

Minds Over Matter

Scotland Calling

Somebody once said that like the seasons, rock and roll is a cyclical phenomenon regenerating from reaction and counter-reaction, stasis then action, galvanised by the likes of Presley, the Beatles and the Sex Pistols. Within this convenient little theory, Simple Minds, over the last couple of years, have been cast as leaders in a return to a stadium rock mentality typified in the 70s by bands like Pink Floyd and Genesis:

"Our album's been in the chart for nearly a year and we did two shows at Milton Keynes and so it's easy for us to be pigeon-holed alongside those massive stadium rock bands of the 70s. I think we have it in control and I see it as a challenge to play those places. We're not afraid to play them and I don't see why we should pay for mistakes made by bands in the 70s.

"People say to me that they preferred us when we played in small clubs. I think that's complete nonsense because it may have felt intimate, but the band at that stage couldn't communicate with anyone. Whereas we can get to the back of those places because the music is big enough."



The current line-up (L-R) Michael MacNeil, Mel Gaynor, Jim Kerr, John Griblin, Charles Burchill.

From Soul to Dynamics

New Gold Dream was an album made by innocents; its dewey-eyed beauty and romantic optimism were perhaps too precious to be anything other than temporary. 'Waterfront' purged the

band of that phase and provided the transition into bigger but not necessarily better things:

"We loved *New Gold Dream*," continued Jim Kerr from the band's rehearsal house just outside London, "and we saw it as being complete and so there was no point in trying to hold on to it. I remember mixing it and thinking that we'd arrived as a band in that we finally had the balance right between our influences and our own vision. We then went and played live and at that time we were doing a lot of open air festivals and stadiums and when we went into the studio the first thing we wrote was 'Waterfront' which had the dynamics to fill any stadium. We never tried to do that, it just happened."

With the release of 'Waterfront' the good press that Simple Minds had enjoyed came to an end:

"Yeah it was panned by a lot of people and the bad press we've been getting is the result of sheer laziness and elitism. Our music has changed and if we didn't change we'd get panned but I think the heart and soul of the music hasn't changed. I think it's the technicalities of the band that are getting rubbished rather than the band itself. In the last few months people who'd written us off have said how good it was live but I haven't seen it in print much."

Before Simple Minds recorded the follow-up to *New Gold Dream*, they played a few dates with U2, whose influence was to become apparent on *Sparkle in the Rain*:

"We were very impressed by their courage and we did have a lot in common apart from the Celtic blood, we did share a vision. Although they came out and named their gods and Simple Minds have never done that, and they're much more outwardly political. When we met I think we did influence each other."

"I was with Bono and Edge very recently and Edge kept saying that when they were making *The Unforgettable Fire* they wanted to have their own *New Gold Dream*. That hasn't been picked up as being obvious. They were a huge influence on us but mainly through their sense of destiny. They weren't afraid to take on what was on their plate and at the time Simple Minds needed to see that, as we'd never felt part of a movement."

When *Sparkle in the Rain* came out its up-front big sound smack gave you the impression that here indeed was a gigantic record. But the sound only disguised the fact that the songs, for the most part, weren't up to scratch:

"I kick myself when I hear it because when it first came out I didn't want to hear it at all, I was very disappointed. I thought we'd sold our soul to dynamics instead of writing good songs. When I hear it now I hear great ideas that we should've taken further down the road."

Critics who wasted 'Waterfront' went on to well and truly rumble *Sparkle in the Rain* and failed to notice that there were a couple of really gorgeous songs in 'Moon, Cry Like a Baby' and 'White Hot Day':

"Yeah, 'Cry Like a Baby' was the dark horse of the album. I was travelling in the car the other day and 'Waterfront' came on and I could see what we were trying to do there — we just wanted to do a song that cut through, and it didn't half cut through when it came on the radio. It sounded like the engine of a huge boat. So I'm really proud of that one. 'Easter, Easter' is a great song and 'White Hot Day' is good. But I guess that's it."

"But we had to do the album that way. We worked with Steve Lillywhite and that added to the U2 thing. He was a great guy to work with but he was more the 'you're a great band, you've got a great vibe, so go and put it down' sort of producer. So what we put down was the vibe of the band as opposed to the songs."

At about this time bassist Derek Forbes left the band:

"I guess the truth has to come out now, he didn't leave, he was asked to leave, which was a big crisis for the band as you don't dismiss people just like that. We'd been having problems with Derek for about two years but because we were such mates we'd put it off hoping things would get better. But we drifted apart and his heart wasn't in it and everything began to go, his politics went weird as well and he got involved with a lady and that turned his head. And we were sitting there with songs and no bass lines. Anyway we were sitting in the place we're in now, which is owned by our current bass player, John Griblin, and we were waiting on Derek and John was in the back room with his bass but without a job. It's funny how situations somehow suggest themselves. We had known John for years when he played for Gabriel plus he's a Scotsman so he understands the sense of humour."

"It was tough, but a year's gone by and we're so much more of a band with John as he can make the band move in so many different ways, whereas Derek had only one way."

When Simple Minds first played here in 1982 they did two nights at Mainstreet. Virgin Records put on a reception for the band at their pad in Parnell. Derek Forbes was late for the reception as he'd got the better of a bottle of bourbon after the show the night before:

"(Laughs) He's a bastard, he really is. The saddest thing is he's such a brilliant laugh, what a comedian, totally embarrassing as well. We needed someone like that especially in the early days when we were more precious. Derek was always good for breaking that. He's playing for Propaganda now so he's in good shape."

Once Upon a Time in the West

From a bank manager's point of view, last year was Simple Minds' most profitable; 'Don't You (Forget About Me)' and the unjustly maligned

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Our Leading Pink Sparkling

