

Rising Cramp

A date with Russell Brown

Philosophies fond of circles tend to emphasise the cyclic nature of things by illustrating with little parables from the Universe. One of the most popular is human life, whereby each individual begins his/her span with childhood, grows up, does things, gets old, goes senile and ends her/his existence back where s/he started, in a second childhood. Lux Interior got about halfway to his old age, looked up, and got bounced back to the grubby part of adolescence. How else would you explain it? 'What's Inside a Girl?' indeed. 'Can Your Pussy Do the Dog?' indeed.

Sleazy sex at home with the Cramps is not a new phenomenon of course — recall the panty panting of 'Under the Wires' — and Lux did, after all, declare himself Most Exalted Potentate of Love (anyone who wrote "Well I can show you how to read the book of life/But you can just look at the pictures if you like" would've had my vote anyway). But grubby sex seems to make up the very fodder and tone of the Cramps' last album, *A Date With Elvis*. Wherefrom springs

this newfound passion for passion?

Apparently not from the fans anyway, as they squeeze up to the pub's bar in their jackets and haircuts to look imploringly at the plain, decent bar staff. They look as unhealthy and as assertively dressed as most English youth; English people, apart from the black ones, are not wondrously sexy. The pub is a hundred yards from the Hammersmith Palais where the Cramps are to play their last-but-one English gig. There's an amusing cross-pollination between this pub and the Britannia — which is opposite the Hammersmith Odeon, where, lawdy, Black Sabbath are playing. It's a matter of which exit you take from the tube station and a few at each pub seem to have taken the wrong 'un.

Upon arrival, the foyer of the Palais looks like the concert's already happened. A pile of handbills has been knocked over and scattered across the carpet, along with sundry other litter ... like the people. Inside, an unexciting outfit called the Guana Batz are playing to the faithful and the easily won over. After imploring the audience to give them an encore, the singer rushes back on at the first cries for more, and says: "You just knew we couldn't go without playing another Stray Cats song!" Yeah, right.

They leave, the house lights come up, and the crush for bar and

toilet facilities begins. In the toilet the mirrors are steamed up from the sweaty bodies and the floor is about an inch deep. Holes in shoes may be austerity chic, but don't be surprised if your feet mutate ...

The house lights are still up when the Cramps shamble onstage. First out is the bass player for this tour, a teenage punkette with a pink mohawk called Fur. That is, Fur's her name, not the mohawk's. The Cramps have a history of trouble with bass players, so it seems this time they've decided not to have one. Fur's bass playing is extremely rudimentary, and this is at the end of a tour. She seems to thoroughly enjoy herself, however, playing about one beat in four and screwing her nose up in a California punk snarl, chewing gum the whole time.

Nick Knox, the drummer, completes the singularly minimal rhythm section, often providing not much more than a sharp click-track for Fur to play along with. It suits — he's very, very, cool: black hair, black shirt, black trousers, black shoes and black shades. The closest he'll come to a frenzy is disdainfully kicking his drums over at the end of the show.

Which all leaves the instrumental weight of the whole performance squarely on Ivy Rorschach. A lesser guitarist wouldn't cope, but Ivy is no way a lesser guitarist. She makes it all look easy, carries the rhythm and melody, and chews gum at the same time. Like Nick and Fur, she's disdainfully cool.

Lux is not cool, he's hot. See how he stores the microphone in his trousers when he's doing nowt else with it? See the wild look in his eyes? See the things he does with his endlessly tall body? He can sing too. Just goes to show what every-

one's always known — the Cramps are Lux 'n' Ivy.

But as well as being hot, Lux is, well, hot ... he wears only a pair of black leather trousers and his torso shines with sweat. Ivy and Fur glisten over an even greater range of body surface; they're both wearing what amount to glitzy, shiny stage bikinis. Being drinking women, they spill slightly over the sides of their garments — by today's media standards they would be too "fat" to dress so. You try telling Ivy she's fat.

Tribal Rites

By now it's become clear that dressing down is *de rigueur* for the audience as well, and at least a third of the males in the area up to 20 yards back from the stage have removed their shirts. They too glisten, and slide off each other when they make contact.

And boy, do they make contact. The area in front of the stage is relatively safe, the usual heaving crush, but to get there a gauntlet has to be run. It's not so much slamming as pounding, dancing with your elbows to preserve your kidneys, but there's something very rockabilly about it. The teddy boy is alive and well in England, and the rockabilly enthusiast's passion for ritual comes through clearly in the dance.

There must be rituals that are to do with simply going to see the Cramps for some of their fans. Not only are many people going to both nights at the Palais, but they've seen the other London gigs and perhaps even a couple in the provinces, or taken a trip to the continent. The enthusiasts range in look from evil-eyed psychobillies to beefy, boisterous flat-tops. The Cramps have always been far, far more popular in

Europe than at home.

The repertoire for the show is drawn mainly from late period Cramps, the last album and the live *Smell of Female*. It and Lux get progressively more frenzied; well, Lux more than the music. It may be a show, but Lux Interior looks genuinely possessed towards the end. Not so much flaunting his sex as having it come out in spots all over him ...

... actually, Lux has spots on his booty. This much was revealing when he hitched down the back of his pants before climbing up to lie on the PA stack to sing 'You Got Good Taste'. He lay up there for a while, sucking the mike, banging it on the speakers, making it feed back ... while an anxious roadie fed him the lead.

By the end of the set he was sprawled on the stage on his own, bashing one of the cymbals. Nick had kicked over. After a wee while, Nick came back and helped Lux off. They came back for an encore, of course, a lolloping country song ... and then left again. That all? It seemed a bit of a cheat at the time, but in hindsight they had been playing a long time and it was very hot and they were possibly completely knackered. Lux certainly looked it. Still, one did get the feeling the second encore woulda bin the killer.

So there y'go ... the story goes that Lux 'n' Ivy once took mescaline every day for a whole year, so maybe that's where it all comes from; Lux Interior as the next evolutionary step on from Aldous Huxley, anyone? You could even picture this sex bit as the Dr Cramp method of forestalling middle-age sexual entropy. Not as young as you used to be? Oppressed by the media portrayal of sex being something that happens

between trim, shiny people with high cheekbones who don't have to take off their Swatches to fuck? You still got it! Lux 'n' Ivy do!

In a world where music sounds "great" (eg: bilge like Go West or Duran) and sex looks "great" (eg: the vicious designer wet-dreams of movie-of-the-moment, the unexciting 9 1/2 Weeks, the Cramps play rock 'n' roll and talk dirty.

And whatever else they may be at any point in time, ze Cramps is purty smart.

Russell Brown

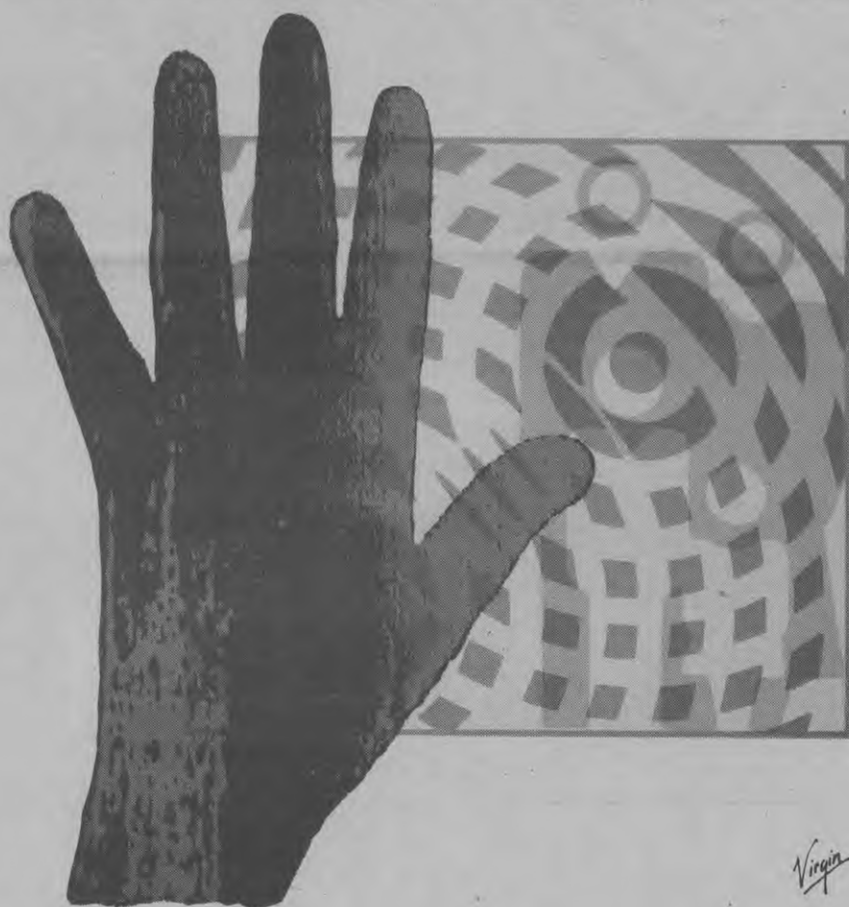
The Weekend Starts Here

Missing Ready to Roll and Radio With Pictures? Well, some form of relief is on its way later this month when Television New Zealand's new music show gets under way.

True Colours begins its 10-week season on Friday June 20, in the Shazam slot of 6.30pm. With negotiations over video payments still at stalemate, now True Colours has been scheduled, RTR and RWP won't be returning until it finishes.

However the video war has had a spinoff effect that could be beneficial to local music. For the bulk of True Colours will consist of New Zealand bands filmed performing live in the television studio. Some videos will be shown, of local bands whose music is more suited to that format than live performance.

Also in True Colours will be music interviews, archival clips of local bands, and as a special feature, news hot from the newsdesk of Shake! magazine. True Colours will be fronted by Phillipa Dann and Dick Driver.



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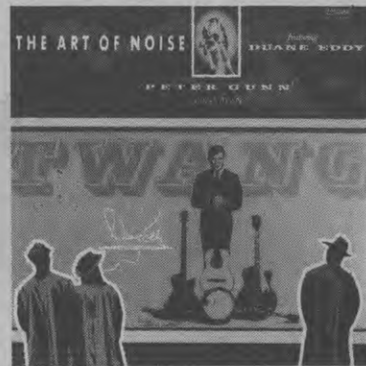
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