

The Jam occupy an enviable position in British music. Not only have they survived the punk boom, they've surpassed it. With a string of hit singles, including three number ones, and a brace of never-less-than-excellent, and (in at least two cases) outstanding albums, they're currently at a creative peak and show no signs of letting up.

I'm running late for my appointment with Paul Weller and Bruce Foxton. It's an uncharacteristically warm day in London, and I get lost in the garishness and noise of Soho, strolling heedless of the time through Carnaby St, with its very touristy atmosphere and the happy brashness of the Berwick St food stalls.

A frantic tube ride over to Bond St and a breathless dash to Polydor Records, where Weller and Foxton have been waiting patiently. Profuse apologies all round, and a brisk walk to the nearest watering hole for a chat and an ale before that peculiar British institution of 3pm closing.

Weller and Foxton only draw occasional glances of recognition as they wend their way through the shopping crowds. No eager autograph hunters, not even a nudge or a pointed finger. Britons respect each other's privacy, and are too well-mannered for such gestures.

*When I'm in the crowd, I don't see anything
My mind goes a blank, in the humid sunshine
And everyone seems just like me
They struggle hard to set themselves free ...
(In The Crowd)*

A bar packed with three o'clock swillers, all conversations fortissimo. Lagers all round, except for Weller who drinks shandy. A thoughtful man of moderate habits and appearance, roughly 24 years old, he's not given to extravagant statements or actions. Often, only his lyrics betray the depth of his feelings. He has a matter-of-fact outlook, always remaining aloof from the to-hell-with-everything attitudes that typified the late 70's. A nonconformist in his own way, he chooses his own directions, but never flaunts them or forces them on others perhaps a major reason why he rose where others —.

Foxton is affable and witty, and probably the prankster of the band. He makes a good foil for Weller in his more serious moments.

"We don't want to get tied down to being just a singles band or an albums band."

At the time of talking, the Jam had just recorded a new single, 'Funeral Pyre', and were busy mixing it. The B-side is the old Who song, 'Disguises'. It was due for British release on the 22nd of last month. Is it vital to keep pushing them out?

"Yeah, but we want to improve on the quality as well," says Weller. "In the last couple of years, people have started taking singles a bit more seriously again, instead of just using them to push an album, so it's vital for us to do it really well."

Did you see yourselves as primarily a singles band when you started out?

"No, it's not just that. We don't want to get tied down to being just a singles band or an albums band, we believe you've got to be able to do both. But the singles are important, put it that way."

John Lennon once said that an LP was just a collection of singles. Could that approach ever work for the Jam?

"Oh yeah. Any of the best LPs are always made, I think, with that in mind. If you could devote as much time to every track as you do to one single, you'd have a brilliant LP. We try and work to that idea sometimes, but it gets a bit difficult. Sometimes songs are specifically album tracks, but it would be good to be able to work in that frame of mind."

Having three consecutive number ones was a big kick, but does it also frighten you?

"It's a little bit frightening, because anything less than a number one after that is going to seem a bit of a let-down. That's the only thing that worries me. I mean, prior to the number ones, our singles always got into the top 30, so that in itself is really good. It's hard to say if the next one is as good, or will make it, because if it only gets to number ten or nine or something, it's going to be a bit disappointing. But in fact, it's still really good, anyway, to get anywhere in the charts."

'Start' drew criticism for its close resemblance to the Beatles' 'Taxman'. Weller readily admits the influence, but makes no apology.

"We were always conscious of nicking stuff anyway, all types of music. It's just that at that time it was the Beatles. I don't see why people should get so up about it, because music is there to use, anyway."

'Funeral Pyre' is not a great advance on its predecessors, which is not to demean it one iota. But it's unmistakably a

PAUL WELLER & BRUCE FOXTON INTERVIEWED BY DUNCAN CAMPBELL

JAM

Jam single, and Weller would have liked to see more signs of progress.

"It's a lot more percussive, a lot more rhythmic, and it's a lot stronger than the other stuff, but I don't know if it's that radically different. Hopefully, the next one will be. It's very difficult when you've been recording for four years and you get a 'Jam Sound', like any band gets an established sound after recording for a time."

But it is important to have an identity.

"Yeah, it's good up to a certain point, but it depends how long you carry it on for. It can get very boring. It starts getting really safe, and you know the reason why you're going to do it is because everyone is going to accept it. That's why we always try and move on."

"Half our show is atmosphere, and you can't capture that on record."

Has the basic three-piece format become at all restrictive?

"No, on the contrary. We always think about different possibilities, anyway. That was especially so on *Sound Affects*. The instrumentation there is a lot sparser than it was before. We try to spread it out a bit more, and we're probably going to work in that area for a while, and see what we can do with that. We're trying to find a way to keep progressing, while trying to simplify it more than we've done in the past."

When you're recording, do you think about whether you can reproduce what you've done on stage?

"That's what we tried to do with *Sound Affects*, because *Setting Sons* was getting really complicated. There was a lot of overdubs and strange, complicated arrangements. With *Sound Affects* we tried to keep the live sound in mind, to do the songs as we do them on stage. We're probably going to try and work like that in future."

Setting Sons created real problems on stage, trying to recreate the heavy atmosphere of songs like 'Little Boy Soldiers' and 'Private Hell'. It took 18 months on the road to make such material manageable live.

"The majority of the set is really a lot stronger now," says Foxton. "Due to circumstances, you know. Something may come through all right in the studio, but it actually becomes much better when we go out on the road and play it in. That's the main thing we've had trouble with up till now anyway, writing the material and playing it before we record it."

So ideally, do you like to break new material in with live performances before recording it?

"That's what we like to do," says Weller, "but it gets a bit difficult because we're sort of pushed to actually write stuff in the studio and we often don't get a chance to air it first."

Part of the Jam's desire to keep progressing is their constant updating of their stage sets. New material is confidently substituted for old, something the fans have come to expect. The only survivor from the first two albums is 'This Is The Modern World'.

"We don't worry about playing the old album stuff too much, we're more interested in playing the new stuff," Weller says. "Otherwise it gets like just trotting out the greatest hits, which is really boring. We always try and update it."

"A couple of years ago there was a lot of moaning that we weren't playing stuff off the first two LP's. But over the last few tours, like you said, they've come to expect that they aren't going to hear the old stuff, and they're going to hear something new."

Carbon copies of the recorded sound are also out. The songs evolve in their own way when played live. Newer titles like 'Set The House Ablaze' and 'Pretty Green' have already been rearranged. But don't expect a Jam live album.

"I can't see the point in it, really," says Weller. "Because half our show is atmosphere, and you can't capture that on record."

"It's really something to put out when you're long gone," Foxton adds. "While we're still writing good songs and coming up with good material, we don't want to release a live album. It's sort of expected of every band, after a

certain number of albums, 'Oh, you must release a live album sometime'."

Weller: "Mostly, bands are into the technical side of it, people want *that* guitar solo captured forever, and all that shite."

Foxton: "It's the same as the policy of releasing three or four singles off an album to tide you over until you come up with something else. Ideally, we try to work one album, one single."

"From day to day, we have different ideas on how we want to sound."

Of course, the Jam have also recorded a lot of songs purely for single release. 'Funeral Pyre' will not appear on a future album. In fact, Weller thinks there probably won't be another LP this year, just singles and maybe an EP of old favourites. But no more soul covers, like 'Heatwave', Weller says they "didn't sound right."

A more productive band would be hard to find these days. Five albums in four years, and perhaps thirty or forty singles. Weller has lost count. Is there any sign of his output slowing down?

"Well, I go through periods, anyway. I've stopped worrying about it now. It used to worry me a lot, a year or a couple of years ago. I'd go through spells where I didn't write for six months. But it doesn't bother me now, because I know that in the end it'll come out. Whenever I feel like writing I write anyway, so it doesn't really bother me. I don't like writing to a schedule, that's the only thing that bugs me."

Foxton: "After *Modern World* and *All Mod Cons*, there was a lot of panicking, trying to write for writing's sake, and it turned out a lot of old crap. We dismissed half a dozen songs, maybe got a couple of good ideas out of ten. It's just not worth forcing it."

Foxton has contributed more in the songwriting field recently, but says it's diminished at the moment. He only writes at random, when something occurs to him.

The sound of the Jam is well established now, but it's a two-edged sword. While it's a source of pride to be readily identifiable, there's the danger of being stereotyped, something the group tries to avoid.

"There's always that underlying sound going through whatever we do, however different we think it is. We can't get away from that," says Weller.

"We always try to aim for something different, but it somehow ends up the opposite," says Foxton. "You get a certain work plan, you've got a certain sound ... if any of us went and cut a solo album, it would still probably sound at least a bit like the Jam."

So you've no plans for solo albums? Both shake their heads.

"It's like Bruce said," says Paul. "If I sat down and thought about a solo LP, the only ideas I'd have in mind would be like our sound anyway, so what's the point?"

Talking of changes and departures in sound, I mention the acoustic ballad 'English Rose' from *All Mod Cons*, an unashamedly romantic song, and quite untypical. Could that approach have been taken further? Apparently not, according to Paul:

"It was sort of a one-off thing. I wasn't really sure at the time whether we should put it on the LP or not. We had nothing to lose at that time, and the LP was a turning point for us, anyway. We tried all the different ideas we had at the time. It's not necessarily one direction I want to go in, it's just one of those songs. Maybe we'll do another one, maybe we won't."

"That's our whole attitude, really. We don't have any hard-core policies on how we should sound. I mean, on *Sound Affects* we really wanted to capture that live sound, but it changes, from day to day we have different ideas on how we want to sound."

The Jam Sound is essentially British, and four American tours have made little impact. Weller considers they were a

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10



**MUCHMORE
ASSOCIATES**

**43A VICTORIA ST, AUCKLAND NZ
PHONE 796-272 796-414, PO BOX 6537**

Exclusively Representing

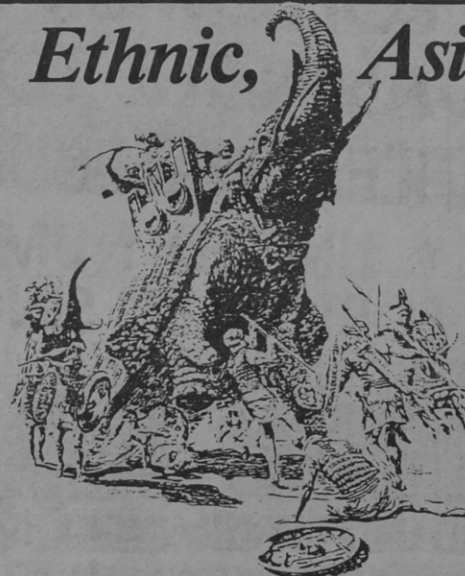
**THE FURYS
NEW ENTRANTS
VALENTINOS**

By Arrangement with
RESULT RECORDS

**The JUKES The REELS
The MOTIVATORS**

Coming In August
SAM RIVERS + 3

Ethnic, Asian & Oriental



**NARNIA
probably has it!**

- ★ Footwear
- ★ Giftware
- ★ Asian Handcrafts
- ★ Handknotted Carpets
- ★ Pipes & Roach Clips
- ★ Cigarette Papers
- ★ Caneware
- ★ Incense
- ★ Jewellery
- ★ Thai Silk
- ★ Textiles
- ★ Clothing



**His Majesty's Arcade
Queen St, Auckland. Ph 34-970**

**154 Willis St, Wellington
(opp Wgtn Settlement) ph 849-149, 846-634**

**The Merchant
Adventurers
of Narnia Ltd**