

got the token funny punk and there are adverts all over the place and you can buy punk post-cards and that sort of thing. And to me that really wasn't what it was about. What it was about was change and being different and trying to create something new. And I think that's been taken and cashed in on and capitalised."

There was a scurrilous rumour about 18 months ago that came halfway around the world to people here who weren't sure whether or not to believe it. The rumour had it that Bryn, former guitarist with our own Eight Living Legs, had joined the Damned as bass player. It wasn't true — a Bryn had joined but he was a Welshman who had never gazed out across the gulf at Rangitoto or marvelled at the grandeur of the Southern Alps. The other Welshman in the band is guitarist Roman Jugg (real name!). Singer is still the ghoul-ish Dave Vanian.

Especially in the days of the Captain, the Damned has always been about strong personalities — have Roman and Bryn come into the band in that respect?

"Essentially they're there for their musical abilities, the fact that they can play the songs that we want. But Roman's actually been in the band for four years, nearly five now, so it's not as if he's a new boy, and Bryn's been in two years. But they're characters in their own right, they're very different characters."

Do you and Dave feel you have to get up on stage and be the characters you've become, the names you are?

"I dunno really — I think I'm just taking the piss out of it all now. I find it quite amusing, to be called Rat Scabies when you're a 30-year-old man. I just get up there and I get on with it. My job's behind the drumkit, I play 'em, I show off a bit, and if I'm pissed off I'll smash 'em up. And that's kind of what I do now. I don't feel I have to get up and impress anyone any more."

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Do you ever get tired of being Rat Scabies after the gig, just want to be Chris Millar and go home?

"Well, yeah, I do. But I mean after the gig it's all part of it, being on the road and stuff. It's 'lads, 'ere we are, we've done a gig, let's 'ave a few bev-ies and see what mischief we can get up to'. And when I'm not touring, that's when I lead my normal life. And I really do the same as anyone else — I sit and watch TV, muck around with my car and all that kind of stuff."

Is it difficult spending as much time as you do with the group?

"Not really — one of the essential things is that you all have to get on with each other. And we're quite lucky that we do and there isn't any of that bitching about 'I think I should sing that song,' or whatever. We'll always pick which is best, there's none of that ego problem. We're realistic, we want the best for the group. The band has always been more important than any one individual. And it seems to work for us. Because there is such a basic honesty within the band it's very easy to get on, someone can just be told to shut up. I have to spend 90 per cent of my life with these geezers and if we didn't get on I wouldn't do it."

That's what keeps the Damned going?

"It's part of it. I think it's really just because of the band — I don't know why but we seem to just worship that thing of the band. It's like if I left it would still probably carry on and people can come and go, but the real thing is that people with the right attitude are in the group. And that's the right attitude musically and the right attitude to life as well."

Brit-punk exploded and kept on exploding for a couple of years, but not much remains of the hundreds of bands and thousands of records and dozens of indie labels. Some of the music, particularly individual records rather than bands, still sounds really good, but on the other hand, punk encouraged people like Duran Duran and Spandau Ballet to get in bands and thereafter plague us with crappy music. So who does Rat Scabies respect when he looks around him?

"I think one of the bands to come out of punk that are still developing and doing something is Killing Joke. And the Stranglers of course are still hammering out good records. But at the moment I'd rather listen to Wagner than GBH. GBH to the ears ..."

You listen to Wagner?

"Yeah, I've just started to actually. It started while we were in Germany. We had a seven hour drive and we were lucky enough to have a video in the back. And Dave had this movie with Richard Burton about Wagner, so we watched that and realised what an out and out lunatic he was, a real old character. I liked the music a bit anyway, because my father's very into the old Wagner, so I bought one of those greatest hits cassettes and now I'm listening to it and really starting to appreciate it."

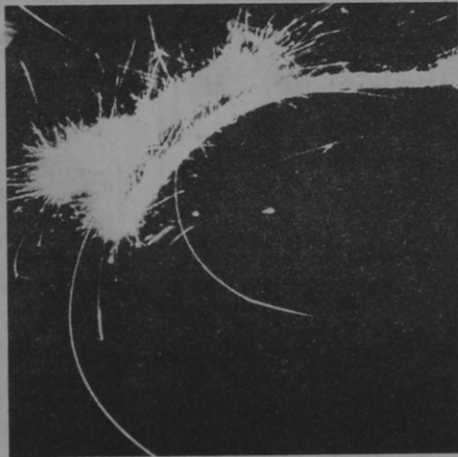
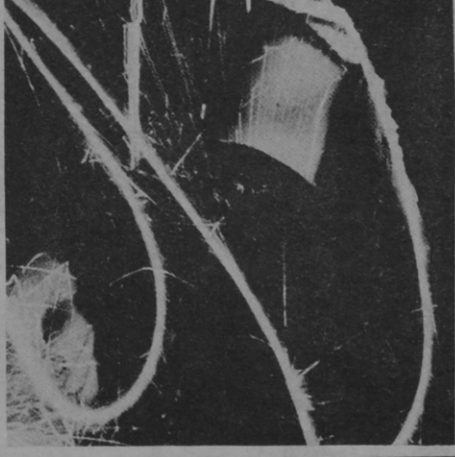
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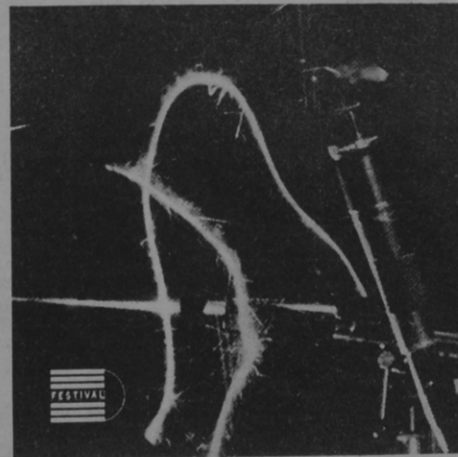
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