

ABSOLUTE MADNESS

Chris Foreman Interviewed by George Kay

When the 2 Tone ska development took place in 1979 the Specials and Selecter offered the socially concerned option while Madness presented the lighter side of reggae in a self-proclaimed 'nutty' packaging that obscured the band's more serious intentions. With a row of endearing singles including their tribute to Prince Buster, 'The Prince'

and the consistent excellence of 'My Girl', 'Baggy Trousers' and 'Embarrassment' through 1980, Madness have effortlessly outstripped the waning successes of their former 2 Tone bloodbrothers. Only The Beat, of the ska school, have come close to Madness's recent commercial and artistic form.

Roots

The band's guitarist Chris Foreman (co-writer of 'In the Middle of the Night' and 'Baggy Trousers', to name but two) had taken time out from a film the band are making to give a phone interview. The film seemed a good place to start:

"It's a feature film about ourselves and it's going very well except that our director Dave Robinson fell off a ladder and hurt his ankle. We're about two-thirds of the way through. It's quite enjoyable but it's very hard work."

The band in its present format came into existence in September 1978, and contrary to (my) expectations they weren't prepared to die for ska:

"I'm the oldest, I'm 24 right? And I can just about remember it. We can all remember reggae coz it had quite a lot of hits over here with people like Desmond Dekker and we all liked that. When we first started the group we used to learn the usual rock'n'roll songs coz we hardly had any of our own and reggae as well. When we started playing gigs we had more of our own songs and we dropped the rock'n'roll ones coz everybody does them and they were a bit corny. We kept the reggae ones coz hardly anyone else did them and a lot of people liked them. The only thing we did with ska was just use the rhythm and off-beat, mainly what I played and the bass and the keyboards. We never used to play it like the original ska records."

2 Tone

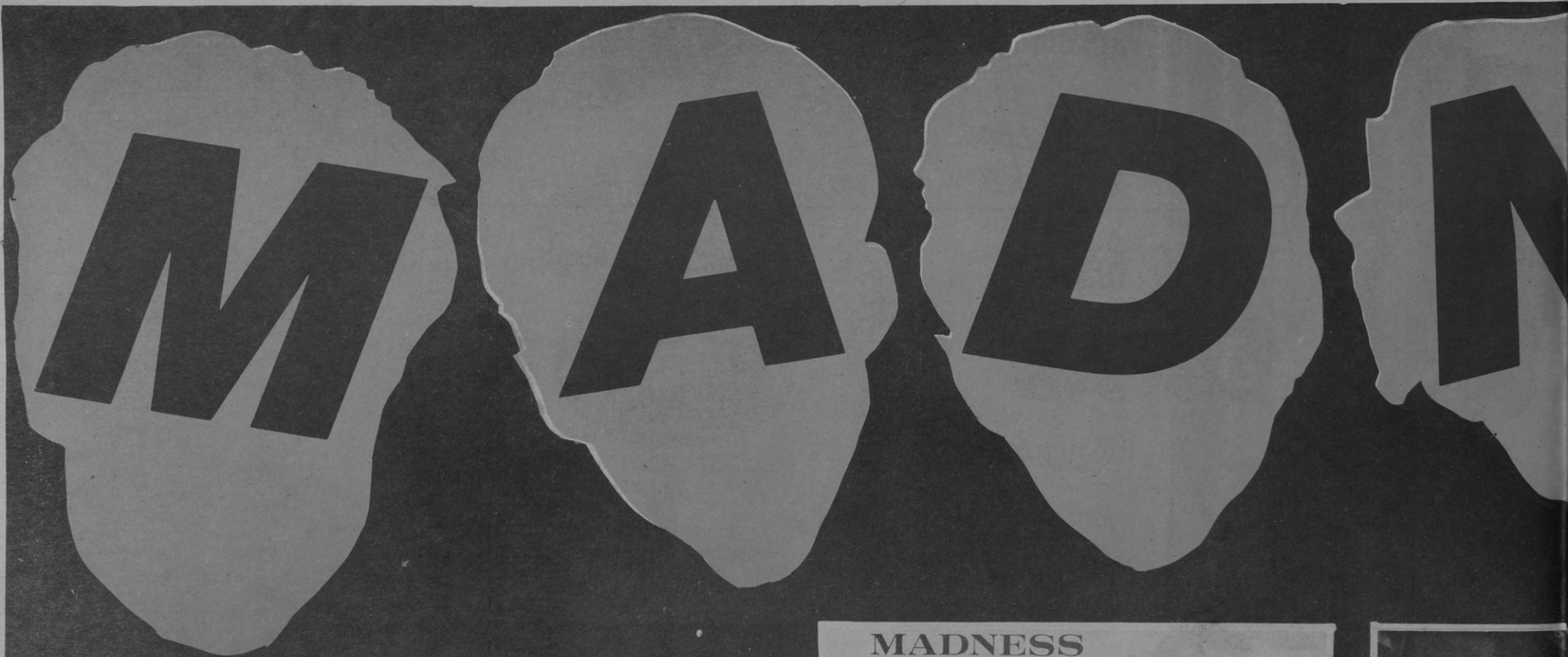
Prior to the Specials setting up the 2 Tone label Madness struck up a friendship with Jerry Dammers. When the label was under way Dammers contacted the band and they released their first single, saxophone player Lee Thompson's 'The Prince', on 2 Tone. Last year the Selecter had a bust-up with the label because they felt the whole ska business was getting out of hand. So why did Madness record only one single on the label?

"We only signed to do that one single and at the time 2 Tone couldn't make albums and we wanted to make an album quick and at this time Stiff were interested in us so we went to them. There wasn't any big break-up or anything like that but it was quite good to get out of that anyway as it was getting lumped together as one big thing."

But surely the band must owe something to the Specials for starting the ball rolling as it were?

"Well I like to think we would've made it anyway but they obviously helped. We were very lucky to be in the right place at the right time. That first single on 2 Tone helped, they just happened to come along and we were the first group to go on it."

'The Prince', chartwise, peaked at number 16 which is indeed promising for a first



One Step Beyond

MADNESS



ONE STEP BEYOND..



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