Welcome to 1976

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

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

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

This is the world of The History Of Rock, a monthly magazine which follows each turn of the rock revolution. Whether in sleazy dive or huge arena, passionate and increasingly stylish contemporary reporters were there to chronicle events. This publication reaps the benefits of their understanding for the reader decades later, one year at a time.

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

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

“This bloke comes up to me and he says…”

It’s not a year for the easily offended.
Contents

6 News

12 David Bowie
The reclusive artist emerges to talk music, movies and motivation.

18 ABBA
The Eurovision winners attempt to win over a sceptical English audience. Does it matter, really, when they have fans everywhere else?

22 Led Zeppelin
Robert Plant’s recent car accident cast a pall over the sessions for the latest Zep album. Still, as Jimmy Page reports, being on the ropes brought out their best.

26 Ronnie Lane
With a Small Faces reunion on the cards, Ronnie Lane continues on his own utterly mercurial path. Musician or farmer? He can’t decide...

30 Wings
A massive offer to reform The Beatles can’t deter Paul McCartney from his new band’s projects. This time: Linda cooks on record!

35 Letters
Outrage at Robert Plant’s tax exile. And just how rockified has reggae become?

36 News
Bowie arrested! The Beach Boys return. RIP Phil Ochs. A meeting with Tom Waits, a “legend in his own mind”.

42 Neil Young
A dinner with the songwriter prior to his London performance. “I live on nerves,” he confides over melon, steak and a chocolate pudding.

46 Thin Lizzy
Phil Lynott and band continue to cement their reputation with the chart success of “Jailbreak”.

50 Rolling Stones
A hallucinatory backstage meeting with the band. A great show, a disagreement over an LP review, and the rest is a blur...

58 KISS
Alice Cooper? Forget about it! The semi-musical shock rockers stake a claim to the post-glam throne.

62 David Bowie
At Bowie’s Wembley shows, LM canvases some striking Bowie lookalikes about their devotion to the star. Occasionally unnerving stuff.

66 Albums

68 Bob Marley
At home with the Jamaican reggae sensation, as he prepares to visit the UK and deliver a new album, Rastaman Vibration.

74 Chris Blackwell
As MM’s Kingston tour continues, the Island Records founder explains his relationship with Marley, and the rise of reggae.

78 News
A meeting with Derek & Clive. Why Hammersmith Odeon is banning reggae. Fairport are dropped by Island Records.

82 Peter Frampton
The former Herd man rejoices in the success of his live double album, Frampton Comes Alive!.

86 AC/DC
During the band’s London residency, Angus Young reveals the revolting truth of the “human kangaroo”.

90 Lynryd Skynyrd
Ronnie Van Zant explains that everything you’ve read about his band is true—and that’s why they get the kind of fans they do.

94 Live
Buzzcocks, The Clash and the Sex Pistols present arms at the Islington Screen On The Green.
96 Eddie & The Hot Rods
Punks or not, the post-Feelgoods R&B band’s residency at the Marquee is enlivening the live music scene. “It’s what the kids want,” they explain.

102 Albums
New LPs from the Bay City Rollers and Burning Spear. Singles are from Hot Chocolate, Bob Marley, ABBA and Queen.

106 Queen
The band celebrate their successes with an earnest chat and an enormous, free Hyde Park gig.

112 News
The Sex Pistols on Today: The perils of organising a punk tour. Tony Parsons assesses what “punk” really means.

118 Patti Smith
Have some heroin, Claude…” On tour in France with the very stoned queen of punk.

122 Punk Labels
A chat with the operators at Stiff and Chiswick. Thanks to them, The Damned have been unleashed.

126 Led Zeppelin
Mountain climbing and filmmaking (perils of) discussed with Jimmy Page.

140 Sex Pistols
Bans from the council. Arguments with the other bands. On tour (at least in theory) with The Clash, the Heartbreakers and Britain’s most notorious band.

145 Letters
Punk? Mine’s a double… Today’s punks/tomorrow’s establishment. Has anyone actually seen the Sex Pistols?
“We’re into chaos”

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

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

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

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

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

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

No one asked for an encore but they did one anyway: “We’re going to play ‘Substitute’.”

“You can’t play,” heckled an irate French punter.

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

That’s how it is with the Pistols — a musical experience with the emphasis on Experience.

“Actually, we’re not into music,” one of the Pistols confided afterwards.

Wot then?

“We’re into chaos.” Neil Spencer
Don’t look over your shoulder, but the Sex Pistols are coming.

Sex Pistols

MARQUEE

and bodices) pieces dancing up front. In fact, I only caught the last few numbers; enough, as it is.
Black Sabbath’s former manager, Jim Simpson, is to be paid £35,000 in settlement of a High Court legal dispute last week. The band will pay £7,500 to Simpson and the remaining £27,500 is to be paid by manager-agent, Patrick Meehan, who denied “filching” the band away from Simpson.

When the case began, Simpson claimed he had steered Sabbath from obscurity to stardom. He sued the four members of the band for breach of contract, alleging that the benefit of his work had been taken away from him. He also claimed damages from two manager-agents, Meehan and Wilfred Pine. The case was contested by all defendants. No order, however, was made against Pine under the terms of the settlement. The band were said to have made $14 million (7m) during their 12 years. Since the split, Simpson has given up management and now heads Birmingham-based record company Big Bear.

Howlin’ Wolf, one of the great names of traditional blues, died on Saturday in a Chicago hospital. He had been in poor health for many months.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

They’re doing it for fun
“A pitiful situation”

MM FEB 14 Robert Plant blames Zeppelin’s tax exile on “an outrageous state of affairs”.

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

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

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

“New York, grey as it may be, is full of some of the finest English talent, not just music but sports personalities and actors, and anybody who has a flair for something. We all want to go home, but there’s an outrageous state of affairs taking place in England, an outrageous mishandling of the country’s affairs in general.

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

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

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

Chris Charlesworth

A huge man

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

When I met Mal a year ago in Los Angeles, after many years, he said: “I’ve met him now, y’know, The King! I want him to record one of my songs.” A true character of the 60s pop scene, full of gruff and bluff, yet a Beatle fan at heart forever; Mal will be missed.
Those who have already acquired a copy of Dylan's new album, Desire, will have noticed at least one difference between this and other Dylan records - on seven of the nine tracks Dylan has collaborated with another writer, Jacques Levy.

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

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

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

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

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

Levy settled down with a Scotch on ice and a packet of Lucky Strikes and talked openly about writing with Dylan. He was vague on only one subject - whether or not the Rolling Thunder Revue would roll again and whether it would collaborate again, or whether the rumoured West Coast Thunder dates would take place.

We began by talking about the events leading up to writing Desire and going on the road. “Bob and McGuinn have known each other for years, of course,” he began, “and Bob knew all the things I'd written for McGuinn. Two years ago we met for the first time on the street here. He was walking one way and I was walking the other, and we both knew who each other was, so we stopped and talked. We spent the evening together, agreed to meet again and maybe work together, and left it at

that. We didn’t see each other for a long time until last summer when, again, he was walking around the corner and so was I. We chatted and he came up to the apartment and then, right out of the blue, he suggested I wrote some material for him as he’d liked the things I'd written for Roger.”

The first song to come from the partnership was “Isis”, though Dylan had already put together the first verse: “He had the general feeling of the song when he came around here but he hadn’t got further. We started to work on it at night and by the following morning it was finished. We did it together, going back and forth and trying things out on each other to see what would work and what wouldn’t. “We were having a great time here during July, Bob would write a song, then pick up a guitar and rush around to the Other End and get up on stage and sing it, but it wasn’t the right atmosphere to write too seriously, and by this time we both knew we wanted to be serious about writing together.”

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

“She and her husband knew Joey well and I knew Joey through them,” said Levy, “I spent a lot of time with Joey in that last year he was
alive, and Bob became very interested in it all. We were telling stories about Joey, and when we left their house we came back here and started to work on it.

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

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

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

When the Rolling Thunder Revue was first mooted, Levy played a prominent role in the planning. He was present at the discussions last summer: “We were taking it seriously, planning. He was present at the discussions right at the beginning, but although they came up with a load of songs, the music never got further than the planning stage. McGuinn did, however, record most of the material and these included “Chestnut Mare” and “Lover Of The Bayou”.

“From then on, Levy and McGuinn met annually to prepare material together. Levy also wrote a song for Olaf Calculcius and had dabbled with songs for other proposed musicals, but he will not be turning to songwriting full-time despite taking on such an illustrious partner as Bob Dylan. “I like my work in the theatre and I don’t want to give that up, and it’s hard to imagine people coming to me now asking me to write songs for them.”

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

“I’m at a loss”

MM JAN 31 Stax Records is closed down.

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

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

Stax president Jim Stewart, company founder in 1959, said of the decision: “I’m at a loss. One minute you’re producing records and the next minute you’re shut down. I don’t know what to say.”

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

Unforeseen recording problems

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

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

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

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

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

Tickets for the Wembley concert went on sale last week but, said promoter Roger Forrester, all money will be refunded and the rest of the tickets have been withdrawn. Meanwhile, Forrester is left with his July 3 booking of the stadium, plus another two dates – July 31 and August 21 – which preclude Gaff Music’s suggestion that the Stewart concert might be rescheduled for late August.

Forrester said this week: “I will certainly be promoting at least two out of three possible concerts at Wembley, and at the moment I’m negotiating for a headline for the original Stewart date.”
“A self-invented man”

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

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

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

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

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

With the possible exception of Bryan Ferry, no other contemporary musician is as much preoccupied with his image as Bowie. But, while Ferry remains the same, Bowie changes his with regularity, not only from tour to tour, but from month to month. One can never really tell, either, whether his replies to any interviewer are...
March 36, 1976: Bowie adopts his Thin White Duke persona at NYC's Madison Square Garden, the last date on the North American leg of the Isolar Tour.
fact or fiction: his views on various subjects change according to whim.

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

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

So let’s get one thing straight from the very start. The views and opinions of David Bowie as quoted below represent his statements made between 6.45pm and 7.39pm US Eastern Standard time on Monday, March 1, 1976. What he’s said before that date, and what he might say afterwards, may vary considerably.

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

“It’s more theatrical than the Diamond Dogs ever was,” said Bowie, toy ing with an unlit Gitane and a glass of Heineken. “It’s by suggestion rather than by over-propping. It relies on modern 20th-century theatre concepts of lighting, and I think it’s better. Of course, it’s not a cabaret, but it certainly is.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Was John Lennon an important contributor to “Fame”?

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

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

“It was Eric Barrett, my road manager, who saw him and recommended him. I needed a pianist because Tony wasn’t around and Mike Garson was off being a Scientologist somewhere, so I needed him. He impressed me a lot, but I’ve never seen him with Springsteen. I once saw Springsteen when he was just forming everything, at Max’s in New York, and I was impressed
by him but I didn’t like the band. That was when I recorded three of his songs, but they were never released. At the time I was intending to do an album of songs by New York people that I liked, but I never finished it.

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

“I just haven’t got around to it,” he confessed. “Most of my affairs have been messily sorted out by my manager. The biggest problem I had in the last few years was that there were plans at one time to take the Diamond Dogs Tour to England. I doubt if ever that show will see the light of day again. I’ve still got the scenery stored away in New York, so there’s always a chance.”

That tour must have been extraordinarily expensive to stage.

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

How were relations between himself and Tony Defries?

“I haven’t seen him since the day I left him. I wouldn’t know. Is the still in the business? I honestly don’t know.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But it must have being satisfying to have a massive US hit with “Fame”?

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

“I just want to do what I want to do, and first, that’s make some money.”
this show and I won't do any hits for the sake of doing hits. I think people look on the show as an honest appearance, and that's why they develop such a strong empathy for it. For the first few minutes they are absolutely alarmed at what they are seeing, they don't understand it, but there's one point when it breaks out and people realise what it is all about.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I was getting all the problems every night. Ten or 15 people would be coming to see me and laying their problems on me because the management couldn't or wouldn't deal with it. For me touring was no fun, no fun at all. They were little problems, but to each individual
they were important. I understood all their problems but I couldn’t cope with them all, so the two major tours I did were horrendous experiences. I hated every minute of them, so I used to say I’d never tour again. Then I would be talked into doing it again to make somebody some money.

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

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

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

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

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

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

“A lot of people suggest all kinds of things to say, and I do”

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

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

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

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

“You know the funniest thing of all,” he continued, talking like a conspirator, “I’d never heard of Lou Reed until somebody said my stuff was influenced by him. So when I heard that, I started saying it myself, that my songs were influenced by Lou Reed. It’s just a piece of pop music. I thought, ‘What a great name’, and although I’d never heard them, I used to tell everybody who asked that I liked them a lot. Then I got around to meeting Iggy, but it wasn’t until months later that I actually heard anything he’d written.

“’It’s marvellous. A lot of people provide me with quotes. They dissect the songs and say that’s influenced by someone or other, but I don’t know whether I’m influenced. All I know is I’m drinking a beer and enjoying myself.’

With that Bowie retired to be made-up for the evening’s concert – just a light dab of eyeliner to accentuate his features, and plenty of water to keep the hair in place. The concert was a huge success, capped with a couple of encores, and pretty much the same as has been described in detail in previous issues of MM. All the material from Station To Station was aired, along with choice selections like ‘Changes’, ‘Fame’, ‘Jean Genie’, ‘Diamond Dogs’ and, most appropriately, ‘Panic In Detroit’. The highlight was definitely “Five Years”, though, which soared to a climax as the band poured on layers of power chords behind Bowie’s agonised vocals.

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

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

HISTORY OF ROCK 1976 | 17

May 1976 after a show at the Pavilion De Paris, Bowie and Dutch cabaret star Romy Haag celebrate the end of the Isolarworld tour at L’Alcazar Club

GETTY

DAVID BOWIE Can you Hear Me
“Just a hobby”

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

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

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

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

While we were humming and hawing over how ABBA should be approached, the band played it cool.
ignored our disregard and stayed home in Sweden, confident that, sooner or later, Britain would come alive to their talent.

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

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

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

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

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

“It’s not really important to us that we have a No 1 single. What is important is that people sit and listen to the music we play and like what they hear.”

— Melody Maker May 22 —

**A**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Moviestar”, by Harpo, also from Sweden, was released on the Continent almost a year ago. A massive hit which Britain rejected, but which Dick James Music, his record company here, were confident would eventually make it and the record came awake about a month ago, DJs picking up on the song and playing it to death. As usually happens when the Beeb picks up on a record, it was a hit. Harpo, too, struck a blow for Europe.
From Holland, the George Baker Selection were set to follow suit until man-about-pop Jonathan King decided that he’d record a version of their Continental hit, “Paloma Blanca”. Jonathan called it “Una Paloma Blanca”, put it out on his own UK label, and, presto, had a hit. After an interesting struggle between the two versions early on, the George Baker Selection’s original conceded defeat.

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

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

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

“This lifestyle” is what makes ABBA so special. If there is such a thing as “the perfect situation” for a pop/rock band to be in, Abba are close to it. They don’t have to tour to earn success, having reached that magical state of strong melody, that’s what I think. If you look at the English chart, a string of hit singles, and you wonder whether ABBA will have contributed something positive to music. There is a lack of distinction in the world of pop. ABBA’s third keeps it short and sweet.

ABBA Arrival EPIC

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

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

Ironically, although the album is initially impressive by its forthright and innocent out-and-out pop, after a while the clinical aspect of the construction of an ABBA song becomes annoying. I’ve had this album for a few weeks, and it’s only now that the coldness of the structure is beginning to rub me the wrong way. There are 10 tracks on the LP. The longest is 4 minutes 20 seconds; the shortest, 2.53. The first side is 16.77 long and the second 14.95. Consider that the ideal length, for the best sound quality, is around 18 minutes, and you wonder whether ABBA have faked and cut the playing time drastically in an effort to go for the perfect recorded sound, or as is more likely, the sum total of a year’s writing from the group’s writers was a mere 32 minutes of song.

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

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

“Dancing Queen” was a hit single, and I’m sure other tracks will keep ABBA in those charts for the next year, principally “Knowing Me, Knowing You”, “Tiger”, “That’s Me” and possibly “Why Did It Have To Be Me”, on which the band uncharacteristically rock a little. “Money, Money, Money”, which sounds as if it should be one of the songs in Fiddler On The Roof, is the current hit. But the best track of all for me is the beautiful “My Love, My Life”, which would have been an ideal Christmas single, full of sentimentality and soppiness. The title track, an instrumental, is the most Continental-sounding of all, drawn from the band’s Scandinavian roots.

An ideal Christmas present for mums, dads, aunts, uncles, son, daughters, nephews, nieces. But who said “once more with feeling”?

Harry Doherty •
“We’ve done a lot of constructive stuff,” Jimmy Page reflects on Led Zeppelin’s progress since Robert Plant’s car crash the previous summer.
“A bit of a gamble”

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

— MELODY MAKER MARCH 20 —

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

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

Swan Song is situated in London’s fashionable King’s Road—in the unfashionable end. You’ll notice that it’s opposite the World’s End pub. If you don’t, you’ll never find it. There’s no grand building. No clue at all to what goes on behind those grim walls.

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

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

As he sat down, Page rested a bunch of American compilation albums on the table, a collection of old rock’n’roll numbers. “I really love listening to these,” he enthused.

“All those guys were looking for something new among all the shit.”

Just like today?

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

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

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

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

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

Avoiding the issue of the injury, you see.

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

There the matter rested.

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

What’s your interpretation?

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

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

What is the whole point?

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

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

Presence was recorded ultra-fast. It took only three weeks, and was recorded in Europe – the Musicland Studios in Munich – so that the band could be close to their wives and families in Britain. Originally, a month had been set aside to record, but one of the band – Page wasn’t squealing on the guilty party – turned up a week late. He commented eagerly on the mending process. No, I wouldn’t do it. I didn’t want to make too much of a hoo-hah about that, about the mending process. No, I wouldn’t really. I’ve got very superstitious after that. It was just strange that it happened within a week of rehearsals. It was just like something saying, ‘No, you’re not gonna do it.’ It’s personal. That’s why I don’t wanna talk about it.”

Avoiding the issue of the injury, you see.

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

There the matter rested.

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

What’s your interpretation?

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

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

What is the whole point?

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

“Well, I know that we haven’t done that.” Another pause, and just to push the point home: “We’ve been quite the opposite without consciously doing it.”

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

“Well, what about... well, I don’t know.” He hesitated. “You see, let me put it this way. When the third LP came out, for instance, the second one... ahm...” He stopped to sort out strategy.

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

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

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

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

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

There was more spontaneity on this album than the others?

“Well, yes, I think so. You see, in the past when it came to the point where we were getting an album together, there were always a number of frameworks that you would toy with at home. At this particular point in time there were no sort of complete frameworks, just little bits kicking
around. There have been sort of phrasing, melodies, rhythms that have been picked up on the travels through Morocco and places like that, which all get consumed. You take it all in and it comes out in the music."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Anything?

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

Was there really that much more for Zeppelin to do?

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

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

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

But there is a prevalent feeling of stagnation.

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

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

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

A

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

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

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

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

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

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

And television?

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

So the only way for Led Zeppelin to get exposure in Britain is to play live. The last gigs here were the series of shows at Earls Court, London. Many fans were disenchanted that the appearances were confined to London, over here. When we started doing bigger places, there was an outcry about Zeppelin deserting the Marquees, the Nottingham Boathouses, etc. So we did a tour of those and then it was this voice is raised in Mohammadi Att-style: 'How selfish can they be to play in small pubs when people can't get in to see them?' I mean, you just can't win.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In the yard stood, jammed amidst the churned-up mud and hay, the glistening, torpedo-like Lane mobile studio.»
Country Lanes
There was time for a cup of tea in the cottage. The interior could have been untouched since the 1920s. Electric light, but all else was ancient, a plethora of antiques, and knick-knacks. Old Annie sat (with her teeth in for visitors), talking to the children, while Ronnie's wife Kate brewed the tea. Charlie Hart, Ronnie's keyboard player with Slim Chance, smiled a cheerful greeting, and he was eventually coaxed into joining us for a lunch at the Castle Inn.

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

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

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

"It may be a complete fluke," he told me, "but the sound inside is just right because there aren't any corners, it's all rounded off. So many mobiles I've used before, not mentioning any names, the sound can be really easy. They forget you've been travelling all day. I love travelling, but this place doesn't appeal to me. It's not as if I haven't done it before. If you're down in London, you sit in an office and they say, 'Well what are you doing?' And they don't know how you live. You'd get a far better idea looking around the farmyard for half an hour than you would sitting in London for three hours."

Was Ronnie looking forward to hitting the road again?

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

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

"If I've got any ambitions at all, I'd like to go on tour in humane conditions. I'd like to turn it into a life, instead of tearing about all the time, then sitting at home for a month with nothing to do. I don't think it has to be like that. That's the way it was with the Faces. "A lot of people would rather do that – they'd like to kill themselves for six weeks and get as much money as they can. I don't see the point."

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

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

"How did he feel about the reissuing of Ogden's 'Nutt Gone Flake', the old Small Faces classic first put out by Immediate?"

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

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

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

"Next time the fire inspector turned up we said, 'We've got our own fire engine, it's round the back.' So we took him round and there were a couple of geezers
they were supposed to be kicking against. It all became an industry, and that's what really nauses me. It really does. Because a lot of these people earn enough money, and have a big enough pulling power and enough popularity to actually do something and turn it on its head. What do they do? Oh. They'll play the game. And perpetuate stagnation. Anything that kicks the cobwebs down is all right by me.

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

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

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

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

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

"Surely the studio was a world of complications?"

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

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

As the tape of the album began to roll and the strains of "Don't Try And Change My Mind" drifted away, and his eyes shone and a beatific smile glowed as he listened to the sustained strains of "Don't Try And Change My Mind"... Ronnie's finger. "Look," he cried, pointing at the bespattered tape spool. "Blood on the tracks."

As the tape of the album began to roll and the strains of "Don't Try And Change My Mind" drifted away, and his eyes shone and a beatific smile glowed as he listened to the sustained strains of "Don't Try And Change My Mind"... Ronnie's finger. "Look," he cried, pointing at the bespattered tape spool. "Blood on the tracks."
“Follow that”

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

—I MELODY MAKER MARCH 27 —

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

Paul, Linda, and Wings were on the loose in a suite where sandwiches piled up around bottles of beer. DJs tripped over journalists in the merry-go-round of interviews at a press conference convened only hours before the band were due to depart on their first dates of 1976.

“Look, I’m off to Copenhagen tomorrow and I’ve got to get some sleep.”

“But we’d be thrilled if you came...”

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

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

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

But first he discussed Wings’ recent adventures.

“We had fab fun in Australia,” said Paul, slipping into Mersey Mania dialogue. “It was the first real tour we’d done for a while.»
Did Paul want to involve himself in a theme, like Venus And Mars?

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

Was he stealing himself for criticism?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Well, as it happens, it is our actual doorbell which our drummer bought us, so it has a group significance. And it seemed a good introduction to the album."
Were there any major projects for Paul in the coming year other than the Wings tours?

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

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

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

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

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

“If we were fellows back in Liverpool aged 18 doing me first job, well I’d think, ‘Nobody can refuse that, can they? It’s just too much money.’ Even if we were terrible it would be worth it—right?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

McCartney: pressure cooking
The History Of Rock is a magazine series celebrating 50 years of the music that changed the world – starting in 1965.

Month by month, it builds up into an unprecedentedly detailed chronicle of the music and musicians we love.

Subscribe today and save 22%

Pay only £9.99 an issue and get every edition delivered to your home

Visit www.uncutsubs.co.uk/historyofrock1976 or call 0330 333 1113, quoting promotion code 10R

For overseas orders please call + 44 (0)330 333 1113

(Lines are open 7 days a week, 8am-9pm) Closing date: 07/07/2016

For overseas orders please call + 44 (0)330 333 1113

(Lines are open 7 days a week, 8am-9pm, UK time)
Readers’ letters

Pay up, Percy, “rockified” reggae and a string-driven thing.

He went of his own accord

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

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

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

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

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

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

Graham Truffet, Corn Close, South Normanton, Derbyshire.

(MM, Jan 31)

Star in the making?

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

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

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

One day, it’s time that horsehair, rosin and the magnificent fiddling of Scarlet Rivera. What a lot of bickering we’ve had lately. The “Are ‘10cc and/or Queen original?” argument seems to me to miss the point of music altogether. If people want to be subjective, let them be so honestly.

Pete Hills, Fennells Road, High Wycombe, Bucks (MM, Jan 24)

Original issue

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

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

Rock and a jah place

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

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

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

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

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

Lou Gazeau, Bulwer Road, Barnet, Herts (MM, Feb 7)

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

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

AL CLARK, Virgin Records, London W1 (MM, Feb 21)

Fiddle about

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

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

D Campbell, Knock Road, Belfast (MM, Feb 14)

Uncivil rights movement

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

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

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

Graham Truffet, Corn Close, South Normanton, Derbyshire.

(MM, Jan 31)

Pay up, Percy, “rockified” reggae and a string-driven thing.

He went of his own accord

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

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

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

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

One day, it’s time that horsehair, rosin and the magnificent fiddling of Scarlet Rivera. What a lot of bickering we’ve had lately. The “Are ‘10cc and/or Queen original?” argument seems to me to miss the point of music altogether. If people want to be subjective, let them be so honestly.

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

Original issue

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

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

Rock and a jah place

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

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

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

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

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

Lou Gazeau, Bulwer Road, Barnet, Herts (MM, Feb 7)

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

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

AL CLARK, Virgin Records, London W1 (MM, Feb 21)

Fiddle about

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

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

D Campbell, Knock Road, Belfast (MM, Feb 14)
DAVID BOWIE APPEARED in court at Rochester, in Upstate New York, on Thursday, pleading not guilty to charges of possessing marijuana in his hotel suite in the town after a concert there last weekend. Fans mobbed him as he arrived at the courthouse.

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

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

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

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

On Friday night, Bowie played Madison Square Garden and a small party was held afterwards at the Penn Plaza Club, the private lounge within the Garden.
March 25, 1976: three days after his arrest and overnight detention in Monroe County Jail, and concerts in Springfield, Massachusetts, and New Haven, Connecticut—Bowie has his mugshot taken before pleading not guilty to drug charges at Rochester City Court.
“Most of the album will be Brian”

A NEW STUDIO ALBUM is in the works, Brian Wilson is back in business and The Beach Boys are planning to visit England in late summer. These were the main points to come out of a chat with Dennis Wilson, who passed through New York last week to spread the word that The Beach Boys are no longer going to rely on their golden oldies to maintain their current status as a major concert attraction in the US.

Over the past three years, the group has found a change of fortune here. While they were considered unfashionable at the turn of the decade and early ’70s, The Beach Boys have made a comeback of great proportions, thanks to a superb strategy.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Oh, on the new tour that’s coming up we will be doing the new stuff as well as some old tunes. I don’t get bored with them... they’re fun.

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

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

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

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

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

MM APR 3 Dennis Wilson explains the Beach Boys renaissance and the return of Brian Wilson to active duty. “I am dumbfounded at him. I am in awe of him.”
Boys any more. Personally I’ve always liked them,” he says, laughing.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chris Charlesworth

---

**“Additional work together”**

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

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

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

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

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

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

---

**“It’s their own fault”**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Back to those cover versions, though. “I don’t like any of ‘em.”

Not even the Eagles’ version of “Ol’ 55”? “Naw – I don’t like the Eagles. They’re about as exciting as watching paint dry. Their albums are good for keeping the dust off your turntable and that’s about all.”

Eric Andersen then? After all, Andersen’s included Waits’ songs on his last two albums. “Naw – I don’t like Eric Andersen either.” He takes the copy of Andersen’s latest Arista project, which I offer, and reads the sleeve notes, punctuating the singer’s own poetic album jottings with the words “Rod McKuen” every few seconds. In the reverse would not appear to be true.

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

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

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

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

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

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

“The things to do something that’s not
necessarily here today and gone tomorrow. But most people don’t care about that, they’re under a lot of social pressure. When getting laid depends so much on what you’ve got in your record collection, then you gotta have all Top 10 hits—that’s the way it is.”

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

So tell us about your backup band, Tom.

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

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

“Yeah, I had Tom Scott, one of my albums—but that was before I found out I could get anyone that I wanted. Tom’s OK but he’s too young and too straight, like a rock tenorman, not really what was a kid... the only white tenor player lining up with a whole lotta—one you gotta have all Top 10 hits—that’s the way it is.”
March 28, 1976: Neil Young leans into the wind from a huge fan at the side of the stage during a four-night stand at the Hammersmith Odeon, London.
NEIL YOUNG returns to England with CRAZY HORSE and a sideways look at his work. “All those people who say Neil Young songs are a drag – it’s a sign of strength rather than weakness if you, the listeners, can cope with them.”

---

NEIL YOUNG: “This man, the longest living rock’n’roll star, died searching for a Heart Of Gold. He never found it but he turned a few people on” (Smiles).

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

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

The huge success of his first real European tour had helped reassure him that he had a place in the panoply of today’s music. No, he added, he wasn’t exactly uncertain before he left California five weeks ago, but – well, who wouldn’t be “up” after such ecstatic receptions? In the last 14 days, he’d done 12 shows in eight countries. “It’s been like taking in Europe through one of those View-Master slides. All the halls are a blur. The people backstage in each hall think we’re crazy – we nod and talk to them as if we saw them the previous night, whereas it was in a different country and we don’t know where we are. Of course we are nuts. Do you know a rock’n’roll musician who isn’t nuts?”

But seriously, the tour had been such an experience. Japan had been conquered, and this during Neil’s first visit. “Nobody spoke English to us there, and the response was very different from western responses, but they understood us, I think, and gave us a great reception. My first time in Japan for those four cities, and it was amazing to see people had come to the shows and copied even the way I dress, the patterned trousers. This has always happened everywhere, but when it happens among people of a different culture, whose whole background is so different from the West’s, it’s nothing less than staggering.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But yes, he agreed, he'd been persuaded by the comeback tour of his friend and artistic mentor Bob Dylan in 1973, that even for a helplessly monostrophic performer, a major performer can have my total respect. He has shown so many of us, especially with that flirtation with movie-making through the years, which purported to show that Our Star was more relaxed than in fact he was. The cool, pre-concert supper!

Before The Flood album tour with The Band, that a major performer can have my total respect. He has shown so many of us, especially with that flirtation with movie-making through the years, which purported to show that Our Star was more relaxed than in fact he was. The cool, pre-concert supper!

"I wish I could write something happy. But there was no disguising straightforward butterflies. It had been two years since his last concert, apart from the small club dates in America, which he favoured against mass media. Coming to terms with this tour, which in sheer logistics had been, for Neil, absolutely monstrous, had been traumatic.

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

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

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

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

But yes, he agreed, he'd been persuaded by the comeback tour of his friend and artistic mentor Bob Dylan in 1973, that even for a helplessly monostrophic performer, a major performer can have my total respect. He has shown so many of us, especially with that flirtation with movie-making through the years, which purported to show that Our Star was more relaxed than in fact he was. The cool, pre-concert supper!

Before The Flood album tour with The Band, that a major performer can have my total respect. He has shown so many of us, especially with that flirtation with movie-making through the years, which purported to show that Our Star was more relaxed than in fact he was. The cool, pre-concert supper!

"I need that edginess... on the precipice of disaster"
“A furious and dazzling assault”

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

APPROXIMATELY 8.25PM on Sunday, Neil Young, unannounced but immediately recognizable, loped on to the stage of the Hammersmith Odeon to open, with a brief acoustic set, his first solo concert in London since the traumatic and confusing Tonight’s The Night performances of November 1973. “Seems like I just got here from somewhere else,” he observed quietly, casting a nervous, apprehensive stare at his audience.

Characteristically dishevelled in a torn and battered suede jacket which hung loosely about his hunched shoulders, and his hair long and matted, he arranged himself behind a cluster of microphones with a complete lack of physical grace, mumbling incoherently to himself as he selected a guitar and, apparently satisfied and prepared, eased into “Tell Me Why”. The high notes of the song he hit with difficulty and he smiled wryly as he negotiated the guitar chords. It was a beautifully informal, casual introduction.

“Let’s see what we’ve got here,” he continued, grappling with a banjo and fixing a harmonica into the twisted metal frame around his neck. He began “Mellow My Mind” – the only composition from Tonight’s The Night he was to perform – picking at the banjo and blowing gruffly into the harp. “Put it in upside down…” he grumbled, half-smiling.

“...Don’t do that every night.”

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

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

He included, in this opening section, three new songs: “Too Far Gone”, “Day And Night We Walk These Aisles” and “Don’t Say You Win, Don’t Say You Lose”, which he included between renditions of more familiar compositions from Harvest (including a simple and moving “A Man Needs A Maid”, performed at the piano and far superior to the overblown sentimentality of the original). The trio of recent compositions, lyrically at least, were of a more intimate nature than the majority of the songs which appeared on Zuma. “Too Far Gone” was instantly both haunting and utterly compelling, with the refrain “We had the drugs, we had the blues/ We still had something to lose...” sending a chilling vibration around the theatre.

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

It was with some sense of relief, then, that the audience received the more accommodating “Heart Of Gold”, with which he ended the acoustic segment, promising to return with Crazy Horse after a short interlude, “to keep this story moving”. Neil Young with Crazy Horse, as the ferocious electric set of the Hammer Smith concert emphatically stressed, are still the greatest bar-room band in the world. With Frank Sampedro (who made his debut on Zuma) in the place of Danny Whitten on rhythm guitar, the formidable Ralph Molina on drums and Billy Talbot on bass shoring up the impenetrable structure of his songs, Young’s electric guitar playing is allowed an expressive freedom.

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

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

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

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

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

A large fan to the right of the stage whirred into action, sending a sharp breeze through the air (a typically idiosyncratic touch, that), as Young spiralled into a dizzy orbit during the climactic section of what may be his most expansive and lunatic song since “Don’t Be Denied”.

“One more laid-back song,” he laconically announced as Crazy Horse fell in behind him and he led them through “Let It Shine”.

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

He returned then for two encores. A magnificent version of the epic “Cortez The Killer”, full of anguish and damaged grandeur, which segued into a brisk and efficient “Cinnamon Girl”. By 10.30 it was all over. It’s extremely unlikely that we shall witness a performance more impressive, from an artist of such stature, again this year. Allen Jones
"I let Thin Lizzy interpret my songs as it wishes."
Phil Lynott at home in Embassy Court, West Hampstead, London, 1976.
“To me rock is a game”

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

— MELODY MAKER APRIL 3 —

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

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

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

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

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

“It’s this band that’ll crack it once and for all. The two guitars fill the sound out much better. They bounce off one another’s playing. They’ve brought in ideas that wouldn’t have happened otherwise. I got the attention because I was the darkie in the middle. I was the figurehead.

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

The prevalent mood that hung over this Hammersmith Odeon gig on Sunday night, that this would be the occasion to herald once and for all the arrival of Thin Lizzy, gave the event an edge of excitement and anticipation rarely noted at rock concerts these days. But in living up to all the expectations, Lizzy did much more than merely consolidate their recently acquired position as top-league rockers and took the opportunity to put their followers through what really amounted to an endurance test.

Lizzy could have chummed out endless riffs to guarantee the desired reception but instead, early on in the act, turned the tables to pull a blues from their archives, “Still In Love With You” from Nightlife, that was augmented by the hard rock their audience undoubtedly came to see. Surprisingly, the audience reacted to this sudden change warmly, sitting back (or standing up) and taking the music in after vainly attempting to clap along. Apart from featuring the affectionate, echoey vocals of Phil Lynott, the number provided a platform for the guitar talents of Brian Robertson and Scott Gorham, who played two beautifully held-back solos.

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

But the orgasm for both band and fans came with the best encore in the world, “Me And The Boys Were Wondering How You And The Girls Were Getting Home”. This was one of the highlights of the evening, a song that had been left off the album but which the band had been performing live. Lynott sang it with passion and emotion, his voice cracking with emotion as he sang the lines “Somebody's got to grind me down, Gonna get back on my feet”.

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

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

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

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

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

“I might cock a run up, but I’ve never once blown a gig with this band through being drunk or smashed. I never will. When I first joined the band, the management told me to watch my drink before going on stage. I said, ‘Fuck off, I’ll have as many drinks as I like before a gig’. And I don’t.”

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

“It’s the same old system,” explained Lynott.

“We’re doing the tour to sell the albums to make the money to do the tours. But we’re trying to break that circle. If we can break our albums sales big, once and for all, then we’ll have very little worries and we’ll be able to continue on doing whatever we want.

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

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

“Well, you see, we’re going for the double — America and Britain. Just like the lads (United). With the twowingers (Gorham and Robertson), our play is spread across the park. Seriously. I don’t know why it has come good. It just has. A year ago, we were confident that it would happen. It’s no great surprise to us now that it has.” Harry Doherty
A surreal, possibly fictional, encounter with a prickly ROLLING STONES.

“I only really listen to black music these days,” says Keith Richards. “I ain’t too interested in white bands who rip off white bands who ripped off black bands.”

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

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

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

It don’t faze ol’ Keith none, though.

Of Keith just collects his legs until he’s sitting in some kind of weird discombobulated lotus posture variant and continues whacking away at his guitar, not missing a single saw-toothed rusty-chrome chord the whole time. It don’t faze Mick Jagger either – Mick Jag-gur performing on the ramp that leads down into the audience from stage centre like the tongue on the Stones logo. Jagger just founces over to his fallen comrade, his mouth a giant red O like some dumb glossy PVC Claes Oldenburg sofa or something and he bends down oh-so-graceful and he hands Keith his pick – which the maestro has dropped on his journey from here to there – and helps him locate his legs and jack-knife back on to his feet.

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

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

"We may be having a party"
April 28: Mick Jagger at the Frankfurt Festhalle, Germany, the first date of the Rolling Stones’ Tour Of Europe ’76
Cosmic Phooeys to the poor unfortunates who come over limp when measured up to the Big Yardstick.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Not by more than half an hour, anyway.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

NOTES FROM RUBBER LIPS: "...Haaaaaanwawenky tonka.haawenky tonk-uh waaananumuhhh..."

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

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

various passive objects right behind him, it's black denim percussionist, is whoppin' ass on

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

Apart from Ollie Brown, the only other supporting musician (leaving the mysterious

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

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

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

Here, operating as an extension of Richard, filling out Rock And Roll Himself's riffs and squeezing curlicues out of the lead-guitar tube to put the icing on the cake, he got it on with a ferocious energy and a commendably disciplined and canny channelling of same. Dig: nobody gets 15 minutes to solo while the rest of the band go off to leak, take a hit, cop a drink or get blown in this band. Nobody gets to be self-indulgent except You Know Who.
I discovered that Honest Ron was brother to Art Wood, former leader of The Artwoods, a group who I'd dug when I was 15 or so and who'd included Keef Hartley on drums and Ian Lord on organ. I annexed it just as Keith started into answering someone's question about why all the stuff on the new album was a year or more old. 

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ronnie Wood wanders over and hands Richard a fragment of cigarette packet with something written on it. Richard scans it, srrrrfff, and looks at me very hard. He also makes no attempt to pass his refreshments around. That fragment of my conscious mind which is monitoring the dream wonders, "Is this some masterly demonstration of Zen and the art of Cool Maintenance, or is the guy the most outrageous bogart in Christendom?"

Keith looks at the note and then back at me.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"It's more like £350 a week," he said amiably enough. "That's just the per diem."
Though I’m sitting opposite him, in some weird floating dream way I can read the note, it says, “Keith—do you realise that you’re talking to Charles Shaar Murray?” I must be dreaming—big rock stars passing notes in class.

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Oh, I dunno... it’s getting broader all the time.”

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

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

From beyond Wood comes a sound exactly like Mick Jagger saying in his proletarian voice, “Oi fort your review was bhaluuddy stoopid.”

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

“OI FORT YOUR REVIEW WOS BLAH HILY STOOPID!”

Louder this time. Omigawd—omigawd—omigawd. This is a dream. This is a dream. Even if it wasn’t, that bit wouldn’t be happening.

Do not panic. Think only of yourself. Do... not... panic.

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

Shortly after, Dave Walters from WEA comes over to me. He’s turned green. He tells me that Mr Jagger would like me and my fellow rock chroniclers to vacate the premises immediately.

I gather up my various impedimenta like a good boy should. Dave Walters is back and this time he’s colour-coordinated to match Billy Preston’s velvet jacket.

“Paul Wasserman’s just told me that Mick said that if you’re not out in 30 seconds he’ll get the heavies to throw you out.”

Dream or no dream, I’m a lover not a fighter. Ultimately, I’d rather be a healthy wimp than an injured punk.

Just past the threshold, Keith appears looking placatory.

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

We roll a smoke, light it up.

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

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

Back in the room I started reading my book. And then I took the phone right off the hook.
Comes on like an idea-shaped vacuum

The Rolling Stones Black And Blue

ROLLING STONES

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

their next bout of recording, and not afraid to admit ‘em, and they’ll take plunge ahead as raw as life itself, and even progressive group.” - Pete Townshend, 1968

Stones are the world’s best rock’n’roll band and well overdue from them. The Rolling Stones should always be a non-progressive group.” - Pete Townshend, 1968

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

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

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

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

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

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

So Black And Blue comes out nearly a year after it was cut, which would imply (a) that the Stones have been having a more than somewhat turbulent time of it and (b) a fairly low read-out on the prolific-o-meter. Still, it wouldn’t matter a hoot in hell if the album had proved itself worth the wait, but Black And Blue is a letdown of hideous proportions, devoid of either the epic sense of sleazy grandeur or the galvanic bejewelled tension which are the Stones’ twin ace cards.

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

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

“Hand Of Fate” is built around a cluster of supposedly fail-safe Stones devices: a snarling, lurching Keef riff, a spitting, grandstanding Jagger vocal, Watts’ cybals smashes to boost the momentum, mixed-down Preston piano, and a hardnosed lead guitar (by Perkins, who sounds uncannily like Mick Taylor, which doesn’t hurt a bit). Only trouble is it doesn’t work. It sets itself up as the latest heir to “Brown Sugar” and “Stray Cat Blues”, but winds up as little more than a poor reggae cover of “Cherry Oh Baby”, the Stones’ latest stab at reggae, was written by Eric Donaldson, who recorded the original version which, regrettably, I haven’t heard. It features Nicky Hopkins in the unfamiliar role of organist and no less than four guitar parts (three by Keef and one by Honest Ron Wood, putting in the first of his three cameo appearances). Charlie Watts plays delightfully crisp and solid drums – the best white reggae drums I’ve ever heard, in fact – but Bill Wyman’s bass is far too sluggish and the guitars stumble over each other, completely demolishing the feel of the track.

The last time the Stones addressed themselves to the wonders of dat JA beat (“Luxury” on it’s Only Rock’n’Roll), they covered their bets by simultaneously stylising reggae to hell’n’ gone, and maintaining a basic classic Stones rough-edge drive with a reggae backbeat. Here, they attempt a straightforward cop of Actual Real JA Licks, and blow it. The vocal is so hammy that any devout Rasta, Muslim or Jew wouldn’t even allow it in the house. The final track on the side, “Memory Motel”, goes part of the way towards reclaiming the lost ground. Perkins and Mandel play guitars (acoustic and electric respectively), and Jagger and Richard pianos (ditto), while Billy Preston weighs in on string synthesizer (the acceptable face of Mellotron). It’s a fair-to-middling example of the Stones Ballad, with just enough roughage from the vocal and drums to satisfactorily complement the pastoral keyboard arama and extremely winsome melody. It would be a more than adequate Second Division cut on a Grade A Stones album, but on this one it’s the first track that actually achieves what it sets out to do.

In general, things pick up a little on the second side. They don’t pull off any masterstrokes, but
on the other hand they don’t fumble the ball.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Massed Engineers (played by Glyn Johns, Keith Harwood, Phil McDonald and Len Hahn) have achieved a radically different Stones sound: ultra-crisp, clean and sharp, with an enviable degree of solidity and punch on the bass and drums, as opposed to the tangled, shaggy meat-grinder mixes of yore. It’s a Conventional Good Sound, and I still haven’t made up my mind about it. Brickbats; the quality of the material and of Jagger’s vocals is at an all-time Stones low. The songs are mostly poor, and Jagger sounds strained and uptight, substituting caricature phrasing and enunciation for the deadly, lynx-like confidence of old. Could be he’s unhappy with the songs and is thus unable to work within them to his customary degree.

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

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

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

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

Oh well. I suppose it’s rather naive at this point to expect veteran heroes – even colossi like the Stones, The Who and Led Zep – to return messianically toting rock n’ roll salvation in the form of Tablets from the Mountain. The two first-named bands have by now enjoyed longer periods of genuine creativity than either Elvis or Chuck Berry, and even rock stars (especially rock stars) have to contend with built-in obsolescence. The hell with it. If they won’t rock us, somebody will. But then you can’t always get what you want. – Charles Shaar Murray
“Larger than life”

In the wake of Alice Cooper, KISS are storming America with their theatrical, sleazy rock. “I love to do all those deliciously painful things to you,” says bassist Gene Simmons, “that make you writhe and groan in ecstasy.”

— MELODY MAKER MAY 15 —

I DON’T FEEL I have to defend myself to you, and I won’t take your criticism either. I’ll take the criticism of a fan, though. If someone who pays money to see us wants to offer an opinion or advice, then I’ll gladly listen. They’re the ones that count...

“I’m a star, you see, a big star. I’m a larger-than-life hero and that’s what I want and have to be. I’ve known I’m a star for a long time because I have a very big ego. Stars should look like stars, they should look better than their audience.”

Gene Simmons is an outspoken fellow, perhaps the most outspoken member of the most outspoken band that America has thrown up in the last two years. He is the bass player of Kiss, a band that has erupted from being a heavy metal garage outfit to superstars in the last 12 months.

The facts speak for themselves all too plainly. On last New Year’s Eve, Kiss headlined a concert at the giant Nassau Coliseum on Lone Island, topping the bill over that other US heavy metal outfit, Blue Oyster Cult. Twelve months before, Kiss supported the Cult at the New York Academy of Music.

During the past 12 months, Kiss’s albums have sold in huge quantities, not only in the US but also in Australia, Japan and Canada. Germany seems to be the only European country that has picked up on them so far, but their upcoming tour of England and the Continent may change all that.

The nearest comparable act to Kiss on the US rock circuit is probably Alice Cooper, though Alice has, in recent years, cut down on the outrageousness and mingled with the establishment to the detriment of his more youthful following.

Between them, Kiss and their manager Bill Aucoin noticed the void that Cooper (and probably Grand Funk Railroad) had left behind and systematically moved in. A combination of hard work, unrelenting heavy metal riff music, sado-masochistic suggestions and every conceivable theatrical cliche of their genre has turned them into the biggest success story of the past year.

Unquestionably, their audience spans an age group somewhere between 14 and 18, the same age group that Alice appealed to during his peak years with the old AC Band. Kiss’s complete lack of musical sophistication sticks two fingers up, not only at the establishment, but also at other established rock bands who, over the years, have progressed beyond the confines of their original statements.”
On stage, Kiss look like refugees from a Marvel comic, complete with bats’ wings, black leather costumes and circus clown-like makeup that would look funny if it wasn’t all intermingled with the SM pose they adopt. It’s no coincidence that their name Kiss and the logo they utilise includes the twin “S” symbol of the Nazi secret police.

Similarly, their stage routine includes fire-breathing, the speciality of Simmons, and extensive use of strobe lighting, smoke bombs, police sirens and any other prop they can lay their hands on to add to the gross spectacle of a live Kiss concert.

Simmons’ other speciality is his protruding tongue, which seems to be at least an inch and a half longer than normal, giving him the look of a vampire, accentuated with makeup that includes a triangular black path running down to a point near the bridge of his nose.

He’s the bass player and, for the technically minded, he uses a Gibson Grabber, a singularly appropriate choice of instrument. Elsewhere, we have guitarists Paul Stanley, easily identifiable with his Flying-V, and “Space” Ace Frehley, whose eyes are surrounded by silver stars and who makes dubious claims about being descended from a race of spacemen whose fashion style he emulates to this day.

On drums we find Peter Criss, who paints his nose red, daubs on stripes like Indian warpaint and adopts a catlike pose, ready to spring like a jungle predator. Up until now, the music they play has merely provided a backdrop to a display of outrageous behaviour and spectacle.

But all this may be changing soon, as Bob Ezrin, the noted producer, has been brought in to take over the musical side of things. Out of the marketing concept has developed the Kiss Army centred in the Midwest of America, where their following is bigger than anywhere else.

For the benefit of their Army, Kiss make public appearances, not only playing concerts, but simply to shake hands, meet fans and — as always — appear as larger than life characters from another planet.

That their gamble paid off was a huge relief to both Aucoin and Neil Bogart, the boss of the Casablanca label. Their success has taken the rest of the industry by surprise.

The Kiss story begins in 1973, which is the year that Aucoin, a dapper little chap who seems to have a high regard for Shep Gordon, Alice Cooper’s manager, saw the group appear at the Diplomat Hotel in New York. Up until that stage, they had no manager, and were handling their own business activities, promoting themselves and inviting anyone associated with the industry to come and see them.

At first, Kiss weren’t too impressed with Aucoin. He wasn’t a real manager with experience in management and they thought he was just an amateur with optimistic dreams.

“I told them that in two weeks I could get them a record contract and set down specific plans as to their future. If that didn’t happen, they could have nothing more to do with me,” he said.

Aucoin, unlike many managers, is very open about the financial side of things. “The original deal was that Kiss were signed with a $15,000 advance, but between Bogart and Rock Steady (Aucoin’s management company).... Well, we wound up putting a quarter of a million into the band before the first year was out.

“We were out of pocket until the last few months of this year. It cost ten thousand a week to keep the band on the road at the beginning, and six months ago, when they were just beginning to break nationally, it was costing twenty thousand to keep it going.

“The record company put in another 120 thousand and we put in the rest, but there was never any real negativity about us not making it. The feeling was always there that it would happen in the end.”

Aucoin was, in fact, aware of Alice Cooper’s approaching “retirement” and this was a factor that led him to take on the group in the first place. Bob Ezrin’s introduction into the fold — Ezrin, of course, produces Cooper — came about not only through Aucoin’s invitation, but also through his own intuitiveness.

Believe it or not, Ezrin is constantly in touch with young kids who call him to discuss new developments in rock. Such a fan called up about Kiss, mentioned that though their stage act was quite unbelievable, their records were lousy. Forewarned, Ezrin accepted Aucoin’s invitation without hesitation.

“They’ll get more musical now,” said Aucoin. “Don’t forget that when you’re running around the stage like Kiss do, you can’t be overly critical about every note you play.

“Now they’ve been on the road for a couple of years and know how to handle an audience, they can concentrate on the finer points of music.”

As a press conference last week demonstrated, it is really quite hard to get straight answers from any of the members of Kiss. After half an hour’s questioning by about 15 reporters gathered to witness this “eve of European tour occasion”, it was doubtful whether anyone was much wiser about the four members of the band.

Talking is not their forte and they seemed much happier striking ridiculously exaggerated poses with a blonde model who is shortly to appear as the centrefold in Playboy magazine, who had been brought along to add a touch of glamour to the ugliness of Kiss’s made-up facade.

“I was born a pervert,” replied Simmons when I caught him alone some time later, but his talk...
became more reasoned as we progressed. His image is, perhaps, best summed up in his own sleeve notes on Kiss’s live album, where he writes: “I love to do all those deliciously painful things to you that make you writhe and groan in ecstasy. My spiked seven inch boot heels are at the ready should you be in the mood for heavy sport.”

All of which sounds rather like a classified advert from Screw magazine, so it comes as a surprise to discover that 26-year-old Simmons was, at one time or another, a teacher in a secondary school and, by all accounts, an academic success at university. He also worships British bands like the Stones and The Who, and makes no secret of basing his own musical ideas on them. Simmons is reluctant to talk about his past, partly because Kiss are currently so successful that he feels the past is of no interest and partly because he was, with Stanley, in a band once signed to Columbia whose album was never released. Mention of all this, he thinks, could prompt the label to release the album on the strength of Kiss’s name and he doesn’t want it to happen.

Sufficient to say that the other members of this early five-piece outfit were fired by Simmons and Stanley because their physical characteristics and attitude towards live performances didn’t shape up to what they had in mind.

“We’ve always felt that we have to look better than the people who come to see us,” he said. “There’s something wrong when the audience looks better than the people they’ve come to see. It’s very important, to us at any rate.”

Legends are made of stories like this one: Simmons and Stanley negotiated an advance from Columbia and, with the money, rented a Greenwich Village loft in which to rehearse, filling it with English amplifiers in their attempts to emulate the British heavy metal sound of the early ’70s.

“We knew we wanted to be exciting, so we asked ourselves who we thought was exciting... Well, there’s The Who, Led Zeppelin and Jimi Hendrix, the loud guitar-oriented bands... so that’s what we had to become. Then we decided that if we had one frontman, there was a possibility that the audience might become bored with him. So our idea was to get four frontmen, each one could have his own personality, look different yet fit into a unifying band.”

Drummer Criss was discovered after placing an advert in Rolling Stone, which Simmons answered.

“When I asked him about his musical ideas I asked whether he was fat, if he wore a beard and things like that. He couldn’t believe that I wanted to know those things, but it was important because we had to get the visuals right from the start.

“Then I went to see him in some club, playing in a band, and he was great. He hit the snare real hard, like the English drummers do, so he was in.”

As a trio, Kiss—for the name had been decided on by now—rehearsed for three months and even auditioned for a couple of interested companies.

“Then, when we thought we were ready to add an extra layer, we advertised for a second guitarist in The Village Voice.”

“Ace was about the 30th guy we heard... I mean, we had guitarists who couldn’t speak English coming along, but Ace came in and I noticed very distinctly that he was wearing one orange sneaker and one red sneaker. He seemed so spaced out that I knew he was it. All he had to do was have his tongue out a lot and make no secret of basing his own musical ideas on them.”

As a trio, Kiss—for the name had been decided on by now—rehearsed for three months and even auditioned for a couple of interested companies.

“They made their first appearance in January 1973, using whatever girls’ makeup they could lay their hands on and adopting a style of dress as much like the present style as they could afford on their stretched budget. During their first year under Aucoin’s management, Simmons estimates the band played 290 concerts supporting just about every band that simulated a blizzard of guitars; drums; EVERYTHING.

But what Kiss hadn’t got at their Hammersmith Odeon gig on Sunday night was a feeling for music. They depended on their band pyrotechnics to win over the English audience and, admittedly, they seemed to do that. But it was all so nauseatingly contrived that the showmanship meant nothing. I comfort myself in the knowledge that the audience were as bored with him. So our idea was to get four frontmen, each one could have his own personality, look different yet fit into a unifying band.”

Drummer Criss was discovered after placing an advert in Rolling Stone, which Simmons answered.

“When I asked him about his musical ideas I asked whether he was fat, if he wore a beard and things like that. He couldn’t believe that I wanted to know those things, but it was important because we had to get the visuals right from the start.

“Then I went to see him in some club, playing in a band, and he was great. He hit the snare real hard, like the English drummers do, so he was in.”

As a trio, Kiss—for the name had been decided on by now—rehearsed for three months and even auditioned for a couple of interested companies.

“Their stage presence is the only thing they have. They’re reaching a point when... well, in a couple of years I don’t know how credible they will be. If my father was playing rock’n’roll, I’d be a bit sceptical.” Chris Charlesworth •
“He deserves to be copied”

DAVID BOWIE returns to London. As if to confirm his role as “the generational leader of the ’70s”, his audience includes an army of doppelgängers. “I’m devoted to him,” says one. “If it wasn’t for him I’d be like everyone else. I’d probably be at home watching television.”

— MELODY MAKER MAY 15 —

ILLY NEVINS has the look of some hoodlum space punk created by Harlan Ellison after a vision suggested by David Bowie in Diamond Dogs. A wild mutation of Ziggy Stardust and Aladdin Sane, his makeup is smeared and grotesque; his T-shirt grimy and torn across the chest, an old fox fur stole is draped in nonchalant contempt about his shoulders. Badges and stickers and graffiti swarm over his jeans and shirt. He stares wild-eyed, with a kind of demented innocence, his eyes slightly glazed. How old are you, Billy? “Fifteen,” he replies, with a trace of cocksure arrogance in his voice and shrug of his shoulders which establishes a mood of petulant defiance. Billy has come to see David Bowie at Wembley Empire Pool. He has travelled, on the underground, from his home in Rayners Lane, Harrow, and suffered, without embarrassment, the indignant and outraged reactions of those members of an older generation he encountered on his journey.

“I didn’t care what they thought. I’m devoted to David Bowie. If it wasn’t for him I’d be like everyone else. I’d probably be at home watching television or something. I’m dressed like this because it’s like a fantasy. When Bowie was Ziggy, it was a fantasy. He’s not a fantasy any more, but I’m still devoted to him. He’s playing David Bowie now. He’s expressing what he feels like because David Bowie isn’t as interesting as Ziggy Stardust.”

As Michael Watts observed last week in his MM review of the opening night of David Bowie’s concerts at the Empire Pool, where he played over six nights to an estimated 48,000 people, no other rock star of the ’70s has captured so vividly and with such accuracy the imagination of the contemporary teenage audience.

He may have inherited from Jagger a capacity for outrage, but Bowie has not been content to merely reflect the frustrations and aspirations of his audience. Rather, he has sought to interrupt the mood of the times and created for himself the role of a significant influence over the lives and attitudes of his most ardent followers. He has connected with the mood of constant change which has characterised this decade and instilled in his fans a fervent and challenging appreciation of the necessity to confront the anonymity which contemporary society would seek to impress upon them by celebrating the notion of outrageous individuality.

Everywhere at Wembley over those six evenings his influence over his followers was apparent in the style of their dress and mannerisms and ideas. The
Jeremy Good, 17, from Havant, Hampshire: “I think what he’s said about fascism is just a whim.”
Steve Gardner, 18, from Lyndon Road, Blackburn, expressed an attitude which was entirely representative. “It’s important to have someone to follow. Someone to associate with. He’s distinctive and individual. He’s always different. He avoids monotony by changing all the time.”

“I respect him for the glamour of his image and his music. He’s outrageous and listener to outrageous music, like Bowie and Lou Reed and the New York Dolls, I’d be surprised if he wasn’t influenced by him. He’s not a great artist, but he’s an influence, so it doesn’t matter. It’s more important that there’s someone to follow. It’s an occasion to see Bowie. It makes you want to dress up.”

Alan Davies, 18, a hairdresser from Bristol Avenue, Bolton, and Martin Sharp, 17, from Lever Edge Lane, Bolton, who had adopted an extravagant punk style for the concert, were even more assertive in recommending Bowie’s image. Davies: “He’s always exciting. He does what he wants and gets away with it. He doesn’t care about anyone else or what they’ll think of him. The music is less important than the image. Everyone needs an image to hold your attention. You’ve got to be outrageous.”

Sharp: “We want to be outrageous, and so identify with Bowie and want to be like him. People at home, however, emerged clearly: all were totally infatuated with Bowie’s persistently changing image. Indeed, their appreciation of Bowie was dominated by an imperative demand that he never remain the same. In an age of ‘grand illusion’, to quote the man himself, it is, after all, appropriate that the current hero be an artist who is an established master of disguise.”

“Why do I like Bowie? Because he’s such a beautiful man. He’s an original guy. Everyone’s bisexual, I have to put up with a lot of abuse in Manchester because I go to gay clubs. Tonight’s better. It’s a special night. Everyone’s dressed up. I don’t care what they say about fascism. I was into fascism long before Bowie.”

Nigel Cummings, 17, of Seldirk Road, Bolton, andJeremy Good, 15, of Warrington Secondary School, Havant, were more vague in assessing Bowie’s importance, but the infatuation with his image was evident. Both, however, had paid over £200 in fares for travel and accommodation in London.

It is enough for Cummings to say that he likes Bowie, without explanation: “He’s unique, isn’t he? He’s always startling. Everyone follows him. He’s always doing something different. No, I don’t always dress like this. It’s just for the show, and to show everyone I like Bowie. And that I’m a bit unique, too.” Jeremy Good was a little less defensive, if no more enlightening: “I heard Ziggy and I thought it was brilliant and very important. I’ve followed him ever since. I had red, spiky hair at the time of Ziggy, and then I went onto the Cracked Actor look and now this (he was dressed like Bowie in The Man Who Fell To Earth).”

“I think what he’s said about fascism is just a whim. I don’t think he’d be accepted as a politician. I went onto the Cracked Actor look and now this (he was dressed like Bowie in The Man Who Fell To Earth).”

Steven Hattersley, 17, an electrician of Henley Street, Manchester, and Martin Haley, 17, an apprentice hairdresser from Manchester, were less convinced about Bowie as a prospective fascist candidate: “It’s a publicity stunt,” Hattersley observed. “It’s got nothing to do with his music. He admires fascism, but he’s a liar. The press tell him and he says something outrageous. We know what he really means.”

Dick Key, 18, originally from Maidstone, now a porter in a hotel in Abersoch, North Wales, was in contrast a little more cynical about the whole event: “I used to think Bowie was a big poof, you know, in the early days. But I was a bit of a hooligan then. A real rebel. I like to be noticed, and to look a bit special. I’m an exhibitionist really. It’s more than just getting away with it. He doesn’t care. He’s so great that he deserves to be copied.”

Jeremy Good, 15, of Warrington Secondary School, said: “I respect him for the glamour of his image and his music. He’s a lot like me. He has the same style and he’s a bit of a rebel. I like to be noticed and to look a bit special. I’m an exhibitionist really. It’s more than just getting away with it. He doesn’t care. He’s so great that he deserves to be copied.”

Christopher Aslanan, 21, a chef from Sandfield Park, Liverpool, has, like Dave and Sharp suffered the anger and violence of those less than sympathetic to Bowie. He is currently a carbon copy of Bowie, with two-tone hair, black waistcoat and trousers and crisp white shirt. He even sports a pair of Gitanes, a detail he picked up from photographs of Bowie in concert (such is the extent of Bowie’s influence that he has just started smoking).

“I always wanted to be different,” he said. “Bowie was different, so I copied him. He’s got a bit like me. He has the same style and he’s a bit of a rebel. I like to be noticed and to look a bit special. I’m an exhibitionist really. It’s more than just getting away with it. He doesn’t care. He’s so great that he deserves to be copied.”

Cliff Parker, of Douglas Road, Aylesbury, a salesmen for John Collier the tailors, attached rather more importance to Bowie’s professed bisexuality: “I have tremendous respect for him as a singer and a writer, and as a performer he is incredibly versatile. But I also respect him because he was the first rock star to admit that he was bisexual, and that took a lot of courage.”

David Carr, 18, a hairdresser from Manchester and an uncanny Bowie lookalike, was even more forthcoming: “It’s a very emotional experience tonight, because I think it’s the end of Bowie as a cult figure. He’s been around for almost twenty years, and it’s enough for him to retire. It’s a great shame, because he’s so great that he deserves to be copied.”

Perhaps the final word should go to Christopher Aslanan, who described as “my God”. He spent £15 for tickets for five of the six shows (he missed Tuesday’s concert). “I like his image. He’s flamboyant and different. I think he said that about fascism because some reporter was getting on his nerves. It makes no difference, anyway. If he was sincere I’d go along with it and agree with ‘im because he’s my God, ain’t he...”

Jez stated finally that he spends his time drinking, playing golf and “spending money on myself.”

Perhaps the final word should go to Christopher Aslanan. Rather exasperated with his blank acceptance of everything Bowie and his determination to emulate every change Bowie went through, I asked casually what he would do if Bowie suddenly became infatuated with the idea of shooting members of his audience for the encore. “I’d buy a gun, I suppose,” he replied without a trace of a smile. Alan Jones

Black tie/white heat

Whatever anyone writes now about David Bowie, it will have no bearing upon his position as a rock figure. At London’s Wembley Empire Pool on Monday, the first of six concerts there and his only British appearance for almost three years, he was given a reception that eventually, as he performed “Jean Genie” for the final encore, brought tears to his eyes.

But he was not the only one to come away from the moment he walked on stage, young male lookalikes with red- frosted hair were making sobbing protestations with hands outstretched, while the impressive show of unashamedly homosexual the audience at the end finally confirmed that Bowie is the most potent British tastemaker since Mick Jagger. Even the most impassive critic would have admitted this was a real event, and not just an exercise in the mixing of LSD, for Bowie left Britain, when he “retired” in July 1973, with only a shaky optimism, but he has returned from America as the fullfillment of Tony Defries’ prophecy that one day he would be an “empire”.

No other ’70s rock star has represented so much in the fashions and social conduct of the young, or, for that matter, been so overwhelmingly ambitious as to want to extend that influence over the cinema and intellectual circles. That he has done this with some success must be at least partly due to his greatest talent as a manipulator of images and social forces. He is so dominating in teenage culture not only because he knows so many more things than his rivals, but because he understands how to exploit them to stay ahead, if only instinctively. For instance, his appearance in black silk
waistcoat and trousers, with his hair slicked flat back, and looking like a character from Isherwood’s Berlin, raised immediate echoes of his recent controversial comments about fascist rule for Britain.

No other rock artist – certainly not Elton John – could provoke that kind of intellectual connection. Yet it’s debatable how great is his actual contribution to music, as opposed to the lifestyle and theories of popular culture.

Though he has had his artistic successes – perhaps most notably with the doom-mongering Diamond Dogs – his gift seems always to have been to synthesise styles, as he has done even on his last two albums, Young Americans and Station To Station, where he performs what he describes as “plastic soul”.

Indeed, though only the keyboard player – the former Yes musician, Tony Kaye – was white, the music performed at Wembley by Bowie and his five-piece band had a metallic ring that was oddly familiar from every album he has made since Hunky Dory.

It’s undoubtedly funky, but it remains somehow mechanistic, ferocious in its loudness and intensity, and quite unlike soul white or black. In vulgar shorthand, he has made nonsense of old Hunky Dory and all.

This professionalism made nonsense of old memories of Bowie as a rather naive, aspiring performer, so in control was he. He sang forcefully, and largely without the chansonnier mannerisms that jarred on his Jacques Brel interpretations, but then in this show there is no room for songs that disrupt the momentum; and his torchy style was mercifully moderated on such modern pitfalls as “Word On A Wing” and “Stay”. But his stagecraft is now considerable. He mugs and flounces with the conviction of a Broadway trouper and none of the earnestly mimetic movements that once made his performance at the old Rainbow uncomfortable to watch.

On an unfamiliar, vastly reworked version of “I’m Waiting For The Man” he had even developed a shrewd cameo for himself as the nervous white boy trying to score “uptown”. He went into this perfect littleadesh of fumbling with his cigarette and mumbling apologies (“Oh pardon me, sir, I’m just waiting for my man”) for his presence on a Harlem street corner that blew open Lou Reed’s own sullen, defiant version of the song.

With just such versions as these he defined himself as a musical performer rather than as a rock act dutifully repeating his hits. He has even learned to move with passable expertise, though his grace seemed acquired rather than natural as his often gawking figure snapped into a hip-swing and his legs pumped like bellows, but at least he has confounded his current travelling companion, Iggy Stooge, who once maintained that Bowie could never cut it in rock because he couldn’t dance.
ALBUMS

Silk BELL

Silk, it appears, have been granted the honour of becoming the first teenybop band to be credited with a bit of skill and hope. And though their debut album is nothing special, there are signs that this optimism is well-founded.

Apart from the two classy pop singles on Silk – “Forever And Ever” and their most recent, “Requiem” – the material, featuring compositions from the band as well as producer Phil Coulter, is quite ordinary, nothing too sensational at all.

It’s an album on which no chances are taken, a compilation of poppy songs, simple enough to please the teenybop audience the band have, initially anyway, chosen to aim for. I’d like to have seen a more daring approach taken – Silk do insist that their influences range from the light to the heavy – but then I suppose it’s difficult to depart from the proven formula. The Coulter numbers, apart from the MOR ballad “Better Than I Do”, are the predictable, commercial compositions he has made his forte. “Requiem”, with its unusual time changes, stands out. The band numbers are less polished and none too memorable. Like all early compositions by aspiring songwriters, they’re about love – “Do It Again” (Ure), “Day By Day” and “Darlin’” (McIsaac) and “No We Won’t Forget You” (McGinlay), Hopefully, they’ll improve with experience.

So, with nothing too startlingly fresh in the material, we must look to the musicianship for substantiation of their optimistic claims, and that, indeed, is where we find hope. Midge Ure is a good vocalist and fine guitarist, with a fine sense for feel; Billy McIsaac is a capable keyboards man; Kenny Hyslop’s drum work is quite good; and Jim McGinlay’s bass playing is adequate.

McGinlay, too, comes across as an outstanding singer on the tracks he handles: “No We Won’t Forget You”, “Darlin’” and “Better Than I Do”, with a vocal that sounds like a cross between Paul McCartney and Clifford T Ward. The harmony work of the band, too, is well above average. That’s Silk’s debut. Perhaps next time they’ll show a little more nerve and go out on a limb, which they refuse to do here. It’s an album that doesn’t give too many glimpses of their credibility but which shows, as their live performances did earlier in the year, that there’s more to them, musically, than meets the eye. 

Led Zeppelin PRESENCE SWAN SONG

There is a man I know, a college lecturer, for whom there is only one rock band. He literally knows of no other group than Led Zeppelin, and while his tastes otherwise roam ‘twixt classical and jazz music, when it comes to rock he will listen entitled, solely to Zeppelin.

Such is the power the band hold over their devotees. And with good reason, for there is a classic simplicity about Zeppelin’s music that is instantly recognisable to those who appreciate symmetry and interlocking forces. From the opening bars of the remarkable “Achilles Last Stand”, the unity of Zeppelin, in the eighth year of their existence, is striking.

Each member fulfils his function with complete awareness of what the others are doing and why, so that every slight moan or ad lib from Robert (like the “well, well” of rising expectation at the beginning of “For Your Life”) seems to fit into a logical place against the rhythmical pulses emanating from John Bonham, John Paul and Jimmy.

“Rhythmic pulses” seems very tame when one is attempting to describe the rock-solid heartbeat that is the mainspring of the band. The excitement Zeppelin generated with their relentless performances of “Tangled Underfoot” at their last concerts was among the more memorable rock events of the last couple of years. Well, Zeppelin have come among us again, this time with a whole album of dynamic compositions delivered with a fervour that shows how anxious the band were to get down their new ideas.

“Achilles Last Stand” is Zeppelin at their most propulsive, its speed and pace regulated by the locomotive drumming of John Bonham, who has the knack of finding a fresh beat to work out on and provide the basis for the duelling role of Jimmy’s guitar and Robert’s vocals.

The guitar drifts in unaccompanied in a mood-setting statement, then blazes into action as the pace accelerates like a battle hymn. But this is no mere rock bash – the tune has a most unusual construction, Robert’s vocal lines adding unexpected extra phrases, heavily emphasised like a litany. There is something mystical about the way this piece develops, and undoubtedly this lengthy performance provides the most satisfying moments of any side one and would be worth the price of the album alone.

Observe the way the drums and guitar work together in the final bars of Robert’s first vocal, choruses phasing together with the power of six combined orchestras. Then, when Jimmy takes off for his single guitar solo, the bass and drums batter out a ferocious series of unison triplets; a simple enough device but one perfectly placed. And instead of slowing down the action, it heaps more coals on the furnish.

The triplets return as Robert sings as if calling the faithful to prayer from some eastern minaret at sundown. Great gusts of cymbal and bass drum hammer home the beats in six-eight time (according to my counting), then the pounding stops as Jimmy takes out the piece with rotating menacing chords. “For Your Life” has to follow this stunning workout, and they neatly drop into a relatively relaxed backbeat, with cliff-hanging suspense between beats, the tension increased by a simple tambourine beat. Robert weaves in and out of the firm and ferocious guitar lines, jamming and scatting in time-honoured fashion. The guitar-vocal dialogue is a tradition that goes back to the roots of jazz and blues.
It’s this living quality that Page, the producer, has captured, while the West German studio sound is fantastically clean and clear. The combination of studio, producer, compositions and energy on the session has worked with that indefinable chemistry that everybody hopes will result when it comes to making an album.

This single album has certainly caught Zeppelin with their atomic particles flying, if you will pardon the expression. The explosive power is maintained on the second side (play side one a few times before allowing oneself the pleasure of exploring the rest of this offering).

“Nobody’s Fault But Mine” has Robert in recalcitrant mood, as he stags the title line, and the guitar seems to run in the point with nagging insistence. Jimmy whirls through a series of furious runs before joining with Robert in a thoroughly bluesy union guitar/vocal section.

They suddenly abandon this piece to switch into “Candy Store Rock”, which would intrigue Chris Spedding, who has tried to achieve this very ‘50s sound. Echo fills the room as the drums and guitar bounce over a brutal John Paul Jones bassline. The guitar sound recalls Neil Christian and The Crusaders, if anyone can remember that far back. And just when you think they’ve said it all, they can with the riff, they get into a sexy boogie, ideal for go-go dancers the world over.

A night on the tiles follows with “Hots On For Nowhere”, a jazzy dance beat, which will thoroughly exhaust the aforementioned go-go dancers. Another potential concert rave-up notable for some unusual Page guitar work, where he drops in something thoroughly Stax-type licks before the party mood grows in excitement. Just listen to Bonzo’s answering snare drum crackle to Jimmy’s guitar break!

Well, before we start going over the top, our emotion is contained, then rechanneled by the final item, “Tea For One”, which is the Zeppelin I love to hear, working out on a slow blues, their power held in abeyance and ever-ready to break out. Robert intones softly over the firm but laidback bass and ride cymbal, while Jimmy renders in tune with atmospheric fervour. The mood here perfectly complements the optimism and strident attack of “Achilles Last Stand” and makes a solid conclusion to an album that has pace, direction and tremendous style. Chris Welch, MM/April 11

Canned Heat Live At Topanga Corral UNITED ARTISTS

White plagiarists almost killed the blues as a vital force in popular music. The perpetual rip-off of Elmore James’ phrases and the piquant cries of John Lee Hooker, BB King et al rendered them trite and meaningless, the butt of satirists and cynics. But the blues boom of the mid-’60s was founded on a genuine and enough passion for the blues.

So mention today of such a band as Canned Heat draws a hollow groan. It recalls an era of exploitation perhaps best forgotten. Which is unfair on Canned Heat, who despite their patent limitations as musicians (they never could swing much), were sincere and deeply committed to the blues heritage. And still are, of course, as a recent edition of the band has just completed a visit to these shores.

These “live” recordings stem from a gig at Topanga Corral in early 1967, and although the tempi drag a bit on tunes like “Bullfrog Blues”, due to the then-popular habit of drummers answering on the bass drum, there is some fine, atmospheric blues guitar soloing on “Sweet Sixteen”, and “Wish You Would”.

Anna Cox

Aerosmith Dream On CBS

This has recently had a long run on the US charts: certainly it’s a grower. The B-side is yer usual HM blitz, with Steven Tyler’s voice rather like McCartney the Rocker, but the A-side’s a real surprise. A slow, spiralling song, mature and restrained, but not yet addictive. NME May 8

AC/DC

It’s A Long Way To The Top (If You Wanna Rock’n’Roll) ATLANTIC

Something is stirring in the outback. Already this year there have been strong single releases from down under by Hush a brainless metallic revival of the DC5’s awful “Glad All Over”, which nearly didn’t die the death it deserved – and by Jeff Phillips, whose pulsating rock song “Superman” should have been a smash.

AC/DC, like so many heavy bands, get mighty boring over the length of a stage performance, but they send the adrenaline count soaring over the three-minute single. Crass lyrics, but a buzz. NME May 8

David Bowie

The ex-Spiders From Mars vocalist has really carved out a strong solo career for himself over the last few years, but by the sound of this he just might be missing the lads. After all that hanging out in LA and appearing on Soul Train he’s returned home to England, bringing along a record that sounds uncannily like it could have been cut at the sessions he recorded with the Spiders for the Aladdin Sane LP, three long years ago. Actually, the players are all Yanks with names like Earl and Carlos, but you can close your eyes and pretend its Mick and Woody and everything’s hunky dory. Nice one, Dave, NME May 8

Fleetwood Mac

Rhiannon REPRISE

More gentle rocking from the Mac, who hit a new groove with the legendary Kiln House album, and have stuck with it since. And who can blame them? The sound is a big success in the States, even if it’s a bit too delicate to bludgeon its way onto the British charts. Stranger things happen, though, so here’s hoping. NME May 1
June 15-18, 1976: Bob Marley & The Wailers play four nights at the Hammersmith Odeon during the Rastaman Vibration Tour.
“My music fight against the system”

Already a songwriter and performer, BOB MARLEY steps into a new role: superstar. “People come to me, say ‘Bob Marley, big international artist’ and I laugh,” he says. “If God had-na given me a song to sing, I wouldn’t have a song to sing.”

— MELODY MAKER JUNE ’12 —

“Don’t want success. Success mean nuttin’. Plenty people been successful, but dey still living dead.”
Bob Marley

IT’S NO ORDINARY rehearsal room, the door-less outhouse in the garden of Bob Marley’s house in Hope Road, Kingston, just a few minutes along from the prime minister’s residence.
The Wailers practise here, in a room about twice the size of the average British lounge. What makes it extraordinary in atmosphere is the unmistakeable feeling that when the musicians are there, playing and smoking and planning a concert or an album, it’s as if nothing had ever happened and they were still jamming purely for fun, as they did 10 years ago. With few cares or considerations beyond the next tune, the new single, and not the faintest prospect of world tours and hit albums.
A drum kit lies idles, an empty guitar case here, a chair or two... and what’s this? A running order is scribbled and stuck to the wall reading as follows:


On another wall is a article of faith – a portrait with the words: “Imperial Majesty, Emperor Haile Selassie, King of Kings, Lord of Lords.” Incongruously, a sticker is pinned beneath it: “Album of the Year – Natty Dread”.

Bob Marley lives here, works here, plays here; and if there’s one thing absolutely endearing about the whole Jamaican-Rastafarian reggae story as it reaches its British peak with Bob Marley’s tour next week, it’s this: what you see, and what they say, is all there is. There’s no hiding behind poses, and the uncluttered sound of their music runs synonymously with their personalities. The rehearsal room is the opposite of pretentious.

Bob Marley, the man, and Bob Marley, the concert, are two different things. His house is large and old and rambling, and bears the vibrations of a commune. People drift in and out, by car and on foot, and he waves to them all, while remaining seated on the steps.

The house is a positive statement by Marley. Opposite, there are some terrible new apartments which look like prison cells, and Bob continually laughs at the fact that they have bars up, protecting them from burglars. “No way to live, no way to live!” he keeps saying. “Must run home like mind. Keep open.”

Thus, Marley’s home, Island House, in Hope Road, Kingston, is open to all-comers. Especially Rastafarians. As the Marley/Wailers success gathers momentum, so their allegiance to Rastafarian principles becomes more concentrated. Every other sentence of Marley’s speech is punctuated by a reference to Jah (God) and as he drew harder on his cigar-sized spliff (joint) repeating: “Righteousness must cover the earth like the water cover the sea.” I had visions of a sermon rather than a conversation, and certainly fading hopes of a lucid conversation.

And yet it’s too easy to dismiss the obsession with Rasta as excluding their attachment to reality. It’s impossible to catch, first time round, every word and nuance of what Marley is saying, but his drift is quite simple to understand, and while he keeps returning to his declarations that commercial gain is not his aim, he is acutely aware of all that’s happening around him. His mind moves very quickly indeed, and his powers of observation are uncanny.

I asked him first about his evident need to smoke ganja (herb), of which he partakes a pound a week, and why the smoking of it was so dovetailed into his Rasta beliefs.

“Herb is healing of a nation,” he said quietly. “When you smoke, you don’t frighten so easy. Herb bring all brethren together, all thinking alike, and that’s why they lock you up when you smoke herb, because it makes people think same way. But if people don’t smoke herb they think different from each other, can be told what to do and get... confused.

“In Babylon we give thanks for herb, and if we didn’t have herb to educate us, we be educated by fools who tell us to live like funny, like in Babylon. Herb is the healing of a nation, Bible say that. Herb come out of the ground!”

Did this contempt, then, for materialism and Babylon (western culture) and even for organised society represent Black Power, and did Bob feel his music was preaching TO white ears, or to blacks about whites?

“My music fight against the system. My music defend righteousness. If you’re white and you’re wrong, then you’re wrong; if you’re black and you’re wrong, you’re wrong. People are PEOPLE. Black, blue, pink, green – God make no rules where my people suffer and that why we must have redemption and redemption is now. Against white people! Couldn’t say that. I fight against the system that teach you to live and die.”
So his music existed for propaganda? He laughed at the seriousness of the word. “No, if God had given me a song to sing, I wouldn’t have a song to sing. So it’s not MY music, from my soul, doing these things, saying these words. I don’t know about propaganda but in telling truth, and I don’t deal with the wrong things of life, and I don’t want to know them, you... know them, and because you’re not perfect you might try to change. Don’t like the idea of propaganda, that’s not how I-and-I see it. Don’t deal with dark things.”

And yet many of his songs, I said, were laced with stabs at various inequalities. “Bellyful”, for example, was surely a commentary on the starvation of some as compared with the abundant wealth of others?

Not exactly, Marley answered. It was more subtle than that—“You belly’s full, but we’re hungry for your LOVE of your brethren. Food’s in your stomach, but cannot you see there is more to living than filling it? Where’s the love for your brother?”

No, he averred, it wasn’t entirely a materialistic commentary, more a sad declaration of the bankruptcy of believing that everything ended with self-gratification. But he was positively not playing a role. Asked if he felt any responsibility as “the most popular star reggae had produced, he said: “I don’t think about it, you know. Too busy working. People come to me, say ‘Bob Marley, big international artist,’ and I laugh. I don’t know what that mean. If it mean more people listen, enjoy music, then good. That’s all.”

Still, he had been watching the adoption of reggae by others, and he liked Johnny Nash’s “Stir It Up”, a world-hit version of the Marley song, and he was interested in how others make incursions into the style, mentioning Paul Simon’s “Mother And Child Reunion” (“nice”).

“See, dem American players come down here and play with Jamaican musicians who are very friendly. Make good records. It happens all the time.”

So there was no determination to keep reggae as a wholly private scene, and Jamaica was happy for the world to go into Kingston and join in?

“Nah, world cannot take it,” Bob replied immediately. “This is one of them things the world cannot take. It’s like gold is gold and silver is silver, and what is... imitation can be seen the imitation.

“So the real thing, nobody can take away from here. You have to really come in to this thing at our time to have the feel, y’know. It’s art, y’know, art. Not just a purposeful thing, but from knowing. That’s why I-and-I know nobody can take it. They can go anywhere and play funky and soul, but reggae—too hard, reggae. Must have a bond with it. The real reggae must come from Jamaica, because other people could not play it all the while, anyway—it would go against their whole life. Reggae has the... inside you.”

Marley was now trying to get himself to define reggae music as clearly as possible, and the nearest he could get was to say it was like jazz. “Jazz—a complete music,” he declared, still smoking. “Reggae complete too. Reggae is funky, but it’s also different from funky, and sometimes I think funky soul music goes little too far in what it tries to do. Reggae music is simple, all the while. Different from soul as well. Cannot be taught, that’s a fact.”

It relied on a mental attitude, he explained. If he was depressed and was going into a studio, he could not make music properly. But then, it might easily have something to do with the people and their vibrations. He felt—well, not uneasy in the company of non-Rastafarians, but not relaxed either. He wanted to stress, though, there was no antipathy towards non-Rastas.

“Well, I say a man a chance if he’s not Rasta. The Bible full of stories of people not treated right for not believing. Problem is not with people who are not in touch with Rasta, but with people who are once Rasta and then have left it and have to go back to it. These can be difficult and... confused people.”

Propaganda for Rastafarianism was something he admitted, if not for black repression. Are you trying to make audiences outside Jamaica appreciate what Rasta is all about? For what stands for?

“Yeh, mon, Rastaman Vibration gonna cover the earth! Yah say: until the philosophy which places one race superior and one race inferior is finally and permanently discredited and abandoned, then we won’t have no peace. ‘Babylon believe in divide and rule, but Rasta one way only, the right way, and we can do it but it take longer. We have redemption now, nobody can stop it...”

Marley said he read a chapter of the Bible every day and based his belief on, including his diet. He is a vegetarian, although that is not a prerequisite of Rastafarianism. He didn’t drink, he said, because it was obvious that pumping chemicals into his body would make him ill. “A little wine, sometimes,” he reflected.

“The reason people drink is because they want to feel how feel when I smoke. Everybody need to get a little high sometimes, just that some people get high on the wrong thing. Herb does grow. How much do I smoke? Plenty.”

Could someone be a Rasta and not smoke?

“Yeah... but if you believe in Rasta and fight against the herb, you are wrong. Herb needs to be understood properly, but, in hands of Rasta, it is the healing of a nation.”

Smoking is highly illegal in Jamaica, however, and Marley repeats his view that society is frightened of people thinking the same way. “Vampires!” he roared. “Most people are negative out there, but Rasta people think positive. Most people in Babylon want power. Devil want power, but Devil need power, ‘cos Devil insecure.”

Insecurity never bothered him. Even when he travelled outside Jamaica, he remained confident, secure, positive. The only place he would contemplate settling in, except Jamaica, was Africa—this was naturally bound up with his Rasta convictions—but even without the prospect of settling there, he planned a trip there soon. Friends say they dread the day Marley goes there, because he’s such a highly charged, sensitive man that it is bound to change his entire attitude, one way or the other, towards his beliefs.

He said the system taught people that they must live and die, but he and his brethren did not agree. Furthermore, they were totally opposed to the worshipping of material goods to the point where people in “Babylon” (Bob’s all-embracing word for the centre of the world’s problems) died working for material objects which would do nothing to enrich their lives.

It wasn’t that he personally renounced materially useful things: bicycles, cars, were OK in the Rasta creed, but they were merely a means to an end. —

“Herb bring all brethren together, all thinking alike”
"If somebody gave me a spaceship, I would give it back to him because I could not use it," Marley continued.

He pointed to that ugly block of new houses opposite, and laughed sadly. "Those people over there are working to live in a situation not good, but the system educated them to think that is the end of their life," he said. "People not taught to be at peace with themselves. Education all wrong. Put you in a bracket where you earn enough money to pay for these things!" (He pointed at the houses again.)

"Well, you have to be a Rasta man to beat the system, and when they can get a Rasta man in jail, they do, and then they try to get you back there. Everyone wants the biggest car, refrigerator, crazy, mon – this is the system I keep talking about..." He started to sing "Rat Race".

What about the race for the title of the biggest reggae band in the world, then? Did he concede such a contest existed?

"Can't say that," he answered, convincingly. "I-and-I, and my brethren, only answer to myself and to Jah. If de Waiters can get a Rasta man in the studio, and Bob Marley, he declared, knew all about the rats and the roaches of Trenchtown living. "He also knows all those old slogans about no money, no jobs, no future. Well, Marley's giving them a future."

"Rastafarianism? Oh, it's quite popular but only among the very young here. I don't think reggae will ever catch on much. It's really dance music for the young. What would you like to drink?"

Ray Coleman •

"Bob's the one who made it, and people are out to take him down, just because I could not use it," Marley continued. She was about 23, a black Jamaican. I asked the hostess her views on reggae, Rastafarianism... "I've seen things, things! (He pointed at the houses again.)

"When I feel satisfied and when Jah tells me to be at peace with myself. Education all wrong. Put you in a situation not good, but the system educated them to be at peace with themselves."

The single star who comes nearest to it is Bob Marley. This is partly because his concerts are actual events as important for the occasion as for the music he so powerfully projects - and partly because, by virtue of the fact that he's black and sings the blues of the '70s, he's capturing the heat of the times.

The man has a hypnotic magnetism, and it's the sure sign of a giant when it scarily matters that the quality of his music is occasionally rough. What counts is solely that he's up there, delivering and communicating.

For too long, it seemed to me, contemporary music has failed to emphasise the emotional rapport essential between an artist and the audience. Bob Marley & The Wailers, during their concerts at Hammersmith Odeon, London, last week, had that rare aura of familiarity and warmth and heart and presence. "Feel The Vibes" said the notice outside the Odeon, and inside, the Rastaman's vibrations were powerful indeed. "Let peace and love abide in this house," said Marley as he took the stage, flanked by congas draped in the Ethiopian colours of green, yellow and orange, and atop the stage, a flag of the same persuasion bearing a portrait of the Rastafarians' idol, Haile Selassie.

Audiences were very mixed in colour, but white or black, all were instantly caught up in the intensity of the event. Today, of course, Marley is more politically committed to the black "redemption" cause than he was a year ago when he played that very special gig at the Lyceum, London. Everyone at the Hammersmith gigs last week seemed peculiarly aware of the seriousness of Bob Marley & The Wailers' stance.

He came out, singing "Trenchtown Rock", and we were away, as those deceptively simple rhythms gripped an audience which immediately abandoned its seats and took to the floor or, like me, stood on seats for a better view. "One good thing about music, when it hits you feel no pain," sang Marley, and his message was accepted.

The Odeon, a venue as cold as this music is hot, often eats artists alive, because it is impossible for them to radiate much from the invisible barrier erected by the stage. Yet within seconds, Marley had done it - completely enveloped his audience and commanded the entire theatre. It was a remarkable achievement.
blurry and theatrical, with Marley’s emotional range on display, it’s easy to catch the mood. Furthermore, Marley is now concentrating more heavily on animation and theatrics. He may dress up as immaculately as Bob Marley at the Hammersmith Odeon, where he seems to be concentrating more heavily on animation and theatrics.

What was equally surprising was the speed with which he raced through his songs. “Rasta-rat!” he exclaimed after the first song, and the crowd roared back approvingly as he sailed into: “This morning I woke up in the curfew… How many rivers to cross before we talk to the boss… (“Burnin’ And Lootin’”).

All Marley’s songs have these cryptic dashes of pure demonic fury, so that even when you’re unaware of the complete storyline, it’s easy to catch the mood. Furthermore, Marley is now concentrating more heavily on animation and theatrics. He may dress mainly, in red T-shirt and ordinary denims, but his out-stretched arms, with hands across face in desperation, clenched eyes, finger-pointing to the extreme to stab home a point – all these characteristics are, if not rehearsed, at least statements of intent. Bob is now working hard to get across his lines, every bit as seriously as a professional actor.

Head held back, he launched into “Them Belly Full”, a reminder that most of his songs stand up as anthems in themselves; the lead guitar solo here, from Donald Kinsey, was a killer. Throughout the concerts, Kinsey impressed with guitar licks that absolutely killed. Throughout the concerts, Kinsey impressed with guitar licks that absolutely killed.

The audience chanted “Everything’s gonna be all right” along with the song, and the simple act of clapping by the I Threes in mid-song was really something. It’s the little things that count… And so it went: “Lively Up Yourself”, “Roots, Rock, Reggae” with the I Threes’ glorious counterpart to Marley’s voice, and the crowd really loving the line: “You know, mister, music sure sound good to me!”

Whether by planning or accident, Marley’s encore was devoted to his political slants. “Rastaman Vibration”, “Rat Race” and a lengthy “Get Up, Stand Up”, perhaps his hottest song, all demonstrated what an immensely powerful repertoire the Wailers now have; I thought they had used up too many of the goodies to encore with anything significant, but how wrong can you be!

Here, Marley delivered his speech in the form of the words of Haile Selassie: “Until the philosophy where one race stay superior and the other inferior is finally and permanently discredited and abandoned, there will be no peace…”

Dancing off the stage, as he had done several times that night, he had assumed the mantle of a finely honed artist. It may well have seemed a long way from Trenchtown, and he may be spouting songs from a safe vantage point, which irritates some of his brethren – but at least he is DOING it.

For his final London show last Friday, before the band took off for its provincial tour, Marley was in even more joyous mood than on the opening show. Dancing around the stage, arms and dreadlocks flailing as if he had been choreographed, he looked and sounded physically tired and mentally high enough to carry him through.

“I Shot The Sheriff” and “No Woman, No Cry” were again the musical and spiritual peaks, and by this show the I Threes had added short but cute individual dances to the start of several of the songs.

Again the audience was politically receptive, especially wailing when Bob sang “We build your penitentiaries… we build your schools…” (during the glaringly anti-capitalist song “Want More”). What of the music? Economy is the strength of Marley & The Wailers’ sound. Aston Barrett’s bass, Earl “Chinna” Smith’s rhythm guitar, Carlton Barrett’s tasteful drums and the percussion work of Alvin Patterson combine for a lift-off which doesn’t rely on volume at all, but through the heartbeat and heart-beat of the music, makes for intoxication after a couple of minutes.

Marley and the Wailers grab you by the gullet and refuse to compromise. No other artist speaks for the time so eloquently, and the pure honesty of purpose is like a breath of garden air in a scene recently dominated by business motives.

Marley may well be the pawn in a Rasta chess game – woolly hats bearing the Rasta colours, posters and T-shirts are on sale at concerts, so the marketing of a cult has certainly taken hold. Whether it’s a good or bad thing for the music’s future is debatable, but the momentum would seem to be unstoppable. For the moment, though, Bob Marley & The Wailers are the leaders, the most potent voice to erupt into the contemporary music arena within the past six years.

And Marley himself is a terrific artist, full of nervous intensity, delivering the goods spectacularly, with a wealth of hot music that can chill the spine like few other events in recent years. All this, and he has his finger on the mood of a generation, too.

Who could ask more? Ray Coleman

**“I Shot The Sheriff” and “No Woman, No Cry” were the musical and spiritual peaks**
CHRIS BLACKWELL didn’t invent BOB MARLEY, but he did believe in him and fund him. In Jamaica, the Island Records owner explains how and why. “I don’t want to sound too clever about this,” he says, “but it’s a mistake to underestimate artists.”

MOVING AROUND REGGAE circles in Kingston, Jamaica, it’s easy to sense uneasiness about the commercial bandwagon to which some of the music is hitched. There’s generally delight that Bob Marley has “made it”, but still a suspicion that musicians had better be wary of opportunistic record businessmen from America and Britain, who see the music as a current fad, to be exploited quickly and then dropped just as speedily when all the dollars have been drained off.

Such is the love and dedication of many of the players that they are loath to sign anything. The rumours of rip-offs are to be heard everywhere, and “trust” is not a word uttered anywhere. The attitude is understandable, yet also self-defeating, because the very thing wanted by musicians who know full well that it’s easy to sense uneasiness about the commercial bandwagon to which some of the music is hitched.

What they all seek to help them, therefore, is that rare animal, a combination between genuine fan and shrewd businessman. Someone who can exercise discretion in weighing up the music, and who can bring a little, say, taste into the business end. Chris Blackwell has these attributes. He’s head of Island Records. His name will be identified by all reggae fanciers, not only as the producer of much of Bob Marley’s work, but also as a projector of Jamaican music since its days of pure novelty value.

When Millie’s “My Boy Lollipop” was a smash hit in 1964, Blackwell—a white Jamaican who had arrived in London two years earlier—ran the Sue label. (Incidentally, it was on Blackwell’s classy little Sue operation that The Beatles originally planned to model Apple: “Small and funky, just like Sue,” George Harrison once told me.)

Blackwell had grown up in Jamaica subconsciously realising the fermenting musical culture, but not until he reached Britain did he fully appreciate the long-range potential for the music. /*
"I feel that Island has been rather like Atlantic, the only company that decided to build artists."

Chris Blackwell in London, December 1972
Today, he is acknowledged as a sort of father figure of reggae's success, living testimony, perhaps, to the idealism inherent in all musicians that they can have their cake and eat it.

In Blackwell, art meets money and survives. Curiously enough, Blackwell did not know Marley when the two men lived in Jamaica. Chris had heard of Bob, but not until 1971 did Blackwell make contact with him, when both were in London.

Together, they’ve forged a kind of musical revolution since a first meeting at Island’s Basing Street studios, and their rapport now is complete. Talking to each man separately, one becomes aware of a peculiar relationship of trust, yet not of warmth. Blackwell has mastered an incredible operation which has hoisted Marley to the top of the reggae tree, so that now he is faced with the inevitable question of: which way now and how do we face a future even trickier than the past, artistically speaking?

Marley, however, though not a man to emit emotion with much candour, was laying himself on the line, by his own standards, when he said to me without any prompting: “Chris Blackwell do good for reggae. Do much to encourage musicians, and no bad deals.”

Blackwell jet-hops round the world these days, but the Blackwell in swimming trunks drinking lime juice at the poolside of a Kingston hotel is different from the man of action in big cities.

Yes, he agrees—he feels relaxed and at home here in Kingston, even though nowadays it feels rather heady returning to such teaming intensity. When he lived there, he was scarcely any local scene, which was precisely the reason he left. Now, the town is awash with music, and he was proud of what his company had achieved with Marley. “He will be bigger than Hendrix,” he declares.

Do you feel Marley would have warmed to you and to Island Records if you had not been a Jamaican? I think it goes round the other way. In many cases a record company does not, or even cannot, add a lot to an act’s long-term future, but I know that in this case I was able to communicate with Bob and a large part of the early relationship was based on my need to eliminate his mistrust and lack of understanding of what I was planning.

I know this will sound like I’m believing in my own publicity, but the fact is that that assurance for Bob could not have come from just anybody. If I had not been a Jamaican, with some sort of knowledge of the local situation, I don’t honestly believe any other company could have come along and got the same results.

Exactly what was it, then, that clinched your relationship and made it work, bearing in mind Marley’s suspicions? I like to think that Bob Marley came to us and stayed with us because he and his band could see we loved their music, believed in them, and most important, would stay with them.

I mean, Island Records has invested over $200,000 in the band, so that’s some act of faith. Reggae artists are not used to that level of money, quite naturally, and the difficult things is that they sometimes tend to equate the amount of space they get, say, in the Melody Maker with the amount of money they should be getting.

For example, David Bowie might get a full-page article, and a reggae artist who has not earned any money might also get a full-page article for musical reasons, rather than commercial reasons, and straight away the reggae musician will say something like, “Hey, where are my royalties for 100,000 sales?”

So unless you’re really sure, you can end up giving them advances or paying them royalties for records that will never be sold. It’s a very delicate business, but sometimes when you’re convinced, you just have to give a lot of money to convince them you know and believe, and that’s what I did with Bob Marley.

I knew it was going to happen eventually. It’s a weird way to work, and hard for the accounts department, but it’s about music, and music cannot always be defined in purely logical terms.

Do you see your personal role as the music business’s populariser of reggae? Did you feel evangelical about it years ago, or do you feel that way now? No, not at all. I just love it. I understand it well, always have done, I think, and I’m able to help it along at this important time because I also know the rock’n’roll side of the business. So far, I’ve been the person most able to—well, put it across. But I think a lot more people will come into it.

Do you think this is reggae’s beginning rather than the middle part? I think it’s the beginning, but I hope the beginning really gets started, because at the moment the scene has a crazy-lish feel to it, which is very dangerous. It would be terrible if the people who are very good don’t get a chance to come out before reggae as a subject becomes written off.

And how do you view other record companies’ activities in reggae? Well, it depends on who they are and what they do. I certainly welcome a CBS or an Atlantic or an A&M or a Warner Brothers coming into reggae if they would really get behind and promote whichever artist they sign. And the small basic reggae labels which have always existed in England play a very important part in exposing all the, as it were, unknown artists.

I agree with any record company that tries to do a job, get behind the artists to whom they should be committed. I only get angry with labels that pick up something because they feel it’s the rage, and they plan to throw out reggae as “releases” with the rest of the regular rock albums.

Do you feel you have changed or diluted Bob Marley and the Wailers’ music in order to get a bigger audience? Not diluted, no. I don’t. The thing people must realise about Bob Marley and the Wailers is that they could never be persuaded to do anything they did not believe in, so there is no sense in which I, or they, could properly be accused of manipulation of the musicians or the public.

On Catch A Fire, I deliberately tried to put something into it which I felt they could relate to, with rock mixes rather than reggae mixes and the bass heavier up front and more things happening on top. I simply tried to get from the musicians something that was basically there anyway but wasn’t coming out. That’s what a producer exists for.

What did Marley and the others think of your attitude, which must have been motivated by a commercial ear? They were very happy with it. But it wasn’t a “let’s get success” move, just a natural progression. Catch A Fire was not a commercially successful album, wasn’t considered rootsy enough, perhaps.

Did you sense with that album that certain purists would say Marley was heading towards “selling out”? Sort of, yes. You always get that backlash of feeling when an artist has a kind of—well, destiny. But I’m quite happy even looking back on what happened, because what needed to be done was done.

When it says on an album “Produced by Chris Blackwell and the Wailers”, what does that precisely mean? Well, for example, on Catch A Fire, with all the tracks recorded in Jamaica, I wasn’t there. They were produced by the Wailers themselves. Then Bob Marley came to England with the tracks and in England what we did together was put on the other instruments—lead guitar on some things, Moog here, organ on other things. Then I would actually mix it with Bob. On the second album, almost all the stuff was done in Jamaica, but overdubbed in England, and we were all together again, mixing and remixing. My production involvements include...
perhaps extending a track, saying this track is really good, maybe we should put more colour into it, do it again, maybe. But now, as always, the basic roots of the music have always rested with Bob Marley and the Wailers. On this latest album, they've done all the stuff.

Did you envisage in your early associations with reggae its influence on the mainstream of popular music, with the adoption of the style by Paul Simon, Paul McCartney, Stevie Wonder? I do know that when I first signed the Wailers, what I wanted to do urgently was get their records to musicians. Because I really felt the correct way to break them would be by getting them respected among other players.

The musicians were so unusually strong, instrumentally, that I fully expected other artists to get as hung up as I had become on basslines, things like that. Often a musician would say, ‘Well, ah, it needs to have something more going, you know. It’s loud and boring.’ But I’d have to argue that that’s not the music, really. It’s a controlled sort of sound.

In those early days, and we’re only talking of say four years ago, were you aware of the political stance of the music? It was impossible, as a Jamaican, to be unaware of it.

Do you see the strength of the music today as in its message rather than as dance music? If you are a black Jamaican and you come from Trenchtown, or if your friends come from Trenchtown, and you are writing your own songs and producing reggae music, the natural source of your music is your environment.

Reggae musicians here feel ostracised by society at large. It’s still very much underground music, really. We all know that Bob Marley and the Wailers are huge, but it hasn’t got through on every level out here.

Do you agree with Bob Marley that many reggae musicians have been exploited by record businessmen? Yes, the rip-off stories are often true, but there is a side to the early stages in a career, when an artist claims to have been ripped off, that bears thinking about. For instance, let’s take the case of [Blackwell names local producer]. I talked yesterday to a musician who pointed out that it was a kind of school everyone went to, and everyone claims that he ripped people off, recorded them, made lots of money out of them, then moved on to the next musician.

But really, as a recording operation, it should be regarded exactly as a school in which the musician can learn. You went there, didn’t pay anything to learn, and didn’t get paid anything to write million-selling tunes or whatever they might be. The musician did his session, and good luck, in a way, to the producer if he had a hit.

The producer wasn’t behaving as a conscious rip-off merchant, but operating in his own little sphere on a certain basis, where supply and demand was completely turned around.

He wasn’t a hard-headed businessman, and he didn’t say, ‘OK, sign here for five years.’ Everybody left him, but it’s worth remembering that they could leave. There was no contract.

It was a kind of useful workshop. Some people might call that a rip-off, but on reflection I believe musicians gained something, too.

Nevertheless, Marley seems to regard you quietly as some kind of saviour who comes along and wipes the slate clean, making it possible for him and other musicians to achieve some credibility. Does that weigh heavily on your shoulders? Well, it’s a bit weird. It’s just that the business here has been so much like the early rhythm-and-blues. I feel that Island has been rather like Atlantic – a parallel situation to R&B in that Atlantic, if you remember, was the only company that decided to build artists.

Other labels just cut tunes. If it was a hit, great! Didn’t really matter who sang it! That used to be the system. Here, I’ve always been more interested in artists than records. We take on artists not just for their first album or single they make, but for their future.

With the general feeling among reggae purists that reggae has or might soon sell out, exactly what do you think the musicians can do to counteract against that possibility? I think the musicians generally feel so strong today, and they must know that what they have is what is wanted, that I can’t see it possible that they will get dumped by anybody, if you see what I mean.

These people have a lot to offer today. It boils down to really caring for artists: when I gave Bob Marley and the Wailers that first cash advance to go and make an album, people said I was mad and I could kiss goodbye to it. They reckoned I’d get a call from Jamaica saying ‘they’d finished three tracks and run out of money, end of story.’ I don’t want to sound too clever about all this, but it’s always a mistake to underestimate artists.

How convinced were you, on that first meeting with Marley, of any charisma attached to the man? Right from the start, when he walked into my office above the Basing Street studios. It wasn’t apparent in his other two musicians at the time, though it is now, but at that moment I realised he has a special... presence.

As a Jamaican, do you feel mentally at one with the music, that this is my country’s sound and the arrival of a giant star like Marley is a kind of nationalistic triumph for you? Well, I definitely feel it’s the music of Jamaica. If only the people in society at large here would realise it’s original and it’s going to spread everywhere and certainly I feel a pride.

I’m really pleased to have something to do with it. But it really is absurd that you can’t hear a note of reggae music in this hotel, except on the radio occasionally. It’s going to break here, though, this year, above-ground. When I left Jamaica in 1962, the biggest-selling album in Jamaica ever was The Student Prince by Mario Lanza, and to be an intellectual music lover was to tune in to Andy Williams. It takes a long, long time to change public taste really drastically.

Have you ever had a serious argument with Marley? No, and I don’t think we’d ever really have one. I think it’s more than possible that at some time we might part. Bob and Island, because it’s in the nature of a small independent company that when a contract expires, an artist on the way up goes to an RCA or a CBS or wherever, because often, though not in all cases, the artist can get a deal rather like one might get from an insurance company. And when they start talking that sort of money against a company like Island, which is not a public company – well, you see the problem.

Does that prospect make you despair? Yes. But there is no way out of it.

Finally, let’s go back to Marley the man. What kind of person do you see in him? Super-sensitive, amazingly bright, takes in a lot of things right to the back of his head. He’s a natural leader, and he has some very, very heavy people around him – when I say heavy, I mean in the sense that they’re very bright, very intelligent and talented.

And it says a lot for him that they acknowledge him as their leader, because they are all very strong people in their own right. Basically, the attitude of Bob and the Wailers has always been that they would, on their terms, like to expand their music.

They had their own little shop here even when I knew them at first, and when they wanted some money they’d go and make a few records and sell them themselves. So they’ve always been a very independent crowd of people, the Wailers.

As a non-Rastafarian, how do you manage to get such closeness with Jamaican musicians? I don’t participate in the Rasta thing, but what I know about it, I like. There’s a general attitude of anti-establishment about it that I appreciate and go along with. Musicians are traditionally anti-establishment, and I guess I always have been too.

Ray Coleman ©
“A couple of oiks”

Peter Cook and Dudley Moore debut their foul-mouthed alter egos, Derek & Clive.

Peter Cook laughs like a drain, though he has to admit that the prospect of duffing up muscle-bound Mickey Hargitay—Jayne Mansfield’s most celebrated ex-husband—is not to be dismissed lightly. Peter Cook and Dudley Moore may just have something to worry about, as anyone who's lent an earful to the infamous Derek ‘n’ Clive tape will testify.

The Derek ‘n’ Clive tape? It all went down some three years back, when Cook and Moore for some reason not exactly clear took themselves into a recording studio and put down on tape a series of outrageously funny, frequently obscene routines of the kind that make your average stag club compère sound like the Pope.

For instance, Peter Cook, who assumes the character of Clive to Dudley Moore’s Derek, revealing that the worst job he ever had was nursing Jayne Mansfield through an affliction known as lobsterisimus hamaquismus, which you won’t find in any medical dictionary but is an unpleasant and pleasantly rare condition where a certain species of seafood somehow takes up residence in the victim’s rectum.

The removal of this aquatic parasite is a highly skilled but unappealing task rivalled only by the worst job Derek (Dudley Moore) ever had: collecting Winston Churchill’s bogies.

You get the picture? Not exactly your usual BBC 1 Light Entertainment fare, though the tapes were never...
August 30, 1976: Peter Cook (left) and Dudley Moore at a press call for the album Derek And Clive Live (live) Hampstead, North London.
**A matter of taste doesn’t come into it, or morality. It’s not malicious in any way**

familiar Pete and Dud characters. Pete and Dud talk knowledgeably but respectfully about the world and its mysteries. Derek and Clive are a couple of oiks who are just pissed off with the whole business.

I mean, anyone who says ‘Hello’ to them is automatically a…

Cut to a recorded highlight:

**Clive:** I was at Tottenham Hotspurs watching a game against Arsenal and this bloke came up to me and said, ‘Hello’…

**Derek:** Oh no.

**Clive:** And I thought, ‘Christ, this bloke comes up to me and says, ‘Hello’…

**Derek:** Provocative fucker…

**Clive:** I said, ‘What do you mean ‘Hello’, and do you know what he came back with? He said, ‘Hello’. I said, ‘I can suss you out for a start… get this in the bollocks’, so I kicked him in the balls and as he fell to the floor he said, ‘Yuuuccchhhh.’ I said, ‘Don’t you ‘Yuuuccchhhh’ at me, mate’…

**Derek:** Like he comes in with ‘Hello’ and comes out with ‘Yuuuccchhhh’? Clive: I said, ‘Don’t you ‘Yuuuccchhhh’ at me, mate’, and I kicked his fuckin’ teeth in and then he went, ‘Aaaaahhhhh…’ And I said, ‘Don’t you fuckin’ ‘Aaaaahhhhh’ at me’, so I really kicked his car in… banged him right in the car with the left boot, and you know, he still had the audacity to come out with, ‘Yrrrrhhhh-urrrrrrhh—I’m dying.’ Well, what could I say to that… I just walked away. I left the situation. I wasn’t going to be put upon.

**Derek:** You weren’t going to be dictated to!

**Clive:** Why should I be dictated to by some cunt who says ‘Yuuuccchhhh’…

**Derek:** Preceded by ‘Hello’!

**Clive:** What a cunt!

THERE ARE OTHER cuts on the album, which, through continuous, unsung render as harmless words that shock and offend certain sections of the public. Says Moore: ‘We set out to explore a whole area of humour that for some reason or another has been glossed over. Derek and Clive are basically about people who are too much to talk any other way.’

‘There are plenty of people like that around,’ says Cook. ‘All sorts of people who are outraged by what’s going on in the world but who have no way of articulating themselves. Instead, they’re forever in a blind fury; that’s precisely what Derek and Clive are all about. Pete and Dud may differ quite drastically from Derek and Clive, but truthfully Derek and Clive emerge more as human beings.’

‘Pete and Dud don’t really see the world at all,’ insists Moore.

‘Or, for that matter, meet anybody,’ adds Cook.

‘They’ve locked in a small box somewhere in Kilburn, where they talk about cosmic subjects like religion, sex and life itself. They only ever emerge for the odd packet of dried prunes,’ Moore observes. ‘But it’s obvious that Derek and Clive are right in there being put upon, out on the streets rubbing shoulders with humanity… in the Kentucky Fried Chicken shop, down the lav, up the Palais, down the disco…’

‘Absorbing as they do,’ muses Cook, ‘the whole rich panorama of life as it passes by their windows as a never-ending pageant.’

Even in these “permissive” times, however, there are those who will argue that by exposing themselves as Derek and Clive, the much-loved figures of Pete and Dud are taking an unnecessary gamble: that it might prove to be detrimental to their future career. “I know precisely what you mean,” says Cook. “I can see the sort of reviews appearing in the press which begin: ‘Why do Peter Cook and Dudley Moore, who have a certain witiness about them, need to resort to this kind of material for laughs?’ Well, it’s not resorting to this kind of material, but utilising the kind of material that most people don’t, and making it humorous.”

So how would you answer the critics?

“I’d just have to say that it makes us laugh,” Moore declares. “That’s the only possible criterion. A matter of taste doesn’t come into it, or morality. It’s not malicious in any way, if it was, then it couldn’t possibly be humorous.”

“The only people we’ve missed out,” Cook interjects, “are the Jews, but that kind of remark can only appear if something deliberate happened when in actual fact it didn’t. As far as Britain is concerned, there aren’t many sacred cows left…” He pauses for a moment. “There’s only Winston Churchill, Sir Francis Chichester and the Queen Mother, and as we’ve included Winston and the Queen Mother on the album, that only leaves Sir Francis.”

I wonder if sailing around the world single-handed was the worst job Sir Francis ever had?

Roy Carr
REGGAE HAS BEEN banned from London’s most prestigious rock venue, the Hammersmith Odeon, and the first victims are the Mighty Diamonds, U-Roy and Delroy Washington. The ban follows incidents involving the police at the recent series of Bob Marley & The Wailers concerts at the venue.

Virgin Records, who were promoting the Mighty Diamonds package, learned of the ban when they attempted to reserve a further date for the artists apart from August 14 and 15, which had already been verbally agreed with Odeon leaseholders Rank Leisure Services.

They were told by a spokesman for Rank, Tony Williams, that neither the Mighty Diamonds nor U-Roy could play at the theatre in the “foreseeable future”. He added that the company would “still be interested in putting on such concerts at the Lewisham or Kilburn Odeons, which we feel would be able to cope much better.”

“Curious,” says Virgin’s Richard Branson, “when it’s the music of the moment.”

Virgin’s managing director Richard Branson said this week: “It seems curious that such a ban should be imposed when reggae is by far the most popular music of the moment. When a top group like the Mighty Diamonds is prevented from playing at a major London theatre on such thin grounds, it is time to get worried.”

Williams said: “I have come to the conclusion that it would be commercially wrong for this company to allow the Mighty Diamonds and U-Roy to play at Hammersmith Odeon in the foreseeable future. It can only create problems. If we want to keep our licence, we are not in a position where we can afford to antagonise local residents, the general public, the police or the local authorities. We want to assess fully the implications of last week’s Bob Marley & The Wailers concerts.

“It will be some time before the complications have been sorted out and that is why we are unable to put on a similar concert for the time being. We have to be the arbiters in such a situation and the decision we make has to be the right one for Rank Leisure Services.”

Virgin are currently seeking a venue suitable for the only London appearances of the Diamonds and U-Roy. The original Hammersmith dates were set to precede the appearances of the band at this year’s Reading Festival.
“I can’t flake out now!”

A minor character in The Herd and Humble Pie, PETER FRAMPTON has hit it big in the USA with a massive live album: Frampton Comes Alive. “The audience was behind me,” he says. “There were ovations during songs as well as at the end.”

— MELODY MAKER JULY 10 —

WHAT WAS IT about the ‘50s that encouraged the birth of so much talent? Was it the result of H-bomb testing or increased sunspot activity that resulted in the mums of the British Isles yielding up a plethora of sons and daughters destined to be key figures in the evolution of rock music?

During the ‘60s we saw most of that talent flowering and forming the cornerstone of contemporary music. But it seemed as if we had seen the last of the Pete Townshends, John Lenmons, Eric Claptons and David Bowies. Were there any more songwriters, guitarists and embryo pop phenomena left in the vaults?

Well there was one man left that ‘60s watchers had long cherished as a potential superstar. But it seemed that Peter Frampton would never emerge from the cocoon of restraint that seemed to dog his career.

He had flashed to fame with The Herd in 1966-7 and was such a good-looking young musician with much potential as a singer, guitarist and songwriter. But, apart from his initial stardom as a teen idol, it seemed as if the rock audience at large could not take him seriously, even when he finally tore himself away from the strictly formalised confines of The Herd (a great band despite the chart image), and took on a subsidiary role as Steve Marriott’s cohort in Humble Pie. »
October 27, 1976: Peter Frampton on stage at the Birmingham Odeon
At first, Frampton and Marriott were equals in the Pie adventure. Certainly, Peter has always admitted his debt to the band and Steve in helping him find his feet and musical direction. But there came a time when Peter had to go his own way. He chose to split from Pie just as the band were breaking huge in America after gruelling tours from state to state.

Peter formed his own band and straight away hit problems. His group was called Camel, an unprosperous name which reflected Peter’s desire not to cash in on looks and teen appeal. Strictly low profile was the attitude that Frampton fostered, to his own detriment.

The band meant little in England, already overcrowded with struggling groups. In the week Camel were launched, there were about a dozen other new bands hitting the road in search of success.

Peter was starting from scratch and found gigs and money hard to come by while he learnt the craft of leading other musicians, who sometimes had ideas of their own that did not necessarily fit with the Frampton way.

His songwriting development, however, influenced to some extent by one of his idols, Stevie Wonder, and his lyrics were unmistakable reflections of his mercurial personal relationships with his girlfriend Mary, a fashion model, who later became his wife.

Meanwhile, although he released a succession of likeable and attractive albums, it seemed he could not break out of the web of apathy that pressed in on him at home. He found solace, personal happiness and eventually success, in America.

With a new lady and his rock-like manager Dee Anthony behind him, and the challenge that America offered, Frampton... came alive.

Nobody was more shocked by the instant success of his live double album Frampton Comes Alive! than Peter, and it seemed fans in America could not get enough of his music, thrusting his single “Show Me The Way” high in the chart.

They flocked to his headlining shows, and now Britain, for so long asleep to his existence, has hailed the man, who at 26 still looks 16 and with a Top 10 single and album, Frampton will be coming home soon—

Did Peter feel more confidence as a writer now?

Did Peter feel more confidence as a writer now?
aren't you bigger now than humble pie were a couple of years ago?

"yeah... i know... which is really strange. when i walked on stage to that ovation at philadelphia i turned round and saw my parents on stage watching me. i just couldn't believe it. i knew it was going to happen because it's been happening on every gig, but they didn't know what to expect.

when i sold out a gig in 24 hours i knew it was a pointer to greater things. but there was a time when i felt i was banging my head against the wall.

around the time i recorded the frampton album at the castle in wales, i couldn't afford to put a band on the road unless something happened. that album did better than all the others put together, but it took the live album to make that one a gold.

when i came back to the states i was headlining at all the gigs, with a middle spot once or twice. that frampton album moved us up the market to almost headline status.

"it was my best-ever studio album and i still love that one. my next album i'll record in america in a house where everyone can live, wake up, have breakfast, kick a ball around and start recording. the best tapes are done between one and five in the morning, always."

was peter brokessed when he made that last but one album?

"very. people were throwing other groups at me to join. but i thought if i do anything, i'll be a session man and try again later. but there were only two months when i was living in london when everything was very low. frampton was a do-or-die album made out of desperation and i put everything i had into it, as i thought it would be the last i did for a while.

were the lyrics of the song "show me the way" prophetic? did they have special significance?

"yeah, maybe. i just met somebody that gave me such confidence. she does... my life is completely changed. all the lyrics in that song are about me and her. the line people pick out is, 'i wonder if i'm dreaming. i feel so unashamed i can't believe this is happening to me.'

"that's about you, everybody... so they all think i'm singing about them. i've learnt the secret through that. they - the audience - are the most important people. i can write personal songs about me, which they think are about them. all my songs are personal, and i've been put down for it many times before.

"my lyrics are the worst thing that i do - i know that. but i think on frampton the lyrics were a 100 percent improvement. they were honest, they weren't trying to hide anything. they were just myself being happy. now i sing 'lines on my face' with a smile.

"and it seems wrong sometimes. but i couldn't do that number, because it gets an ovation. diana ross is doing the song. i think. she's done 'baby i love your way', and somebody else has done 'lines on my face'. barbra streisand also wants to do the song. things like..."

peter suddenly dropped from his american-tinged tones into pure mike reid cockney: "it's completely freaky! after all this time... well i can't take it out now. i've always wanted it to happen and now it has.

"so i'm going to lock myself away and write. i've got enough stuff for the next album already. i'm writing all the time, but i want an intense period alone to put it all together for a single studio album with about 11 songs."

will peter use the voice bag again?

"i've got it, it's my trademark now. every time i see ringo he comes up to me and goes, 'wah, wah, wah, wah, WAAH.' i'd like to do a whole album and just talk it through. the voice bag was first used in 1925 or something, and the one i use took four or five years to evolve. it's been a secret for a long time, but it's so simple.

"stevie wonder used it on music of my mind, which brought it back instantly. then joe walsh did it and my girl penny found out where joe got it from. the one i use is called a hell, which is from bob hell's sound system. i made one, and instead of a bag over the shoulder he has a box on the floor. it's quite difficult to use - i couldn't talk with it for a long time.

"but all it consists of is a small speaker in a box, with a tube coming out of the top leading to your mouth. the box becomes another lung or diaphragm. you just have to over-mouth the words.

"i always remember that bit on music of my mind when stevie is going, 'in other words... ' if you go back and listen to that album, he's talking all the way through. it's really nice to talk to audiences like that. i say things like 'i love you', and they like it. they don't wanna be shouted at like so many groups do. if you communicate subtly, they'll understand you."

peter admitted that he felt american now he lived abroad. "i used to the facilities, the big cars... " his girlfriend penny is american. where did they meet?

"in new york, when i was still with humble pie. we sort of got it together, as people do. she was just a friend of a friend at the time. it was great when it happened - it was just something i needed. i'm a happy person now and that is reflected in my songs."

why hadn't peter gained greater personal success earlier in his career?

"everybody needs that bubble of the business around them to harden into a shell. it happened to me with [ken] howard and [alan] blaikeley and steve rowland and jack baverstock in the herd, and it worked.

"they fought off outsiders and the machinery around me worked. and it was a protective layer that didn't let anybody in that wasn't wanted. i was a guitarist, occasional singer and songwriter, with no great aspirations. that's the wrong word - i had aspirations, but i never thought my songs were that incredible.

"then i needed three-and-a-half years of just playing to people. they can tell you what's right or wrong, nobody else can. whether it was a good move or a bad move, i had a very enjoyable time in humble pie. maybe it wasn't the right music for me to do, but it was a great stomping ground... and we did stomp!"

"i knew you really loved the band, and it was really a good band. but it got to the point where i no longer had the facility to do what i wanted. i couldn't write acoustic songs and stuff, so i had to leave. and i'm very glad that i did.

"although, at the time, i thought it was the one big blunder i'd made in my life. i left and the album went - wah! there's no doubt their success spurred me on."

did peter have any thoughts on what happened to humble pie after their first flush of success? he seemed reluctant to speak. "i'm very close friends with jerry [shirley] again, and he lives near us. but the band? well, the music went in the wrong direction - for me."

"it was heavy english rock and then it went into american soul, which, to me, wasn't right. and steve thought it was. i thought that was wrong, but that's just my personal opinion and that's not putting the band down. but i tell you, he still excites me when i see him. he did a tour here. the band wasn't that together, but they got a great ovation."

"i don't want 80 pages of me singing my own praises and then putting down steve - do you understand? you know i never, ever want to put people down, but i do see mistakes were made. god knows, i've made some heavy ones!"

after tours of america, australia and japan, peter will be coming to britain in the autumn, when he is expected to play a concert at charlton football ground in south london.

peter agreed that his band had been a bit shaky on their appearance in philadelphia, but explained that john simios had just left after a few years, and andy newmark was still finding his feet.

"it takes time to get a band together. i can't really direct them on stage, because i'm too busy with the audience. the band before was a working machine, and sometimes you have to make a change. bob mayo, my keyboard player, leads the band for me when i'm out front, and when i don't have to sing, i become the director.

"round about october, november, we'll be playing madison square gardens for two or three days. nobody knows about that yet - but it's gonna be amazing. and i've got lots of secret surprises lined up - brass section, strings, things like that. i'll play numbers from every album, things i've never done before on stage. i can't tell you all the dates yet, but they'll be announced."

"you know, i've never, ever thought i'd get a no 1 hit anywhere, and now i've had a hit in america, england and japan. it's all coming true - like a big dream. and i'm grateful. i'm gonna keep doing what i'm doing for a long time. it's put another 25 years on my life." chris welch •
“I like to rip it up”

AC/DC’s triumphant residencey at London’s Marquee Club showcase an Australian band with a raw and ribald take on rock’n’roll. Audiences go wild. And that’s before they’ve seen the “human kangaroo”. Really, you don’t want to know.
July 26, 1976: Angus Young and (right) Bon Scott on stage with AC/DC at the Marquee Club, 90 Wardour Street, London
HOPE PUZZLED BY the Status Quo phenomenon should beware. AC/DC, from the same rock family, could wreak similar havoc, but they will only realise their full potential if, amid all the raucousness that inevitably surrounds power-chord bands, they better organise their assaults.

But whatever they do lack in presentation at the moment, the band is certainly making great strides towards becoming a major attraction, as was suggested by their Monday-night residency at London’s Marquee Club. When I caught the band there last week, they had just broken another house attendance record, which, I’m told, they’d set themselves the previous week.

AC/DC have been tagged as an Australian band, though three of the members, brother guitarists Angus and Malcolm Young and singer Bon Scott, are Glaswegians, with only the rhythm section of drummer Philip Rudd and bassist Mark Evans being children of Melbourne.

I’m sure that the gig I saw at the Marquee, where sweat was shed by the bucketful, was an off-night for the band – sound troubles (twice) brought the gig to a halt – they did enough to show that they’re a good boogie band, with apparently no pretensions about being anything else.

But I was left hoping, somewhere around the middle of their set, that they’d shatter the uniformity of riff, vocal and solo (in that order), which all tended to become much of a muchness after a while, and widen the scope a little.

The potential is there to do it if they’d only harness and direct the music, and vocalist Scott and punk guitarist Angus Young have certain charismatic qualities. Scott, with his moody stare and distinctive Scottish voice, could be a first-class frontman instead of, as he strikes me, a poor cross between Alex Harvey and Stevie Marriott. His enthusiasm did seem a trifle contrived at times.

Seventeen-year-old Young, with his schoolboy uniform (discarded after the fourth number of the set because of sauna bath conditions), has hit on the really good gimmick of looking like a rock’n’roll Norman Wisdom, only more backward. Though not a great guitarist (solo’s over the one-minute mark became, to say the least, repetitive), he’s a great showman. Where do AC/DC go from the Marquee in murky Wardour Street? Judging from the wild reaction of their audiences, they could just about slip comfortably into Status Quo’s shoes once they have pulled their socks up. Harry Doherty

DEPENDING ON WHO they were trying to impress, the best ways for any band to leave a grateful audience used to be either viciously trash their equipment, hurl full-tilt into a rock’n’roll medley, or disappear in clouds of dry ice. But times change. Appetites become jaded. And with few exceptions, those well-rehearsed tactics that once transformed the front six rows of the local Odeon into a demolition area are now forgotten by the time the house lights have gone up – and the punters quietly file through the exits.
to the strains of Dark Side Of The Moon.

In terms of rock brinkmanship, it seems nothing short of Hari Kari can shock a mid-'70s audience—and even that might not warrant an encore! We’ve seen it all before. So what else is new? I’ll tell you—the Human Kangaroo! According to Angus Young, demented 17-year-old lead guitarist with AC/DC, it’s a jape that he picked up from singer Bon Scott, who employed it to jolly-up après-gig piss-ups.

The Human Kangaroo? Young Angus comes complete with instruction manual. What I do,” he begins, masticating every word, “is to go behind the equipment, strip off all me clothes, put me legs tightly together, me hands behind me back and hop like mad across the stage.”

Not, I assure you, a pretty sight, but it’s made him the seven-stone darling of a whole new generation of thrill-seekers. However, Angus points out in all modesty that this artistic portrayal isn’t de rigueur at every gig. “I usually do it as a special treat—I’ve done it at the Marquee when the audience has been really great. But in any case I make sure the kids don’t go away disappointed.”

Precisely how Angus Young pleases all the people all the time takes this form. Having spent the best part of an hour trashing his Gibson, stomping the stage in bright-red schoolboy uniform and shaking his head as though trying to remove it from his shoulders, he strips to his briefs, mounts the highest speaker stack and, having turned his back to the crowd, dramatically lowers his undergarment below his knees to give a Full Frontal. “You’ve got to really entertain a crowd nowadays,” maintains the fearless flasher. “Personally, I think it helps if a lead guitarist has some kind of visual gimmick. Truthfully, “I just couldn’t stand in front of the group without doing something!”

AC/DC are everything you’d expect an antipodean boogie band comprised of three expat Scotsmen and two Aussies to be: crude, rude and exceedingly randy. On stage they sweat and shake and play at just one speed—flat out.

But despite the general ribald image, AC/DC are built almost entirely around the uninhibited antics of young Angus. Though as a guitarist he may be running on a quite different artistic ticket to, say, a Beck or a Gallagher, he has his own kind of star quality.

Angus makes it clear that he has no real aspirations to becoming the fastest new guitarist in the west, but even so, if you cast aside his penchant for doffing his trousers, this bona fide Seventh Son builds up such a head of steam that only the very fastest can keep pace.

He equates primitivism in rock with honesty, and feels there’ll always be a ready-made market for bands content to stick to basics and not get trapped by illusions of grandeur. “I don’t like to play above or below people’s heads,” he argues. “Basically, I just like to get up front of a crowd and rip it up.”

Tutored over the last six years by his brother Malcolm (a whiz-kid in his day) on a diet of Berry, Hendrix and Richard (Keith and Little), Angus theorises that the worst thing any rock band can do is to perform for their own amusement: “That’s why we keep it simple and make it visual. You see, there are some people who can’t get off on music no matter how simple you play it. You’ve also got to cater for them. Rock is all about having fun, and if you take the business part too seriously it isn’t fun any more—and the audience sense it.”

Having got as far as any rock band can get in Australia, AC/DC arrived here in April with a deadline of six months in which to make or break it. Within weeks they’d risen from a £25-a-night support band to potential bill-toppers.

“I’m really not all that surprised that we happened so quickly in Britain,” Angus says without any trace of egotism. “I say that because I honestly believe that we give the public what they want. If we didn’t then we’d be on our way back to Australia by now.”

But what if his precocious brawny image eventually runs out of mileage? By the time he’s grown out of his togs and teens he could be washed up. “Yeah,” he sighs, “I might be a has-been. If I am, I hope I’m a rich one. But really, that’s not the most important thing to me. Of course I’d like to conquer the world and go on forever like Chuck Berry, but if I don’t, if suddenly tomorrow it all ends, at least I can say I’ve done it.“ And, he concludes, “just so long as we don’t do like so many bands do—drift away from that thing that made us famous—I don’t think there’s much for us to worry about for the time being.”

The Human Kangaroo? Young Angus

AC/DC High Voltage ATLANTIC

Any new band that opens its first album with a song that goes, “It’s a long way to the top if you wanna rock’n’roll,” is asking for trouble. And it’s particularly so in the case of AC/DC, whose musical development is still at the raw stage. Not that there’s anything wrong with punk rock, of course, but if Lenny Kaye of the Patti Smith band, and acknowledged expert on these matters, can claim that his group aren’t punk because they don’t have a Farfisa organ, then there’s no reason for AC/DC’s lack of originality to be lauded. Their main fault lies in the instrumentalists: it’s the same old boogie, the same old sub-metal riffs you’ve heard a thousand times before. Too many of their songs sound the same. Still, there’s hope. The lyrics have a brashness and lack of sophistication that’s always useful in the heavy branch of rock. Best of all is the suitably laboured punning and innuendo in “The Jack”, a song which only the naive will think is about playing cards.

This track is evidence that AC/DC (said to be Australia’s most popular hard rock band) have some potential. But then so did fellow Aussies Daddies Cool (arguably the best rock’n’roll revival band around—and long before most everybody else got in on the act), and what happened to them? Michael Oldfield.
“We draw a rowdy crowd”

Everything you’ve read about good ol’ Southern boys LYNYRD SKYNYRD is true. “As soon as one of us gets drunk and disorderly and we’re put in jail,” says singer RONNIE VAN ZANT, “we git press for it, just like that.”

Lynyrd Skynyrd have jetted into England for the Knebworth Fair (they were the success of the day, it turned out), and Van Zant insists that he hasn’t touched a drop of drink so that his vocal cords will be in perfect condition for the band’s most important gig ever in this country. Which explains the two empty bottles of Moët & Chandon on a dressing table, another half-empty bottle of bubbly in another corner of the hotel room, and a just-opened bottle of whisky next to the bed.

Lynyrd Skynyrd have just about made it big in England, a feat that was achieved with relatively little difficulty, via a few prestigious support spots, plus one short headlining tour at the end of last year. In fact at Knebworth they were playing in front of an audience which numbered more people than they’ve played to in all their previous visits here. All in one day.

Van Zant adopts a low profile about the Knebworth business; no bumming, no wild claims about who they would blow off the stage, no moans about why lOcc (who’d probably play third to them on an American bill) were billed above them here.

But there was a definite undercurrent of confidence that this gig would set them up for the superstarrish recognition here that they enjoy Stateside, which, two days after our meeting, they had gained.

Though the bulk of Skynyrd’s publicity has been geared towards their drunkenness, rowdiness and...
August 21, 1976: appearing between Todd Rundgren’s Utopia and Loco, Lynyrd Skynyrd perform at the third Knebworth festival, headlined by the Rolling Stones.
subsequent arrests, they’re much more subtle than that image suggests. Loud they are, boogie they do, but there are few bands around in the world who’ve consistently come up with loud, boogie classics: “Free Bird,” “Gimme Three Steps” and “Simple Man” (from Pronounced Lëh-nërd Skin-hërd); “Sweet Home Alabama” and “Workin’ For MCA” (from Second Helping); “Saturday Night Special” and “Whiskey Rock-A-Roller” (from Nuthin’ Fancy); and “Double Trouble”, “Cry For The Bad Man” and “(I Got The) Same Old Blues” (from Gimme Back My Bullets).

But it’s always the boozing and fighting that gets the attention, probably because the boys in the band booze and fight a lot.

They expect audiences to throw bottles and similar armoury at them in the States, says Van Zant; they then throw them back. So that’s what’s called “audience communication”.

“I’ve seen Allen [Collins, one of the guitarists] git hit in the head with a boot one time. Staggered the poor boy, buckled his knees,” cowboy Ronnie chuckles.

“We were laughin’ like hell and he was comin’ round about 12 bars later. ‘Goddamn it. Gotcha, didn’t he?’ You git hit with frisbees. ‘Throw a frisbee at the group. Maybe I can hit him on the head.’ Crazy. It can git out of hand. ‘I don’t like seein’ anybody git hurt or fightin’, but there’s nothin’ you can do about it. If you holler down the microphone, ‘Please quit fightin’; they say, ‘Fuck you too.’ If they’re gonna do it, they’re gonna do it. They’ve gotta have their money to come out and fight each other. Crazy people.”

Van Zant calling his patrons “crazy” when his own reputation, and that of his band, had not been the most peaceful in rock n’ roll?

“Yep,” he nods. “I think we draw all them rowdy bastards. We draw a rowdy crowd in the States. A bunch of drunks. Our type of people.

“Yeah, most of it is true about us. But almost every group I know fights. You don’t hear about it, but as soon as one of us gets in a little thing, drunk and disorderly or something and we’re put in jail, we git press for it, just like that.

“Other groups, they don’t, but they jist love to pick up on that shit and write about it. That’s the way it started out and they’re still writin’ about it.

“Little things like that get all the publicity. I don’t git into many fights now, not me, cos, fuck, you git hurt, hit on the throat, and you miss a gig. Cut the guitar player’s fingers, and there goes Lynyrd Skynyrd for a while.

“Matter of fact, Allen and Artimus [Pyle, drummer] is pending on trial right now, only lucky we got out of the States for the gig really. See, they [the police] beat the shit outta him [Artimus]. He git a policeman at a Who gig.

“He was tryin’ to git in at the stage door and this American policeman listened to nobody and started grabbin’ Artimus by his beard to lead him away. Artimus knocked the shit outta him, knocked his helmet off.

“About that time, a batch of ’em came up and they all handcuffed him, threw him in the back of a paddy wagggon and did a little number on his head. He had a black eye and knocks all over his head.

“Simple Man” tells of the advice his grandmother, a very religious soul, gave him during his misspent youth. “Forget your lust for rich man’s gold,” she told him. And then there’s the story of “Gimme Three Steps” of how Van Zant has been caught cavorting with somebody’s wife and begs for a head start.

“I’ve had that happen to me several times. I’m sure you have too.” Huh? “Well, I don’t know if you got
a gun pulled on you, but Jesus, I'm sure you've had someone say: 'Stay away from that woman. She's mine.' Well, this guy wanted to do me in, and there I was sayin', 'Gimme three steps towards the door.'"

Van Zant rises to display a wounded hand in his leg.

"When I was a kid, I shot myself right there, fuckin' around with a gun. I'm tellin' ya, they hurt. Blew a hole right there in ma leg."

Back to the music, though, and Van Zant argues that if they play a bad gig, inquests are held immediately in the dressing room as to why such a disaster occurred and steps taken to ensure that the same mistakes don't happen twice.

"Maybe somebody got too tipsy and didn't know when to draw the line."

Skynyrd make no secret of the fact that they rely on drink to put them into the right sort of loose mood for work.

"Ya can overdo it. If that happens, the whole group, well, they've got on me before, scolded me. The rest of the group'll get on the guy who fucks it up. That happens quite a lot."

"We rehearse a lot and play a lot and it just really shouldn't happen. Everybody knows their part. I can tell by lookin' at their eyes if they've been smokin' or drinkin' too much."

Recording-wise, Skynyrd are as meticulous in their own little ways as the next big band, relying on a laid back atmosphere to get the work done or, if it's a fun song, bringing friends in to create a party mood.

Talk of producer Tom Dowd, who first produced Skynyrd on their latest album, Gimme Back My Bullets, drifts into conversation about Al Kooper, the rock star who went South, discovered Skynyrd, got them a recording contract, and produced for three albums, until it all went stale. What was the difference in the two men?

"There had been fights in the studio. Tom Dowd's a real producer, where Al was very hard to get along with in the studio. It had to be his contract, and produced for three albums, until it all went stale. What was the difference in the two men?"

"Tom Dowd has cleaned up the sound considerably, but not too much. The grittiness that sets Skynyrd apart is still very evident. He's put instruments in the proper perspective—lead guitars are heard only when necessary; the rhythm section is given a body that it previously lacked. It's the first album Skynyrd have done without third guitarist Ed King, who quit during last year, and they've tailored their work so well that he is not missed. Gary Rossington and Allen Collins deal effectively with guitars, creating a beautiful marriage."

The band sound as a whole is more distinct than on any other album, due to the excellent vocals of Ronnie Van Zant. His unique offhand style, combined with guitars that play mostly lead, set Skynyrd up as an outstanding rock band. The album'sfailings are on Side One. I'm left on occasions with the impression that Skynyrd are trying to manufacture an anthem, bidding to record another "Freebird" or "Sweet Home Alabama." Every Mother's Son" and "Trust" are the tracks which offend. But the last track on Side One ("I Got The Same Old Blues") by J.J. Cale could reach such status. The number is given a tremendous treatment - slide guitar on top of an infectious riff, a sluggish drum beat, a stop, and then Van Zant enters on vocals. The best track on the album.

The second side sees Skynyrd play at their best on songs which suit their style perfectly. It opens with the raucous "Double Trouble," with a female chorus adding the guts. A screeching guitar solo opens "Searching," another magnificent track. Drums are brought up in the mix to match the guitar work and thump the message home. The redoubtable Artimus Pyle, drummer, is at his crispest.

"Cry For The Bad Man" vies with "Same Old Blues" for the honours. Again, it builds slowly to a crescendo, with the bass work of Leon Wilkeson well to the forefront. The highlight of the track comes with a joint lead from Rossington and Collins, as notes come screaming out of the speakers. Gimme Back My Bullets will win Skynyrd many new fans in Britain. Southern Fried Boogie rules, OK. Harry Doherty
Aggro chic

“Someone’s got to come along and say to all of us, ‘All your ideas about rock’n’roll, all your ideas about sound, all your ideas about guitars, all your ideas about this and that are a load of wank. This is where it is!’... Someone’s got to come along and say, ‘Fuck you...’”

Alex Harvey, November 1973

I T’S ALMOST FUNNY. Not quite worth an uproarious explosion of uncontrollable hilarity, but definitely good for a wry chuckle or two when it happens to someone else. Trouble is, no one’s laughing because all the professional chucklers just found out that the joke’s on them. Anyway, we competent rock’n’roll pulse-fingerers know that this is The Year Of The Punk. You got Patti Smith doing Rimbaud’s-in-the-basement-mixing-up-the-medicine, you got Bruce Springsteen with his down-these-mean-streets-a-man-must-stereotype, you got the Ramones as updated Hanna- Barbera Dead End Kids, you got Ian Hunter doing I-used-to-be-a-punk-until-I-got-old-and-made-all-this-money, you got everybody and his kid brother (or sister) crawling out of the woodwork in leather jackets trying to look like they were hell on wheels in a street fight and shouting Put The Balls Back Into The Music.

Ultimately, if the whole concept of Punk means anything it means Nasty Kids, and if Punk Rock means anything it means music of, by and for Nasty Kids. So when a group of real live Nasty Kids come along playing Nasty Kids music and actually behaving like Nasty Kids, it is no bleeding good at all for those who have been loudly thirsting for some combination to come along and blow all them old farts away to throw up their hands in prissy-ass horror and proclaim in that oh, that this wasn’t what they meant at all and won’t it please go away.

In words of one (or, at the most, two) syllables you wanted Sex Pistols and now you’ve got ‘em. Trouble is, they look like they aren’t going to go away, so what are you going to do with them? Alternatively - ha -ha - what are they going to do with you?

In a way, it’s a classic horror-movie situation. Dr Frankenstein’s monster didn’t turn out according to plan but he was stuck with it anyway. Professor Bozo opens up a pyramid/summons a demon/goes up to the Old Dark Mansion despite the warnings of the villagers and gets into a whole mess of trouble. Don’t rub the lamp unless you can handle the genie.

The current vogue for Punkophilia and Aggro Chic has created the atmosphere in which a group like the Sex Pistols could get started and find an audience, and - dig it - it is entirely too late to start complaining because they behave like real Nasty Kids and not the stylised abstraction of Nasty Kiddery which we’ve been demanding and applauding from sensitive, well-educated, late-20s pop superstars.

Anyway, time’s a-wastin’. Their gig at The Screen On The Green for quite a while was projected on the screen and someone gets creative with the lights. The area near ’em the misses via a bunch of wank. This is where it is!”... Someone’s got to come along and say, ‘Fuck you...’

The Pistols play loud, clean and tight and they don’t mess around.

The Pistols are all those short-haired kids in the big boots and rolled-up baggies and sleeveless T-shirts. Their music is coming from the straight-out-of-school-and-onto-the-dole deathtrap which we seem to have engineered for Our Young; the ’76 British terminal stasis, the modern urban blind alley.

The first 30 seconds of their set blew out all the boring, amateurish artsy-fartsy mock-decadence that preceded it purely by virtue of its tautness, directness and utter realism. They did songs with titles like “I’m A Lazy Sod” and “I’m Pretty Vacant”, they did blasts-from-the-past like “I’m Not Your Steppin’ Stone” (10 points for doing it, 10 more for doing it well) and “Substitute” (a Shepherd’s Bush special, that) and they kept on rockin’.

“Should I say all the trendy fings like ‘peace and love, maaaaaan’?” asked Johnny Rotten, leaning out off the stage manically jerking off his retractable mic-stand. “Are you all having a good time, maaaaaan?” Believe it: this ain’t the summer of love.

They ain’t quite the full-filt crazies they’d like to be, though: Johnny Rotten knocked his false tooth out on the mic and had the front rows down on their knees amidst the garage looking for it. He kept bitching about it all the way through the gig: Iggy wouldn’t even have noticed. Still, they got more energy and more real than any new British act to emerge this year, and even if they get big and famous and rich I really can’t imagine Johnny Rotten showing up at parties with Rod’n’Brigit’n’ Mick’n’Bianca or buying the next-door villa to Keef’n’Anita in the South of France. And if Elton ever sees them I swear he’ll never be able to sing “Saturday Night’s Alright (For Fighting)” again without choking on his Dr Pepper.

Charles Shear Murray

NME SEPT 11 The Clash and the Sex Pistols play an Islington cinema. Teeth are broken.
August 29, 1976: the Sex Pistols' Glen Matlock and (right) Johnny Rotten at The Screen On The Green, Islington, North London.
Protégés of Dr Feelgood, Eddie & The Hot Rods are a young, “high-energy rock’n’roll band”, into the MC5 and “goin’ out there an’ doin’ it”. “The Stones can’t relate to kids now,” says bassist Paul Gray. “They’re a completely different generation.”

Probably for the first time this decade, Top Of The Pops was one of those miss-it-if-you-dare shows last Thursday. People rushed home to dump themselves in front of the box at 7.10 and — “Uggle-uggle-uggle, good evening, guys and gals” — watch Jimmy Savile introduce the hottest new act to make the show in years.

It was worth it, too, wasn’t it: Paul Gray pacing malevolently from side to side behind Barrie Masters, who was doing his unlevelled best to spit his eyeballs out the screen at the nation, while the very wonderful Eddie & The Hot Rods rocketed their way through the demonic, chart-climbing Live At The Marquee EP. Yours for just £1.00 and worth the price of admission for the one track they did on TOTP, their fast-as-lightning-and-twice-as-electric version of Bob Seger’s “Get Out Of Denver”.

Even more worth the price of admission these days, though, is a live Hot Rods gig because, unless some nascent, jet-propelled beat group is already warming up to wrench the Rods’ crown away before they’ve even finished trying it on for size, this is undoubtedly the hardest-rocking combo in the kingdom.

Cram yourself into the Marquee when they’re back there next Tuesday. It’s a good summer for that venerable establishment, with the Rods and AC/DC appearing virtually on alternate weeks, each group breaking the attendance record set by the other mob the previous week. Obviously, that can’t go on much longer, so you’d better get in while you can...

The doors are closed within an hour of opening; the air is unbreathable; the disco...
Eddie & The Hot Rods: (clockwise from top) Barrie Masters, Dave Higgs, Steve Nicol and Paul Gray.
is good—the new Velvets bootleg EP, for instance; semi-rival punks The Damned hang out with the tiresomely-paranoid—till—I get too—now—like all the little clique that surrounds the Hot Rods. It feels special.

When Eddie... The Hot Rods bounce like a wicked Bay City Rollers (oh, there are links: mods begat skins begat blank begat Rods; mods begat skins begat Rollers begat a new youth cult): you have to be deaf, dumb and blind not to know it’s real special.

The atmosphere is beautiful, so cramped yet really friendly, and somehow it could be that these exhilarating kids are bounding their way through “The Kids Are Alright”? Regressive, innit? Fancy that—I picked that first Who album in a junk shop not long ago, and I’d forgotten just how regressive The ‘O’ were back then. Bo and B and all... The Rods even clatter their way through Townshend’s idiotic windmilled “solo” and the hammering build back to the verse. Good stuff.

They proceed to blitz an ecstatic audience, an endless stream of high-energy three-minute shots, Dave Higgs starting each number with a driving guitar riff that unfailingly runs straight out of Barrie Masters’ spoken intro just right. Paul Gray and Steve Nicol pile in on bass and drums and within four bars Masters grabs the song and shove it in.

It’s an impressively polished show, for all its vim and its venom, its occasional right-roots collective improvisations and its occasional pratfalls uninsured by any safety net except the bravado to get up and swagger on.

One such pratfall comes when Masters’ rampaging limbs pass a little too close to the shaded Gray, snatching off his hat. “We...” Gray tells me, without the least hint of realising that he may be a little overdone... I dunno, what other punk bands are there?”

The Rods are an oddity. “I fink it’s great... I liked Patti Smith at first, but I thinkshe’s a bit overdone... I dunno, what other punk bands are there?” Paul Gray agrees with the air of one who has adjusted to being on the way up already.

First Things First: bread. Are the Hot Rods still on the £20 per week mentioned by Max Bell back in April, or has the impecuniosity of the EP been sufficient, to quote that April headline, for the band to “up their wages to £25 a week and find true happiness”?

“I dunno where he got that twenty quid from,” Gray says, settling into the coach seat and lighting a fag. “We was on 15. We’re still on 15 quid a week, but if things go all right we get a tenner extra.

“But I mean even 25 quid goes nowhere when, like, you’re on the road. Like fuckin’ truckin’ up’n’dahn the M1 and the services at four o’clock in the morning... the amount of cigarettes, booze and food you consume is astonishing.”

You can’t actually live on £25 a week...”

“Well, none of us actually live on it,” he says, and for a moment I expect him to reveal that Masters is, in the current fashion, bionic. “We all live with our parents, see, that’s why.”

How do they feel about supporting a bunch of rock’n’roll delinquents? The atmosphere is beautiful, so cramped yet really friendly, but impossible, traipsing around with the band as they ‘ll say: “After the gig they’ll say: ‘You’re the same age as us, same level’”.

A good year. “It ’as ’appened very quickly,” Paul agrees with the air of one who has adjusted to being on the way up already.

He confesses to having been into heavy metal before joining the band, while Nicol was “into jazz” and Higgs into blues. “We had really diverse interests. But the one common denominator was high energy, just goin’ out there an’ doin’ it, y’know, so that people get on with it,” he says, setting the centre of their mutual interest about the MC5 and J Geils, the common denominator was high energy, just goin’ out there an’ doin’ it.

Uh huh. And what about the newer US punks? (Profuse apologies for using that word—Gray reckons we lazy journalists should coin a new term for the Rods, like “high-energy ’70s rock’n’roll”, Yet the Rods are probably closer than any other band around today to what “punk” meant, in terms of music, when I was a kid.)

“I think it’s great... I liked Patti Smith at first, but I think she’s a bit overdone... I dunno, what other punk bands are there?”

The Ramones.

“They’re all right for one song, but the album I just can’t fuckin’ tolerate. The thing that wires me up most is the vocals. Can’t stand ‘em. But I think the best band in that ilk were the MC5— I should think they’re my favourite band really.”

So that’s where the Rods take their lead from?

“No, because we only sort of discovered MC5 only like a few months ago,” Gray tells me, without the least hint of realising that he may be.
since about the early '70s. Punk rock's such a big thing. So many bands are doing it, and so many kids are in it, and getting pissed off with the older bands like the Stooges and the Hones..."

Who?

"Er, the Who and the Stones. Like, back in 1965 kids had them two and The Animals and The Yardbirds, and there was nothing like that right up until last year. Now it's all coming back, and kids today, who weren't into all that, so they felt a bit missed out—know I did—and they've gone this whole new thing coming on.

"So they think, 'Great, I can get in on it—I'm right at the beginning.' GOD knows what direction it'll go in. But I was 18 two weeks ago, so like I sorta know, 'cos I'm a kid y'know, and I know what kids feel like. Old people like the Stones can't relate to kids now, they're a completely different generation. So if you're a young band like us you know what the kids want.

"After the gig they'll come up and talk to yer and say, 'It's great that we can talk to yer after a gig [which may strike cynics as the aren't--we having fun attitude to having fun], and you're the same age, on the same level as us, kids playing to kids.'

"I'll leave you to draw your own conclusions (he lied) about people who make a virtue of such accidental attributes as their sex or nationality... or their age.

"That's why we wouldn't play 'Ammersmiff Odeon,' 'cos it wouldn't be like that. I can't see us doing that like the Feelgoods did," he reckons. "You could do two nights at the Roundhouse, say, rather than one at Hammersmiff. 'Cos fuckin' seats, man, that's not rock'n roll. You gotta have a floor where you can f**k about.

"Presumably coming out of the Southend scene—auditions at Feelgood House, etcetera—has helped the Rods a lot. Even now Graeme Douglas of the Kursaals is being very helpful towards The Wharf Rats, who could well be in the position the Hot Rods are in now in a year's time.

"Yeah, there's quite a little sort of community of bands. But there's also a lot of competition. Like when we started we were very friendly with the Feelgoods, but when we started to make it they got a little hostile towards us.

"I don't wanna say much, 'cos it's all right now, but I don't think they thought we'd make it. A lot of people that used to write for Feelgoods towards us.

"But the MC5, at the time they were doing it... what other music was goin' round then... I think that's f**kin' genius, I really do. They shoulda played, they came into contact with the scene by virtue of the music they heard..."
It was a head-on confrontation with the big British production or stage bands. Since Led Zeppelin first smote the music biz on the far side of the Atlantic back in ’69, America seemed to reel somewhat under the pressure. And when we followed up with ELP, Yes, Genesis, Pink Floyd and the heavy metal men - Heep, Purple, Sabbath and so on - Americans preferred country rock, singer-songwriters - almost anything except the type of "arranged music with glamorous lead vocalist" package.

There was Grand Funk Railroad, of course, but nothing quite like Queen to add to the long British honours list. That was - until Aerosmith. I suppose it was the mixture of instrumental prowess, musical attack and dash of flair that attracted me to the first Aerosmith album when it arrived on our shores virtually unheralded a couple of years ago. I’m still not a rabid fan of the band - we haven’t even had a chance to see them yet. And of course they are bound to upset most critics by appearing to follow a time-honoured course. Dull stuff for rock writers really,

just another group that appeals to the vast mass of kids. I can almost see the heads bobbing to the beat of “Back In The Saddle” at the Odeon, Hammersmith, even now. What have this hugely successful combo (in America) got to offer then, I can almost hear resentful sceptics sniff with hostility and suspicion? A certain je ne sais quoi. Steven Tyler is the arrogant, ill-tempered lead vocalist of the satirine features who looks as if he might give Freddie Mercury a severely slapped wrist if they crossed laser beams. But most impressive is the relentlessly riffing guitars of Joe Perry and mighty Brad Whitford. While Steve is shouting out the vocals on “Last Child”, listen to the Whitford guitar (he co-wrote it with Steve) dig into as nasty a riff as has been blasted forth since Jeff Beck was hooked up with Carmine Appice. Not to put too fine a point on it, they cook, and the guitars send those icy fingers along the spine.

Dig the way the hi-hats belt in a John Bonham on the fast “Rats In The Cellar”, a kind of tribute to the canyons of New York City. Solid vocal harmonies, driving guitars - what more could a simple rock fan request? And for more laidback tastes there are the chiming chords and Who-like aggression of “Sick As A Dog”, a most listenable stomper followed by the even more raucous “Nobody’s Fault”, with Tyler getting almost apoplectic. Joey Kramer is the man in the engine room, a blare of flailing crash cymbals and detonating toms, and he kicks along a boogie epic like “Get The Lead Out” with angry vehemence. Depending on your philosophy, it’s irresistible stuff that will get knees pumping in the three-quid seats, and groans from scribblers in the freebies.

But at the risk of being cut dead at the annual rock writers’ convention, I find the sensuous rhythms and animal pulse of “Lick And A Promise” (just one of many erotic selections), a strangely heady brew. They could keep up this ecletic hullabaloo based on the familiar backlog of rock riffs all night, and I’d feel no pain.

Chris Welch, WM 7/10

The Bay City Rollers Dedication DEL

The Rollers are such an emotive subject it is a problem to unravel fact from fantasy, to separate fanaticism from fury. A fan will swoon at the sight of Ian Mitchell placing one delicate hand upon a tartan-trimmed knee. The rock community at large froths at the mouth at the apparent incompetence they represent.

And yet somewhere between the extremes...there is just another group, struggling like all the rest to get an audience off the deckchairs, up and shouting: “More!” Only difference is, the Rollers don’t have to struggle in that department any more. Now they want to prove that they can play and deliver music slightly more demanding and adventurous than “Bye Bye Baby”. They have created their own separate world from the rest of us, and yet buried beneath all the banners, tears and headlines, there is some sincere musical enterprise. If one can forgive them for being Rollers and listen, then there is evidence for the case that the Rollers really can play and don’t need men in white coats to switch on their amplifiers.

It seems unlikely, even in this cynical age, that a totally different group, heavily disguised in false beards and dark spectacles, was called in to the Canadian studios where this album was recorded to take over the essential chores of playing and singing on the Rollers’ behalf. I am quite prepared to believe this is all their own work, in which case they deserve a gold star and a tick. I am constantly surprised at the scope of the Rollers’ arrangements, their brisk percussive power, which could do credit to any new-wave New York rock band, and their disciplined, melodic vocal harmonies.

Listen to the driving power of “Rock’n’Roll Letter”, or the Ramones-like “Yesterday’s Heroes”, so virile, resonant and filled with the clangour of life. Eric Faulkner’s lead-guitar solos are so funky on “Rock’n’Roller” that if the band arrived unannounced for a set of maximum R&B at the Nashville Rooms, the place would be in uproar.

And there is still room for romance. Note the warm,
emotive vocals by Les McKeown on “Write A Letter”, and when Ian Mitchell offers up a heartfelt monologue on “Dedication”, with its massive Phil Spectorish string arrangement, one could imagine it bringing a tear to the eye of Elvis “The King” Presley himself.

There are some weaknesses. Bryan Ferry fans have been heard to chaff at Leslie’s allegorical, almost surrealistic treatment of Brian Wilson’s somewhat trashy pop song “Don’t Worry Baby”, on purely aesthetic grounds, and it is true that compared to Ferry’s alternative version, McKeown lacks a certain je ne sais quoi or comment est ton père.

But producer Jimmy Lenner and his engineer have given the Rollers a very respectable sound, rich in presence, with some of the best vocal tracking I’ve heard this summer.

The Rollers are generally better playing their own sturdier and simplistic riffs than dealing with the material of others, but here they show, especially on a dramatic and oddly mysterious grand finale, “Dedication”, that the Rollers are more serious about their music than either their fans or sternest critics might suppose.

Chris Welch, NME Sept 11

Burning Spear Man In The Hills

Next to the current crop of wild-eyed wired-up weird-asses coming out of JA these days, Burning Spear sound almost conservative.

They leave dub sorcery and dreadlocks-a-go-go right down there in the dumfer for the carefree youngbloods to play with their nitty’s a different breed of gritty. Burning Spear don’t play games. They’re dealing in plain speaking. Their music has a subdued but pushing backbeat, discreet horns, carefully layered keyboards; the occasional touch of ack-ack guitar stands out like a barbed-wire fence in an open field.

Their tunes are modally based (usually with a simple two-semitone or 1-IV modulation) rather than structured around chord sequences, and their combination of unassailable dignity and extreme simplicity is reminiscent of nothing so much as the classic country-blues recordings of the ‘20s and ‘30s. Burning Spear’s stark understatement is almost enough to send the casual rock fan (no disrespect intended - that’s where I’m coming from) scampering back to the safer and more familiar ground of Bob Marley, Third World, U-Roy and Toots.

In other words, unless you’re hip to the ground rules it ain’t the kind of reggae album you buy unheard on impulse to slap on at your next party when the skank initiates and midnight ravers want to forget their weakness and dance. Not that you can’t dance to it per se – it’s just that after a while you’ll find your self either listening to Winston Rodney’s vocals or else not listening at all.

Rodney is Burning Spear’s lead singer and composer-in-residence. He wrote nine of the 10 songs contained herein all on his lonesome and the 10th in conjunction with one P Fullwood. Excellent though Delroy Hines and Rupert Willington’s backing vocals are, it’s pretty much Rodney’s show all the way: he’s the one you listen to; he’s the picture and his arrangements – subtly coloured by Jack Ruby (AKA L Lindo)’s production – are the frame.

B Spear’s first album, Marcus Garvey (which contains their most celebrated song, “Slavery Days”, radically reinterpreted by Third World on their first album) is probably the most comprehensive musical collation of Rastafarian politics and theology extant. Man In The Hills, while no less committed, contains an extended layer of subject matter within a similar framework of reference. The philosophy is the same (liberation, deliverance, brotherhood, peace) but the expression is looser.

Rodney is at his most moving on “Black Soul”, a slow, ecstatic, incantation of pride and solidarity... reminds me painfully of how black folks address each other as “brother” and “sister” as a matter of course. How come it’s so hard for any of us to call anyone “brother” and sound like we mean it? If anything, white racism over the centuries has cost white people more than it has black. The tangible things we took from them they can take back; the intangibles that we lost in the process we may never regain. Anyway, on with the fan ‘n’ games... Lemme say it this way. Bob Marley’s a dervish shaman, a stoned Holy Roller; Toots is into hoarse hellfire. Racked up against those two, Burning Spear are puritans. They’re a slow burn rather than a white-light-white-heat flash.

If you’re prepared to work at getting into their mind and letting the work getting into you, you could find that prising this album off your turntable is a task akin to shot-putting a pregnant elephant.

Charles Shaar Murray, NME Sept 11
DR. FEELGOOD'S CHRISTMAS PARTY

**DR. FEELGOOD**

**CLOVER**

and

**THE LEW LEWIS BAND**

will be rockin'!

Hammersmith Palais

on

Sunday, December 19th

Admission £2.00 in advance

Doors open 7.00pm

Christmas Eve at the Kursaal, Southend.
“Show you mean business”

DR FEELGOOD are about to release a live album, called Stupidity. It’s not a flashy effort. “You don’t have to be dressed up like some old tart in satin and sequins to play rock’n’roll,” says LEE BRILLEAUX. But where do they stand on punk?

— MELODY MAKER SEPTEMBER 18 —

I FIRST ENCOUNTERED DR Feelgood in November 1974, at London’s Roundhouse where they were supporting, quite incongruously, the veteran space warriors Nektar. It was a vivid introduction. The Feelgoods’ reputation was already considerable, but I was totally unprepared for the point-blank intensity and naked aggression of their unsophisticated, but immensely potent, Anglicised rhythm and blues (or, as vocalist Lee Brilleaux would have it, “rivvum ’n’ blooze”).

Ten minutes of the razor-edged velocity of Wilko Johnson’s guitar, Lee’s nicotine-smeared vocals and the unrelenting urgency of Sparko’s bass and The Big Figure’s percussion, and I was crunched.

The band was successfully making the transition from the London pubs and clubs, where they has first gained attention, to larger venues and larger audiences. In December of that year the Feelgoods accompanied Hawkwind on the preliminary dates of that band’s massive winter tour of Britain, and mesmerised audiences in Glasgow, Newcastle, Manchester, Birmingham and their local mob in Southend. In February of 1975, the band consolidated that success with the Naughty Rhythms Tour, with Chilli Willi & The Red Hot Peppers and Kokomo.

It was a bold co-operative venture, designed to break all three bands from the insularity of the London pub scene. For Dr Feelgood it worked. The Chillis didn’t survive the tour. Komomo still exist in a strange kind of limbo, unable to fully establish themselves outside a small circuit of British gigs.

Down By The Jetty, the Feelgoods’ recording debut, was released to coincide with that tour and its sales reflected their increasing popularity. Their appearances later that year at the Orange Festival in the South of France and the Reading Festival in England demonstrated that they had effectively captured the imaginations of both
Continental and domestic audiences. By November they were considered important enough to have the news of their first headlining tour (an exhausting 25-city trek) announced on the MF’s front page. Within a month of that tour, culminating in a concert at Hammersmith Odeon, the Feelgoods were in America. They played at the CBS convention in San Diego, decided that the country was hungry for more of their ferocious R&B vitality and returned earlier this year (with a second album, Malpractice, behind them), for a gruelling two-and-a-half months of intensive gigging.

Since their return to Britain the group has been largely inactive. They’ve played only six concerts, principally to reassure themselves that their popularity had not declined during their American campaign, and prepared for release this week a live album.

It is disarmingly titled Stupidity and is a collection of the most requested numbers from their stage show. Recorded during their last British tour in Sheffield and Southend, Stupidity reaffirms the Feelgoods as one of the most vicious and electrifying R&B bands ever to strut their stuff on the planks.

Simultaneously, the group begins another extensive tour of the country. It’s good to have them back...

“Stupidity,” observes Lee Brilleaux, relaxing with a bottle of gin (that’s being rapidly drained) in the United Artists Records press office, “is the natural culmination of the first phase of Dr Feelgood’s career.” It captures a certain quality of excitement and strength that was lost in the Spartan arrangements of Jety and suggested only on the more successful tracks on Malpractice.

Rumours that the band was struggling to complete a third studio album are vehemently denied by Lee and Sparko, who finally gets his nose out of a glass of whisky to refute the suggestion. They have been recordings successfylly, he affirms. But the next studio album, they would have made a subsequent live album, of material similar to that included on Stupidity, quite redundant.

“It would have been too retrospective,” offers Lee, “and we released the albums in that sequence. Better this way, he continues, to satisfy those who have long demanded a Feelgoods live collection, and also to prepare the way for the new studio work.

“We’ve become accustomed to studios now,” he says. “There were difficulties at first, but they were gradually encountered and gradually overcome. We feel we can stretch ourselves a bit more now, without losing any of the intensity. I think this next album’s gonna require time. I think we all realise that.

“We’ve realised that there’s a lot more we can do in the studio, and we’ve determined to take our time over the new album to make sure we do it right. It’ll still be Dr Feelgood. There’ll be no mistaking that it’s us,” comments Sparko. “The ferocity will still be there. That is the sound of Dr Feelgood. It is cut down to the bone. It’s the rawness of Dr Feelgood that distinguishes us from the thousands of other bands. But you can make the studio work for you, without destroying the impact. We still won’t get into doing hundreds of overdubs. If we went into a studio and started acting like a lot of pansies, fiddling around, then it wouldn’t be Dr Feelgood. It wouldn’t work.”

Certainly, the Feelgoods’ success can be attributed to the very basic appeal of their music. At their best, the band is savagely unrestrained. They emerged at a time of increasing musical complexity and reminded us that rock’n’roll could be exciting and fun without recourse to advanced technology. They may be derivative, and no one could accuse them of attempting to innovate, but there can be no denial of their energy and ability to stimulate jaded senses. The Feelgoods, and their pub rock contemporaries like Kilburn & The High Roads, Charlie And The Wide Boys, Chilli Willi and later The Kursaal Flyers, played music with an enthusiasm and a lust for pleasure, entirely without pretension.

They played the music they liked, for fun. It was as simple as that. For Lee and Sparko it is still as simple as that, and they deny that their original stance—which provided so many journalists with reams of colourful copy—was consciously a rebellion against the techno-flash extravagance of so many bands. Their aggression, says Sparko, was not contrived: “If you’re playing something you believe in and no one’s listening, it makes you mad.”

“Yeah,” Lee agrees. “You look at an audience and think, ‘Fuck you lot. I know this is good even if you don’t. So listen, you cunts.’ And you put that feeling of aggression into the music, rather than battering the audience with all the verbiage. I never went in for calling the audience cunts. I used to think it sometimes, but I don’t think it’s really a good thing to tell them.”

“All you can do is impress them through your performance. If you can show an audience that you mean business, then they’ll pay you a bit of attention.”

During their recent US tour, adds Sparko, audiences were often stunned, frequently confused, but never indifferent.
“Most places, the kids never knew what hit them,” contributes Lee. “I don’t think they’d ever seen anything like us. Lots of those kids had never really heard rívum ‘n’ blues. I mean, it was a weird one. We were playing rívum ‘n’ blooze to an American audience in America and it sounded foreign to them.

“And they were surprised not only by the music, but also our appearance. They are still very used to musicians getting on stage dressed up in all the kit. You know, the whole rock-star bit. It’s still the same old business. But, you don’t have to be dressed up like some old tart in satin and sequins to play rock’n’roll. The music should speak for itself, and the people should speak for themselves.

“The point about rock’n’roll, and the reason it started in the first place was that anyone virtually could play it. Someone could get hold of a guitar and learn to play it reasonably well and then jump on a stage and play.

“Rock’n’roll isn’t satin fuckin’ trowsers and limousines and massive banks of amplifiers and thousands of roadies everywhere. It’s about people! Human beings. They are important. The rest don’t mean nothing.”

“It’s the attitude that has characterised the Feelgoods’ career. And one can divine in this defiance an influence on the attitude assumed currently by so many of the younger bands who have followed the Feelgoods into the pubs and clubs in London.

“Bands like The Lovers – particularly Joe Strummer (who’s now strumming with The Clash) – Eddie & The Hot Rods, even the Sex Pistols may not have deliberately copied the sartorial style popularised by the Feelgoods and Ian Dury and Charlie And The Wise Boys, but their shambling, ruffian look is certainly derived from these sources of inspiration.

“You’re talking about all the so-called fuckin’ punks, ain’t yer?” scoffs Lee when I mention this connection. “But I mean, what’s a fuckin’ punk? A punk should be 17 and convinced that he’s a star. Even if he can’t play. And I admire that when it happens naturally.

“But I don’t admire it when people make out that they’re punks and they got two A-levels. When we came on in the early days, those clothes that we wore, they wasn’t stage clothes they we’d ‘doined’. They were the clothes that we turned up to the gig in. That’s what we were wearing. . .

“I always used to wear me best suit,” interjects Sparko.

“Yeah, we didn’t decide to try to look scruffy and wear old suits. We just thought that since we were playing music that everyone thought was uncommercial there would be no point in tarring ourselves up and blow-drying our hair. We weren’t deliberately trying to develop a style. It’s just that people picked it up on us. We never deliberately throw mud over ourselves. We didn’t have to.

“We had this van that we spent so much time underneath that we had enough stains on our clothes without having to get into all that. I think this whole punk thing at the moment has got too stylised. There’s no such thing as punks anymore. This lot are consciously making themselves out to be something they’re not. They’re trying to come on like little yobboes. And they’re not little fuckin’ yobboes. Little yobboes don’t get up on stage and play guitars. Yer little yobbos go down the disco and kick people.”

“And,” says Sparko, adding a final word on the subject, “they wear smart clothes like me. Not second-hand rubbish.”

As I mentioned above, this current tour is Dr Feelgood’s first since the marathon trek last November. Once again, their itinerary takes them to provincial centres most bands these days avoid. It’s not the Feelgoods’ style, however. They owe their stature to the support of their admirers in these areas and aren’t prepared to forget the fact.

“I think it’s unfair,” says Lee, “when some bands make it and then decide that they will do only four major gigs and sod the people in North Yorkshire who want to see them. If people in North Yorkshire want to see us, we ain’t gonna say, ‘Sod yer! If you really want to see us yer’ll have to come down to fuckin’ Manchester!’ We’ll go and play in Yorkshire. It’s not the end of the fuckin’ world.”

Inevitably, such a decision precipitates enormous pressures on the band. Lee: “You always feel, see, that you’re under an obligation to finish the act. People have paid their money to see you, and three-quarters of the way through the set you may feel really sick and ill, but really don’t matter if you die. You wanna do your job. It’s hard and getting no easier.”

“You should, I suggest, ‘incorporate an acoustic set in the middle of the act’. Lee replies. “That’ll be the bludgin’ day.” Allan Jones

“The music is stripped to the bone and jerks with aggression”
March 22, 1976: Queen aiming for an atmosphere of “excitement, expectation and, ultimately, enjoyment” at Tokyo’s Nippon Budokan.
And as their forthcoming Hyde Park concert testifies, QUEEN are doing all right. “We don’t think we’re above anybody,” says Roger Taylor. “We don’t consider ourselves to be above our audience.”

“We do the best we can”
"I don't think there's ever been a show like we're going to do in the Park. We're not going to hold back at all just because it's a free concert. It'll be the whole works. I hope it all fits together as a very nice and peaceful and enjoyable afternoon. It's a way of saying thank you. It's an adventure, fighting your way through 15 million miles of red tape. It's quite hilarious."

Had anyone mentioned to Queen four years ago the possibility that they would be topping a concert in Hyde Park, it's likely that the band members would have been taken aback by the idea. They would have accepted that it was most likely that they would eventually play a gig of such magnitude. They always knew they'd be a big band, and they were conscious, from the start, of the importance of creating a highly distinctive and personal sound that could be associated only with them.

Queen's roots lie in a band called Smile, which Brian May (guitar) and Roger Taylor (drums) played together in. When the singer, Tim Staffell, left to pursue a solo career, Freddie Mercury came along and persuaded them to form a band with him. After six months, John Deacon joined on bass and Queen was formed.

But had the life of rock'n'roll turned sour, the men in Queen could easily have returned to comfortable professions: Mercury, who designed Queen's logo, studied graphic design and illustration; May received a BSc in physics; Taylor graduated in biology; and Deacon won a first-class honours degree in electronics.

The result of a studio trial at London's De Lane Lea studios was a demo tape that consisted of most of the songs that would appear on the first album, and EMI rushed to sign the band. A first single, "Keep Yourself Alive", was released during October 1973, and flopped, and the band's gig as support act on a Mott The Hoople tour earned them meagre attention. But had the life of rock'n'roll turned sour, the men in Queen could easily have returned to comfortable professions: Mercury, who designed Queen's logo, studied graphic design and illustration; May received a BSc in physics; Taylor graduated in biology; and Deacon won a first-class honours degree in electronics.

On their four albums to date, Queen, Queen II, Sheer Heart Attack and A Night At The Opera, Queen have meticulously stamped their own sound, and earned enemies because they've been so fussy about their work. Sheer Heart Attack and A Night At The Opera were particularly open to these attacks, but the days are past when Queen have been affected by such superficial judgments.

They go into the studio to get the best sound they possibly can, and adopt whatever means are at their considerable disposal to do so. Queen's first album is still considered by many of their fans as their best. Like most debut discs, it's a work that encompasses the material that has been accumulated and played on the road for a few years before they got a chance to record, but many of the songs continue to form an integral part of the stage act.

"Keep Yourself Alive" and "Liar" are classics of the band that'll probably never be dropped, while "Doing All Right" and "Son And Daughter" are contrasting rockers that could be dispensed with to make room for new material.

Overall, the album epitomised what Queen were about - not just a hard rock band, but a group of musicians well into melody, playing with subtlety that many '70s bands had ignored. The music was a '70s music, influenced and flavoured by the '60s but structured and orchestrated (especially May's guitar work) in a fashion that owed little to the past.

May: "It had the youth and freshness which was never regained, because you're only young once. It had a lot of rough edges, a lot of bad playing, but obviously we didn't have that time to spend on it, which we did subsequently. It was all done in odd times when Trident Studios were available, so it sounds a bit bitty to me, and sound-wise it's very patchy. But I would never think of going back and redoing it in any way, because I think it has a freshness which we won't have again."

"I still like 'The Night Comes Down', which was done as a demo on our own at De Lane Lea Studios. It was the first time we'd be as, a group, in the studio together. I'd also mention 'My Fairy King', because that was a portent of things to come. That was an experimental thing. It was the beginning really of Fred playing the piano. He used to play for his own amusement but was very against putting a piano in the stage act. He didn't feel confident, I suppose, and also felt that he wanted to move around, didn't want to be stuck playing a keyboard. The whole track was built around that and the backing track was done on the piano.

"The piano is gradually creeping in on the stage act now, which is good. It gives us so much more scope. From a thing like 'My Fairy King' came 'Black Rhapsody', the six-minute opus with the operatic middle section, gave them a much wider audience, who went out in force to sample the variety of wares on A Night At The Opera. Now they're one of Britain's biggest bands.
"Queen II was a point where all the adventurous ideas came out"

Queen, on the second album, and then ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’.

Of all four albums, Queen II remains firmly my favourite. A work that brimmed over with inventiveness, it was Queen at their most consistent and certain at their most mature, musically. The songs were outstanding, complemented brilliantly on record by their instrumental skill. Brian May’s role as guitarist on Queen II was not as guitar hero, but of one who worked totally with the group to give a strong, unique sound. And I don’t think that Freddie Mercury has out-matched his Queen II performance on any other record.

The album had most of what is good about Queen. The songs reflected versatility in that department. From May came the classic in the moving “Some Day One Day”, and, of course, Mercury penned the first hit single, “Seven Seas Of Rhye”, while the two contributed the tracks that were to form the loose concept of the album, “White Queen (As It Began)” (May) and “The March Of The Black Queen” (Mercury), the battle between good and evil. Mercury also gave us the ravaging “Ogre Battle”, with its savage battle sequence.

To me, Queen II was an album which gave the band a direction, and to dabble adventurousness with rock at such an early stage in their career was a move that displayed unusual confidence in their own ability. Strangely enough, the subsequent albums, Sheer Heart Attack and A Night At The Opera, have not portrayed the unity evident on Queen II.

May: “I must admit it’s my favourite. It was the first time we’d been able to – having got all those things out of our system on the first album – construct an album from a white sheet of paper. Everything that went on that album, we’d decided was right for the album out of a lot of songs we had around at the time. We really did try and shape it into a coherent whole, both musically and thematically.

“It really was. I think, the most considered album, because that album had been dreamed of right back before we made the first album. We knew we were getting all the stuff out of our systems so that we could concentrate on making an album and doing all these orchestral things that we’d always wanted to do with guitars and voices; doing the more fairly emotional songs and structured songs, which we couldn’t even think of doing on stage but which we could do on album. All that was safe for the second album.

“The songs have a lot of meaning for us, and for our audience. That album crystallised what Queen was, I think, because, at that time, all the equipment we had to offer was on display in a way, the songwriting and the means of treating an album separate from a stage show. I think that set our direction more than anything else.

“Queen II was a point where all the adventurous ideas came out. There are seeds in Queen II of almost everything we’ve done since, but it was so compressed that all of it didn’t come out unless you’d listened very closely.”

If Queen II offered adventure, excitement and a definitive Queen sound, then Sheer Heart Attack is, in retrospect, the calm after the storm, an album which presented nothing startlingly new from the band, save a bunch of excellent, slickly produced songs. Again, Freddie Mercury and Brian May dominated the songwriting, but the contributions of Roger Taylor (“Tenement Funster” – Taylor averages one rocker per album) and, for the first time, John Deacon (the soothing and poppy “Misfire”) widened the writing scope a little.

Mercury’s songs veered from the smartness of “Killer Queen” and “Flick Of The Wrist” to the poignancy of slower numbers like “Lily Of The Valley” and “In The Lap Of The Gods”. May’s contributions to the album, however, were more defined, for apart from one track, “Dear Friends”, his songs were mainly straightforward rockers, like “Brighton Rock”, “Now I’m Here” and the slightly lesser-paced “She Makes Me (Stormtrooper In Stilettos)”.

Sheer Heart Attack has been the only album on which May has stuck so closely to the hard rockers. He usually shows other sides of his character by writing well-structured, often complicated pieces. May: “I do feel an affinity for the hard-rock bands who are not ashamed to do hard rock all night and do it incredibly well, bands like Status Quo. I think that if I wasn’t doing what I’m doing now, that’s..."
what I’d be doing, and I’d gain a lot of satisfaction out of it. It’s one of the hardest things in the world to be a really good rock band. To write really good rock songs is much harder than writing little things that all fit together well, so I suppose that’s what is in my mind when I do those.

“I never like to see us get too far away from rock. I hope we’re never too sophisticated, if that’s the word, and that we’ll always be able to just get out there and do some rock’n’roll. I think that would be a loss, really, because it is not to be sneered at in any way, and to do that kind of thing is, as I say, as demanding as doing any of the complex things we do.”

So Sheer Heart Attack was the straightest rock album Queen have yet recorded, strong but safe. Although it failed to present an experimental band, which the second album did, and although it worked within a much tighter framework, it was the album which virtually broke Queen as a major band worldwide.

May: “I regard Sheer Heart Attack as the most polished album, the most finished product, in the sense that we were playing better and the songs are all quite separate and treated in their own ways. It was done more for contrast than for continuity. The songs contrast but, at the same time, we weren’t going out on any great limbs. Everything was a logical development from Queen II, although people didn’t realise it at the time, but I think they do now.”

May’s right. Sheer Heart Attack was a neatly packaged, concise rock work, unlike last year’s release, A Night At The Opera, which displayed the spirit of adventure that marked Queen II.

Queen were well established when the time came to record their fourth album and they decided that they’d spend whatever period was necessary on finishing the new album. They obviously went into the studios determined that the end product would portray a band much more diverse musically than any previous album, which it did.

There were typical Queen rockers in “Death On Two Legs” and “Sweet Lady” and typical Queen symphonies in the brilliant “Prophet’s Song” and “Bohemian Rhapsody”. Songs like those are expected from Queen. Not expected were the vaudevilleian “Lazing On A Sunday Afternoon”, folksy “39”, jazzy “Good Company” and middle-of-the-road love song, “Love Of My Life”. It was Queen putting themselves out on a limb again, saying, “Look, we’re not just a rock band, we’re something deeper than that.” Here’s the proof.

Premtentious though it might seem to say it, A Night At The Opera pulled them away from comparisons with heavy-metal giants Led Zeppelin, and pushed them nearer to The Beatles. By becoming more diverse and writing a wider range of material, Queen had made themselves more accessible to a wider public.

A Night At The Opera, in my opinion, still had a few loose ends that weren’t completely tied up, but the next album will probably see the full fruition of the ideas. For all intents and purposes, the album was to Queen what Sgt Pepper was to The Beatles. It’s opened up so many unexplored areas that have to be followed— at the risk of losing original fans.

May: “A Night At The Opera is really the conundrum, because I don’t really think of it as a very commercial album. But it was the one which broke all the records. It’s not nearly as easy-listening an album as Sheer Heart Attack. There’s a lot of very uncomfortable things about it.

“We were deciding to branch out again. It was a conscious decision. Thinking that Sheer Heart Attack was not enough, if you know what I mean, with A Night At The Opera we wanted to be adventurous again, but at the same time, use the expertise which we’ve learned in doing Sheer Heart Attack, and in doing all the millions of gigs in between. I’m pleased with it on the whole. It’s got some very accessible things and also some very inaccessible things.”

Queen’s fascination for, and addiction to, recording studios, however, has taken its toll on the stage act. When they had finished recording A Night At The Opera, the band had two days to rehearse a stage act that would be taken around the world. The result has been that the stage act, good though it is, hasn’t compared with recorded performances, which isn’t surprising when nowhere near the same thought is put into making it original. The signs are that that approach will change this year.

May: “It has been quite a problem. What we’ve decided on for these few gigs at the moment is to do a halfway thing, with new songs thrown in. It’s right for what we’re doing, because they’re unusual gigs and a lot of people will see us who’ve never seen us before. It’s right to present the complete history of what we have been. For the next tour—the one after these gigs—that’ll be the one where we start restructuring.

“In the case of the last tour, there was almost no rehearsal, because we went ahead and planned all the tour and worked ourselves to death to try and get the album finished, and there were only two days between finishing the album and going on tour.

“But for the next tour, we’ll rehearse. We’re not going to make the same mistake again. Maybe we could have pulled out something special if we’d had more time to rehearse, so this time we’re going to finish the album, make sure we have the right time for rehearsal and then go on tour.”

QUEEN HAVE MAINTAINED that record performance and stage performance should be treated as totally separate entities and that when they do one thing on record, there should be no obligation to repeat the feat in front of a live audience. Their stage act comes in the form of a compromise which works well.

The band adapt their songs as best they can for live work and, to bridge the gap between the perfect sound on record, they create an atmosphere around their set that involves their audience totally; so suddenly it doesn’t matter to punters any more whether or not they play songs as on record.
When an audience comes to a concert, they come to hear music played. Why the hell can we never do what we do on record. We try to get as near as we can. We’ve never used any outside musicians either on stage or on record. It’s not because of any strict policy, more due to personal satisfaction, by dragging it out of ourselves. We like experimenting with instruments and voices to create the effect on record that we want. We don’t really try to recreate the sound on stage. I mean, you can’t do anything like ‘Prophet’s Song’ like the record on stage. It’s like a six-part harmony, and there’s only three singers. There’s no way that you can do it.

Those are problems that we’ve got to solve ourselves, but if it sounds good, I don’t think anybody can have cause for complaint. If it doesn’t sound good, fair enough.

All you can do is do either medium to the best of your ability at the time, and in the studio, you have so much time and so many different things, you have all the advantages — so why not make it as perfect as you can, even if it does make the stage act a harder thing to do?

We say about using tapes, as 10cc do; well, I don’t agree with that. When an audience comes to a concert, they come to hear music played live, not to hear backing tapes.

All I can say is that we do the best we can within both mediums, and we’re honest in both. I don’t think that saying we treat recording and playing live as separate entities is a cop-out; I think that’s honest. If we wanted to cope with the things that Freddie is wearing these days? Nobody could wear those lines after we’ve done something.

The harmonies we sing, they’re not tape-loops.

When we go on stage, we want to make people enjoy themselves, to lift them. We’re certainly not resting on our laurels in any way at the moment. Perhaps a bit later on in all this, we’ll want to say something real about the things that really matter, poverty or whatever, but at the moment it’s not the right time or place to say it.

For one thing, we’re not influential enough. It would only damage ourselves to do it and it wouldn’t have much effect on people, and possibly we’re not even mature enough to know how to say it yet. I hope we say something on those lines after we’ve done something on purely musical lines and entertain lines, which is what we’re trying to do now.

What John Lennon was trying to do after he left The Beatles was amazing. He was just being himself. Some of his statements might have been naive, especially in retrospect, but what a brave, honest way to do it.

“People seem to think we don’t try enough on stage, but when we come off we are totally wiped out, exhausted. A lot of them seem to resent the fact that it’s entertaining. They say that we’ve got no sense of humour, which is ridiculous. How could we have no sense of humour with the things that Freddie is wearing these days? Nobody could wear those lines without having a sense of humour.

“People say that we’ve kept above our audience, but I don’t really think that’s true. It is these days a bit, but only through necessity, because the organisation is so big. But I can remember the first two or three tours we did; we always used to try and let anybody who wanted to come into the dressing room. But we can’t do that now, obviously.

“We don’t think we’re above anybody. We might think we’re a better band than most, but we don’t consider ourselves to be above our audience.”

In the past year, Queen have entered a class of their own. This rise coincided with the arrival of a new manager, John Reid, who had already made his name by handling Elton John. When he plotted the course for his first year with Queen, Reid decided that they should spend a substantial period cracking America wide open. The result was that the band are now one of the biggest rock acts in the States and, nine months after its release, A Night At The Opera is still in the charts there.

The feedback from the American success has opened many English eyes, and has given both Queen and Reid the confidence to stage the free show in Hyde Park.

May: “I’m staggered by the past year. I’m amazed. I suppose now we’re conscious of having to live up to something, whereas before we weren’t, so that’s an additional strain. I will be happy as long as I feel that we do live up to people’s opinion of us. If I think we justifiy it, then I’m happy. I am always striving to see that we do.

“We’re certainly not resting on our laurels in any way. We’re always pushing on to new things. In a way, it would change us less than most people, because we’ve always had those attitudes really. We always went for perfection in the face of financial disaster.”

Harry Doherty
The interview that started the controversy took place on Wednesday December 1 on Thames TV’s early current-affairs programme Today. The actual interview lasted one minute 40 seconds, after a short introduction by Grundy and a 40-second clip of the Pistols on stage. Our recording started a few seconds after Grundy’s introduction as he faced the four members of the band seated in the studio. Standing behind the Pistols was a group of fans.

The following is a transcript of what ensued.

GRUNDY (To camera) …Chains round the necks and that’s just the fellas, innit? Eh? I mean, is it just the fellas? Yeah? They are punk rockers. The new craze, they tell me. Their heroes? Not the nice, clean Rolling Stones… you see they are as drunk as I am… they are clean by comparison. They’re a group called the Sex Pistols, and I am surrounded by all of them…

JONES (Reading the autocue) In action!

GRUNDY Just let us see the Sex Pistols in action. Come on, kids…

(A film clip of London Weekend’s documentary on punk broadcast the previous Sunday came on the screen)

GRUNDY I am told that that group (hits his knee with sheaf of papers) have received £40,000 from a record company. Doesn’t that seem, er, to be slightly opposed to their anti-materialistic view of life?

MATLOCK No, the more the merrier.

GRUNDY Really? »
“What a fucking rotter”: when Queen cancel at the last minute, stand-ins the Sex Pistols and their "Bromley Contingent" entourage give Today presenter Bill Grundy more than he bargained for, Dec 1, 1976.
A BIG PUNK ROCK concert starring the Sex Pistols is being planned for London later this month. The show celebrates the release of the band’s debut single, “Anarchy In The UK”, on November 19. The show will also feature Chris Spedding & The Vibrators, whose “Pogo Dancing” single is available from November 12, together with Suzi & The Banshees (sic) and, from New York, the Ramones and Talking Heads.

The venue has yet to be decided, though there were plans to stage the show at the Talk Of The Town, London’s traditional cabaret club. This idea was dropped after difficulties over the licensing laws. The show will be the prelude to the Pistols’ first major British tour, exclusively reported in the MM’s Dialogue, which this week discusses the state of British rock.

“In the same way that the Rolling Stones were known as symbols of rebellion when they started, so are the Sex Pistols. The Stones are now the elite of the rock ’n’ roll establishment and the Sex Pistols are the new people knocking at the door. “To a lot of kids the Stones and groups from that era don’t mean a thing. They’re too old for a start, all over 30, and the kids want some young people they can identify with. “A lot of people criticise the Sex Pistols for not playing well, but they’ve only been together for about eight months. I think a lot of kids watch them and think, ‘Yeah, I could do that, let’s form a group’.

The concerts come as the climax to a triumphant three months for the Sex Pistols, Britain’s top punk band. They were one of the big successes at the punk rock festival in London two months ago, and in October they signed a recording contract with EMI.

In this week’s Melody Maker, Nick Mobbs, EMI’s man who signed the Pistols, claims: “I genuinely think that they’re the start of a wave. I think they’re the rare breed of artist; they’re total entertainment and in a lot of ways uncompromising in what they want to do.”

Mobbs is one of the top A&R directors featured in the MM’s Dialogue, which this week discusses the state of British rock. “The time is right for an act that kids of 16 to 18 can actually identify with,” says Mobbs. “The key point is that the group are very young. There’s other groups giving entertainment, but this group are only 19-year-olds and because they’re young they’ll grow and their audience will grow with them.

“In the same way that the Rolling Stones were known as symbols of rebellion when they started, so are the Sex Pistols. The Stones are now the elite of the rock ’n’ roll establishment and the Sex Pistols are the new people knocking at the door. “To a lot of kids the Stones and groups from that era don’t mean a thing. They’re too old for a start, all over 30, and the kids want some young people they can identify with. “A lot of people criticise the Sex Pistols for not playing well, but they’ve only been together for about eight months. I think a lot of kids watch them and think, ‘Yeah, I could get up there and do that, let’s form a group’. “Again, that hasn’t happened for a long time because groups are too good; the musicianship has been so high that kids of 16 have been put off. But already, there are about 12 groups in London directly inspired by the Sex Pistols.”
**Rubbish**

**MM NOV 20 A punk package tour proves problematic.**

*Punks are at war!* The special punk package tour in December, co-starring Britain’s Sex Pistols and New York’s Ramones, has collapsed. The Ramones, Talking Heads and Chris Spedding & The Vibrators have pulled out — leaving the Pistols to soldier on alone. But the whole tour has been revamped and the Pistols are now joined by the Heartbreakers — the band formed by ex-New York Doll Johnny Thunders — The Damned and The Clash.

Highlight of the new tour will be the first-ever concert at a new major London venue, the Roxy Theatre, Harlesden, on Boxing Day.

The Ramones manager Danny Fields claimed this week that the tour was never really on — but Pistols’ manager Malcolm McLaren has slammed that statement as “a load of rubbish”. Fields told *MM* this week: “As of last Sunday night only three dates had been confirmed of the 20 or so the Sex Pistols’ management had told us about. Fred Bannister, who was promoting the tour and who was a major factor in persuading Phonogram to back it financially, had pulled out — and when he quit, Phonogram pulled out. “We weren’t too concerned about violence. Perhaps Phonogram were, and I know promoters are always worried about violence. But I don’t see what Phonogram are worried about — we’d be in the thick of it, not them.”

Phonogram said they were not in business to set up tours, and any decision by them would not have affected the shows. Promoter Bannister was unavailable for comment.

But Malcolm McLaren, the Pistols’ manager, said: “All that about the tour is rubbish. It’s just that Phonogram wouldn’t cough up any money to promote the tour. The Ramones felt they weren’t getting any publicity, but that’s not my fault. Anyway, if the Pistols were touring America with the Ramones and we only got one line I wouldn’t blow the whole thing out. It’s ridiculous. “Talking Heads are out because they were part of the deal we made with the Ramones.”

McLaren claimed that Spedding had pulled out because he wanted to play his own dates, but neither Spedding nor his record company, RAK, would comment.

McLaren has revamped the tour for the Sex Pistols, which now starts on December 3 at Norwich University. Further dates: Derby Kings Hall (December 4), Newcastle City Hall (5), Leeds Polytechnic (6), Manchester Electric Circus (9), Lancaster University (10), Liverpool Stadium (11), Cardiff Top Rank (12), Bristol Colston Hall (13), Glasgow Apollo (15), Dundee Caird Hall (16), Sheffield City Hall (17), Southend Kursaal (18), Guildford Civic Hall (19), Birmingham Town Hall (20), Bournemouth Village Bowl (21), London Roxy Theatre (26).

The Damned have pulled out of their tour with the Flamin’ Groovies. The Groovies failed to arrive at London’s Roundhouse on Sunday, leaving The Damned and The Troggs, who were also on the bill, without a PA. A spokesman for The Damned told *MM* this week: “We agreed to play the tour to give some modern credibility to it. But we are not interested now in supporting or bailing out living legends.”

Phonogram refused to comment. Roundhouse concert promoter John Curd, however, said the Groovies told him they were suffering from flu. He dropped the admission price for the concert, which started three hours late with a replacement PA, from £1.70 to £1.20.

**Assassination attempt**

**MM DEC 11 Bob Marley shot at home. Attack possibly “politically motivated”***

*Reggae superstar Bob Marley was the victim of an assassination attempt last week. Gunmen shot their way into his home in Kingston, Jamaica, on Friday night, but Marley suffered only a slight arm wound in the raid. His manager, Don Taylor, threw himself between Marley and the gunmen as they opened fire. He was shot five times and is now on the critical list after an emergency operation. It is thought he may be permanently crippled as a result of his injuries. Marley’s wife, Rita, was wounded and clubbed during the attack, but she was released from hospital after treatment.*

Speculation suggests the attack was politically motivated. There will be a general election in Jamaica in three weeks’ time, and Marley, despite his allegedly apolitical stance, had accepted an invitation to appear, together with The Wailers and Burning Spear, at a concert benefit for the Island’s current premier, Michael Manley. The invitation followed the release of a new Marley single, “Smile Jamaica”, in which he extols the virtues of the country despite its recent history of political violence.
The kids are hungry

**NME OCT 2** The energy in the “punk” movement should give senior rockers pause for thought. “This time next year,” writes one young staffer, “they could be laughing on the other side of their faces.”

“Smashing guitars used to be proper anger; it isn’t any more. It’s the theatrical melodrama.”

Pete Townshend, January 1968

“I think this whole punk thing at the moment has got too stylised. There’s no such thing as punks any more. This lot are consciously making themselves out to be something they’re not. They’re trying to come on like little yobbos. And they’re not little fucking yobbos.”

Lee Brilleaux, September 1976

“Go! Geet-outa-Denver baybee! Go! Geet-outa-Denver baybee!! Go! Go! Go!”

Eddie & The Hot Rods, right now

**S**O IN THE year of our punk 1976 the veteran end of the rock world finally woke up to the nine-year-old fact that this ain’t the summer of love. The kick in the teeth that savagely brought an end to its slumber was, of course, the mercurial rise and still rising of amphetamine-stimulated high-energy ‘70s street music played by kids for kids the first time in maybe 12 years.

Yeah, you guessed it – the unfortunately titled punk rock. Unfortunate because punk rock is a second-hand name first used to describe American garage bands like ? And The Mysterians, The Leaves and Shadows Of Knight who started making their music after being completely won over to the cause of rocking when they first heard the bands of the mid-’60s like the Fab Four, the Stones, The Who, The Kinks, The Yardbirds and all the rest. Unfortunately because punk rock is the term used to describe the descendants of those garage bands in the States, combos like the now defunct New York Dolls, the Ramones, Tom Verlaine’s Television and the Heartbreakers.

Unfortunate because punk rock is the term used to describe the descendants of those garage bands in the States. combos like the now defunct New York Dolls, the Ramones, Tom Verlaine’s Television and the Heartbreakers.

Punk rock just won’t do – the name is too old, too American, too inaccurate. The kids in the Hot Rods who shake the foundations of Wardour Street every week ain’t “punks”. That makes them sound like refugees from West Side Story.

They are kids who are the product of the United Kingdom in the 1970s: more specifically the teenage wasteland of the Essex Overspill. The music they play reflects their times, no more, no less. Kids rock was be more to the point than punk rock. Sure, they play a lot of material that they didn’t write themselves. So did the Stones and The Who when they were 18 years old. What’s so good about the scene that the Hot Rods and the Sex Pistols are in is not only is it the most exciting thing happening in this country at the moment, but also the members of the bands have time to develop as writers, which they must do if they are going to survive over any period of time, let alone Make It. That is, to do what the Feelgoods did – evolve from their stomping grounds of small clubs and pubs and make the transition to playing large venues in front of 10 times as many people without losing the essential blitzkrieg malevolence of their music, make their set a healthy mixture of original material and old masters and, ultimately, cut records as exciting as their live show.

It was the Feelgoods who blazed the trail around the pubs and clubs of London that the punk/kids-rock bands are following. They made it possible for bands like the Sex Pistols, the Hot Rods, The Wharf Rats, The Damned, The Clash and all the others to get venues twice a week or more where they can get up and play the music they want to in front of people who are getting off on it.

The Feelgoods weren’t the only band on the pub-rock circuit, of course, but by using...
The kids who are playing it and the kids who are getting off on it are all hungry

Bromley Contingent mainstream and punk icon Sonny Cashman

November 15, 1976 the Sex Pistols at the Notre Dame Hall, Lancaster Place, central London
“Intoxication takes a lot of fuckin’ work”

PATTI SMITH embarks on a European tour. Frenchmen, hecklers, bootleggers, George Melly and hash all play a part.

;&#149; NME OCTOBER 23;

“I’M not ever gonna be a hundred per cent cool, y’know... I mean, for you to like even try to be a hundred per cent cool to me is like just... a joke. I’m never a hundred per cent cool and look how cool I am...”

Patti Smith’s movie for the night appears to be Don’t Look Back. She showed up for the post-gig press and media binge held in the bar of her Amsterdam hotel in full regalia of the 1965 Bob Dylan. Dark suit, white shirt, the identical impenetrable heavy-rimmed shades. Now, up in her room finally doing the interview she’d been postponing all day, her voice crackles with exhaustion as she alternates NYC street-sneers and put-downs with long elliptical surrealist streams-of-consciousness (to put it politely) and spaced jive babbling (to not).

She’s definitely into her role as Dylan in Don’t Look Back. Me, I seem to be cast as the man from Time magazine.

“...It’s like... there’s no shame in not being cool sometimes, y’know... I’m often really uncool. Back in the States they call me ‘winghead’ because my hair always... did you ever notice how my hair sticks out?”

“I thought you did that on purpose,” I murmur.

“It sticks out because I’m too spaced out to take care of it. I mean, why do you think they call them ‘dreadlocks’, man? It’s all tangles, man... when you’ve been on the road a long time you forget what you look like, you enter a kind of monkey stage. I think we’re getting to the monkey section of the tour. By the time we get to England I’m really gonna be a monkey. I want to be a really mean monkey...”

The gig was at the Paradiso, a converted church near the centre of town. It’s the most famous rock venue in the country, undoubtedly the top club/small gig in town.

Like the Melkweg, a more recent and less publicised club with more or less the same setup, it’s renowned for its openly sold dope. Last year at the Milky Way (I ended up there because the Paradiso was closed that night), they’d had giant slabs of hash laid out on stalls so that you could taste and try, buy however much you wanted or could afford, and then wander over to a table and smoke yourself stupid in a paranoia-free atmosphere.

Things seem to have tightened up some, though, because we’re told that anybody who’s buying has to go through some complicated play-acting rituals with the bloke at the pipes-and-skins stall. We’re also told to watch out for dealers palming the wares and replacing the package with a seemingly identical dummy or inferior one sneaked out of a pocket. This ain’t the summer of love.”
October 9, 1976: Patti Smith poses for photographs following a show at the Paradiso, a converted church in the centre of Amsterdam.
There was an ominous crackle in the air. Things had gotten off to a bad start when Patti’s pianist, Richard Sohl—generally referred to as “DNV,” an abbreviation of Death in Vienna, because of his resemblance to the young boy who plays Dirk Bogarde’s bête noire—had dropped out of the tour because of his dislike of heavy-duty touring and large concert halls. DNV had been with Patti longer than any other musicians except Lenny Kaye, and therefore Andy Paley, a former member of the Sidewinders and a long-time friend of the band—had been drafted in as pinch-hitter, done two rushed rehearsals and schlepped straight off to Europe.

‘Andy’s real crazy, he’s amazing. Amazingly crazy. He was telling me what a good soldier he was gonna be—left right left right, y’know— he was gonna be a real fascist—and he’s so spaced out. You know what he puts us through? The first night we’re on the road, a girl comes into his room to interview him and the only word she knows is ‘champagne’. Then he had a nervous breakdown and heart attack.

“Every heavy metal record happened to him on this airplane on the way to Hamburg and we had to put him in an audience... ambulance. Lenny and I had our pockets... I had so much hash on me and we were sitting in this hospital with all these people like... like nurses, y’know? I’ve never been to a fuckin’ hospital, man, I’d rather crawl across the floor a thousand times and have my head against it than go to hospital... and there we were in this Nazi hospital in Hamburg...”

Everyone seemed tired and on edge. Downstairs in the dressing room area a young French fan called Claude was sprawled in a chair—terribly drunk. He’d been hanging around all day waiting for a chance to meet Patti and the management had let him wait in exchange for a bit of amateur stagehanding. But here he was finally in front of Patti Smith and he was too drunk to recognise her. All he can do is vomit at what first looks like blood but—everyone’s relief—turns out to be wine.

Patti snaps in a one-liner, New York street style—“Hey Claude, ya want some heroin? ”—then genuine concern takes over and she moves in, holding him by the shoulders and talking to him urgent and gentle, close up. His head tilts back and he heaves up some more wine. “It’s OK,” says Patti. “every man I’ve ever fucked has thrown up on me at least once.”

Everyone stands around embarrassed. “It’s getting a little bit too real,” someone mutters. Hanging thick in the air is that peculiar mixed reaction of opinion. “It sounds really MkkeyMouse slow and painful process of adjusting each amp, mic and instrument sound wind is interminably on. The Feetwarmers seem to regard rock bands struggling to sort out their mountains of gear as being inept, spoiled brats who can’t work their own gadgets.

“I’m sorry that we won’t be able to stay and see you,” Melly tells Patti urbanely, “but we have another show to do tonight in the Hague.” Patti tells him sure, she understands, she knows how it is.

‘By showtime the club is pretty thoroughly packed. Up in the balconies as well as down on the floor, it’s like the District Line in the rush hour except that everybody’s stoned as fruitbats and the train ain’t leaving the station. Lights go down,-ready goes from around with torches, the troggo on to the usual preliminary clang-honk-tweets and then Patti and the band blaze into Uncle Lou’s “We’re Gonna Have A Real Good Time Together” as the lights go up. It’s a great opener—short, sharp, appropriate without being too obvious. Ivan Kral and Lenny Kaye are already in overdrive on the guitars, Jay Dee Daugherty’s hammering into his drums like a crazy man, slipping a hi-hat accent just a whisker ahead of the beat to give it just the right jet-boosting surge, with Patti leaning up and down like a demented pogostick, her flea-market rag a constant blur of motion. Nice applause. She tells them children of Paradise, tells ’em that she’s been “sampling the local wines. I rilly like think windmills are sooooo cool, ya know.”

Puzzled silence. One jovial drunk with the equivalent lung power of a mid-price PA system yells, “Break It Op!”

“If you take one part windmills,” says Patti from the stage, “one part hashish and one part cocaine...” raged cheers of recognition of the key words. The drunk yells, “Break It Op!” again and then changes his mind. He refills his lungs and bawls, “Fock! Fock!”

Patti ignores him. “...you get a rilly great drink.”

They work their way through the set, through a few selections from Radio Ethiopia (“This is from our new album. It’s a rilly cool record with a rilly great bass and drum sound”), a couple of borrowings—a great blasting version of the Stones “Time Is On My Side”, preceded as always by Patti’s “Ticktock—fuck the clock” recitation riff, and their medley of Lou Reed’s “Pale Blue Eyes” and the Punk Archivist National Anthem “Louie Louie” —and some of the material from Horse. Throughout it all, our stentorian friend keeps on howling for “Break It Op!”

“Redondo Beach” is, as ever, talked in. “Redondo? Beach? Is A Beach! Where? Women! Love Uthaaaaahhhh! Women!” staccato Patti, then closes in on the mic to make little kissing noises.

They do a fair version of “Kimberly”, their live performances of it always pail to the album track, because Krall and Kaye are both on guitar and that magnificent baseline is therefore conspicuous by its absence. Both are eager of a basic shift of musical emphasis and in order to take the weight off Paley, the band is much more guitar-heavy than they were the last time I’d seen them. Paley moves to bass for “Gloria” – Kral sketches in the opening chords on piano and resumes his guitar duties as soon as the song hot up – and plays some guitar on the encore.

Patti has amp trouble during “Radio Ethiopia” and this only adds to the irritation caused by the audience’s fairly subdued reaction throughout the set. By the time the set proper ends she’s on the verge of losing her temper and walks straight off stage.

The Feetwarmers, all immaculately costumed in Early Gangster, setup the support act for the evening is George Melly and the Feetwarmers. Melly strolls in looking like the Mayor of Savannah in a cowboy hat and an ostentatious check suit. He’s chewing a More and leaning on an elegant white cane, which he describes as “purely an affectation, really”.

Where! Women! Love Uthaaaaahhhh! Women!” staccato Patti, then closes in on the mic to make little kissing noises.

They do a fair version of “Kimberly”, their live performances of it always pail to the album track, because Krall and Kaye are both on guitar and that magnificent baseline is therefore conspicuous by its absence. Both are eager of a basic shift of musical emphasis and in order to take the weight off Paley, the band is much more guitar-heavy than they were the last time I’d seen them. Paley moves to bass for “Gloria” – Kral sketches in the opening chords on piano and resumes his guitar duties as soon as the song hot up – and plays some guitar on the encore.

Patti has amp trouble during “Radio Ethiopia” and this only adds to the irritation caused by the audience’s fairly subdued reaction throughout the set. By the time the set proper ends she’s on the verge of losing her temper and walks straight off stage.

The first encore is the speciality version of “My Generation” with Kral singing the alternate verses and Kaye taking a nicely over the top bass solo. Patti leaves still simmering, and on her return for the second encore berates those whole dwell in the “false paradise” in a long improvised rhythmical tongue-lashing. She’s into a rap about breathing and energy...
and pyramids and triangles when our friend Break It Op starts broadcasting again. Without even pausing for breath she goes from pyramids and triangles and breathing and energy to “Fuck you, asshole!” “Do you think you’re really cool just standing there going, ‘bleccccchhh’?” she snaps. “I can do that too. Why don’t you take your dick out? Gawon take your dick out! Owychna go home and just say ‘bleh hhhhh’ in front of the mirror?”

There is silence. Mr Break It Op has subsided. She gets back into her rap and steers it into “Land” and finally they really drive it in and drive it home and drive it and drive it and drive it. It’s too little and too late to affect any kind of major reconciliation.

As the number rampages to a climax, she steps to the mic and ralottes off “Andy-Paley-Ivan-Kral-Jay-Dee-Daughtery-Lenny-Kaye-the-Patti-Smith-Group!”, makes a plui-I-wash-my-hands-of-you gesture and rushes off stage. Her brother Todd, who’s working with the road crew on tour, takes her arm and then they vanish.

The audience, probably brought down more by her anger than by any deficiencies in the set, leave quickly and quietly. You can tell that it’s one of those occasions where it’s definitely not cool to wander into the dressing room before allowing a reasonable interval of cooling-off time to elapse.

When Pennie Smith and I are finally summoned to join the assembled company, the unspoken feeling enfoldng the room seems to be that they’d just blown Amsterdam pretty thoroughly. Whether it was the exhaustion, the residue of various injuries and illnesses, the sound problems, the audience or whatever, it’d been a bad gig. And while the artist of genius who does a bad gig can still be an artist of genius, a bad gig by an artist of genius is still a bad gig.

“So what’s your instinctive reaction to a guy in the crowd who yells out?” I ask, faithfully adhering to my role as man from Time.

“It makes me feel great... if it makes me laugh... like a bubble breaking in my heart. Like a really completely sincere effort to communicate and get to connect; even if it doesn’t totally come into focus, the intention is so clear that unless you’re a really bitter person you’ll open your heart to it and let it reach you.

“See, there’s two different great kinds of rock and roll. There’s fascist rock and roll, which is like Bowie and disco and Motown... y’know, like a metronome. It’s rilly great, it’s perfect. I mean it gets ya. You can’t help but get caught in the groove, y’know?”

“The other one isn’t really defined; it’s like raw energy that you’re trying to sensuously and rhythmically hone... is that the right word, Lenny? None? None... you do your homing, get into different kinds of plants, kind of cup-shaped... more like bell-shaped like tulips... no, not like tulips but like lilies... you get into the horn of any flower that has a bell shape and it’s a really pleasurable thing... y’know, sound. If you’re really relentlessly into something and you’re into sound, it gets to the point where it doesn’t matter whether you’re good or evil or dream or nightmare or whatever, you get into this rhythm of sound and you just have to be great no matter who you are. I mean, Karen Carpenter could be great if she’d just loosen up a little.

“It’s all there. You just have to be willing to get baptised over and over again. Most people just get baptised once and they think they got everything covered. They know how they’re gonna think for the rest of their lives...”

Do you want to make a fascist rock record?

“I wanna make something like Station To Station... something in as purpousive a state as Station To Station and as perfect as Black And Blue. Those two albums are like Sgt Pepper and Pet Sounds or something... and then Radio Ethiopia because it’s going to be really great. I really love both elements — there’s more than two elements, there’s three. There’s like language which you don’t have to deal with — I’d just as soon deal with sound, but when I’m called upon to use language in order to go a step higher or a step further to explore just for the pleasure... of man... I’m real cool. I forgot where this sentence was going to end... I had to say ‘real cool’ because I couldn’t remember where the sentence should end up... “Radio Ethiopia is a lot like Albert Ayler. That’s not hard to understand. I don’t know what people will think of our record, but how I view it is... the first record was like a little egg, ya know... and this one is like a little chick... and then the little chick opens its mouth... and takes in a little worm... and gets nourished and gets strong and becomes...”

“Abigger bird,” croons Lenny Kaye.

Charles Shaar Murray •
British record labels are doing it for themselves – and for just £400. No lawyers, no contracts, STIFF and CHISWICK are tearing up the record industry rulebook, with singles by bands such as THE DAMNED. “They really haven’t got much to lose,” says one label boss.

IN JANUARY 1959, Berry Gordy Jr founded Motown Records on the strength of a £400 loan. In July 1976, Dr Feelgood’s one-time tour manager, Jake Riviera, in partnership with Graham Parker’s manager Dave Robinson, launched Stiff Records with precisely the same amount. Their £400 was advanced by the Feelgoods.

“Today’s Sound Today”, a respectful paraphrase of Phil Spector’s “Tomorrow’s Sound Today”, is Stiff’s slogan – and an accurate one for a label which in less than three months has established itself as the prime outlet for aspiring local club talent.

A shoestring operation run with boundless enthusiasm from a small converted lock-up shop in London’s Notting Hill, Stiff has built up the kind of street-level credibility that the major record companies never attain, despite their standing on the stock exchange.

“Credibility,” Dave Robinson insists, “is even more important than actual finance at the beginning of a venture like Stiff.” White man doesn’t speak with forked tongue!

For the time being, Stiff only have sufficient cash to enter into one-off deals (with an option), but the fact that an artist of Nick Lowe’s stature (ex of Brinsley Schwarz) was prepared to inaugurate the label has meant that Riviera and Robinson have had little difficulty in attracting fresh talent to the fold.

Of the artists so far signed, none are what could be termed “other labels’ rejects”. Primarily, they are those souls who normally don’t fit into most major record companies’ five-year investment plans.
You wouldn't believe what's on the B-side.

Independent labels come out of the closets, and into the streets.

The Damned: Stiff Records made them the first UK punk band to get a single out with "New Rose", released on October 22, 1976.
1976

It's the immediacy of Stiff that makes it such an attractive and exciting enterprise. For, in every much the same way as the more responsible sections of the rock press file reports on emergent talent, Stiff are recording many of these artists while they've still hungrier in their bellies, fire in their blood and an HP company on their backs. The upshot is that they get the results out on the streets while it's still happening. Despite a limited cash flow, Riviera maintains that if necessary, within two weeks of signing a letter of agreement (who can afford lawyers?), an act can have their record pressed and in the shops.

Though Riviera sometimes chooses extremes to illustrate his logic, he nevertheless makes his point. "For too long," he says, "there has been a gap between the million-quid advance and scuffling about in a cellar. There had to be a middle ground. I believe Stiff is it."

Now £400 isn't a helluva lot of money with which to try to set the record industry on fire, but, with just svelte Suzanne Spiro to hold the fort, answer the phone, handle the paperwork and heal the sick, Stiff seems to get by without too many traumas.

The most important thing is that Stiff sells records; maybe only a few thousand copies at most, but that's still a few thousand more than most new artists can hope to sell. Along with other similar labels, Stiff has instigated its own market through an international network of specialist record shops and mail-order companies.

You have to understand that with the majors, unless it's a specialist release, a golden oldie or a disco demand, a record either sells no more than the initial pressing order of a couple of hundred or else, if it's lucky, it makes the charts. With few exceptions, there are no in-betweens. Stiff releases come off the company's shelf as quickly as they arrive from EMI's pressing plant. Actually," says Riviera, "EMI freaked when we got started. They began to ask who the hell are these guys who are doing 5,000 with the Pink Fairies and other groups they've never heard of. They still can't quite get over it. They're used to singles turning at 500 or selling upwards of 20,000, and here we are forever reordering 1,000 copies immediately after one lot has been pressed."

Though overheads continue to escalate, £300 will still get 2,000 copies of any record pressed and also cover the royalties. The cost of the picture sleeve is extra, but Stiff can still maintain quality control and bring their product into line with other labels by selling a single at the recommended retail price of 70p.

So apart from a picture sleeve, what else can Stiff offer an artist? "The way things are at the moment," Riviera continues, "we can virtually guarantee to sell quite a few thousand copies of a record by a band that, for various reasons, the majors would never consider signing." Roogalator is offered by Riviera as a prime example. They received some exceedingly fine press coverage, every A&R man checked them out, but when it came to the crunch nobody was prepared to take a chance with them.

"Working with the kind of limited finance we have at our disposal, it can often prove to be frustrating when you know for a fact that with a band like Roogalator we can easily sell 5,000 EPs in advance, yet only have sufficient funds to place an initial pressing order of 2,000. For instance, we got 6,000 advance orders on the Pink Fairies single and 2,000 for an unknown band like The Damned."

Owing to different production budgets, each record has its own break-even sales figure; every one of Stiff's releases has not only recouped the initial outlay but they've all shown a profit.

The Lew Lewis single "Boogie On The Street" only needed to sell 800 copies before it showed a profit because the Feelgoods gave Stiff the tapes gratis. As a result, Lewis will be cutting a follow-up, probably a reworking of Manfred Mann's "5-4-3-2-1." Roogalator will go into the black at 3,000, because they received a £100 advance. One thing that does remain constant is the exceptionally high royalty of 15 per cent that Stiff pay their artists.

Says Robinson: "We're not in a position to give large advances. The hundred quid we paid Roogalator was an exception and also about as high as we could afford to go. So we ask a group to come along with us. They really haven't got that much to lose."

"To begin with, they get a record in the shops and if it sells well they are in a position to make a good profit. To a relatively unknown club band, a single is of great help with regard to getting gigs."

Though there is an option clause on both sides of Stiff's letters of agreement with their artists, there is a distinct possibility that because of the media coverage that Stiff has garnered, any one of their acts could chalk up a small hit, a big reputation and as a result be picked up by a major label who wouldn't have normally considered signing the acts that Stiff thriv on. As Riviera points out: "Already publishers and a few astute A&R men are starting to think that if it's good enough for Stiff, then just maybe they should get in quick."

"We are a little scared of that happening," he admits. "Naturally, we want to build Stiff into a steady thing, but at the same time we don't want other labels to use us simply as a stepping stone—once we've demonstrated that there's a demand for an act, a major label comes along and reaps all the benefit from the hard work we've put into the act. I can tell you, we work our butts off."

Having already admitted that as yet there isn't sufficient floating cash to lure acts with large advances, Dave Robinson hopes to put into effect a plan that will swell Stiff's coffers. At one time, Robinson used to run the recording studio at the Hope & Anchor in Islington, during which time he recorded "live" every group ever to play there. Once Robinson has secured the necessary releases from various bands, he intends to compile a double, maybe a triple album of '70s pub rock featuring everyone from the Feelgoods to the Brinsleys, Ace and Kokomo. Robinson and Riviera reckon that the profit from such a project would be far more amenable than having a silent financial partner.

Stiff is a sink-or-swim operation. It will succeed or fail on its principles. Whatever the outcome, the partners are determined to avoid the pitfalls that plague most labels: heavy release schedules, lack of promotion time—and apathy.

"We've got to make Stiff a self-reliant organisation," Riviera insists. "Because to be truthful, aside from the money we received from the Feelgoods, nobody is prepared to back us. They all think we're bloody mad. Don't really think we've got a chance. For instance, they know that if we suddenly found we had a chart hit on our hands we'd be forced to lease it to one of the majors like they do in America."

Neither Robinson nor Riviera were born yesterday. They are fully aware that musicians are extremely
ambitious and that loyalties can be bought for a hefty cash advance. Nevertheless, Stiff feels that there are sufficient bands to maintain the label and enable it to survive without compromise.

"Let's not kid ourselves for a minute," says Riviera, "none of our acts have secured deals with other labels as a result of recording for Stiff. If nobody is going to pick up the Pink Fairies orBoogaloog, we've got sufficient money for a another single - or in the case of Nick Lowe, an album - and they want to do it, then we can keep on issuing records by them because we know in advance their minimum sales potential. Also, they know they're not stuck with us for life. I honestly think it's that kind of freedom that can often bring out the best in an artist."

However, it needs to be pointed out that Stiff's comparatively minor success is also beginning to work against them. On those occasions when they've approached a major label to enquire about the possibility of leasing master tapes they've been treated with suspicion.

"It's not so much that they're scared of us," says Robinson. "Just that they're not sure what we're up to and how we can keep on selling thousands of records by people they've never heard of or that they wouldn't want to record."

"Therefore," he concludes, "when Jake and I come around asking to lease something they automatically think it's worth a fortune, but they'd never think of reissuing it themselves. They much prefer to sit on it and do nothing." Stiff can't afford to procrastinate. As a matter of fact, neither can they afford to pay their staff wages. Robinson and Riviera earn their daily wages. Robinson and Riviera earn their daily crust not from Stiff but through their management company, and then they only draw £34 apiece each week. "It's gonna be one helluva time before we become tax exiles," quips Riviera, "but there's always the possibility." Berry Gordy didn't do so bad for himself on £400 either.

TED CARROLL is adamant. Within the next 12 months, Chiswick Records will have a hit record. A gregarious red-bearded Dubliner, Carroll exudes the kind of confidence one would expect from a man who's had his Rock On record shop immortalised in the lyrics of Thin Lizzy's "The Rocker".

The proprietor of both Rock On and Chiswick, Ted Carroll is the most respected character among British record collectors and a man who has an enviable reputation for fair trading. He'd much prefer to undersell than oversell his wares.

A visit any of Carroll's three Rock On stalls/shops is a compulsory part of any visiting rock fan's London itinerary. While still living in Dublin, Carroll was first baptised into rock 'n' roll when he played rhythm guitar with the Caravellas before switching to bass when they mutated to The Greenbeats and recorded an obscure Jagger-Richards original for Pye. A musician by night, Carroll also held down a nine-to-five gig as a bank teller. However, when he was transferred to a border town in 1961 he quit playing and became a part-time promoter, organising weekly R&B sessions at a tearoom on the beach at Killarney. Two years later, the police closed him down for overcrowding the venue.

Soon after, Carroll got himself involved in managing an early Skid Row line-up that included Phil Lynott as lead vocalist. That kept Carroll off the streets until 1968, when he moved to Bournemouth where, for the next two years, he drove a corporation bus. On a visit to Dublin, Carroll once again met up with the Skids and immediately accepted the position of tour manager - a six-month gig that took him to America for a four-week tour. During a stop-over in Sacramento, Carroll purchased a copy of Charlie Gillett's book Sound Of The City. On his return to London, he quit the Skids and, with some Decca and London-American deceptions he picked up on the cheap from an Irish wax shop, leased the Saturday-Only record shack in the rear of an arcade in Golborne Road at the flea market end of Portobello Road in October 1971.

Though Carroll had taken over Thin Lizzy's management seven months earlier, he abdicated soon after guitarist Gary Moore quit. From there on in, Carroll devoted his energies to expanding Rock On. In 1974 he opened his stall in the Soho Market and just before Christmas of last year he not only opened a shop in Kentish Town Road, but launched Chiswick Records with The Count Bishops' "Speedball" EP. Carroll argues that as Chiswick is a logical extension of Rock On, he couldn't compromise himself when it came to recording the Bishops.

"You've got to start the way you intend to continue," Carroll theorises, with the result that he invested £150 on studio time, £400 on the pressing of 2,500 records, plus the cost of the sleeve and the labels. "I reckon," says Carroll, "that it costs £800, but we've already recouped the amount and made a profit."

The "Speedball" EP has already notched up sales of 2,500, while most of the 1,000 re-order pressing have already been accounted for. "It wasn't for the Christmas rush, I'd have reordered 2,000, because I can get rid of them."

Chiswick almost had a minor hit with their second release, a reissue of the early-'60s British rock classic "Brand New Cadillac" by Roy Carr & The Playboys. Had Chiswick finalised their distribution deal with President Records when the single was hot, it might have made the Top 40. Despite missing important concentrated sales action, "Brand New Cadillac" is approaching 10,000 copies and still selling steadily.

However, Carroll isn't losing sleep over the Vince Taylor near-miss, for he has little doubt that Chiswick will get a hit and hopefully it will be with Hammersmith's arcane mod power-trio, The Gorillas, the only act under exclusive contract to Chiswick.

Carroll has invested money in new equipment, a manager is being sought, a French tour supporting The Flamin' Groovies is upcoming, together with a December date at the Roundhouse. Carroll insists that labels like Chiswick and Stiff and the French-based Skydog operation will succeed because not only do they show a genuine interest in the records they release, but they also have integrity.

"So few of the major labels," insists Carroll, "have any integrity. They are all money-making machines. It's a fact that most of the people who work in them know bugger all about the music or their artists, and truthfully they don't want to know. For all that they're contributing, they might just as well be selling Lego. And the kids have got to live."

"The only person I know," Carroll continues, "who works for a major record company who is totally aware of what he is doing, is in a powerful position and is successful, is Andrew Laudor over at United Artists. I'm sure there are other people like Andrew in other record companies, but how often are they given an opportunity to really prove themselves?"

Though they might not have real effect on this country's balance of payments, Chiswick Records is building up a large export business for, according to Carroll, both here and abroad a whole new record market is crystallising.

"The shops," Carroll reveals, "are a direct reaction to Boots and Smiths. Today, there are two ways of running a record shop. You either discount the Top 50 or you specialise."

"It's those shops who specialise, stock imports, cut-outs, rarities and small labels that are beginning to do good business and build up regular customers. There's a big market for individuality, and as a result these specialist shops can open up on their own, without having to take out large accounts with the majors."

"The great thing about a label like Chiswick is that unlike the majors, a record isn't dead after three weeks. The product continues to sell to people who might not have picked up on some of the releases when they were originally issued. Thankfully, the back catalogue continues to move. And now, with our distribution with President, should one of our records suddenly take off, we can handle it. They've proved themselves over and over again with hits for Hank Mizell, George McCrae and KC & The Sunshine Band."

"You know," Carroll concludes, "the first shoe-string label to score a hit will scare the shit out of the majors. You see, we're straight off the streets and are in touch with what's happening than all those expense-account A&R men. We ain't gonna take over the entire record business, but we're gonna get by. That's for certain."
“Have we gone over the top?”

JIMMY PAGE ponders LED ZEPPELIN’S The Song Remains The Same. A fantasy sequence found him scaling a Scottish mountain (“a bit hairy, actually”), but the epic project has been worth the expense.

WARM HANDSHAKE, TWINKLING eyes and black hair grown thicker than he has allowed for some while – Jimmy Page arrived at his London office in the King’s Road exuding good cheer. And he had plenty to be pleased about with the launching, after a three-year delay, of Led Zeppelin’s first plunge into the movies, with the epic The Song Remains The Same. Fans are currently queuing to packed cinemas in Britain, as they have in America, to watch one of our finest and longest-established groups commit themselves to the probing eye of the cinema camera.

Any faults are cruelly exposed on a screen, and that Zeppelin emerge with their mystique intact shows their good sense in not attempting to become actors in a role. The nearest they get to that is in the mildly controversial fantasy sequences, where each member portrays himself in some personality-revealing situation. The film is an accurate portrayal of Zeppelin as they were one day in Madison Square Gardens. Whether you appreciate the movie depends on how much you enjoy Led Zeppelin and their music.

The film’s release, together with a fine double album, shows just how committed Zeppelin still are in 1976. Not for them insularity or idleness. Physical Graffiti, Presence and now a double LP and film – Zeppelin are heading for even greater peaks of productivity in 1977.

Page, whose powerful solos during “Dazed And Confused” are one of the highlights of Song..., talked »
Jimmy Page appears as both himself and the Staff of Wisdom-wielding Hermit in The Song Remains The Same.
“Curiously enough, no. I hadn’t seen many of the other rock films, except Monterey and Woodstock. I don’t know what Slade’s film was like, but it was a rock ‘n’ roll feature film. This one was just as much of a reality, really, the gig, with fantasy sequences, part-documentary. It’s one sequence frozen in celluloid.”

Did it achieve all the aims Jimmy had in mind when the film was first conceived?

“Yeah, pretty much. Obviously there were things which weren’t quite the way one wanted them. It’s a massive compromise making films. You can just go on spending a fortune, there’s no two ways about that.

“The fantasy sequences were introduced because we knew we had gaps in the film of the performance, and you can’t really cut the soundtrack because so much of our stuff is improvised.

“So we thought, let’s do it that way, and curiously enough, it’s fair to say it built very much like a Zeppelin song or track. ‘Achilles’ Last Stand’ grew and built in the studio, and the same with the fantasy sequences in the film, as ideas were added.

“We had complete control of the film, which was made during our non-residency (of the UK) period. We categorically stipulated what we wanted, and it was pretty much done that way.”

How did each member of the band go about selecting his fantasy sequences? John Bonham drag racing, for example, Jimmy climbing a cliff face in Scotland, John Paul Jones the wild horseman and Robert Plant, a knight rescuing fair maidens.

“It was like when we each chose a symbol for the fourth album...”

Did it achieve all the aims Jimmy had in mind when the film was first conceived?

“Yeah, it was a bit hairy, actually. It wasn’t done in one take — that was the trouble. It was a very steep climb at this place in Scotland, and it didn’t occur to me I’d have to go and do it again! The crew said, ‘Back down there’, and believe me, it’s very steep, and I’ve got a great fear of heights.

“Yeah, pretty much. Obviously we hadn’t worked on it every week for three years. When you’ve been on something for that amount of time, there is always that slight reservation: have we gone over the top?”

What caused him doubts? What could have been improved?

“Er...” Jimmy paused.

“Just the length of things, but it doesn’t bother me. When you have committed yourself to something, and there’s a high standard to compete with, like Woodstock and all those other rock films, you realise there is no mucking about, no half-measures.”

with the same youthful exuberance he showed that day back in 1968 when he walked unannounced into the MM office and said he had just formed a group.

Jimmy said how much he had enjoyed the London launch.

“We had two premieres in America, one in New York and in LA. They held them apart by a few days so we could check the cinemas out. It’s not as easy a job as you’d think, getting the sound right for cinemas. I remember seeing Woodstock and they had towers of speakers.”

How did it feel sitting in the audience watching his own group?

“Well, the first time in New York it was great, the first time one had sat in a real audience — every time I had seen the film before was with technicians, people with a really critical eye. Then the film lived for the first time and you could see people getting off on things, applauding and laughing at the right times, generally vibing.

“Although the project spanned three years, obviously we hadn’t worked on it every week for three years. When you’ve been on something for that amount of time, there is always that slight reservation: have we gone over the top?”

We each went away and came up with an idea. It gave insight into each personality, whether it be tongue-in-cheek or deadly serious.”

And Jimmy indulged in mountaineering?

“Yeah, it was a bit hairy, actually. It wasn’t done in one take — that was the trouble. It was a very steep climb. I thought it would be great in snow, so there would be a luminescent quality.

“Curiously enough, the night we arrived was a full moon, and blow me if there wasn’t snow on the mountain. But they didn’t get the cameras up in time and the snow had melted by the next night. It wouldn’t have worked anyway. You need so much floodlighting to get that luminescent quality. It would have been nice, though.”

Led Zeppelin had long fought shy of TV. Did Jimmy feel that movies were a better medium for the band?

“We each went away and came up with an idea. It gave insight into each personality, whether it be tongue-in-cheek or deadly serious.”

And Jimmy indulged in mountaineering?

“Yeah, it was a bit hairy, actually. It wasn’t done in one take — that was the trouble. It was a very steep climb. I thought it would be great in snow, so there would be a luminescent quality.

“Curiously enough, the night we arrived was a full moon, and blow me if there wasn’t snow on the mountain. But they didn’t get the cameras up in time and the snow had melted by the next night. It wouldn’t have worked anyway. You need so much floodlighting to get that luminescent quality. It would have been nice, though.”

Led Zeppelin had long fought shy of TV. Did Jimmy feel that movies were a better medium for the band?

“Well, TV has been done now by bands like Queen. You need a good range of frequencies to be able to hear what’s going on in groups like ours, and you can do that now with stereo radio broadcasts along with TV sound.

“The film soundtrack was going to be in Quint, by the way, which is a form of Quad. Take stereo, for example. In the cinema, stereo isn’t two tracks — it’s three. This was all new to me. When they refer to Quad, they have an extra track which makes it Quint.
"We started to work to that system, but we found out that when Tommy went around the out-of-town cinemas, they had the music coming from four speakers and the voices coming out of the fifth speaker behind the screen, and at a lot of points in the cinema you couldn’t get a complete sound picture. "They were getting a strangled sound with the voices, so we took all this into account and settled on four-track stereo – three at the front and one at the back. It works out to give you a circle of sound.

"It’s by no means an easy job to get the sound right in every venue. Cinema managers don’t like it if you say, ‘Your equipment isn’t quite what we need, you know, the low end, the driving basslines.’ They look down their noses at you, especially if they think their stuff is tip-top.”

I loved Jimmy’s use of such a quaint, old-fashioned phrase, and it took on a much more cutting edge as Page beamed innocently. He warmed to his theme.

"There’s no standard, you know, about the reflective quality of the screen; some have very bright images, some are very dull; same again with the speakers and amplifiers. There’s just no standard. It really shocked me.

"One would have thought a chain of cinemas would have standard equipment, but no! It was a whole new world to me! Slightly frustrating, but some cinemas have put in special speakers for Tommy, Lisztomania and Earthquake.”

How important was making the movie to Zeppelin’s career as a whole?

"It’s by no means an easy job to get the sound to capture the imagination.”

"Possibly we could have had more of that, but the thing we wanted most was the feeling that it’s out. Nobody went off to do sessions or anything like that. There’s a great feeling in the band, you know. We’ll be going on for years!

The good feelings are still there. Before our rehearsals for the last album, we thought we had no idea about ‘Achilles’ would come out, and it was so exhilarating. You never know what is going to come around the corner next, and that’s the whole magic of it.”

Will Zeppelin start work on another album yet, or will they wait until the sound track has run its course?

"Well, I’m glad you called it the soundtrack and not a ‘live’ album, because we have so much good live stuff. Obviously we were committed to putting this album out, although it wasn’t necessarily the best live stuff we have. We’ve been working on a lot at home. I’ve got a couple of long pieces that would make good albums.

"We’ve got six live concerts on tape which were good nights. With a computerised desk you can put your mix down, leave it in a box, put it on two years later and it’s exactly as you originally planned it. And you can build it up gradually and make a lot of dramatic changes within the space of a four-minute track.

"We’ve got some ancient stuff – live at the Royal Albert Hall in 1970 – and it’s very interesting to listen to now. You can compare different versions of tunes as they span a couple of years. A chronological compilation is the thing I’ve always been keen on, but the soundtrack came instead, so that can be shelved for a while.”

Returning to The Song Remains The Same, did Jimmy feel there could have been more in the movie about the running of the band, backstage scenes, more of Peter Grant, their legendary manager at work?

"We were rather dubious about putting something like that down. Despite Jimmy being a bit like Derek & Clive.

"Possibly we could have had more of that, but the thing we wanted most was the pace to build.” Jimmy snapped his fingers slowly. "The film could have been another concept altogether. But if you have a helluva lot of dialogue, then you stop the music altogether, and we were trying to keep the music going as much as possible. We didn’t want interviews with each member of the group. We were going to leave out the New York hotel robbery – but it was a documentary, it was all true, it happened.

It had started to be a documentary and then shied away from that – didn’t it?"

“Mmm,” Jimmy looked dubious. “Well, it was a montage, wasn’t it?” he said quietly. “That was the challenge, to keep it from just being a concert, and I think it’s a fair old balance. It could be interesting to do a full documentary on that side of the group, you know, what goes down. But it’s a taster. Get your imagination working!” Chris Welch

“ ”
"Democracy has collapsed"

THE STRANGLERS
don’t rate “paranoid clown” Johnny Rotten or “Iggy Bombom”, but talk a
good punk game.
“The trouble with rock in the last few years,” says Jean-Jacques Burnel, “is
that it’s become verbose, self-indulgent and safe.”

— NME DECEMBER 4 —

UGH CORNWELL AND Jean-Jacques Burnel, Stranglers lead and bass
guitarists, are ready for me. The instant I walk through the door I’m
assailed by their criticisms of my review of their Marquee gig, which has
appeared in the morning’s NME.

“You don’t look so young yourself.”

“Do you consider yourself mature, then?”

“Come on, then, tell us where we sound like The Doors.”

“Did you see how they were getting off on what we said about the Marquee?”

And so on...

This is just what I need, having leapt out of bed late, paid the earth for a cab, got soaked
walking to the interview, got no cigarettes, had no breakfast, and when I’m still trying to force
myself awake. It’s especially galling because, apart from criticising the band’s “stance”, I’d
given them a rare review. Musically they are one of the most exciting, adventurous combos
I’ve heard in a long time.

But I shouldn’t have let myself be. See, The Stranglers get up on stage at the Marquee and rant
about its obsolescence and tell the audience to smash the place up after the gig (“It wasn’t an
order, it was suggestion”). This I find quite unwarranted: if you don’t like it, don’t play there.

The Stranglers, however, see the Marquee as a major stanchion of the system which they
reckon has repressed their talent. Like most of their punk/dole queue/new wave rock
cohorts, they are martyrs and rebels.

Humbug.

Let’s have a look at how martyred and repressed the Stranglers are. They formed the band
just a year ago. Since then they’ve been working constantly; they’ve supported Patti Smith »
Jean-Jacques Burnel is a bassist, history graduate, karate expert and Triumph motorcycle enthusiast.
on both her media blitz tours, and they've now landed a contract with United Artists. They've really had it tough, haven't they?

While they're on the subject, let's look at a couple of their contemporaries. The Sex Pistols have just released a blow against the empire called 'Anarchy In The UK', a pretty good thunderous single which I like a lot. But in so doing these "anarchists" have signed on as minuscule fish in the colossal pond of EMI. Watch its foundations shake.

Oh, and The Damned, "Dole Queue Rock", is it? Look, mate, I was on the dole for two years trying to launch a rock band. It had no hearing whatsoever on the kind of music we played, and we didn't presume to set ourselves up as spokesmen for some great new breed of Dole Queue Kids. The Damned claim to be society's rejects - a very lucrative business.

The Time Happens to be right for a new youth craze, and self-styled Angry Young Men are it. It's a long time since anyone had had an easier route to a recording contract than the Pistols, Stranglers, Damned and Vibrators - none of whom have been playing in public for more than a year - and the ironic fact is that their overnight success is partly due to playing up the way the rock establishment is supposedly trying to make life difficult for them.

The Stranglers claim to be different to the other bands of the new wave - while still laying claim to a place in its hierarchy - because they are "more politically aware", and are not just into showbiz, which they reckon a lot of the other bands are. Are their politics? Well, that's a tricky one - let's leave it till later.

But they profess many of the same litanies as the other bands. For instance, it's now apparently de rigueur for less mainstream punks to deny any knowledge of the Stooges before this year. The Stranglers like to be classified as psychedelic, though they're at pains to tell me exactly what psychedelia is not (hippies, of course), and disclaim any knowledge of the Nuggets bands which appear to be such a strong influence on them (Electric Prunes, Standells, etc. etc). I can't help thinking they're doing a mantle they've misconstrued.

Another new wave litany: they refuse to reveal what they were doing before The Stranglers. It later slips out that two have teaching experience.

And another: Jean-Jacques recites his "criteria for good rock" - "it's gotta be energetic, it's gotta rock, it's gotta be economic and it's gotta be aware. It's gotta be neo-revolutionary, even if it's just fucking people's heads about a venue, political at that low a level. And the trouble with rock in the last few years is that it's become a very self-indulgent and safe.”

What constitutes "safe" rock? I cite The Kinks, and most major beat groups, as "safe" examples of good rock. Yet later I wind up arguing Cornwall and Burnel's cause by wondering whether in these austere times the emergence of a "new Rolling Stones" might not be a more real threat to social stability than the originals were in their heyday.

(In fact, while it may be a little complacent of me to point it out, the so-called rock revolution - which is nowadays sneered at as a failure - did, undeniably, play some kind of role in setting the social climate for, say, the legalisation of homosexuality and abortion, the end of the American presence in Vietnam, Watergate, and most non-economical leftward developments of the past 10 years, from the SLA to Women's Lib.)

Another new wave litany: "There's nothing worse than a apathy or smugness at a rock gig," he tells me. "We only take a stance because it's better than taking no stance at all. You put over the music in the best way possible," says Burnel. "So you

We're due for tyranny. People laugh, but I think it could happen"
that they’re identifiable with their audiences. I think they’ve been manipulated.

The bands or the audience, it’s not clear. I put it to him that in a way the kids may have been manipulated into that agoraphobia anyway. “You reckon? You don’t think there’s any there anyway just because of disillusionment, a sign of the times?”

Having suggested it, I am actually in no position to hazard any kind of guess as to whether I’m right or wrong – except that discontent rarely breeds unprompted. But I can suggest that had many of the new bands’ current audience seen them cold a year ago, their instant reaction might well have been that it was absolute crap.

“Oh sure,” Jean-Jacques agrees. “The fact that they play badly and people say, ‘So what? That’s inverted snobbery, isn’t it?’

“I reckon a lot of them suffer from bad musical systems,” says Cornwall. “You know, the PAs terrible and it just comes out as a din. Once they get their musical systems together, then you’ll be able to really judge if they’re doing anything.”

I suggest that maybe people don’t pick up on rebels – they have to be told: this is a rebel for you. Burnel agrees and cites James Dean as an example of this. “We needed heroes, so pick one out.” (Certainly it’s amusing to think of the number of people who stuck pix of Dean on their walls during the great 20th Anniversary media madness.

“It’s the same with the music scene at the moment,” opines Burnel. “They’re picking out old heroes because at the moment they’re still trying to get new heroes together. That’s why Iggy ... Iggy Bombom is becoming a cult figure.

“The thing is, there aren’t any heroes. Politically there are no heroes either; that’s why everything’s going round in circles, very directionless.”

Although The Stranglers play totally different music from most punk bands, they are, as I’ve said, similar (if more articulate) in their attitude – much of it, I suspect, received from rock critics’ post-Velvet punk intellectualisations.

Maybe they can shed a light on the Nazi fetishism that had crept in here somehow. “Well, it’s just ‘cos that is the only thing around, the only vibe, that is unified and with a certain direction,” Hugh reckons. “People want direction.

“Everyone is paranoid,” Jean tells me fervently. “There’s decay everywhere. We’ve always lived with the assumption that things were getting better and better materially, progress all the time, and suddenly it’s, you hear every day there’s a crisis. Things being laid off, people not working.

“Everything’s coming to a grinding halt,” he goes on, whilst I start moving towards the door to nip out to Selfridges for a gas mask. “No one sees any heroes. The politicians have lost their credibility; political philosophies are no longer relevant. Sure, they want something dynamic.”

Those sort of paranoid fantasies used to entice me when I was a speed-freak, but I can’t work myself into a terror these days. Still, I suggest the one about the Stones not being so dangerous, as they arrived in comparatively affluent times. The Stranglers agree. I ask if they reckon Johnny Rotten is going to be subsumed into the system in the way that Mick Jagger became associated with leftist things; there aren’t any leftists heroes really... Tell that to the Russians, Chinese, Cubans and Yugoslavs...

“No,” says Jean. “They’re not politically right wing but they’re politically ripe, I reckon. Until there’s another symbol to replace the swastika, or another ideal, they’re gonna stick to that one. It’s gotta be as strong as that... It’s gotta be seen to be as strong as that, as energetic as that.

“Leftist heroes were very much middle-class heroes. They want warrior heroes...”

We wander up this blind alley a while, till I realise I still haven’t got a straight answer.

“You’re very good at doom-mongering, Jean, but which side of the barricades do you line up? He’s boasting about his musical sophistication being “another weapon” in his “armoury”, but... do you consider yourselves to have any sort of political message beyond, er, self-liberation?

“Well, yes,” he says. Then, after we’ve been talking little except politics for nearly an hour, he has the nerve to tell me: “But this is neither the time nor place to get into it.”

Totally bemused, I try to coerce them by suggesting that if they don’t state their position themselves, they leave it up to people to make up their own minds – and with all this gush about the imminent fascist apocalypse, well...

“But we’re not associating ourselves with any of the other bands,” Burnel protests. “We’re right out on a limb musically and philosophically...”

“Hey, that sounds a really heavy work, doesn’t it?” muses the guy who’s been reciting Plato.

Strange Interview. The Stranglers are probably the most self-righteous interviewees I’ve met, modestly arrogant about their musical worth, and convinced they have a part to play in a social upheaval they maybe paranoiaically see evidenced in the physical trappings of an in-crowd whom, paradoxically, they sneer at for being trend followers. Yet when it comes to the crunch, for all their onstage aggression, they don’t commit themselves.

They are recording live at the Nashville on December 10, and they’re going into a studio at the end of the month to record a single, either “Go Buddy Go” or more likely “Grip”. The single’s out late January and an album, hopefully, in February.

I’m not enamoured of their spoken pronouncements, but make no mistake about it, these guys are great musicians who are going to make records that will be played till they wear out. And as The Stranglers are well aware, that means power. Phil McNulty *
The Eagles on stage in 1976, following the departure of Bernie Leadon, one of the four founders of the group.
“Something has been corrupted”

As mellow as they appear to be, the EAGLES have a new album which explores a more satirical side. “We have a love-hate relationship with California,” says Glenn Frey. “Like anything you love, you’re capable of hating it, too.”
WHAT'S IT LIKE, I asked, being an Eagle? Glenn Frey, a perpetual talker, paused to consider the question and the silence lasted almost a minute. "Oh well... it's not unlike anything I've done all my life... It's not unlike being in any other band, but the world around me seems to change its perspective on me as much as I change my perspective on it. So what it is really... it's a pain in the ass."

Frey and Don Henley collapsed into laughter.

"What he means by that," said Henley, attempting to introduce an element of seriousness into an interview that had already lasted well over an hour, "is that especially over the past year we have felt a tremendous amount of pressure. It's almost harder once you get to the top of the mountain than it is climbing it. It's hard to stay up there and maintain it."

"I admire the Stones, no matter what I think about their music, because they've stuck there. I admire Paul Simon and The Who simply because they've stuck around and not burned themselves out. It's hard because you lose a lot of friends along the way."

"Being an Eagle can be a handicap," said Frey, "but only because of what other people tend to think. Your life is not your own any more, but that's a concession I'm willing to make."

"But we asked for it," added Henley.

The Beverly Hills Hotel sits elegantly at the junction of Sunset Boulevard and Beverly Drive. Its pink-roofed walls are almost camouflaged by the pale-green palm trees that have been planted in endless rows along the grassy sidewalks of this most sumptuous Los Angelean suburb.

Stories concerning the hotel are legendary, principally because it has, over the years, housed rich and famous guests whose behaviour has made Hollywood synonymous with decadence. Nonetheless, it is a discreet establishment: if the bellhops know anything they keep their lips sealed and conversations in the Polo Room Bar are deflected by the walls that surround the choice booths.

The hotel itself is probably not the one directly referred to by the Eagles in the title track of their new album Hotel California, though the ambience of the establishment is neatly reflected in the song's lyrics. Either way, it was the location chosen by Glenn Frey and Don Henley for one of their rare interviews last week.

Frey and Henley, the two main vocalists in the group, are the perennial spokesmen for the band, whose music has consistently reflected the sound of California in the '70s as much as The Beach Boys represented the Golden State in the '60s.

The other longest-serving member of the band, Nebraskan bass player Randy Meisner, whose soaring falsetto graces such tracks as "Take It To The Limit," is a shy, retiring man who rushes home to his wife and three children whenever the group have a free moment.

Which isn't very often these days. Throughout 1976 the Eagles have toured the US almost constantly, finalising their position as one of the top few (regularly working) bands in the country.

Their year began on a shaky note with Bernie Leadon's departure and the simultaneous arrival of Joe Walsh, a partnership that seemed, on paper, to be a curious mixture of rock and harmony. It's worked, though, and the Eagles are now bigger than ever.

Their Greatest Hits album has notched up sales in the region of five million copies and, at the same time, introduced the band to a whole new audience. Joe Walsh, who doubtless had a following of his own, has probably done the same thing.

Work on Hotel California began in March and ended in October. Sessions were crammed into spare days when the band wasn't playing and, like all their albums, it reflects the cautious approach that the band have towards all their albums.

It seems, at times, as if all the individual words and notes, all the intricate little harmonies and all the little background guitar chops, are carefully considered before insertion. Sometimes the results are almost too good to be true, but usually they produce the best floating harmonies, effortlessly easy-going music, since The Everly Brothers.

THE NEW ALBUM is based loosely around a concept in that the State of California represents a hotel whose guests have somehow reached the end of the day; somewhat vaguely it's supposed to chronicle the decaying morals of the '70s. Frey and Henley don't enjoy explaining the meaning, which is far less obvious than the western concept of Desperado, their second album.

Musically it features more extremes: the lusher cuts are as mellow as the Eagles have ever been, even to the point where one track is reprised as an instrumental with only a string section playing, while the uptempo material bounces along with a harshness that must have come from Joe Walsh. Surprisingly, Walsh's only composer credit is a slow song he wrote some time ago with Joe Vitale, onetime drummer in Walsh's defunct Barnstorm band.

"A lot of the music on this album came very easy to us," said Frey, sipping coffee in a bungalow at the Beverly Hills Hotel last week. "We worked up three of the songs for the October tour that we played and found them easy to do on stage."

"We have been playing the title track, 'Wasted Time' and 'New Kid In Town,' but it's difficult to do new tunes on stage. If the people haven't heard them on the radio they just don't pay that much attention. There has to be a repetition factor for some reason."

"When we start touring again in March the album will have been out two months or so, and by that time we'll be playing it all or most all of it."

Although it's been almost a year and a half since the group's last studio album, One Of These Nights, they didn't have the usual wealth of spare material that most bands accumulate. "We hardly ever do," said Henley. "We can usually tell when we start a song that if we get past an eighth of the way into finishing it, it'll be worth doing. If we don't get that far then we know it won't be worth finishing."

"The ones that get finished wind up on the record," Frey adds. "We know some people write a lot of tunes, pick the best and throw the rest away, but with us they never reach that far. We do save ideas, though, especially ballads. We also try to balance an album, because we believe it's a work of art and it should have contrast and continuity at the same time."

"The rock'n'roll on this album came from Felder," said Frey, who always refers to the band's second guitarist by his surname as if to differentiate between him and Henley. "Strangely enough, Joe wrote a ballad, but me and Joe and Don here collaborated on one track together. I think Joe was saving his song because he knew something like his joining the Eagles was coming up."

The circumstances surrounding Walsh's entry into the group seemed to be almost too convenient to be true. Walsh, as a solo artist, was an employee of the Geffen-Roberts management team who handled the affairs of Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young at one time.

When Bernie Leadon quit the group, Walsh was between bands, so his baptism as an Eagle was a natural business move even if some sceptics doubted his musical compatibility. "We actually knew him some time before he joined," said Frey. "Even while Bernie was still in the band we had a feeling that he might be a part of..."
us before long. We had an indication a year and a half before Bernie left that he was planning to leave—or at least he wasn’t going to stay with us for the duration. The duration as we saw it was a much longer period of time than he wanted it to be.

“We had talked to Joe as early as the beginning of 1975 and his attitude was that... ‘If it ever happens, give me a call.’ He’d spent a lot of time in his solo ballpark, but he also knew what it was like to be in a band. So we more or less knew which way things were going to go and it was more or less a matter of time. Even as far back as the last time we were in England, which was that Elton John concert, we knew something was going to happen, although we didn’t want to talk about it.”

“We knew for two years that Bernie wasn’t happy with the road,” said Henley. “He’d been doing it longer than the rest of us. He’d been in the Burrito Brothers, remember, and his road map started five or six years before we began travelling at all.

“Besides, Joe was getting tired of being the leader of a group and feeling that he just wanted to be in a group for a change. He was to be a participant rather than a chief who hired and fired people. Writing all the songs gets to be a big burden on any solo artist.”

“There was never any question of trying anybody else,” said Frey. “We never made any other calls because there really wasn’t anybody else who could join our band, and we wanted to keep it a five-piece group instead of going back down to four again.

“We like the advantages of a five-piece band. When we got Felder it allowed me to just play rhythm guitar and still there were two guitar players, so we could have two lead guitarists playing with each other, yet there is still a rhythm instrument playing with the bass and drums.”

According to Henley, Walsh fitted into the band much easier than didonthisalbuminthewayofsongwriting. “But lthinkheand

“On stage we did ‘Rocky Mountain Way’ and ‘Funk #49’ and ‘Turn To Stone’. He’s capable of playing the stuff we do and we’re capable of playing his music. Sure he introduced some harder guitar playing, even though he didn’t put it on this album in the way of songwriting, but I think he and Felder played some killer guitar for us all. To me it’s like Duane Allman and Eric Clapton together.”

Frey agreed. “Those boys [Felder and Walsh] really gel on well together, which didn’t happen with Bernie and I.”

“Bernie had bluegrass roots,” continued Henley. “He’d never really messed with rock ‘n’ roll guitar, and he never really understood how to get that dirty rock ‘n’ roll sound. He was just not schooled or programmed in that area. We also knew that Joe was so controlled that he could play the ballads with no problem at all and a lot of people doubted that.

“Also Felder can play the banjo and a mean mandolin, so we didn’t lose anything in that area when Bernie left.”

THE EAGLES’ LAST concert with Leadon was in the fall of 1975 in front of 55,000 fans at Anaheim Stadium in California. Ten days later, the remaining four Eagles were rehearsing with Walsh for a tour of Australia and New Zealand and Japan.

“We didn’t want any rumours to get around that Bernie had left and that was it for the Eagles,” said Frey. “We wanted it out quickly that Bernie had been replaced by Joe and the group were on their way to New Zealand. Even so there were rumours that Joe wasn’t staying with us and that the group was going to split up.

“Joe’s contract with ABC had expired and Irving Azoff was shopping around the labels to get him another solo deal. First there was talk of Columbia, then staying with ABC and he finally wound up with Asylum, but because he was shopping for a solo deal people construed it as meaning that he couldn’t have been interested in recording with the Eagles and that this was a short-term thing. All that was bullshit.”

“The band is his first priority,” said Henley. “I don’t think he cares if he ever makes another solo album.”

According to Frey, American audiences were quick to accept the new look Eagles. “I received one letter from someone who wanted the old Eagles,” he said. “He wanted those mellow Eagles.”

“And that,” said Henley, “was before he’d even heard the show with Joe in it. It said something like, ‘How can you let Joe Walsh fuck up your harmonies’, but that was before they’d even given us a chance. I don’t know whether we ever wrote him back or not, but we don’t need those kind of people anyway.

“Joe’s own songs proved to be showstoppers in the set, and that was a great change for me. In fact they saved me, because we’ve been playing ‘Witchy Woman’ and that stuff since 1972, and to do new songs was like a shot in the arm for us. We can play that kind of material and always have been able to.”

“We were kind of reticent to play that music unless we could make it sound great,” said Frey. “We didn’t want to make a limp-wristed attempt, because we didn’t have the right kind of guitar players before. We’ve been working on getting the right guitar lineup for the last three years and now we feel we’ve got it.”

“We’re not about to change direction, though,” said Henley. “We’ll be keeping the best of the old style and not abandoning country rock or whatever you like to call it. We just want to stretch things out a little bit.”
On this album we get into rock & roll a little bit, which is something that we began on On The Border and developed further on One Of These Nights. But on the tour there was a whole load of kids who were yelling for Joe, and I think there was probably a whole load of them who’d never heard his material either. It was like new songs for them."

Leonard, meanwhile, has had an easy year, though he does have plans to record a solo album in the new year. Glyn Johns, who produced the first two Eagles albums, will be producing the record in a studio that Leonard has built in his home.

“We always knew that he wouldn’t just retire completely,” said Henley. “He just wanted to do things at his own pace while we were caught up in a momentum and had to take it to the limit, if you’ll pardon the expression.”

Neither Frey nor Henley expected their Greatest Hits album to do as well as it did. “I never expected it to do five million,” said Frey with genuine disbelief. “The numbers this year are staggering, and I try not to look at them any more. It’s a different kind of person who buys Greatest Hits albums... people who buy them for gifts for children and not the kind who buy regular albums. I think you reach more people with them... you reach the over-25s and under-15s a lot.”

Leonard seemed vaguely embarrassed by the success of the record. “Let us say that we aren’t really advocates of Greatest Hits albums,” he said. “They are more or less a play by the record company to get free sales. They don’t have to spend any money to make them and they get a lot of money back. We got a couple of hate letters after the Greatest Hits album came out that said we were selling out... they said that us and Steve Miller were the last bands who were holding off selling out this way.

“But we didn’t have anything to do with it. The record company put it out and we couldn’t stop them. We had a say in picking the tracks, sequencing them and doing the graphics.”

“I must say,” said Frey, “that an eagle’s skull which appeared on the sleeve is not very good karma in terms of the American Indian. By putting this shiny eagle’s skull on the album we felt like we knew where the Greatest Hits thing was at."

That was what we looked like after writing all those songs,” quipped Henley. “But another reason why I didn’t feel bad about putting a Greatest Hits album out was that it definitely marked the end of a phase for us. It marked the end of five years, and this new album opens up a whole new era for us. Ever since ‘Best Of My Love’ kicked off a whole big thing for us, moving us from the top 90 per cent of bands in America to the top 10 per cent, we’ve been running and I never had time to think about how well the Greatest Hits record did. We just wanted to stay busy.”

A pattern, coincidence perhaps, seems to be emerging with the release of Hotel California. The Eagles’ first album contained three hit singles—"Take It Easy", "Witchy Woman" and "Peaceful Easy Feeling" — and was followed by a concept album, Desperado; the One Of These Nights album contained three hit singles—the title track, "Lyin’ Eyes" and "Take It To The Limit"—and is followed by their second concept approach.

"Like Desperado it didn’t necessarily start out to be a concept album but it became one after all,” said Henley. “It’s a more urbane version of Desperado inasmuch as the symbology isn’t set in the past but is there and now.”

“We had all those hit singles off One Of These Nights and that gives you more room to breathe and make an album more like the kind of album we really want to make,” said Frey. “We took some artistic liberties with the new record which we hadn’t taken before, and part of it was because we felt a slight ease of pressure because the last album had done so well.”

"Hit singles are no crime,” said Henley. “Some people view them to be something that can’t be good artistically, and that’s total nonsense as far as I’m concerned. Paul Simon has hit singles, Bob Dylan has hit singles, Neil Young has hit singles, and The Beatles had lots of hit singles.

"The way the record business is structured these days... if you don’t have singles you can forget it. You can work for 10 years making eclectic and artistic underground albums and maybe you’ll get the recognition you deserve when you’re half-dead.”

"But even the FM stations here are playing singles just to stay in business. Admittedly there’s a lot of fucking rubbish in the singles charts. I won’t mention any names, though we all know who they are, so I think..."
Hammont Organ Makes Its First Appearance on an Eagles Album

On this album we're simply holding California up as an example.

"And that's much too much togetherness," said Henley. "When we do get away we like to get away properly. We all have ladies and other friends, and this year we've neglected our relationships with other musicians like Jackson Browne, JD Souther, Linda Ronstadt and other people we would like to hang out with and write songs with a little more. In the next two or three months we'd like to reopen all those doors and think about our next album."

"I wouldn't live anywhere else, though. I wouldn't run away, I'd rather stay here and corrupted, then moved on somewhere else, but we're not doing that."

"On this album we're simply holding California up as an example."
On board the Anarchy Tour bus, December 1976: (front, l-r) Mick Jones, Johnny Rotten, Billy Rath (Heartbreakers bassist), Paul Simonon and Joe Strummer. At the back, Johnny Thunders sits next to photographer/tour manager Lee Black Childers (blond hair).
“We feel like prisoners”

The SEX PISTOLS’ appearance on TV has caused uproar. Radio stations won’t play their single, local councillors are banning concerts, and the band are suing. MM reports the fallout.
**Punk Storm Gathering**

He said the council was disgusted by the Pistols' lack of manners in making them wait at King's Hall for nothing—and added: "I have personally spoken to the manager of the group and he told me that they will not perform before the council unless we come here this evening and see the whole of the show.

"This we are not prepared to do. We have bent over backwards to put on this rehearsal, but in fairness to the group, the promoter and the public, the committee have decided that the Sex Pistols will not perform here tonight."

He said the rest of the package—The Clash, The Damned and The Heartbreakers—could play if they wished. The Clash and The Heartbreakers refused.

The Damned, staying at a different hotel, considered their response and, says MM reporter Caroline Coon, it was rumoured among the touring party that The Damned would play.

The Damned's Dave Vanian announced: "Although we do not align ourselves with the Pistols' political position we sympathise; but we are going to do all the gigs we can and any others that come along."

Said manager McLaren: "We were disgusted by this statement and we feel that The Damned have no place on this tour."

The original opening date of the tour was to have been Norwich University on Friday, but this date was cancelled by the university authorities. The vice-chancellor, Frank Thistlethwaite, met two members of the Students' Union social committee on the morning of the show and, according to an SU spokesman, "took it upon himself to force the union to cancel the punk package concert.

"Since the university own the hall, they are legally entitled to do this by simply refusing to allow the union use of the hall. We wish it to be known that we are disgusted with the manner in which this decision was taken."

Said a spokesman for the authorities: "Because of the group's reported views on violence we felt there was a possible threat to personal safety if the concert had gone ahead."

At press time the Students' Union reported they were planning to rearrange the concert despite the university's views.

Two more dates disappeared because the owners of the venues, Rank Leisure Services, refused to be associated with the Pistols. Bank information officer Chris Moore told MM: "The date at Cardiff Top Rank on December 14 was never really on. We had signed no contracts with anyone connected with the Sex Pistols for that date."

"As for Bournemouth Village Bowl on December 7, the Sex Pistols' appearance on TV brought that to a head. We were concerned about the security aspect of it all. We were certainly not keen to be associated with a band of this sort."

Moore added that the question of future Sex Pistols concerts had been discussed and said the company wouldn't be interested in booking them if they could not prove they had changed themselves from the current format.

The only dates remaining from the tour by press time were Leeds Polytechnic on Monday this week, Manchester on Thursday, Dundee Caith Hall (December 16), Plymouth Woods Centre (21) and London Roxy Theatre (26).

Dates were added at Leeds Polytechnic—a second booking—

---

**The Sex Pistols' Headlining British tour has been reduced to ruins. Just six dates from the original 19 are left following mass action by local councils and hall managements across the country. Pistols manager Malcolm McLaren plans to take legal action against everyone involved with the band's cancelled dates and claims that the Musicians' Union support him and the Pistols. A spokesman for the Union, however, commented: "We haven't had an opportunity to assess the situation. The Sex Pistols wouldn't be regarded as different to any other band coming to us with a problem. If we felt there was a legitimate complaint we would take it up."

Dissent has broken out on the tour itself. Said McLaren: "The Clash and the Heartbreakers are behind us but we are not in sympathy with The Damned and we will ask them to leave the tour after the show at Leeds Polytechnic."

McLaren said The Damned considered playing at Derby Kings Hall on Saturday when the Pistols were refused permission to play by local councillors. "We were disgusted by this and so they will have to get off the tour."

McLaren has arranged new dates for the tour and told MM: "There is no way we are going to be prevented from playing in Britain. This is pure censorship and a complete denial of the principle of free speech."

Radio stations across the country are banning the Sex Pistols' debut single “Anarchy In The UK” and one major record store chain is considering this week whether they should refuse to stock the record.

One radio station was swamped with phone calls after playing the single and inviting listeners' comments. But sales of the record have rocketed in some parts of the country.

One record retailer in Manchester claimed he could have sold as many records as EMI could have supplied and blamed his lack of stock on the lightning strike by workers at EMI's pressing plant on Friday after the Pistols' controversial appearance on Thames Television.

Another punk band, The Vibrators, claim they have suffered a backlash because of people associating their music with that of the Pistols. Three of their British dates have been cancelled and a full European tour scrapped.

In Glasgow, where the Pistols were due to play the Apollo on December 15, the local council revoked the theatre's entertainment licence for just that night. Said Councillor Robert Grey, explaining the unprecedented move: "This group attracts a young element and I honestly believe we have got enough problems in Glasgow without importing yobs."

Local councils in Derby, Newcastle, Liverpool, Bristol, Sheffield, Guildford and Birmingham all banned the Pistols from playing in their towns.

This was an unprecedented decision for Sheffield Council since they have never banned any rock group from the City Hall before now. Newcastle Councillor Arthur Stabler said: "It was decided to cancel the concert in the interests of protecting the children. We can control what happens at the City Hall but not what happens on the stage."

In Derby on Saturday the Pistols kept a 15-strong council delegation waiting for two hours at the King's Hall. The band had agreed to stage a special preview concert so that councillors could judge whether the show should go ahead or not.

The Pistols stayed in their hotel as the councillors waited, refusing to travel with a waiting police motorcade into the centre of the town. Eventually the council delegation conferred in secret at the hall and Councillor Leslie Shipley, leader of the delegation, then announced the concert was off.
Radio One is refusing to play the “Anarchy In UK” single during its daytime programme, but denies that its decision was prompted by the controversy surrounding the Pistols. A spokesman said: “The record has been played by John Peel as a new spin on his late-night programme, which has always featured new bands of interest.”

Peel will be devoting his Radio One show this coming Friday to punk rock, with The Damned making their BBC debut and records by the Pistols, Australian punks The Saints and New York punks Television.

Producer John Walters told MM: “It’s not meant to be a history of punk, but a presentation of the music after all the words about the sociology of the players. It’s not like the Beeb jumping on the punk bandwagon, but just some examples of what the controversial artists sound like.”

But in Sheffield the local commercial station, Radio Hallam, has banned the Pistols’ single. DJ Colin Slade told MM: “It was played last week during the lunch show and then we threw the phones open to the listeners. We got 80 calls through our jammed switchboard in less than 20 minutes, and only four people said they liked it. The rest thought it was terrible. We decided this was a pretty clear mandate from our audience, and so the record is not being played.”

In Manchester, Piccadilly Radio say the record is not on their playlist, and the same goes for Capital Radio in London and BRMB in Birmingham.

In RECORD SHOPS across the country, sales of the single rocketed after the Pistols’ TV appearance. One retailer in Cambridge said: “People who would never normally be seen in our shop have been coming in and asking for the single. They’ve been buying because of the curiosity value and because of the Pistols’ appearance on television.”

Another retailer in Manchester told MM he sold every record he had in stock. “We could have sold plenty more but EMI didn’t have any more in stock, which was a great shame from our point of view.”

A spokesman for EMI said that sales were very healthy but refused to give figures. “That’s not our policy. But let me just say it was doing fine before that television programme, but it’s doing fine now.”

EMI’s pressing plant in Hayes was hit by a lightning strike on Friday. Women on two shifts refused to pack the Sex Pistols single in protest over the television appearance. They handled other records. The problem was resolved and the plant was back to full production on Saturday.

A spokesman for EMI said: “We can appreciate what these ladies were upset about and I won’t suggest that they were exactly delighted to have to go back and carry on packing the record. EMI itself does not condone the use of bad language, but there is no question of action being taken against the Sex Pistols.”

The spokesman denied suggestions that directors of EMI were attempting to force the recording division to revoke the band’s contract. “That’s totally out of the question. Their contract is signed and that’s all there is to it.”

Boots are currently considering whether to continue stocking the Pistols single. Said a spokesman: “Some of our branches have copies of the single, but I think we will need to have a special listen to the single to see whether it is offensive before deciding on whether to continue selling it.”

Pistols singer Johnny Rotten, speaking to MM at his hotel in Leeds, commented: “The whole thing is ridiculous. I don’t see why councilors should dictate to people what kids go out and listen to all night.

“It’s up to the kids who work and pay taxes just like anyone else to decide what they want to do. I’m just sick of the whole thing. We feel like a bunch of prisoners.”

STOPPRESS: Sex Pistols London concert at Roxy Theatre on Boxing Day cancelled.

Sir John Reid, chairman of EMI, said at the company’s AGM on Tuesday that they are considering “very carefully whether to release any more Sex Pistols records”.

He also told shareholders: “EMI will review its general guidelines regarding the contents of pop records. We seek to discourage records which are likely to cause offence.”

“Clever management”

Rock stars comment on the PISTOLS “outrage”.

Alex Harvey

“The hypocrisy of all this is staggering me – if even the first four-letter words on the chart are offensive, one wonders what Shakespeare would have said. Yet you get a man who says the TV show offended him admitting that he would use these words to his mates, but he didn’t want it coming in his home. Well, how hypocritical can you get?”

Eric Burdon

“This is obviously a spin-off from the Rolling Stones era. I haven’t heard the Sex Pistols yet, but anything that publicises hot rock or more sex is all right with me.

“This really is a very clever piece of management and is typical of the times, which seem to throw more attention on the management than the music. Perhaps the warning aspect is the quasi-Nazi spin-off from New York. Hitler would have been very proud of Clockwork Orange, Andy Warhol, Kiss and the Sex Pistols. It’s when this gets beyond the playful side, and youngsters could perhaps be manipulated for other reasons, that the real danger would set in.”

“Hitler was very much under the influence of Wagner – and this was an unpleasant association with music. But I don’t want to pre-judge the Sex Pistols. I haven’t heard them play. The name, however, turns me off. But from what other people have said, their music is not that important. Let’s hear something which is more interesting, and then we won’t care what they say.”

Roger Daltrey

“The best possible hype image since The Who and the mod thing. It’s not all that original. If you look back through the files of old MMs you’ll be surprised how much the Sex Pistols sound like us.

“Swearing doesn’t bother me at all; just I think they could have said something really sensational. I don’t dislike what they do, but I’d like to tell them they’re not skating on thin ice, for the press jumped very quickly on the sensational aspect and if the group can’t produce something more substantial to back them up they are going to be in for a very tough time.

“It’s about time the youngsters kicked up a bit more fuss and that would lead to a more mature attitude in people. But a lot of this is good old rock ’n’ roll hype. The Sex Pistols may now feel they won’t change, but you don’t see things the same at 32 as you do at 19. And only someone of 32 could say that. It’s all like reading about The Who smashing up hotels – so what’s original about that?”

Phil Collins

“I suppose their behaviour is aimed at teaching something other music can’t reach. And if the public reaction is anything to go by, then they couldn’t have had a better PR job done for themselves. It will arouse interest in the group, and as the main aim of a group is to get a record in the charts, then it is likely people would now buy a disc by the Sex Pistols out of curiosity. But if Johnny Rotten and his group aim to become the next Beatles, they won’t do so on shock tactics alone – they’ll have to produce something musically worthwhile.

“A friend video-taped the group on a So It Goes TV programme and following all this publicity we played it over out of curiosity. All we found was a complete lack of talent.”
Punk? I'll drink to that

What is happening to music today that forces the Melody Maker every week to write reams on the so-called punk rock controversy?

For two years or more the Melody Maker has been printing regular (though with increasing vehemence) articles on what has been apparently accepted as the new wave in rock music.

Don't you think this attitude amounts to the greatest form of adulation that punk rock could ever receive? Whatever caused the current "success" of these bands, it certainly was not their music.

I would be tempted to lay the blame at your feet. If you really would like punk rock to be no more, may I suggest you ignore it, and in six months it would be gone? Punk rock really does not have the popular appeal your weekly articles continue to give it.

I'm surprised by the arrival of punk rock, as it was bound to come. OK, punk rock has no talent and they won't progress from punk music because they can't. So real music lovers just be patient; punk rock will kill itself with its own hate of establishment.

CHRIS WHITAKER,
Ongar, Essex (MM, Nov 27)

Punk: the truth

In reply to Chris Whitaker's letter, I would like to say that it's not what the punk bands are playing that matters, it's what they are saying.

I've been involved with music now for about 16 years, and one thing I've learned is that music and truth go together hand-in-hand. For too long now we've been inundated with bands who are very technical, very clever, very polished, but shy away from the important issues of life and cover them up with technical wizardry and pretentious lyrics that have no relevance.

Now I'm not knocking good music, but let's have good music and truth together. You may think punk bands lack talent; this may be true in the musical sense, but there is no lack of honesty and truthfulness in what they do, and this must surely be the rarest talent of them all.

Thank you, punk rockers; it seems the Age Of Aquarius isn't dead after all.

GEOFF GRAHAM,
2 Tudor Road, Camp Hill, Nuneaton, Warwickshire (MM, Dec 11)

Pistols live, after a fashion

The likes of the Sex Pistols have yet to prove that they are only worthy of a mention in a publication dealing solely with fashion, and if the music they deliver live is anything to go by, I think that their audacious lyrics and discordant music will not hold their heads above water when their followers tire of torn jumpers and safety pins.

STEVEN MORRISSEY,
Kings Road, Stretford, Manchester (MM, Dec 11)

Publicity no stunt

I wonder if, may through the columns of your magazine, I can express my deepest thanks to the public relations office of Chrysalis Records. On Tuesday, November 30, I sent a letter to Chrysalis requesting information on Robin Trower. As I posted the letter I thought I would receive a reply, good or bad, in a month or two.

How wrong I was, because on Friday, December 3, just three days after I sent the letter, I received a reply with the information I had asked for plus two photographs.

The speed of the reply just left me astounded. In these days when one hears so much about record companies treating the consumer in a shoddy manner, it is gratifying to find a company that does care about its customers.

I really hope you will print this letter, not out of a desire to see my name in print, but because it is about time that the record companies that take trouble over their customers get some favourable publicity.

GEORGE P COLE,
Acland Hall, Bingley College, Bingley, Yorkshire (MM, Dec 25)

Pressing problem

The price of records continues to increase, yet the quality of pressing continues to decline. It's annoying to part with an amount approaching £4 for an album, and then play it, only to find the enjoyment of the music ruined by crackling and hissing noises.

This situation seems even more inconceivable when one considers that in recent years the improvement in hi-fi equipment means that faults on pressings become even more apparent. Surely, as sound recording and reproduction equipment improves, so should the quality of record pressings.

A return to the quality of pressings of five or 10 years ago can't be beyond the bounds of possibility.

GRAHAM GREEN,
Staines Road, Twickenham, Middlesex (MM, Dec 25)
Lester Bangs falls in love (and sees the Promised Land)

Coming next... 

in 1977!

So that was 1976. Hope you said something outrageous. Certainly, that’s not it from our reporters on the beat. The staffers of NME and Melody Maker enjoyed unrivalled access to the biggest stars of the time, and cultivated a feel for the rhythms of a diversifying scene; as the times changed, so did they. While in pursuit of the truth, they unearthed stories that have come to assume mythical status.

That’s very much the territory of this monthly magazine. Each month, The History Of Rock will be bringing you verbatim reports from the pivotal events in pop culture, one year a month, one year at a time. Next up, 1977!

FLEETWOOD MAC

The doUGHTy JourneyMEN of the British blues boom enjoy their transformation into a classy, enormously successful MOR act that has delivered Rumours. “Now we can make jokes,” says Mick Fleetwood, “but it wasn’t very funny at the time.”

THE CLASH

IN THE CAFF and on the tube with the drummerless punks. On the agenda: violence, revolution and inferior bands. “All the new groups sound like drones,” says Joe Strummer. “I ain’t seen a good new group for six months.”

THE SEX PISTOLS

A TRIP TO Scandinavia with the band and their new member, Sid Vicious, who Johnny Rotten calls “the philosopher in the band”. “I’m a highly original thinker,” says Sid. “He’s just jealous because I’m really the brains of the group.”

PLUS...

Bowie!

The Jam!

Led Zeppelin!

Tom Petty!
Every month, we revisit long-lost NME and Melody Maker interviews and piece together The History Of Rock. This month: 1976.

“If you get down and you quarrel every day/You’re saying prayers to the devils, I say…”

Relive the year...

BOB MARLEY BECAME A SUPERSTAR

DAVID BOWIE CONQUERED STAGE AND SCREEN

PUNK ROCK OUTRAGED A NATION

...and QUEEN, PATTI SMITH, LED ZEPPELIN and many more shared everything with NME and MELODY MAKER

More from UNCUT...

WWW.UNCUT.CO.UK