band, whilst maintaining this extremity, have developed, almost invisibly, from a bad-tempered ball of hate and insecurity into a fully functioning Top 40-scoring pop group. They have squeezed the repetitious, badly organised and often neurotic wall of noise into a malleable but tense brand of horror-pop.

Smith’s lyrics are still verbal montages of headlines, advertising logos, Mancunian slang, abbreviations, beatnik speak, computer jargon and classic prose, but the overall sound of new single...
“Hit The North” finds the narky Manc six-piece far, far away from the hectic days of “Totally Wired” and “Bingo Master’s Breakout”, certainly much further away than anyone in The Fall No I could have imagined.

The truth of the matter is that Mark Edward Smith is no longer the frail, foul-mouthed young boy in tank tops whose bile stung the skin of all of those it landed upon.

Smith, by his own admission, is maturing, and growing more confident with age. Over the past four years he has changed from being a tyrannical whisky-guzzling speed kind into a genial 30-year-old wit who enjoys the friendship and loyalty of his band, and the stability of his marriage.

The drunken Mark E Smith who laughs at, ridicules and repeatedly sets right Morrissey’s South Bank Show is the nearest the man comes to behaving like the beast you, the public, believe him to be. None of his mirth was fuelled with bitterness, only a sardonic disbelief at Morrissey’s lack of style.

As we settle down around the wooden table he writes upon, my aim is not to fill my tape recorder with spiteful and shocking gems of vitriol, but to expose the side the public never see. I want to make Mark, the herald, sing.

Under the collective gaze of Marlon Brando, Peter Lorre, two Barbie Dolls, and the lop-sided squint of a pair of Manchester City footballers stuck, courtesy of Panini, onto the back of last year’s G-Mex Festival programme, Smith is in good humour. In fact, I have rarely known him not to be. One of many demo tapes sent to him, “Dick Vomit, NY ‘82”, catches my eye.

“That guy got knocked down and went into a coma, and all he had on him was some small change and a tape of This Nation’s Saving Grace, so the hospital got in touch with us to see if we knew him. We sent some music and a message back and they played it to him.”

Did he wake up?

“No. Ha ha ha, but he got better eventually though, and then sent us that demo. It’s awful.”

To understand The Fall’s rejuvenation, you must understand the importance of the new members. The arrival of Simon Woolstencroft on drums, Marcia Schofield and Craig Scanlon a refreshing kick up the arse. Brix on guitar, has given the old core of Mark, Steve Hanley, and Craig Scanlon a certain something.

“I don’t think Simon Woolstencroft gets enough credit,” continues her husband.

“He’s not a calm influence, but he’s a very soothing kind of guy.

“It sounds daft, but our drummers in the past have always been a bit of a pain; always brilliant, but always a pain. I used to lay awake at night knowing what they were doing and what they were going to do, but with Simon I just forget about him – hah ha ha, no, you know what I mean. He comes round a lot to see us, just to chat and stuff, which is good.”

Has there ever been anyone outside your family who has been very influential on your life?

There was one person, this half-Irish guy called Thomas, who I grew up with, who was a very good friend of mine. He was a few years older than me and he taught me all the jokes I know and everything.

“He taught me a lot about humour. He was very scathing about fashion, bell bottoms and skinheads and that, that was when I was about 13. Me and him were very close, we used to go round taking the piss out of people. He did affect me, but I couldn’t say how. I haven’t seen him in years.

“Apparently he never goes out of the house much now, but he was always like that. Even later on, when I’d go round and ask him if he was coming to the pub, he’d say, ‘Yeah, I’ll just go and change me socks,’ and he’d be up there an hour. Then he’d come back and he’d have two different socks on.

“Like you used to have gangs around here, and me and Thomas would always go from gang to gang, and always could. So if we joined one, we’d get attacked by the other.

“So they’d have us tied up against lamp posts and they’d be hitting us with sticks. And Thomas would be going, ‘Oh, where did you get them jeans from?’ or ‘That bloody haircut you’ve got, it’s fantastic.’ And you just had to laugh, because they didn’t even know he was taking the piss. And they’d go, ‘Oh, you’re just mad, you are.’

“And you’d be crying and they thought it was because they were hitting you, but it was with laughter, they were that stupid.

“We used to have names for all our enemies, like Simon Of Diarrhoea, and we’d make up stories about how they’d go home and dip their heads in buckets of diarrhoea. We used to go to these synagogue youth clubs as well and pretend we were Jewish.

“He’d have like a suit jacket on, with fucking big lapels on, and a tie, and a rotten shirt which had a fucking hole in it, and pants that were falling to the bottom or something. They ‘d have us tied up against lamp posts, hitting us with sticks.”

“There’s a change of atmosphere in the band now, Mark, the physical tension has been channelled into musical tension.

“You find it’s better therapy as well. We did this festival earlier this year with Nick Cave and the Swans, and Butthole Surfers, and it was interesting seeing them still making the same mistakes we used to make, and thinking they were great for it. Like we were the only ones to ask for a separate dressing room and they were calling us ‘pop stars’ for it.

“We had to walk through these really disgusting Butthole Surfers, little spool American kids who can’t even be bothered to wash, you know, standing around in their underpants. And they were giving us this ‘pop stars’ shit and Thommo, our tour manager, turned to them and says, ‘Look, it’s nothing to do with being fucking pop stars, it’s to do with being fucking professional, which is something fucking Butthole Surfers will never be.’ And this little kid’s shitng himself. They didn’t even make it to the next gig, their bus broke down or something.

“I just got sick of being pissed around and ripped off. Brix’s arrival was a good influence on me, because I tend to lose perspective and things like that. Also Steve and Craig are great to have in the band, they’re very loyal.

“People suggest they’re ‘yes men’, but they’re not; they wouldn’t be in it if they were. They put as much in as anybody.

“Brix has added some form of sense to my life, she’s someone I can react against or build around. Otherwise I’d be thinking about the band around the clock, which is what I was like.

“On the American tour when I met Brix I was so obsessed with things like ‘We’re not playing any old numbers’ that we were playing all the numbers from Perverted By Language, which we hardly knew and which didn’t even get released for another six months.”
Do you have any friends today whose closeness is inspiring?

“I went through a thing about six months ago when I thought, ‘Fucking hell, I’ve been nice to a lot of people and they’re not my friends anymore’, and I started to crave company again. “There’s a song on the LP, which we do live, called ‘My Friends You Can Count On One Hand’, and you can. It’s funny who you regard as your friends. Like I regard Gavín from The Virgin Prunes as a good friend even though I hardly ever write to him and he hardly ever writes to me, but he’s still a good friend. It’s something that you can’t get rid of, not that I want to.”

Does The Fall maintain your sanity?

“No particularly, no. I think I’d be alright without it. I could write, I want to.”

But he’s still a good friend. It’s something that you can’t get rid of, not that even though I hardly ever write to him and he hardly ever writes to me, friends. Like I regard Gavin from The Virgin Prunes as a good friend Count On One Hand’, and you can. It’s funny who you regard as your friends. Like I regard Gavín from The Virgin Prunes as a good friend even though I hardly ever write to him and he hardly ever writes to me, but he’s still a good friend. It’s something that you can’t get rid of, not that I want to.”

It was amusing but it was very protective, impenetrable…

“I know exactly what you mean. I wrote it at Brix’s grandparents’ in America and they said, ‘What the hell are you going on about?’ And I read it and thought, ‘What the hell am I going on about?’ ‘Protective’ is the word; I didn’t want to impress by messing around with the words, I didn’t want it to be like the usual ‘pop star writes’ stuff. You know, nicked from a book like that Housemartins guy, or some second-hand opinion Paul Weller’s just read on some crap Labour Party leaflet. But it’s like you go a bit crazy because you’re unleashed – you think, ‘Heh heh, I don’t have to write any music around this fucking piece.”

Mark E Smith’s Ins and Outs

**NME OCT 31** The Fall frontman conducts his own “which trial”.

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<td>Woody Woodpecker</td>
<td>Plastic grebos in Doctor Martens boots. (You’d never get a real biker to wear them.)</td>
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Smith’s Own Writing

**Smith’s own writing** is, and always has been, The Fall’s strength. Never-ending macabre time-scapes, seconds snatched, imaginations tortured. He takes recognisable everyday images and figures (pop groups, politicians, religious leaders, brands of milk) and slots them into scenarios which present an uncomfortably startling interpretation of society.

In “Hit The North”, originally commissioned by the Lancs Tourist Office (ha ha), James Anderton appears – not that an amplified voiceover bellows, ‘The bit about Anderton is coming!’ But it’s a talent Smith has whereby he can include a character so subtly while still making his presence felt so ominously.

Writing much of his work when unable to sleep at night in London, or first thing in the morning while you’re fresh but there are still residues of dreams to work from”, Smith sees his work not only as contemporary but futuristic as well.

“Like ‘Kicker Conspiracy’, it’s what everybody’s saying about soccer nowadays. I don’t care what anybody says, I was saying it four years ago.”

Likewise, he says it’s years since he deliberately wrote under the influence of amphetamines. Not that he condemns it, he simply claims it’s no longer necessary.

“The thing about writing under the influence of alcohol, or anything, is you lose you objectivity and that’s very good. Any stimulant is good for writing.
Sartre, who I never liked, used to get through 60 cigarettes a day, 10 bottles of wine, five grams of amphetamine, and other barbiturates. And that’s quite common with a lot of writers. Not that you can do it today, because there’s been this big clampdown. Which I think is ridiculous.”

Do you think your biggest influence is contempt for society?

“Well, I think there are far more contemptuous societies around the world, I don’t think people realise that for a start. I don’t know, what I am trying to do is get other people to click onto the same things I’m clicking onto.

“That’s the pleasure I want to give people. You know like when you read a book and you read a chapter and it’s something you’ve always instinctively felt or known to be right. And it hits you like I’ve always thought that’. That’s what I want to do.”

Do you ever get that sort of reaction from meeting people?

“Well I’ve never met anybody like me, but yeah, I guess I do sometimes. I tend to like people a lot and dislike people; I don’t dislike people so much. I usually find the people I dislike I can take the piss out of, which gives me as much pleasure as if they were someone I did get on with.”

**SMITH’S BIGGEST FAILING** as a writer is his inability to communicate his own strong sense of humour. Whereas in person his persistently cruel but hilarious humour, always punctuated with his crazy spluttering giggle and laugh, runs amok freely, any humour communicated through his lyrics is restrained and presented quite unnoticeably, like the perverse delight that grips the tale of the “Bournemouth Runner” on last year’s *Bend Sinister*.

Do you think you do your sense of humour justice in your writing?

“Well, I’ve only really developed that side quite recently. It’s things I’ve always laughed at in the back of my mind. I just say them now, and I haven’t got a clue what I’m on about, and then you get all these really horrible people going, ‘Oh great, I’ve always thought that’, you know, ha ha ha.

“But I do have that capacity in interviews where I say things, and it’s like a lot of my songs, I say ‘em and I haven’t got a clue what I’m on about, and they come true.

“It’s funny because the next time I was in the States after I’d said that, I fucking picked up the fucking Washington Post, the director of Ethiopia’s famine… the famine commissioner or whatever he was, had defected to America. And he’d got three houses in America already, right? What’s the famine director of Ethiopia doing with three houses in America? And there’s bands going out and playing for nothing; you know what are they trying to tell us, man?

“I just couldn’t believe that. And he defected to the States. Probably fucking out of our money you know what are they trying to tell us, man?

“Now, you know, then I think, ‘You were half right, Mark’. And also, it’s to prove a point that you’re not going along with everyone else, a big-headed thing.”

**YOU SEE**, he can still rant. The wild-eyed Salford bigot with the mouth on him still is within Mark Smith, but that side of him has become unnecessary with maturity. Smith is still as opinionated as ever, but nowadays his thoughts tend to ring through with degrees of bizarre, but straightforward, sense.

“It’s his advanced sense of history—he frequently reads biographies, history books and sociological texts when other people are gobbling up the Sundays—that make his political comment (eg, Ethiopia) seem so shocking.

“It’s funny actually, because the other day I was laughing me head off in here and Brix came in and asked me what was up and I told her.

‘It’s something like ‘US 80’s 90’s’ is supposed to be funny, it just doesn’t come over as that.

‘And ‘Terry Waite’ was meant to be funny, but fucking hell, you don’t want to make that funny any more.

‘I think you’re right about the ‘Bournemouth Runner’. Did I ever tell you we found out who it was? We got a letter off him which said, (adopts creepy voice) ‘I am the Bournemouth Runner’, and it turns out he’s like the biggest football hooligan in Bournemouth, and he’s a Fall fan, coincidentally.

“And he bought *Bend Sinister* and put it on and this track comes on and he couldn’t believe it. And he went round telling everybody, and he painted it on his back apparently, and he’s one of these people who get put in jail every week for fighting.

“He tried, every night of the southern tour, to nick the backdrop, and on the last eff-ing night, in five minutes while no one was looking, he got it. Good on him, actually. Ha ha ha.

“This is the only sort of humour present in Fall songs.

**The rise of your own sense of humour runs in time with the band’s recent success and development.**

“Yes, it makes a lot of difference. I’ve found that if I’m like that with the band it keeps morale up, and the band love it, and they’ve been a lot more warmer to me since I’ve been more like that. It’s a safety valve as well. Another thing is you shouldn’t put pressure on your friends.

“I always hate it when somebody’s in a nervous state and they lay it on everybody else. The Yanks call it ‘buckets of tension’, because I can always tell when someone’s upset in a room.

“So a lot of it is to help that. Like you get to a gig and there’s a gang of Hell’s Angels outside and you’ve got to walk through them to get in, and you feel a lot better for it. But yeah, I think I should bring it out more, also you get a lot more confident as you get older.”

When we talked about Neal Cassidy yesterday and you interpreted his hammer swinging as a defence mechanism, it occurred to me that all the obnoxious comments you’ve come out with in your time—‘Andy Kershaw needs a kick in the balls’—are your hammers, your defence.

“Ha ha ha, yeah. Well, with a lot of things like that Ethiopia thing, when that came out I read it and thought, ‘Fucking hell’, you know what I mean? What a thing to say about anybody, to even consider it, you know. And then you get all these really horrible people going, ‘Oh great, I’ve always thought that’, you know, ha ha ha.

“But I do have that capacity in interviews where I say things, and it’s like a lot of my songs, I say ‘em and I haven’t got a clue what I’m on about, and they come true.

“It’s funny because the next time I was in the States after I’d said that, I fucking picked up the fucking Washington Post, the director of Ethiopia’s famine… the famine commissioner or whatever he was, had defected to America. And he’d got three houses in America already, right? What’s the famine director of Ethiopia doing with three houses in America? And there’s bands going out and playing for nothing; you know what are they trying to tell us, man?

“I just couldn’t believe that. And he defected to the States. Probably fucking out of our money you know what are they trying to tell us, man?

“Now, you know, then I think, ‘You were half right, Mark’. And also, it’s to prove a point that you’re not going along with everyone else, a big-headed thing.”
Chuck D (left) and Flavor Flav outside Def Jam Recordings' offices, New York City

1987
OCTOBER - DECEMBER
“Cracking heads with noise”

A meeting with hip hop’s most exciting group, PUBLIC ENEMY. The band’s fusion of rock, soul and politics isn’t without friction, though. Both Chuck D and Professor Griff throw down some challenging assertions, but then “uncertainty is bullshit, as far as black people are concerned”, Chuck says.

— MELODY MAKER OCTOBER 17 —

GET THIS. Public Enemy are a superlative rock band. Everything about them, from their attitude – (renegade street cool given extra edge by a fierce dose of radical chic) to their sound (an implacable juggernaut of grunge-metal riffs, white noise, dub-space and galvanised R&B beats) puts them in our camp, and dead sets them against the designer soul we all abhor, the smooth, suave, placatory pseudo-sophistication that smothers the entire surface of Planet Pop.

However you define “rock” – urgency, aggression, vehemence, the will both to face reality and to exceed its limits, or just as big noise – Public Enemy fit the bill. So pay attention, suckers.

I’m in the offices of Rush Management, sister company of Def Jam, located in Manhattan’s Lower East Side not far from the Bowery (as in “bum”) and CBGB. Sat opposite is the articulate and emphatic Chuck D, chief firebrand and ranting poet of Public Enemy, “the Black Panthers of rap”. And I’m asking Chuck if this monstrous, brutal noise of theirs actually belongs to the category of black music any more, or does it (as I believe) represent a complete break from black pop tradition?

Chuck doesn’t quite agree: “Hip hop is black because it uses elements of soul and R&B – the tension, the friction – that have been lost. Most music made by black people today is caught up in synthesized over-production, it’s trying to cross over, and it sounds grey.”

As in bleached out, whitified, Burchill’s beigebeat?

“No, just grey, period. Rap music has more soul than any of this so-called soul.”

Hmm, can’t see it myself, can’t really relate hip hop’s frigid, heartless solipsism to soul’s limpid, outreaching warmth. I reckon...
Chuck D’s belief in a continuity between R&B and hip hop is a kind of moral conviction (Chuck sets great store in blacks having a consciousness of their history). I can’t see any precedents in black pop for the harsh drone-squall of “Terminator X Speaks With His Hands”, for the piercing blare of unidentifiable sound on the extraordinary “Rebel Without A Pause”, nor for the way these noises are repeated mechanically, inexpressively, without inflection, wholly alienated from the human touch, in an endless cycle of attrition.

Chuck, where soul and funk are about getting loose and grooving, your kind of hardcore hip hop is wound up, clenched; it’s hardly a release, more like further harassment.

“What we like to do is take elements from soul that make you feel good and draw you in, and put those sounds and beats next to noises that are going to push you away. So the listener is kind of coming and going, walking a line, thinking, ‘Oh lord, turn that off’, and at the same time not wanting to turn it off.”

This is the opposite of fusion: a kind of suspended-animation fission, where inconsistent sounds are frozen in mutual contradiction, within the same soundspace.

“It’s a conscious process. Records like ‘Public Enemy Number One’ take a helluva long time to mix, ‘cos it’s very easy to turn people off, but not so easy to get a balance between turning people on and harassing them.”

What happens technically?

“The sampled sounds come from anywhere. Take ‘Rebel Without A Pause’. A lot of people said that noise came from a James Brown grunt, but what they didn’t realise was that it was a blend of the grunt and a Miles Davis trumpet, which produced a sound that wavered. And then we took that tone and stretched it. The drone on ‘Terminator X Speaks’ and ‘MPE’ is a backwards fire truck!”

Amazingly, “Rebel”, the B-side from the last single that has now become a club sensation and a highly sought-after rarity, isn’t going to be given another push, although it is appearing on the next album. Instead, there’s another single off the Yo! Bum Rush The Show album: “Sophisticated” (the “Bitch” of the original title and “all the curses” have been excised to court radio) backed by a new track, “Bring The Noise”, which is appearing on the soundtrack of the movie of Less Than Zero.

“It’s a pumpin’ track, 109 beats per minute, which is fast for hip hop. It’s a gamble.”

Death to disco

CHUCK ADHERES to the Def Jam party line: that rap is black rock’n’roll, that it’s based around rock’n’roll’s 4/4 beat rather than disco’s pulse beat, that its renegade, vandalistic attitude is the antithesis of disco’s aspirations to showbiz acceptance.
"My thing is I don't like house music. I first heard it as a DJ, when I was doing radio shows, and I said then that I thought the beats lacked soul, they didn't move you. Certainly you could move to it, by choice, but those beats don't move you like a 4/4 beat does. You can use that disco pulse beat, but you have to have something that's funky in there, a bassline, otherwise you just got all these drum machines playing like a load of metronomes; I think it's easy to make those kinds of records.

"I like that MARRS record 'cos it mixes up house with hip hop, but Chicago house, like go-go, is [my man!] overrated, and you can tell because neither house nor go-go has sparked in other areas. Whereas Chicago house, like go-go, is the most artificial shit I ever heard. It's not so much the music as the attitude that goes along with it — 'Don't speak loud, dance to the music.' It's BULLSHIT!"

Trad-rock objections to disco, these, but the point is that this magical dissolution of origins, of class, race and sexual differences, is what the dancefloor is all about. House constructs its ideal consumer as a biracial, anti-black, anti-culture, anti-feel, the most artificial shit I ever heard. It's completely expressionless. And, for a lot of blacks, it's just something, you express it through your music; if you like something, you dancefloor is all about. House constructs its ideal consumer as a biracial, anti-black, anti-culture, anti-feel, the most artificial shit I ever heard. It's completely expressionless. And, for a lot of blacks, it's just something, you express it through your music; if you like something, you...

"Rebel with a cause"

THEY TRY, OH but they do try. Whenever left-inclined subcultural theorists encounter a black pop culture, they always follow the same syllogistic reasoning. Blacks are an oppressed class. Such-and-such is a music of black origin. Therefore, such-and-such a music must be animated, at however sublimated and submerged a level, by currents of resistance to the-way-things-are. Often, the desperation to locate such micro-resistance to uncover a subtext of cultural dissidence results in bizarre interpretations. So the venerable Dr Paul Gilroy can argue in City Limits that Eric B and Rakim's "Paid In Full" is a "demystification of their means of production". Demystification, eh? The guys are on the make, they want in, they're counting their money, and if they're not as cynical as Schooly D (who won't put out unless he's paid in full, IN ADVANCE), it's still hardly worth celebrating. So much for all the cant about hip hop serving a community. The trouble with hip hop is that, no matter how you juggle the subcultural arithmetic, the end product is not going to be a clearly defined "contribution to the struggle". The politics of hip hop occupy a different space altogether. Just take Public Enemy.

Chuck D's political orientation derives from the inspiration of the Black Panthers, the '60s black activists. "It's something I'm still learning about, so I don't know much about how I can tell you. Right now, we've been meeting with some former Panthers from the Oakland area, California, where the Black Panthers first started. There were a lot of racial problems in that area, and what the Panthers did was to structure a more rigorous force that represented order and strength to the community. They started off peacefully, but as their demands got rejected, they grew more militant. We're meeting up with ex-Panthers and we're trying to spark off a revival.

"We're meeting with ex-Panthers, trying to spark a revival"

"Louis Farrakhan [a Black Muslim leader from Chicago — and crony of Jesse Jackson — whose anti-Semitic opinions severely embarrassed the latter during the last campaign for the presidency] is interested in our programme to revitalise and re-educate black youth. We want to build self-respect and a sense of community, because blacks are in a sorry state."

"What caused this demoralisation and debility?"

"There was complacency in the '70s, after the civil rights victories of the '60s. Plus some of our leaders were killed off, others sold out or fled. There was propaganda by the state to make it seem like things had changed, a policy of tokenism elevating a few blacks to positions of public prominence, on TV shows and stuff, while the rest was held down. Blacks couldn't understand how they'd suddenly got these advantages, and so they forgot, they got lazy, they failed to teach their young what they had been taught in the '60s about our history and culture, about how tight we should be. And so there was a loss of identity — we began to think we were accepted as Americans, when in fact we still face a double standard every minute of our lives."

"Has there been no improvement in attitudes and opportunities whatsoever? I thought the whole Def Jam stable, for instance, came from a middle-class, suburban background…"

"People go on about this, about us having cars when we were kids, but I know, a black suburban neighbourhood is still a black neighbourhood. "Black America is suburban — places like the New York ghetto aren't the norm. What we need to is build a sense of community and a sense of business. We're in a capitalist society, we can't overthrow this government, so we must learn to use the system."

"So your vision of how to change things isn't socialistic or collectivist…"

"Only among ourselves, black people. I have… socialistic beliefs, but I also have an awareness of what's real and feasible. Obviously, for America to survive it'll have to become socialistic, ultimately, 'cos the system's crumbling now. But in the meantime we have to stand on our feet, we can't wait. We have to raise ourselves, because nobody else will do it for us."

"The meantime is a mean time. Compare '70s 'political' soul with Public Enemy. With What's Goin' On, 'Love Train', 'Why Can't We Live Together?', 'We Gotta Have Peace', as well as pristine woe, you also got a glimpse in the angelic purity of the harmonies and arrangements, of a utopian vision of how things should be — a rainbow coalition of love and equality. Compare the plaintiveness of "Backstabbers" with the vengeful "You're Gonna Get Yours'. With Public Enemy there's no vision of the perfect world that is the goal of struggle, there is only a faithful sonic analogue for the disharmonious, fraught social environment and a fetishisation of the state of being prepared, masked and armoured, to deal with it. Public Enemy are hooked on the glamour of the means of militancy and mobilisation, barely aware of the vague halcyon end."

"Would he even like it if there was integration?"

"Once again, we're talking fantasy, man! Of course I'd like it if everybody white married somebody black and then the next generations were all black. Then there'd be no double standard, except the kind of sick, fucked-up thing black people have among themselves that makes them judge between different shades of darkness."

"But this integration is never gonna happen. So people should stick to their own. Without a strong sense of black consciousness, there's no cohesion, and no survival. The Chinese, the Jews, they stick together, deal with each other, basically."

"Do you think maybe rap reflects that lack of community, what with all the rivalry between MCs and between posses, all against all?"

"Yeah — but inside each and every rapper there's something that's saying, 'I'm yelling out loud for that shit that ain't right.' Now he don't know what, 'cos he's uneducated. A rapper speaks out loud, and really he's asking for help. 'Cos, for the last 15 years, no information has been given to him about the system and so he don't understand why he acts the way he acts."

"We're back with subcultural theory again — daily life as rife with acts of micro-resistance, pre-conscious skirmishes with bourgeois »
ideological hegemony, unarticulated rage – if only it could be channelled into revolution! (The Black Panthers tried to do just that, taking the fact of young black male street criminality and trying to radicalise it.)

Or there’s the situationist dream that all you needed to initiate total revolution was a federation of teenage delinquent gangs – the conclusion of “Too Much Posse”?

Soul on ice

Throughout popular culture, being black is being installed as a signifier of being more human. From the histrionics of George Michael and Mick Hucknall to the Kronenbourg ads (a young, sexually indeterminate City Limits—reading man, who plays saxophone, is tutored in reaching into the depths of his soul by a wizened black master of the instrument – the slogan: “A Different Kind Of Strength”), blackness is being elaborated as a model of oneness with your body, of being in touch with your emotions, of a new, more acceptable kind of masculinity. The cluster of ideas here have quite a genealogy – the depth that comes with a history of suffering; the idea of the black as warmer, looser, less hung up than the white; the offensive notion of “natcheral riddim”.

While white pop bases itself entirely around the form and the ethos of black passion, what’s fascinating is that black pop has gone in the opposite direction, becoming colder, more inhuman – in the case of hip hop, more wound up, manacled; in the case of house, dispassionate, plastic.

Hip hop is (to abuse Eldridge Cleaver’s fine phrase) – soul on ice – a survivalist retreat from engagement with the outside world or other people, back to the frozen shell of a minimal self. There’s a new kind of relation to the body, not the slow suffusion of “getting in touch”, but more domineering a regime, a priming of the machine in readiness for self-defence or massive retaliation.

This is the DIS TOPIA. An eternal now forever teetering on the brink of extinction, a world without narrative (that’s why “Rebel Without A Pause” is like a locked groove); the hip hop ego traverses a treacherous soundscape, constantly faces sonic ambush or mined terrain, always over can never rest.

Klaus Theweleit, in his book Male Fantasies, takes the Freikorps – First World War veterans who formed into right-wing militia in the postwar years in order to suppress proletarian uprisings, and who later became a substantial component of the Nazi streetfighting paramilitaries – and examines their correspondence, diaries, poetry and favoured literature in order to psychoanalyse their attitudes to women and femininity. He notes a startling consistency in the imagery used – masculinity, both inside and outside themselves.

The relevance of this to hip hop should be fairly obvious. If soul singers like Al Green and Prince meld sexual divisions into a world of fluid, androgenic bliss, then hip hop freezes sexual divisions, hard. In more domineering a regime, a priming of the machine in readiness for self-defence or massive retaliation.

We need leaders. We’re the only people who can raise ourselves. I don’t think anything will be achieved in my lifetime, but a start can be made and maybe in the next century we will be so strong and independent that only overt aggression will threaten us, a wave of lynching. Right now they don’t need to destroy us, ‘cos we’re doing it to ourselves.

Finally I get to talk to Griff, leader of Security Of The First World, Public Enemy’s security force and… well, it turns out to be rather more complex and peculiar than I’d imagined.

“We wear paramilitary uniform, because everybody wears uniform today – Gaddafi,
Khomeini. What else do we do? We mingle with the crowd, we talk, we enlist. We’ve met up with Farrakhan’s son. Everybody who joins gets involved in physical training. Martial arts."

So as to acquire a sense of one’s own power?

“Because once you know yourself mentally and physically, you’re better able to deal.”

One of the things that struck me this trip was the way Americans use the word “to deal” intransitively – a sure indicator of the survivalist mindset of the whole nation.

“We do drill, it’s called the Fruit Of Islam. It brings about harmonious totality among ourselves. Sixty guys all in one step.”


It all sounds quite logical and needed, the way they tell it. And it’s all very, very dodgy indeed.

If there’s one thing more scary than a survivalist, it’s a whole bunch of survivalists organised into a regiment. It must be that when a group of young men band together in a tight unit around a channelled mindset, a particular structure develops, and it’s pretty much the same structure, or “desiring machine”, that’s behind communist youth groups, the Boy Scouts, the Freikorps, any army anywhere in the world, and fascists.

Fortunately, Public Enemy and Security Of The First World are sufficiently powerless (“52 and growing”) to remain fascinating to us pop swots, rather than disturbing.

“A lot of the critics pick up on the violence element, but they don’t understand it’s an analogy. It’s like ‘my Uzi weighs a ton’. No gun weighs that much, it’s a metaphor, a strong image, ‘cos you got to grab people, wake them up. It’s like if I hit you over the head with this stapler, you’d give me 100 per cent attention, for sure, maybe even 150 per cent! So what I’m doing is cracking heads, but verbally, and with NOISE.”

Let’s hope it stays that way. Simon Reynolds
1987

ALBUMS

The Wedding Present

George Best

RECEPTION

Fondue sets... his ‘n’ hers pillow cases... reproduction cake stands... To the infallible rule that all Wedding Presents are both pitifully predictable and totally useless, our quartet of home-spun heroes are the only known exception. George Best triumphantly confirms that unique standing, being both a surprise and a thing of beauty.

Two days after the first time I ever saw The Wedding Present my jaw was still dragging and bumping along on the pavement behind me. The fact that they played, rather than thrashed, at that finger-shredding velocity left me startled. That George Best comes without a moment’s respite from the sonic gale means I’m startled still. And yet, once you’re used to the shock, and can hear past the surface clamour, you find both the surprise and the beauty...

The fact is, you see, that George Best uncovers what was somehow hidden in the breakneck emotional blitzkrieg of the WP’s singles, namely that David Gedge is as good a lyricist as Britpop currently possesses. Here he’s etched a dozen little love-scpes of sometimes quite breathtaking realism, a world fuelled by desire, lust, paranoia, romance and bitterness, yet distinctly more Dalston than Dallas, more Darlington than Dynasty. These are songs about fleeting eye contacts, snatched and forever treasured, about drunken kisses and casual betrayals, about girls who walk home a different way each night to avoid the airhead wolf-whistles. Real situations, real feelings, real people, real love.

And real does not translate into ordinary, because Gedge (like Costello, Morrissey, Bragg and Ray Davies, at their respective best) uses language – in his case, conversational and undecorated - to transform the personal and the mundane into the universal and the deeply affecting. Take, for example, the shrugging, spiteful resignation of “Don’t give me that! / Cos you were seen / Everyone thinks he looks daft/ But you can have your dream” (“Everyone Thinks He Looks Daft”); or the sickening sadness of “Slowly your beauty is eaten away/By the scent of someone else in the blankets where we lay” (“All This And More”); or the desperate chirpiness of “Don’t Be So Hard”, where the endlessly repeated line “you’re not like anyone I’ve ever met” is eventually poisoned by the whispered outro “at least not yet...” It’s as simple as this; for every face of the hoary old love thang, Dave Gedge has a new, and revealing, coat of paint.

In the present pop climate, The Wedding Present have been almost insanely brave. By refusing to make their music any more listener-friendly, or their lyrics any more sugary sweet, they hurl themselves wilfully into the face of accepted pop wisdom and maybe sacrifice the chance of Thursday nights out with Mel, Kim, Pepsi, Shirley and all the rest. But, that fleshy prospect notwithstanding, I reckon their courage has been utterly vindicated; Dave Gedge stands exposed as a prototype genius-next-door, while George Best is an unmitigated delight, the best British debut of the year, the most remarkable contribution to humanity ever achieved by supporters of Leeds United.

Danny Kelly, NME Oct 10

Pixies

Come On Pilgrim 4AD

REVIEW

The debut, mini-LP by Boston’s Pixies collapses into the slipstream of Throwing Muses, whom they are to support on their forthcoming British and European tour. Like the Muses, they ramble excitedly through post-punk textures - on the hammer-swinging “Caribou”, imagine a gin-soaked Siouxsie circa “Melt”, on “The Holiday Song”, a stricken and emaciated Robert Smith stripped of his assets. The Pixies are audaciously, vitally loose, a snook at pop’s current will to airtight efficiency, integration, the filling of every space.

By falling apart, disintegrating, cracking up, the Pixies conspire to create space – guitars and hollers relate only adjacently, give each other a wide berth. The wind blows clean through the amateurish Pixies. The structural untidiness, the holes rather than the “whole” of, say, “Nirvood’s Son” suggest something larger, more porous than The Song.

Black Francis’ vocals are curious rather than truly possessed, an eccentric mélange of roadside observations, sudden impulses, cracked anecdotes and failed high notes. It’s a voice, now humorously, now urgently, on the edge of its tether, all tongue and tangle, flailing towards obscure ends, pulling along semi-collapsed song structures by the bit, then tripping in excitement.

Having said all that, Come On Pilgrim isn’t quite the tumble I’d anticipated - Pixies have further to depart yet. Their almost mocking predilection for lumps of post-punk noise still hampers them a little. Once they’ve got their last leg out of that horrible husk, they’ll be sporting in the new guitar air with the rest of them. David Stubbs, MM Oct 10

Gaye Bykers On Acid

Drill Your Own Hole VIRGIN

You know, when all the cows have come home to roost and all that, I feel certain that Gaye Bykers aren’t completely hopeless. All the rust and junk is in there. The guitars are there, eyes washed in pleasant enough shades of green. So, what goes wrong? Why ought they to change their name, with its imitations of multiple deviancy, to Thick Bykers On Beer? Maybe it comes down to attitude - singer Mary’s got too much of it. All through this album I feel the cold waft of a fist waving vaguely about my face. Or maybe they’re felled...
by the slightest leverage of self-consciousness. I suspect – and this goes for the likes of Zodiac Mindwarp and Pop Will Eat Itself as well – that if the Bykers had been born in America they could have been the Butthole Surfers, completely moronic, abstractedly adhesive, their brains leaking and their bloated bodies oozing. As it is, the Bykers are too fatally tamer and perhaps more durable (suspect but not condemnatory adjective) that their live thrash-outs. However, I’m told they’re much too unreasonably reasonable, the richest fabrication of this last exit-before-the-Christmas-supersavers week... MM Nov 21

The music? The Bykers’ problem is that they’re never up in the air, never bowl-deep. There’s gruff motormouth motoric Mary up there with her crotch splayed on the handlebars, with the rest of the band riding pillon. On “World War 7 Blues” they rise, horribly cocky, to something like Judas Priest with a small, blunt instrument instead of a dick. On “Drive In Salvation” they descend correctively into a swamp-like seizure. Every track begins with a slow, ominous emergence, like a junk creature from a swamp, a slow, ominous emergence, like a junk creature from a swamp, a little rusty, a little dirtier. Review copies of Drill Your Own Hole come without a hole in the middle. A mere prod of my pen, however, was enough to puncture one. David Stubbs, MM Nov 7

**SINGLES**

**The Cure**

**Just Like Heaven**

FICTION

I’m at a loss as how to greet and chronicle this important event, knowing full well that one facetious crack out of line could see my assistant editor taking a sudden interest in the Edgar Broughton Band and dispatching me with strange zeal to review their gig at the Crewe Corn Exchange on Saturday night. What can I say? At least it doesn’t sound like Dexys Midnight Runners like the one before last did. It’s a colourful, fluffy, fluttery, fussy thing, a mere transcription of the Down With Skool! graphic on the sleeve. Unimpeachable, really, but turns my face green, as if having consumed too many truffles. MM Oct 10

**My Bloody Valentine**

**Strawberry Wine**

LAZY

Right, Cyclops is already bored with faster and faster. His new criterion for what makes great pop is: does it make time stand still in a haze of anticipation and intangible nostalgic lust? My Bloody Valentine probably don’t know what the hell that means, but there is one bit – after the first chorus on their wispy, willowy blackcurrant-rock song – where they swallow mercury and just for a second, just scuppered his chances of outing Rick Astley for The Big One That Matters So Very Much Honestly All Of Us Here At Radio 1 Lose Sleep About It And Sometimes Even Can’t Manage Sex With Our Wives – the (fanfare) Christmas Number 1! MM Nov 21

**Paul McCartney**

**Once Upon a Long Ago**

**PARLOPHONE**

**Roger Waters**

**The Tide Is Turning**

(After Live Aid) EMI

This year’s McCartney Christmas No 2 catches me off guard, having been severely weakened and embarrassed by the ecstasy half the best-of job is doing me in with. “Jet”! “My Love”: Magical and black lamblike, I swear. Odd, isn’t it? The other half is disgraceful, and this particular nursery rhyme stands proudly with one hoof in each puddle, which is not good for its groin. Roger Waters is a new English comedian. “The thought of my little ones burning” is his best alternative carker here. Another good bit is where he says “crap” and it’s, like, really rude, so that’s yodelling and warbling wildly. He’s never been the same since “Bohemian Rhapsody”. MM Oct 31

**The Fall**

**Hit The North**

**BEGGARS BANQUET**

I’ve hated everything they’ve ever done, but this is great – sounds like Van Der Graf Generator. They usually whinge and moan a lot because they come from up north, but we won’t get into that. This is really good – it’s got a nice tune and a party mood, luvvie. It sounds like The Glitter Band, too, which is great because, in the past, Mark Smith has claimed his lyrics are really important because he’s a northerner, but you don’t hear what he’s on about on here. MM Oct 24

**Freddy Mercury**

**& Montserrat Caballé**

**Barcelona**

**POLYDOR**

In the most curious matching of talents known to man, Freddy settles back in the armchair and whinges a bit while the weighty Montserrat leaps around...
“Why don’t we put out a real Christmas single?”

THE POGUES celebrate the festive season with a new single, “Fairytale Of New York”, and play a date with special guest JOE STRUMMER. “As a human being, I’ve been grossly overrated,” confesses Shane MacGowan. “But I think I’ve been underrated as a songwriter.”
"You were handsome/You were pretty..."
"Fairytale Of New York" duetters Kirsty MacColl and Shane MacGowan in 1987
I t was 2.30pm and it was too early, much too early for The Pogues to be up and about. Shane MacGowan lay stretched out along the seating, fast asleep, in the Camden Electric Ballroom, while Andrew Ranken, Darryl Hunt and Philip Chevron sat lethargically around a table in a nearby pub, staring into their glasses of orange and bitter lemon. Spider Stacy just about made it in for last orders and a shot of fire-water, cracking to life with a cheerfulness that was a relief but also an intrusion into his pocket of awful silence.

Back in the Ballroom, someone was waking Shane. The singer opened bleary eyes, reached for the bottle of port and emptied it.

“There’s a place round here where you can drink all day,” he muttered several times, finally ambulating out of the building and into a French restaurant a few doors along. He ordered one drink (a bottle of wine) and, as an afterthought, a couple of starters: tomatoes with basil and a bowl of snails, both requested en français, an endearingly individual français.

We spent a lazy, friendly afternoon in here, the singer and myself, although its revivifying qualities did not extend to Shane, who seemed as groggy, as uncoordinated, going out as he had coming in.

Several hours and a soundcheck later, we were back in the restaurant, only this time the company had expanded. On my left, Mr Joe Strummer, about to make his first live appearance in more than three years as special guest of The Pogues. On my right, the ubiquitous Spider, banjo player Jem Finer and Shane MacGowan, who had undergone a remarkable transformation. Sobered up and sharpened up, he appeared to be on edge, tapping an irritable finger on the table top and snapping at various well-meaning enquiries, the earlier good humour giving way to a certain suspiciousness now that we’d arrived at the official conversation.

There was, however, no jiggery-Poguery afoot on my part, no inclination to be critical, for instance, of the drinking aspects of the band. Far be it... Yet to broach the subject was to ask for a prickly response from MacGowan, who was clearly anticipating the sort of finger-waggling reprimands that the press, from time to time, have felt obliged to deliver.

The Pogues, in the past, have been accused of irresponsibility in encouraging young fans to drink more than the doctor would’ve ordered. As an additional consequence of their associations with the demon alcohol, the group have been taken less seriously, in certain quarters, than they deserve. In view of these things, there would seem to be a case for a dry run, or at least a watering down, of their own approach.

“Ten years or a bit longer ago, when I used to go and see gigs – The Faces, Mott The Hoople, Lou Reed – everybody would go in the pub, get a bit drunk and then go to the gig,” retorted Shane hotly, the tapping on the table getting a bit drunk and then go to the gig,” retorted Shane, who seemed as groggy, as uncoordinated, going out as he had coming in.

As a songwriter, Shane, in collaboration with Jem, has excelled himself with The Pogues’ new single, a Christmas song called “Fairytale Of New York”.

Described somewhat misleadingly by MacGowan as “a bit like ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’”, it moves through two separate moods, the first slow and lyrical, Shane’s rasp catching not only in his own throat but ours too, and the second sprightly, brilliantly tuneful, a bright duet between Shane and Kirsty McColl. The vocal interplay simply sparkles as the story unfolds, through characterisation, of an elderly couple, the life they have and the life they once imagined they’d have.

“We thought, ‘Why don’t we put out a real Christmas single that isn’t a lot of tosh,'” explained Shane. “And then it was a challenge to write a duet. It’s set in New York because the idea that I had seemed like a New York sort of tune, an Irish-American Broadway thing, with an American music-hall feel.

“Like a lyricist, particularly, Shane’s a lot more sensitive, imaginative and evocative than some people give him credit for, although he himself is reluctant to agree with me there.

“I don’t think I’ve been underestimated as a lyricist – well, perhaps I have by the press, but not by the audience. They know all the bloody words, a lot of them anyway. As a human being, I’ve been grossly overrated. But I think I’ve been underrated as a songwriter.”

“I haven’t got anything in common with the actual part I’m singing”...
The Pogues are within the scene, but draw any divisions Cl

�umple-up upstart,” chipped in Spider. “We did Straight To Hell in 

mushrooms. Either that or he’d had a very heavy prayer session. But ‘Bono, I just wanted to know what the gig was like.’ I think he was on the city. They have a great spirit, they have great hearts, great souls.” I said, ‘Bono, I just wanted to know what the gig was like.’ I think he was on the city. They have a great spirit, they have great hearts, great souls.” I said, ‘Bono, I just wanted to know what the gig was like.’ I think he was on the city. They have a great spirit, they have great hearts, great souls.” I said, ‘Bono, I just wanted to know what the gig was like.’ I think he was on the city. They have a great spirit, they have great hearts, great souls.” I said, ‘Bono, I just wanted to know what the gig was like.’ I think he was on the city. They have a great spirit, they have great hearts, great souls.” I said, ‘Bono, I just wanted to know what the gig was like.’ I think he was on the city. 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1987

“T’ve been questioned a lot, I’ve been strip-searched”

Born one Christmas Day in Kent, where his parents were on holiday, he moved back to Ireland with the family, where he remained, for six formative years, in Dublin and Tipperary. Still his affinity, his passion for Ireland is all-consuming, as vital to his thinking, to his preoccupations, as it is to his music. He keeps a close eye on all of the local bands on his half-dozen visits a year, citing The Real Wild West, Hothouse Flowers and Fleadh Cowboys (“the only really great country band that Ireland has ever produced”) as the best of the current crop. He similarly keeps tabs on the social and political issues of the day, rages at the injustices of the existing situation.

Nowhere is that anger more inflamed, more directly articulated, than on “Birmingham Six”, a forthcoming album track which explores the predicament of the Irishmen in court at the moment, protesting their innocence of the bombing charge for which they were convicted 10 years ago, now that fresh evidence in their favour has emerged.

“T’ve been strip-searched.”

Yet, proudly said by the band to contain “no fillers”, it was recorded virtually live with Steve Lillywhite at the controls, and for all of its inherent Poguishness, its inescapable Irishness, it finds the group virtually live with Steve Lillywhite at the controls, and for all of its inherent Poguishness, its inescapable Irishness, it finds the group

“I’ve been questioned a lot, I’ve been strip-searched. I’ve had to take my trousers down.”

Given the band’s outspoken interest in the affairs of Ireland, it didn’t seem out of place to ask for a view on the Enniskillen bombing. Unfortunately, this sent Shane off into another of his huffs, the finger tapping discordantly as he demanded to know the reason for the question.

“The Enniskillen bombing was a stupid thing to do, a revolting thing to do,” he finally ventured. “I don’t want to say anything personally...”

“It was horrible and it was self-defeating,” added Jem.

“I don’t believe in killing Irish people anyway,” said Shane. “I don’t believe in killing anybody, but some people are legitimate targets.”

“If you see yourself as fighting a war,” said Jem hastily.

“Arded people are legitimate targets,” Shane concluded. “If you’re carrying a gun, if you’re prepared to shoot somebody, you’ve got to be prepared to die yourself.”

JUDGING BY THE few tracks I’ve heard, the new album, If I Should Fall From Grace With God, due out in the new year, should prove to be The Pogues’ most complete, convincing and commercial work yet. Proudly said by the band to contain “no fillers”, it was recorded virtually live with Steve Lillywhite at the controls, and for all of its inherent Poguishness, its inescapable Irishness, it finds the group exploring all sorts of diverse possibilities in sound and style, mood and word, the lyrical ferocity of a “Birmingham Six” counterbalanced by bursts of humour and flights of fancy.

“Turkish Song Of The Damned” was named after an amusing misunderstanding with a German fan who’d been trying to ask The Pogues if they’d heard “The Turkey Song” by The Damned. Musically, this one’s an intrigue, an odd but effective blend of Greek, Turkish and Irish influences which ends in an accelerating whirl, “like Zorba The Greek”. Lyrically, it’s a fantasy.

“It’s an 18-century ghost story,” said Shane.

“There’s this guy who’s been on a shipwreck but managed to get away with all the money, lots of money. For years, he’s been dancing, drinking, screwing and going out on the beach, and every time he hears this wailing and the dervishing, he’s just waiting for his shipmates to come back and get him. Then the ship comes back up and his best mate comes back and there’s a knock on his door... It’s about guilt.”

THE ELECTRIC BALLROOM was packed to suffocation point, the humidity count reaching almost unbearable levels as the throngs danced and sang and accorded The Pogues one of the wildest receptions I’ve ever seen, a reception which became even more hysterical with the arrival on stage of Joe Strummer, leading the band through encores of “London Calling” and “I Fought The Law” and later declaring the whole night “wonderful.”

The Pogues, for their part, were wonderful enough on their own to come back after Strummer, to build on the existing fever with an affectionate gallop through “Maggie May”, triggering a massive exhilaration that remained in the building, fizzing through the atmosphere, long after the crowds had gone home.

I was reminded of something that Shane had said earlier: “All I want is for people to like the music, to like the tunes and to have a good night out every now and again.” I think we had one at Camden... Carol Clerk
RIP, The Smiths
To all suicidal Smiths apostles. So, goodbye Smiths.... but remember all you charming people who have cherished and followed the handsome four for so long— when Morrissey closes a door he opens a window. And so, Stephen will embark on a scintillating new career which will without doubt touch our innermost emotions, awaken our latent sentiments as all those last Smiths masterpieces did over the years. His sensitivity (and coy sensuality) haven’t changed with his circumstances. The deep beauty of Morrissey’s words will follow the handsome four for all time. Though The Smiths have separated, the perfect unit careers also. Though The Smiths
have done if he was the father of Madonna dates had been doing when they heard the Smiths? What were The Smiths would have done if he was the father of Madonna? Winter, 1972 – 82. Pop journalism RIP. Finished. Enter Reynolds, Roberts, Stubbs, Oldfield. “A drop of the thug and a wanker. Please don’t give this jerk any more coverage as he is a student thug and a wanker. MORRIS MINOR (pseudonym), Birmingham (NME Aug 29)
The fans salute the critics
In the big bang beginning there was Nick Curly, with McDonald, Tyler, maybe Bell later on. Then, surely, Burchill, Parsons, Baker. “The fits and the fury.” Best came last. Money, Penman, Bohn, Kopf, Hoskyns, Godhead! Soon it was over. Lights out. 1972 – 82. Pop journalism RIP. Finished. Enter Reynolds, Roberts, Stubbs, Oldfield. “A drop of the hard(est) stuff”, “love (ly) wor(l)d (apart, the language, and so, at longlast, come again? Return to the things that count the most: sex, lust, jokes, fucking, fighting, dancing, flirty flighty obsessions, godlike genius, Prince, Madonna, New Order, Donna Summer, Barry White, the pleasure principle, pop music as God intended it. Never po-faced (see Gabriel in this week’s NME), often pretentious (keep that up!), No Bragg, no pubs, out of the Odeons and into the heavens— as serious as it gets, as co(s)mic as (a) fuck, taken extremely at all times and in all ways, always the widest vision, a sense of history/ humour/wonder. “As far as I’m concerned... this is as political and liberating as entertainment can get” (King Tuts). Rock’n’roll, phew, analyse it to fuck, Simon, yes! Celebrate it to death, Jonh – of course!
PAUL LESTER, Sheffield (MM/Dec 12)

Readers’ letters

MM/NME JUL-DEC The Smiths’ afterlife, Eldritch’s ego, Albini’s hotness and more.

RIP, The Smiths
To all suicidal Smiths apostles. So, goodbye Smiths.... but remember all you charming people who have cherished and followed the handsome four for so long— when Morrissey closes a door he opens a window. And so, Stephen will embark on a scintillating new career which will without doubt touch our innermost emotions, awaken our latent sentiments as all those last Smiths masterpieces did over the years. His sensitivity (and coy sensuality) haven’t changed with his circumstances. The deep beauty of Morrissey’s words will follow the handsome four for all time. Though The Smiths have separated, the perfect unit careers also. Though The Smiths...
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The greatest stories from the pages of NME and Melody Maker revisited in a monthly trip through music’s golden years.
ORDER ONLINE AT WWW.UNCUT.CO.UK/STORE
S O THAT WAS 1987... Hope your thighs looked thin when photographed.

But that’s far from it from our reporters on the beat. The staffers of NME and Melody Maker enjoyed unrivalled access to the biggest stars of the time, and cultivated a feel for the rhythms of a diversifying scene; as the times changed, so did they. While in pursuit of the truth, they unearthed stories that have come to assume mythical status.

That’s very much the territory of this monthly magazine. Each month, The History Of Rock will be bringing you verbatim reports from the pivotal events in pop culture, one year a month, one year at a time.

Next up, 1988.

NICK CAVE
THE BAD SEED contemplates the seriousness of his position in the context of the pop form. “I don’t think ‘the form’ has died, or anything. I think it’s just had its catharsis of creativity for this 15 years or so.”

LEONARD COHEN
THE CANADIAN POET/SONGWRITER returns, to a collective swoon. People like his new album, I’m Your Man, though he’s unsure how exactly to take this.

“When one lives in a state of acute self-criticism, it’s always a surprise when someone likes something you do.”

What causes that self-criticism?

“The evidence accumulates.”

ROBERT PLANT
THE FORMER LED ZEP singer addresses the influence of his former band. Not least on himself.

“My solo career has meandered self-consciously between total amnesia and rejection of anything I might’ve been doing before 1982,” he says, “and an inexplicable desire to write songs with no choruses.”

PLUS...
JAMES BROWN!
RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS!
MORRISSEY!
Relive the year...

U2 SPREAD THE WORD ABOUT THE JOSHUA TREE

THE SMITHS WENT THEIR SEPARATE WAYS

GUNS N’ ROSES LIVED UP TO THEIR BAD REPUTATION

…and THE CURE, TOM WAITS, GEORGE MICHAEL, REM, THE FALL, BJÖRK and many more shared everything with NME and MELODY MAKER

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