

THE CURE

Life began awkwardly for the Cure with the release of a debut single, "Killing An Arab", that was a hit beyond proportion. The Cure was greeted as the answer to everybody's question of where next and pronounced the sound of '79. The band — then Robert Smith, Lol Tolhurst and Michael Dempsey — weren't prepared for such overwhelming attention so quickly. After the release of an LP *Three Imaginary Boys*, the Cure were support on the ill-fated Siouxsie and the Banshees tour last year. Smith, the Cure's guitarist and songwriter, took on the role of Banshee's guitarist — playing two sets a night — after John McKay and Kenny Morris left Siouxsie stranded part-way through the tour.

Following two more singles that sounded good but never saw the charts ("Boys Don't Cry" and "Jumping Someone Else's Train" — a sharp attack on jumping bandwagons) the Cure readied for "A Forest". With bassist Michael Dempsey out of the group new members Simon Gallup (bass) and Matthew Hartley (keyboards) helped come up with a near-miss in the singles chart that peaked around 30. "A Forest" was surprising hit material in contrast to the likes of Whitesnake, the Nolans and the Beat who then held chart places. The second LP *Seventeen Seconds* had *Sounds* (in its usual off-the-mark analysis) calling the Cure "the new Genesis".

I spoke to Robert Smith and Lol Tolhurst in Fiction Record's offices in Willesden Greens when the Cure were midway through their first headlining English tour, a tour that has since taken them on to Europe and the US with concerts in Australia and New Zealand this month.

I began by asking what had prompted the band's line-up change, and whether it had been made because of a better-realised conception of how the Cure should sound.

Robert: "We knew the line-up was going to change for quite a few months before we planned this tour — it was a personal thing more than anything else. We had been looking to add another instrument before the Banshees' tour but we never came across anybody we liked enough to include in the band. When the Banshees tour ended it seemed like a good time to start again."

Were you auditioning keyboard players specifically?

Robert: "It could have been any instrument. We were more interested in the person and the ideas that person had. It might have been a violin, sax or a flute. As it was I think keyboards was the best choice because there's a lot more you can do with synthesisers to add to the sound."

Were the songs on the second album written around that same time?

Robert: "Yeah, they were all written within about two weeks and recorded in the following two weeks."

Lol: "Just around Christmas."

Didn't you think it unusual to be recording a new album so soon after Matthew and Simon had joined the band?

Robert: "The songs relied a lot on the emotion involved. At the time the songs had just been written and it seemed right rather than waiting and playing them in because they might have got worse. They might have become too refined."

"It was better to write the songs and go in and record them. I think it worked really well. It was really spontaneous — most of the tracks are first takes. It took only five days recording and five days mixing, that was it."

Did you write some of the songs in the studio?

Robert: "Some of the lyrics for the second album were. We had pages and pages of lyrics grouped under different titles kept in a big box. With 'A Forest' there was about five or six different interpretations of what the song should be about. When we'd recorded the backing track we sat up all night and worked out a set of lyrics that would fit the music best. I think it worked really well. There's a story running through the album — little phrases in each of the songs that relate to others."

How did you arrive at the cover for the new LP?

Robert: "I usually take photos on tour just for something to do. I dropped the camera while taking one of them. It was outside and all it caught was a tree-line and the trees formed themselves into the shape of a church. I thought it was a good idea to use something like that — a blurred image."

"It's trying not to give people a pre-conceived idea of what the music's going to be like. I don't know whether it works or not yet — I like it..."

Do you think you can avoid pre-conceptions? If you don't supply your own image isn't the music press going to give you one?

Robert: "They try. That keeps things alive — they seem to take great delight in trying to pin a label on us. It doesn't worry me really. It's better than if we had four mug shots staring out from an album cover and people immediately thought 'a punk band' or 'a new wave band'. People who might think they won't like that type of music won't even bother to listen to it. A lot of people who come to see us aren't people you'd expect to come and see a 'new wave' group. You get young people at the front and the audience seems to get older and older to the back, till at the back in the shadows you see aging hippies. But it's all right, it's a cross-section."

I had wanted to ask you who you regarded as your audience. Is it in fact a cross-section of people?

Robert: "Well personally I just write the songs and play as if I was in the audience. I don't think about anything else. I judge whether

we're playing badly or well not on what I'm actually doing on stage but whether it was in the audience I'd like what we're doing. We could be trying to say something different and it could be going wrong. But if I was in the audience I'd appreciate somebody trying to do something different on stage rather than playing safe."

So which bands do you go and see?

Robert: "I don't get the chance to go and see anyone."

What about before the Cure? Which bands were you seeing then?

Robert: "Oh, very hip people."

Don't you think that by trying to avoid preconceptions — the blurred images and so on — you'll be thought art school-types?

Robert: "Well none of us have ever been near an art school."

But don't you think it's an art school approach?

Robert: "I know what you mean ... I don't think we're called that anymore though. We didn't consciously try not to have an image, the same as we don't now. Before we brought out "Killing An Arab", we'd only been doing one or two gigs a week in local clubs — whoever would have us play. Suddenly that came out — we had front covers everywhere, 'single of the week' and things and within about a month we were going on a British tour. We weren't prepared for any of that. We hadn't thought — we should have done actually — but we just couldn't envisage the whole rock 'n' roll process of working out your image before setting off to crack the market and all that. It just seemed really stupid — until we got involved with it we didn't realise we had to work that way."

"With the change of line-up and the new stuff people have more of an idea of what we're doing. But we couldn't give ourselves an image if we tried because we change so much very quickly."

Lol: "It also makes it more exciting to be changing rather than having one static idea of 'this is our goal and these our aims'."

But wouldn't you say image can be a good thing when the band has a clear idea of what they are and what they're doing?

Robert: "We have but it's just not definable. I know exactly what the Cure is about but I couldn't define it in a concrete image for a photo or an article."

"It's very nice if you've got a strong image like Siouxsie and the Banshees. You couldn't do it with us — it would be manufactured. It's impossible for us to keep up a facade of looking a certain way. Some days I wear a suit. Some days I feel like today and I wear really horrible clothes. That's the same as everybody. Everybody has moods and some days you feel bloody awful and so you dress accordingly. To actually force yourself into the position where you can't be seen in public without a pair of shades on or something like that is really absurd."

"There's a lot of bands that haven't got an image and I don't think we should be singled out as the band that goes out of its way not to have an image."

You say there are a lot of bands who don't have an image, but they're bands that people know something about. If they haven't seen or heard them then it's through others writing and describing what that band is about. If you hope not to have an image aren't you liable to be misinterpreted?

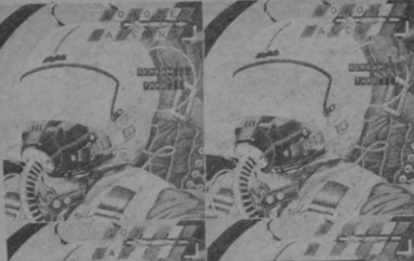
Robert: "I'm not so naive as to think that it's wrong for journalists to put bands into categories. If you do you start questioning the whole point of writing reviews anyway. The whole thing is totally subjective. Whether you like a group or you don't, whether you think a group sounds like another group — it's entirely up to the person writing it. But sometimes a label sticks and that's what we're trying to avoid."

"I don't care if you draw comparisons between us and Frank Sinatra or the Dooleys. It really doesn't worry me. But if we got stuck with that ... well, we've been lucky enough to have avoided anything like that so far."

Well perhaps just choosing a band name is choosing an image — when did you decide to call yourselves the Cure and what made you choose the name?

Robert: "There were lots of names we could have called ourselves. The Cure came from a line in one of our songs. It seemed a refreshing sort of a name."

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Jo Jo Zep & the Falcons Competition

WIN! AUTOGRAPHED "SCREAMING TARGETS"

The first three correct entries will win Autographed copies of Jo Jo Zep and the Falcons' *Screaming Targets* album and the following seven correct entries will win a copy of their new single "Shape I'm In" (with new "So Young" and "Shape I'm In" dub on flip). All you have to do is answer the following questions and post your entry into *Rip It Up*, PO Box 5689, Auckland 1, by August 3 (the day we open the entries).

1. What venue will JJZ & the Falcons play in Auckland?
2. Name the JJZ & Fs song that both Elvis Costello (not released yet) and Frankie Miller have recorded?
3. Name the first single released from *Screaming Targets*?
4. What is your name and address?

