

Like it or not, Paul Young is big business. His mild-mannered, highly polished R&B struck a chord in a chart year dominated by similar marketable black and white propositions. Culture Club, Style Council and Michael Jackson are unavoidable examples.

From 'Wherever I Lay My Hat' through to 'Come Back and Stay' and 'Love of the Common People', Young and his wily record company, CBS, haven't put a foot wrong in selling him as a desirable musical product.

The phone clicks, I'm in Augsburg, Germany, the Alpenhof Hotel where Young is staying during a tour of that country. His album, he tells me, has been number one in Germany for fifteen weeks and his single, 'Love of the Common People', holds a similar position in Holland. But America remains unimpressed:

"It's funny because I thought the album was more of an American taste and yet the Europeans have grabbed it first."

His accent is working-class London, straight from *The Sweeney* or *Minder* and he leaves the 'g's off his endin's. His original hero was the Free's Paul Rodgers whose public statements of influences led Young to seek out the records of Redding and Sam Cooke and later Joe Tex, Bobby Womack and Motown.

Smitten by soul he formed the unknown Streetband and then the slightly better known Q Tips whose keyboard player, The Rev, is still with him:

"I just kept Ian on keyboards because I loved his playing and arrangements and I always thought he was a bit stifled in the Q Tips."

The Q Tips surfaced at the same time as Dexy's:

"Yeah, it was accidental though. That's the strange thing that happens in England — you get these musical explosions that happen in the same time in different areas. I started the Q Tips because I'd had a voice problem. For three months it was out of action, I was in and out of hospital and after I saw an opera singer to train it back I thought I'd better get a band together to get used to playing live again."

The Q Tips broke road records, they played live like it was going out of fashion:

"We did over three-and-a-half years of live work. In the first year we only had sixty days off the road. One night we supported Bob Marley at Crystal Palace and then drove down the same night to a community centre to play to a couple of hundred kids."

In a sense the decision to go on his own seems to have been made for him:

"When I decided to go solo the Q Tips had parted with Chrysalis as they saw us as a little bit of the 2-Tone thing. But our music wasn't that lightweight young people's thing. We just wanted to play soul. So we went out in search for a record deal for the Q Tips."

"A few record companies said they were interested in me if I wanted to do a solo contract. I hadn't thought of going solo at the time but I was writing songs that could never have worked with Q Tips, so I decided to take the chance."

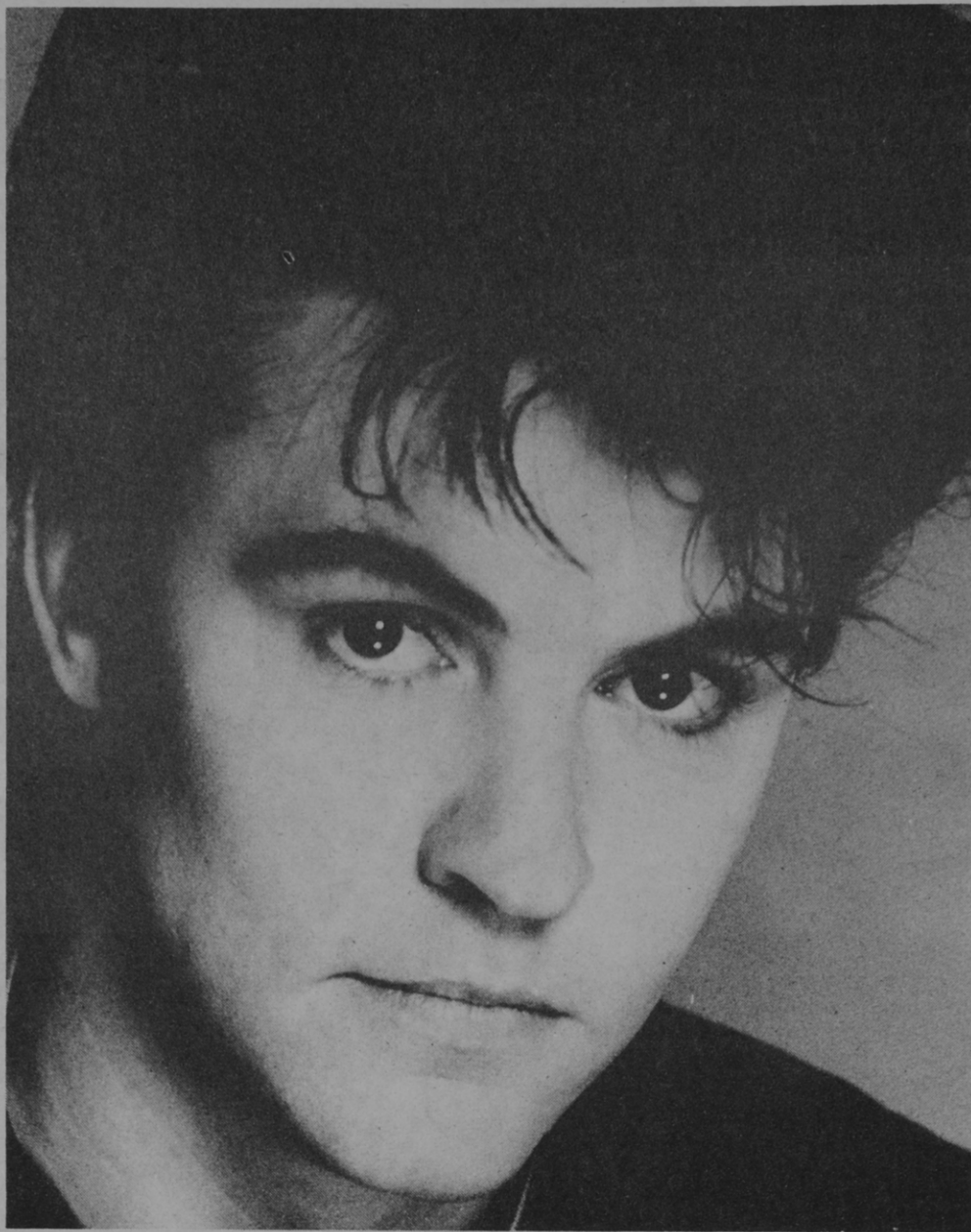
#### Gloss

To most people Paul Young appeared from nowhere. A fait d'accompli of impeccable grooming and restrained tasteful talent. Someone in CBS had done their homework or was it that easy?

"CBS held back in the beginning because I signed the record deal without ever playing them a demo. They knew what they were getting but I think they wanted to market me in the same way as Shakin' Stevens but when I told them I wanted to do other things as well as soul music they got worried and they only let me record a couple of songs at a time. The first two singles failed ('Iron Out the Rough Spots' and 'Love of the Common People') but the second one showed a lot of promise. So when the third one ('Wherever I Lay My Hat') went they got

## Parlez-vous R&B

PAUL  
YOUNG



right behind it — CBS have got the machinery and a marvellous spirit."

Didn't you think the promotion was too glossy, too hyped-up?

"It can look like that to an outsider but the first way I was marketed was my idea. 'Wherever I Lay My Hat' was a classy sounding track and I put a suit on to go with the image of the song. I suppose the first image you put out is the one people remember. But I didn't see it as any more than a photo on the front of a sleeve so that was my fault really. I didn't expect the single to be very big for a start."

#### If The Hat Fits ...

"'Hat' wasn't the first choice as the third single, it was going to be 'Come Back and Stay' but we'd just changed the bass pattern and remixed it so in the end we decided to go for something else."

What prompted you to tackle 'Hat' as it's hardly one of Gaye's timeless moments?

"That's why I chose it. The song's good enough but Gaye's recording hasn't aged very well. It has the stamp of the late 50s with the strings and everythin' being a bit lush. It sounds very old-fashioned and I thought the song had a bit more life in it. If I couldn't have found a good way to do it then I wouldn't have bothered with it. We played around with drum machines and found a different rhythm pattern and then took it from there."

Your interpretation has certainly changed the

sexual stance of the song:

"Yeah, the lyric is a bit of a boast, but because we slowed the track down and did it in a more bluesy fashion it gives the impression that although the person in the song is a bit of a lady killer, he wants to settle down but he's still got that terrible urge to go on pullin' girls."

Is that the way Paul Young is, or is the video of the song just a piece of acting?

"Yeah, the video is not a true impression. In fact if you get to the end of it, and that doesn't often happen over here, I actually get shot for being so horrible."

"In a lot of these videos the girls get the rough end of the deal — all they can do is walk around in stockings. I just thought it would be good to end where the male doesn't get the upper hand."

#### Let's Parlez

Young's album, *No Parlez*, has that *Solid Gold* finish. I can hear Marilyn McCoo gushing over its "brilliance" and the fact that three "smash hits" have already been lifted from it. Yet for a self-confessed soul and R&B artist the album lacks grit:

"Yeah, I know what you mean. It's such a good production, it's been smoothed out a little. But I'd rather have an album like that than an album of ideas because I'm fed up with not seeing an album through."

In Streetband and Q Tips we never took any care but this time we took a lot of care, and it was the first time that I really worked on the

vocal tracks. Perhaps we were a bit over zealous in the studio.

I love R&B so much that I was tempted to faithfully re-create that sound so I wanted a producer to take me away from that. I thought of Trevor Horn but he was over priced. Laurie (Latham) was the first unknown producer that I tried. Up until then he had only been an engineer with only a little co-production to his credit. I got him to mix a demo and he did such a fantastic job that I told CBS that I wanted him to do the whole album. It's Laurie's odd production ideas, he's a big George Martin fan, that shaped the sound."

#### Carrying Torches

On *No Parlez* Young tackles Joy Division's 'Love Will Tear Us Apart'. Not just a song but a hymn for a religious movement, the torch song for worshippers of content/honesty over style. Mishandling it would mean that Young would permanently alienate certain factions:

"We knew we'd probably get into a lot of trouble for it, but that was the deciding factor as I was fed up doing what was expected of me. I wanted to take some modern songs and give them some of the old feel and atmosphere. Laurie came up with the idea of doing 'Love Will Tear Us Apart' and we listened to it and got the lyrics out. I thought the lyrics were the main point in recording the song as they were so powerful."

"Because my R&B roots are so strong I saw the song as how the Four Tops might have done it because I can imagine Levi Stubbs doing the vocal. That was the base we started from so it's got a touch of the Four Tops 'Reach Out I'll Be There' rhythm pattern."

To be fair Young treats the song with respect although he hardly adds anything. Any adverse reaction?

"I had a few upset people when we did it on *The Tube* TV show. My first appearance was on that and I played 'Love Will Tear Us Apart' live, and as soon as I got off the stage a bloke came up to me and started to bend me ear and said, 'you shouldn't have done that'. I saw the same guy at *The Tube* a year later, and he's just a member of the public, and I was standing next to him in the toilet and he said, 'I was wrong wasn't I?' He still didn't like it but he could see my reason for doing it."

Of Young's three hit singles to date only one, 'Come Back And Stay' is an original. On the album it made a grand entrance being the best of his self-penned stuff therein, but the 12" extended mix version loses dynamics in its stop-start production gimmickry. Agree?

"That's the first time I've heard that criticism. I don't agree with that. A lot of 12" records lose the song but a lot are only sound experiences. I thought Laurie did really well with the song although a lot of fantastic sounds we recorded were lost in the mix-down. I think you've got to look at the 12" of 'Come Back' as an experience of sound."

"I don't think it's danceable enough but you can't do to it what isn't already there. On the next album there's gonna be at least one track that's gonna be more like a club record, something that's danceable but unconventional."

The next album:

"I've got a couple of me own again but I'm gonna write some more and I'm still looking for other people's. We want to keep experimentin' and there's different styles coming out, like we've done a ballad with a country influence. We've already recorded three tracks in Paris and we'll do the rest of the album in a month's time."

Now that you've reached this level of success, your next concern must be to retain it?

"Yeah, but I don't want to flog the horse until it's dead. I never want it to appear to be work otherwise I'll cease to do what I do well. Success is not important to me as long as I like what I'm doing."

Paul Young — the talent next door, a nice guy with a good voice and a love for R&B that is rapidly being diluted to MOR. When he's finished he'll set himself up in a pub somewhere and ...

George Kay



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