



# BOOMTOWN RATS' BOB GELDOLF INTERVIEW

At the time of writing, The Boomtown Rats have scored their sixth hit in the UK, and their second number one, with a quite untypical song called "I Don't Like Mondays."

They're the most successful, commercially, of the new wave acts, being a little bit punk, a little bit R&B, and a lot of good time, and are thus able to transcend most barriers and reach a wide audience. Only the US of A remains unconquered, but this is only a matter of time, according to one of the biggest mouths in the business.

We are speaking, naturally, of Modest Bob Geldof, whose sometimes-overpowering stage presence and superb ability to manipulate the media have contributed no little to the Rats' success.

A chance to speak with the man himself was jumped at, thanks to Polygram, who are doubtless sweating blood over the cost of an hour's toll call to London.

Geldof is an interviewer's dream-cum-nightmare. He is articulate, witty and full of quotable quotes. The only problem is, you can't shut him up. Still, better too much copy than not enough.

The Boomtown Rats started out in Eire in 1976, the various members having known each other for sometime, and having being inspired by seeing the Feelgoods into having a go themselves. At first, they were called The Nitelife Thugs, but Geldof changed the name after reading Woody Guthrie's "Bound For Glory." Their first gigs, in the republic's boozers, drew some negative reaction.

"I think it was similar to the resentment, and fear possibly, that was happening in England at the same time with the new bands," says Geldof. "But it wasn't necessarily just the promoters and the club owners, it was also the established musical clique that existed in Ireland at the time, of other bands. I think they were afraid."

"When we started, within three weeks we had a huge popularity, precisely because we were doing things that seemed to be the antithesis of what they were doing. We weren't getting up on stage and ignoring the audience. It seems ridiculous now, but it was only three or four years ago. The guitarist would play long-winded solos for half an hour, and mainly they were just indulging in tedium, self-indulgence and boredom, that had very little to do with the audience."

"We were the very opposite of that, so we got popular very quickly as a result. I think it was the danger we posed to the established

musicians that resulted in resentment from them.

"I think if you do something that is completely different and new, people are afraid, not of what you are doing, but afraid of the unknown."

In Britain, things were different. The Rats were no longer alone in the fight to shake the business by the throat. A movement had started which could not be ignored, and the Rats arrived at the right time.

Their debut single, "Looking Out For Number 1", was the first new wave single to be played by the BBC, and the Boomtown Rats made another breakthrough, being the first new wave band to appear on the prestigious *Top Of The Pops* TV programme. This paved the way, and the British singles charts took on a much healthier look, which continues today.

Geldof, as we said before, is a very skilful media manipulator, especially television, where he plays to the camera, rather than ignoring it.

"I was always dying to appear on TV or hear myself on the radio," he says. "And the reality is almost as good as the dream, it's one of the few things that we've found to be true."

"TV has always struck me as being an immensely powerful medium, and I think in the 80's it will probably be the primary medium for rock and roll. Video, too, will just explode soon, because video discs and equipment are cheaper than videotape."

"But you must be aware of this power, and I think a lot of the new bands are intimidated by TV. You must regard the camera as a lump of glass and metal, which is a direct line into somebody's house."

"To try and get across what the band is into, you must react to that situation, so I put myself in the situation of the person watching TV. I've got to make that person, sitting there with his can of beer, react, and I've got to reach through his TV screen, as the camera allows me to do."

"When we appear on TV, I constantly address the camera, which always pisses off the director, because you're supposed to be not aware of the cameras. But on one show recently, I asked them to come over to the set. I pointed out where the volume control was, and told them to turn it up really loud. Apparently they did a survey, and about 56 percent of people who were watching went and turned it up."

"I don't think you'll ever transfer the excitement of a live gig onto TV, so you've got to find another way of portraying some excitement."

Is it possible to get ahead these days without compromising yourself?

"I think the industry in Britain is at present in a huge state of crisis. I think it's a compromise anyway. When you go to a record company, you're saying: 'Here's my talent, exploit it, but exploit it for my use.' The problem comes when the bands are ripped off and exploited for the record company's use."

"I think, to sum it up, it's a "You scratch my back, I'll claw yours" sort of ethic, and the Boomtown Rats tend to keep their nails fairly well sharpened."

The Boomtown Rats have completed a new album, *The Fine Art of Surfacing* and are planning to feature in a film. Details are confused, but Bob says it's a satirical vampire movie, for which they'll probably write some music as well.

Also in the pipeline is another American tour and a chance of seeing them down this way in the new year. (Visiting NZ in October to look at venues etc are Rats manager, Fachtna O'Kelly and Ensign Records boss, Nigel Grainge).

Bob could have talked all night, but the phone bill had started to run into three figures, and we called it a day, much to his disappointment. Only a fraction of what was discussed appears here, but it shows well the value of complete self-confidence and hustling power.

Take a leaf from his book and you could become The Next Big Thing. Failing that, you could probably be a first class used car salesman.

Duncan Campbell

Back in 1978, when the Boomtown Rats were already well on their way, Bob Geldof was asked to write an article with some basic advice for would-be rock stars, wanting to start a band. The resulting article appeared in May '78, in the first issue of a magazine called *Rock On!* Geldof tells us the mag was simply a tax write-off for a large publishing house. *Rock On!* vanished without a trace after only a handful of issues, and Bob says he "never got a cent" for the article. However, he graciously gave his permission for us to reproduce it here. Read and learn!

## How to start a Band and not get Screwed BY BOB GELDOLF

Way back in my head I can remember hearing this plastic freebie my sister had years ago. It came in the first edition of some short-lived rag called *Serenade*. It had Cliff Richard on it saying things like, "Well hi there this is Cliff. I don't know about you but right now I'm excited, (Oh really Cliff? I thought that was a sin.) Yeah it's an exciting business making records."

Now listen I don't agree with Cliff Richard about *anything* but this time the sentiment remains true even if the situation has changed.

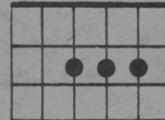
It is *exciting*. I'm not about to start denying that I love playing rock'n'roll in front of a couple of thousand people at the Rainbow, the Marquee or anywhere else. It's a gas (if embarrassing) seeing yourself on TV, hearing yourself on the radio. Just like when you get your picture in the local paper for being at a match or wedding or whatever, we get a kick from seeing ourselves in the weekly music comics. I love it — and so do most other guys in the other bands even if they don't admit it. I'll tell you one thing it's a helluva lot better than any other job I've ever had and that's for sure.

I mean the whole point of this thing is fun. The whole point of anything should be fun, amusement — anything that keeps the blunt teeth of boredom away from the brain. Look, we didn't start the Rats to be "rich and famous", we started it for a laugh, something to do on Saturday afternoon. There was no positive motivation, no huge philosophy, no giant idealism, no cause, only six guys who hung out in someone's garage and in some south Dublin record shop. We were playing at being big stars — we still are. But at least we were playing.

That was the loosing end of '75. We played in Ireland through '76 and made it to England with a bunch of songs in time to contribute to the greatest year of rock in the last decade.

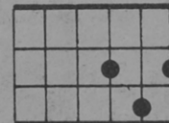
Over these past two years, we have I suppose, as much as anyone else, run the rock'n'roll gauntlet. When you, eventually, as a band, move into the record making area of rock the rarest word in the vocabulary will be 'music'. The most common ones are 'nett', 'gross' and 'percentage', you understand? Learn fast — everyone wants to screw you. Now look, assuming you like the music and you check out the bands and you read the papers and listen to the records etc., assuming all this why don't you actually *play* in a band? Listen, you follow football — you play it with your mates, follow rock'n'roll — play it with your mates. It's e-e-e-zee. All ya need is ... a little bit of gear, maybe a couple of acoustics to practise on or better still an electric and amp. Quality doesn't matter.

If you can actually play, great. If you can't, follow the "Geldof Duff Guitar Players Guide to the Stars". Learn a chord — let's say 'A'.

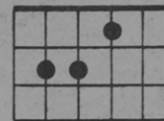


say 'D' do the same thing with that,

Hammer that out together then learn another



then learn 'E' Hey when's your new album coming out maaaaan?



Listen, you can play almost any rock song with those chords. For example, "I-I-I don't wanna be like you" E ..... E ..... E ..... A from that brilliant classic "Looking After No. 1" reproduced by kind permission of us.

If you can, try writing a few songs of your own. If you can't, learn *something* right. Now you've got a bunch of songs together, try and get a few gigs. You don't need a manager for a good while yet, but if there's a mate who'll do the job for a while — fine. If not get one of the band to do it, someone with a good enough business sense, because when you actually begin playing as a working band that's all people want to know about — business. Whether you're gonna make money for *them* or not. You've just got to be better at business than they are — it's easy.

Now the next bit seems really stupid, but getting a good name for yourselves is really hard. We had a bitch of a time finding one. We were called Mark Skid and the Y-Fronts for a day, the next day we were the Dockside Demons. We actually played half a gig as the Nitelife Thugs. We were always farting around with names until we got the Boomtown Rats which seemed to fit. And that's the important thing. It's kinda like naming a kid — you might be stuck with it for a long time. You'd better like it, it's you who's got to live with it.

The only way to get gigs is to check out the local pubs, clubs, schools, dance-halls etc., give them a ring and try not to be your normal obnoxious self. You must brown-nose for a little while, a little bit of smarm goes a long way ... well it might get you onto that bit of plywood they probably call a stage. It doesn't matter if you're crap. It doesn't matter if people are shouting abuse at you — forget it. It's a helluva lot better to be playing in a band than to be watching one. At least *you're* living your dreams. They say in sex you should always enact your fantasies — same in life Chester. Any way you'll get better as time goes on, let's face it you can't get any worse.

Once you start getting a name, obviously you'll find it easier to get gigs. You get to know the managers and other people from the clubs. Always do a lot of publicity. I think all the new bands understand that. Most them have bigger hype jobs than Grand Funk Railroad and the Rollers put together — little more subtle maybe but unfortunately in a lot of cases it's worked. Try and get some posters done. Get a mate to design them, save about \$20 if you can and go down to the local instant print. You should get a thousand done for that. Plaster them everywhere. We printed our own cos Simon (the drummer) had a small silkscreen press. There might be one in your school. Anyway you can always get a spray can.

If you can, put most or all the money you're making back into the band. If you're doing it strictly as a hobby and a once-a-week is fine for you, great. You should end up with a lot of good gear and a bit of beer money. If you find that the band has gotten too big for your area, then maybe it's time to get a manager to get the gigs (later through an agency) and the highly-prized record contract. It's best to find a mate you can trust and who has his shit together. The chances of being ripped-off are very slim, and it's the best method. If you can't do it that way, find out about someone (a guy who's managed bands before etc.) check him out and tell him he has to give your band 24 hours a day. You do, so why shouldn't he. He'll ask for between 10 and 20% of your total income, and you'll have to start dealing for a figure. For that sort of money expect the world. It might be only 12% of \$60 now but what about later after your smash American six million selling album? It's about now you start thinking about giving up the job or whatever. One rule — stay on the dole, you're gonna need it pal.

Bob Geldof

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