

Journalist as Record Exec.

Paul Morley and Frankie
Go To Hollywood

Meatloaf tried to hit him over the head with a guitar, the Psychedelic Furs chased him around a table, Wham threw a glass of water over him... journalist Paul Morley came punching out of the pages of the *New Musical Express* during the punk era and splattered vitriolic ink over whoever didn't live up to his pop vision.

He says with typical modesty: "I brought a whole new style of writing to pop journalism using different language. Now there is a smugness at the magazine. Because it has such a tradition of writers — Nick Kent, Burchill/Parsons, Penman/Morley — they think they are important but who the fuck knows them? A couple of years ago I think I had an affect."

That was a period when he almost single-handedly gave credibility to the likes of Spandau Ballet, their Tory, ayrian notions and look-a-like Lady Di fans. It was a journey that ended with him lauding ABC and Dollar, one that spurned a thousand Jones' and Kershaws.

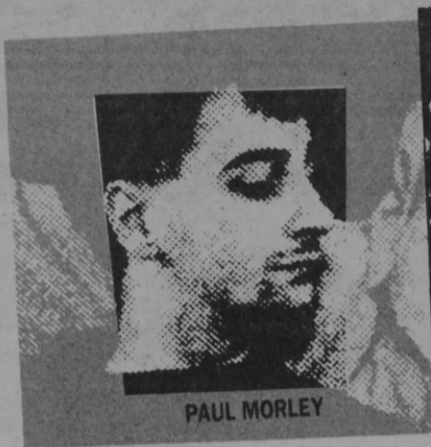
"Well everybody makes mistakes ... but I don't have any regrets. In a way it has worked out rather well for me."

Morley spends most of his time these days on the other side of the fence as a partner in Zang Tumb Tuum, the record label behind Frankie Goes to Hollywood, the Art of Noise and the German group Propaganda. As you might expect, he is the ideas man, the writer of press releases, the seller of ZTT to the world.

"I was going along to interview these dick-heads every week who I was supposed to be subservient to. They were so stupid! That is why I got a bit of a reputation as a bit of a hard bastard because I couldn't be bothered anymore. I thought there's got to be a better way of doing it and because I was so arrogant in the end you really do have to justify yourself."

"I had endless hassles with people complaining they couldn't understand what I was writing, what I was on about but I must have been getting through to have been noticed by people like Trevor Horn."

He'd slagged Horn as a Buggie (of 'Video Killed the Radio Star' fame) but thought him a genius as producer of ABC and Dollar. Horn



PAUL MORLEY



FRANKIE GOES TO HOLLYWOOD

There's at least one person out there who is not enamoured of Paul Morley's Frankie Goes to Hollywood marketing strategies — none other than Boy George. George wrote an open letter to the group's frontmen, Paul and Holly, accusing them of giving gayness a bad name. Ironically, in a recent *NME*, Bronski Beat (members of which are gay) accused George of perpetuating gay stereotypes himself. George replied to them also in no uncertain terms the next week.

George's letter is printed below:

Dear Paul and Holly,

When I wrote the song 'Do You Really Want to Hurt Me', people of low intelligence assumed it was a hot tune dedicated to the art of flagellation (whipping) etc, etc. I could have seized the opportunity then to label Culture Club 'naughty but nice' and joined the long and boring line of 'rock stars' who have sold themselves on pure sexuality for the last 30 years — but people who still

consider sex to be risqué are as dull as those who still regard, and use, the guitar as a phallic symbol.

Being 'gay' is not exactly a revolution in 1984, neither is sex, rubber or laser beams — they are as much a part of the furniture as your rude (but brilliant) song 'Relax'. A top-selling record, banned or otherwise, brings you into the middle of the road bracket along with 'Karma Chameleon' and 'White Christmas'. (Really Holly, ask your bank manager.)

No one is accusing you of being without talent, but it is obvious to everyone that Paul Morley pulls the strings and Trevor Horn does the cooking. Frankie Goes To Hollywood are a great band with or without the puff pastry, so do you really need to let yourself be manipulated?

Just look at the other three members of Frankie, aside from the two 'Fire Queens' up front, and you can see that they have only just discovered 'Him' magazine. The video to accompany 'Relax', that was branded too rude to be shown, WAS tacky and

very insulting to anyone with a brain — a Hilda Ogden-type view of homosexuality.

You are not educating people, only telling them that being 'gay' is like a four letter word sprayed on a toilet wall — cheap, disgusting and very childish.

If you're so concerned with making people aware of sex why don't you be a little more explicit and intelligent in your interviews? It is not clever to call me an idiot simply because I express a valid opinion. As for Nick Beggs, why shouldn't he commit himself to religion when you only crawl round the walls of pornography like a little child at school concealing a cigarette from the teacher?

Your video taught me nothing. It just made me proud that I have never used 'second-hand information' to further my career; it reminded me not to listen to rumours over garden fences told by frustrated housewives tensed by the tightness of their knicker elastic.

This is Blighty not San Francisco.
BOY GEORGE

to its eventual banning) but when pressed on the matter it is the only time his conversation doesn't flow at the speed of an album on 45.

"We pulled-off a bit of a stunt with 'Relax' and it was probably the corniest way to do it using sex which people are notoriously hung-up about and gayness is the last taboo in rock."

"We saw Frankie on television and no one would sign them because they were gay and most of the people in the record industry are gay and they don't like it dragged out in the open. We wanted to cause a fuss in a very banal way. We weren't claiming it was going to change the face of pop but me and Trevor just wanted to upset people."

"People like Spandau Ballet, Duran Duran, Wham, China Crisis were slowly becoming millionaires by putting together a very skilfully crafted pop. It was often made by people who were in their forties because one of the legacies of punk is that nobody can play their instruments so they have to wheel in all these old people to do it for them. I thought if they are going to do that why can't they do it with a bit more life. They might as well be Matt Munro or Barry Manilow."

"Young people who form pop groups make it easy for record companies to manipulate them because they often don't have any ideas of their own. They start with all these dreams like altering the face of rock 'n' roll and then they end up at a record company and because record companies are good at making money they tend to take over."

"Frankie came to us with more than an idea. They came with energy and exuberance so it

wasn't necessarily an idea that was important. What we wanted were signs of life. 'Relax' was a celebration of sexual possibilities but even more than that it was a display of energy which was missing in pop music."

"If you lose your imagination, your ability to articulate, you might as well not exist as you will lose the power to say no to your masters (the great capitalist conspiracy). In my little field of pop that is the motivating factor. You must have language, hopes and dreams."

Even if the huge orchestrated sound of 'Relax' wasn't to your taste, it sat as boldly as a fluffy, creamy slice of gateau among the stale scones at pop's tea party.

It hit at the safety and mediocrity of chart pop, discovered the grandeur of disposability, provided a golden pop moment, Morely maintains.

"ZTT is meant to be a bit of a fantasy. People think we are serious and arty but I think we are the funniest record label in the world. We have accepted our position and confronted the whole ironical stupidity. We understand we are in the middle of the great capitalist conspiracy. It is no use just whinging about what you hate, you have to do something about it. Each record is meant to suck you into a world giving you the feeling that you have been somewhere. There is a point where escapism and art meet. What dulls the masses is a lack of imagination."

"The pop single is our adventure although there will be albums later. We are in love with the seven inch and twelve inch. The pop single can be a very arty object as Phil Oakey once said to me and that has had a considerable influence on the ideals of ZTT. It is something that is very important to us and hopefully to the people who buy it. I remember when I went out and bought pop singles for the first time it was the only thing as a young person that I actually owned. It was a way of breaking away from all the restrictions, censorship and inhibitions of the adult world. We wanted to return that. We sold about 400,000 copies of the twelve inch of 'Relax' and on the back of the cover was an abbreviated pornographic novel. So what? But I love that!"

"Once people start interfering with your dreams then you are lost. If music is being received by a lot of people why not make it exciting and imaginative as opposed to going through the motions."

"People are going to be horrified by Frankie's new single (an anti-war song called 'Two Tribes') because the group haven't settled down and gone safe. Nobody thinks they can follow-up 'Relax'. Everyone thinks they are just some kind of gay sex group. It is a basic song saying who wants to die but it is done in a glamorous way, not in a Clash/Killing Joke/Paul Weller way. I mean, what is the point of preaching to 18 year olds who are rebellious anyway? We want to be in the charts to get through to everyone. It is done in a way that if Frankie are going to save you they are going to give you more!"

As Morley readily admits himself there is nothing radical in ZTT's approach. They simply use the conventional tools of the industry with flair. And pay laborious attention to detail.

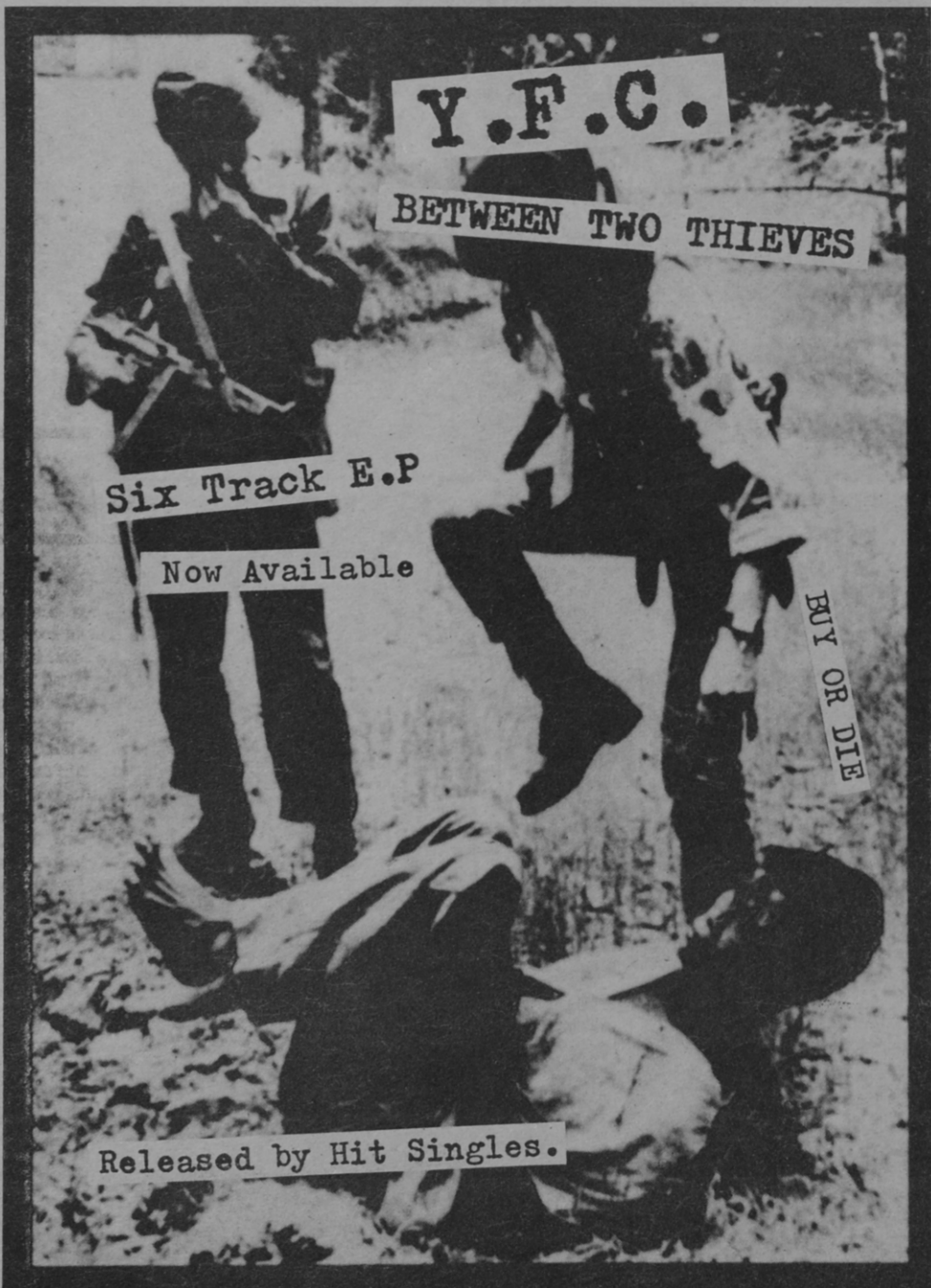
"I know we care more. Nobody else spends five months working on a single. The Thompson Twins just stick to the formula. We put a whole lot more adventure into the enterprise. It is intelligence against stupidity. I knew there was no aggressive pop anymore and I knew if you did it right it would sell a million. In a way it was too easy for us."

Horn had considered signing Tom Jones, believing the old crooner's voice to be essentially rock 'n' roll and to have that element of soul everybody wishes for. He was eventually put off by a late night video showing Jones doing kitsch country and western numbers with women hanging all over the place. Now Engelbert Humperdink is under consideration.

"At ZTT we are all quite mad," Morley reasons.

Later on he will mention that all the great faces in British rock — Jagger, Bowie, Curtis — are/were so because of their eccentricity.

Richard Langston



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