

Hull Breaks Loose

The Notorious Bird Brothers

"It's nice to get into the charts, feeling that we're talking to people that outspoken political bands don't," explains Housemartins' bassist Norman Cook on the line from Hull.

Originally formed by vocalist Paul Heaton and guitarist Steve Cullimore when they were scuttling around Hull doing benefit gigs for the miners' strike, the Housemartins are now a household property;

a hit album *London O, Hull 4*, three hit singles, and the *Caravan of Love* EP currently doing brisk business here, has ensured that much.

This success has happened via their boys-next-door image and



their dislike of London and fashion. "We're anti fashion, if fashion means dressing up like a Martian. We care about what we wear, but ours is sort-of street fashion, not pop star fashion — we don't like it being the centre of fashion or the centre of the music business — we don't think it's very healthy. There's a bit of rivalry between us and London."

But your press from London-based magazines has been good?

"Yeah, I think they like it. They like championing Northern bands. I think there's a bit of inverse snobbery. They like covering bands from Liverpool and Manchester."

been the track on the album people either love or hate. I think more people like it than hate it."

There are elements of black humour in the Housemartins' music, with lines like "Don't shoot someone tomorrow that you can shoot today," and the tongue-in-cheek stuff on the back of the inner sleeve of *London O, Hull 4*: "Don't try gatecrashing a party of bankers — burn the house down." Does that humour often get misinterpreted?

"It does sometimes, especially in countries where they don't speak English. For example, the 'Don't shoot someone tomorrow' line, to the Germans sounded like a call to arms, and trying to persuade them we were pacifists was a bit difficult."

Sheep Dogma

The album *London O, Hull 4* was a Northern blend of politics and pop, sometimes likeable, sometimes too likeable, too lightweight. But songs 'Think for a Minute' and 'Sheep' emerge as the best blends of politics and pop:

"'Think for a Minute' was written for a CND album, so it was about nuclear weapons, but it didn't turn out like that. All the lyrics have a certain amount of politics in them."

"'Sheep' was inspired when we were first asked to go to London to see record companies. Just seeing people getting off and on tube trains at the underground reminded Paul of herds of sheep, especially with the way they got off and on with their heads down."

In political songs is it important to avoid being explicit?

"I don't know about being too explicit, but it's important not to be too dogmatic — saying you must do this or that. We don't like telling people what to do, we like raising questions and getting people to work out the answers. I like Paul Weller but I'm often put off when he says things like, 'You don't have to take this crap,' because a lot of people do. A lot of people haven't got any choice, and I don't think it's right shouting at them or blaming them. He's got nothing to do with the working class, he's a pop star. He doesn't have to live that sort of life."

Most of *London O, Hull 4* is relatively unsuccessful, for example the cumbersome gospel of 'Lean on Me' didn't seem to work so well:

"D'y think so? We made that up as we went along. We got a pianist in and we said, play some gospelly stuff, and he started. And Paul just made some words up over the top. For us it was a little bit of magic, hearing it just come straight out. It's

Gospel Truth

And so to the *Caravan of Love* EP, a record that has seen the band labelled as Christians.

"None of us are Christians — that's been blown out of proportion by the press and maybe by our record company. None of us go to church, we're just interested in religion, and that interest comes from gospel music. The 'Caravan of Love' song is something we've been doing live for the last two years, and it's been a favourite. We'd put two fast singles out and one slow one, so we thought we'd put out an acapella song."

On the EP is a song 'Heaven Help Us,' an acapella that tails off into a gospel send-up sermonette which ends up being embarrassing:

"The version that was on it was from a John Peel session, and we just added the sermon to the session, which we sometimes did live. When we put that on the EP we forgot that the sermon was on at the end and we should have cut that off. Thinking about it, it probably doesn't stand the test of time on record, it was a bit silly. The sermon goes down well live. It respectfully takes the mickey out of the gospel thing."

So far the Housemartins have covered politics, pop, religion and acapella — is this a deliberate attempt to avoid categorisation?

"No. Because we don't present journalists with an image on a plate they find it difficult to write about us. In England the fact that we're football fans gets picked up a lot."

The Housemartins have a new single out called 'Five Get Over-excited.' Is it progressive?

"No — we still only know the same four chords."

George Kay

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