

# 'VERLAINES' FROM PAGE 18

I could make of it lyrically. I couldn't hit the nail on the head.

"It probably sounds lyrically a little bit more bombastic than it was intended to. It was intended to be about the image it used, of someone burning down a library, which the crusaders did on a crusade. People destroying potential knowledge of themselves, lying to themselves. Just totally burying anything they don't want to know. Which always leads to not getting out of the particular situation you're in, you come up against the same mistake more and more often.

"It was just really hard to put down. In a way I suppose there's a lot of songs that are like that, that lyrically go around the same subject. I suppose a lot of writers go around the same subject time and time again and sort of collectively hit it on the head by taking it from all angles. So maybe it's only part of the jigsaw."

What's the 'Noryb' in 'Ballad of Harry Noryb' — 'Byron' backwards?

"Yep."

Want to explain?

"Well, you know what a Byronic hero's like — this sort of proud, lonely guy who says (rude gesture with one finger) and wanders off and treks around Europe and is very high and lonely. A Noryb is something like that, he finds himself in the same position of totally rejecting it, but it's not like a Byronic hero who does it by choice and decides the world is stuffed and goes and does this thing totally on his own. A Noryb is someone

who finds himself there and does not make a conscious decision to do that. So he's sort of like an immigrant in a totally foreign country, which is in the lyrics as well. I think Norybs are probably more common than Byronic heroes in the world.

"It's important to get across in the lyrics that it is totally defined by fate in a way, that it's happened that way and it's not just sort of perverse satisfaction and self-pity. But most of the people who outwardly look like that do delve in self-pity I think."

Who were you looking at when you wrote that?

"A couple of people who shall remain nameless, neither of whom are totally like that. And there's probably a bit of myself in it as well — although I'm not like that I think. It's just a part of the potential ... although maybe anybody's got the potential to end up like that if the right things happen. Reading *Under the Volcano* helped, I think — the main character is a modern 20th century anti-hero. He's quite disgusting until to all outward appearances he's delving in self-pity. But the way he writes the book shows he has no choice in acting the way he does."

As opined at the beginning of this story, *Hallelujah* will probably win the Verlaines a new audience, other than the kind of people who go to grotty pubs to hear original music. After all, as Jane says, her father likes it and he's never liked any rock music before. Is it important to keep the rough edge in the live gigs?

"We don't have a lot of choice really!" Graeme laughs.

Jane: "I don't think the Verlaines as they are will ever lose it, unless we dramatically change the way we work. We get pretty excited on stage because we don't play live very often. And that automatically makes an edge. I always feel on edge."

Graeme: "You put a lot more energy and enthusiasm into it rather than a controlled getting the notes right. That's definitely true for me."

The thing about the Verlaines, the three-piece line-up and all, is that it seems very much a band under control — as opposed to some bands that get away on the people in them ...

"Well I think we've got three people who are absolutely dedicated to *not* letting it get away on us," Jane affirms.

"We've got one person with absolutely no choice!" laughs Graeme.

"But I mean I don't think there's any conflict in the reasons people are doing it," she continues. "They're doing it because of certain criteria, because it's good fun doing it, and we all realise that if we play too much then it would stop being good fun."

So you consciously put limits on it?

"It doesn't even have to be very conscious really. It's just feeling that if we've just done a lot of gigs then we won't really feel like doing another one. We won't be too excited about doing it."

Do you practise often?

Graeme: "I've been too busy this year — apart

from the record I haven't had time to do anything really. But next year should be good. I've only got four papers to do, so I should be able to do lots of things. I'll be able to spend two hours a day writing songs, which will be good. I can churn out music nearly any time I like, but I have to sit down and work on lyrics."

So what's planned for next year?

"A lot of practises first. In a way we've been pretty slack. It's taken a lot of work to organise the record I suppose, in terms of actually going up there and doing it, rehearsing it, writing it out, organising it and then doing the organisation for the other end of it has taken most of the time."

Jane: "We've put a lot of hours into business that's not actually involved with playing, organising things. It's taken quite a bit of energy this year."

How do you feel about the non-musical side of the band — would you rather be without it?

"I'd rather it didn't have to be done. But if it has to be done I think I'd rather it was the band that was doing it. I'm pretty wary of situations where bands tend to lose control over what they're doing because they've got someone else deciding things for them. Autonomy is a pretty big point."

"A managerial person would have to be pretty well picked," notes Graeme.

"Yeah, a managerial person would have to be someone who was as much a part of the band and shared exactly the same sort of ideas and principles as Graeme, Robbie and me," Jane agrees.

You seem to get through things pretty well anyway.

"I think we get through things because there's a lot of people in the country that make it really easy to get through things. Like basically it only takes a phone call to Auckland to say we want to come up and do a gig. Having a network of people around the country like that, it just means that basic things in organising are just made so much easier, because there's all those peo-

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Verlaines, 1982, Jane, Graeme, Gregg.

ple on the other end happy and willing and keen to do things for you. And I imagine the same thing happens the other way — people come down here and they don't have any hassles about accommodation and they can borrow gear if they need to."

"It's good on the record side too," Graeme continues. "Roger's working really hard and it's starting to look very organised. It just works both ways, I mean Flying Nun is really working hard at getting everything rolling with the record and Roger says 'Get us some photos, get us this, get us that,' and because Roger's been really motivated we think 'Fuck, better do something.' It's a really good atmosphere at the moment I think."

Music isn't your job at the moment — would you like it to be?

"It depends on what you call a job ..." Jane ventures. "What's a job?"

Well, something that supports you and pays the rent and buys flagons of beer ...

"No, I can't imagine that."

Graeme: "I can imagine the band actually paying us money. We don't earn anything at the moment — it goes into expenses and recording costs. I mean we haven't even got a full set of gear between us yet. When it comes down to it, we've got a lot of things to buy before we get any money, but I can see the day if we manage to stick around for a wee while yet that we could be in a position of getting the occasional bit to help the rent along, just a wee bit, without the thing getting any bigger than it is now."

Jane: "Yeah, the whole thing we were saying before about not thrashing it is very important. And if we can make money without thrashing it then that's wonderful!"

So goes the Verlaines. The very model of the kind of group they are. Robbie Yeats has put a firm end to the band's rotation of drummers and they're set to do the things they want. The trip to England, naturally, is an attractive goal, and has been put a little closer by the Chills getting there and finding encouragement. Graeme thinks maybe it'll have to wait until 1987.

The Verlaines haven't made a bad record yet, but *Hallelujah* is exceptional if only because it's so fulfilled — it does what it sets out to do. But the use of dynamics and "narrative" song structures are part of a sophistication that, in this context, is unique. It's summed up in the closing 'Harry Noryb', a song that speaks, roars, wails and finally whispers an ending.

"It's a bit funny doing a Verlaines interview," I said to Charlie afterwards. "Because the music's pretty eloquent in itself anyway."

"Put that in the story," said Charlie.

**Russell Brown**