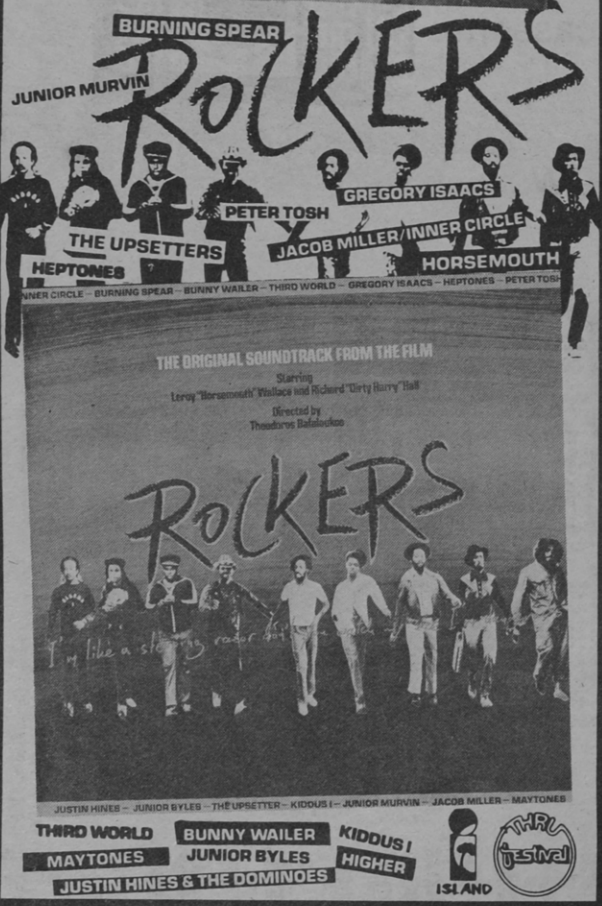


NEW REGGAE

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Psychedelic Furs Talk

The Psychedelic Furs would probably resent being called a cult band, but when they started in 1976, amid Punkophilia, that's undoubtedly what they were, going very much against the tide.

The Furs were playing lengthy sets with 15-minute songs — definitely non-U at the time. Punk clubs were the only venues available to them, and they were often soundly bottled. But the Furs steadily built up a following and started filling some of London's better spots.

As the name suggests, psychedelic bands from the 60s were their strongest influence, though vocalist Richard Butler and horns/keyboards player Duncan Kilburn both confess a liking for Dylan in his *Highway 61-Blonde On Blonde* period.

CBS signed them in October 1979, and their debut single, 'We Love You/Pulse', was released the following month. In February 1980 came their second single, the classic 'Sister Europe', often remembered for its very Bowie-esque vocals and sax.

"When we did it in the studio, I sang it really harsh, like most of our other songs," Butler recalls. "And Steve Lillywhite, the producer, said 'Why don't you sing it a bit softer?' So I did. I wasn't trying to sound like anybody else, especially David Bowie, but a lot of people have said since that it sounds like him. Listening to it now, I have to admit they're right, but it wasn't intentional."

The Furs' first album was out at the end of February 1980. The band at that time was a great cacophony of sound, leading to charges of self-indulgence and lack of discipline. Asked how competent the Furs were individually when they started out, Butler mumbles "absolutely useless."

"John (Ashton, guitarist) and Vince (Ely, drummer) were both very competent musicians," says Kilburn. "During the time they'd been in other bands, the rest of us had been learning by ourselves."

Kilburn says he picked up the sax because he liked the sound, and admits his playing owes more to emotion than technique.

The first album had also been some three years in evolution, and by the time it came to recording, some of the material was no longer relevant to the band. The new LP, *Talk Talk Talk*, which was completed in four months, gives the Furs much more satisfaction.

"The first album was described as a wall of sound by a lot of people," says Butler, "and I think the new album is more a wall of melody. There's loads of melody going on, whereas before we were playing chords. Now, we're all playing melody at the same time, which still adds up to a massive sound."

Talk Talk Talk has been a long time coming — almost 18 months since its predecessor. Touring commitments in America kept the Furs from writing new material, so *Talk* was a rush job. Yet the Furs are happier with it, since its statements are much more immediate.

Like the Jam, the Furs like the chance to 'play in' their new material, get used to it and make changes, before recording. But the rigours of touring and recording to a schedule do not always permit this.

With *Talk*, they managed to strike a happy balance. Some of the new songs were already in the stage set late last year, and 'Mr Jones' was a late-1980 single. The band took a break from recording *Talk* earlier this year to play two nights at the London Marquee, and give the fans a taste of their new ideas. The reaction was pleasing, though in a different way.

"It's fine to have people dancing and enjoying them-

selves," says Kilburn, "but all you end up with is a pile of bodies. What I enjoyed was seeing people standing still, listening to what we were doing, and really appreciating it."

Lyricaly, the Furs have always been ambiguous. Butler writes the lyrics, and likes to play games with the listeners, letting them draw their own conclusion.

"It's like a collage," he explains. "If you stick any two pictures together, no matter how much at random, people will make a meaning out of it. It happens all the time in art galleries, an artist will do something totally banal, and people will come along and make up meanings."

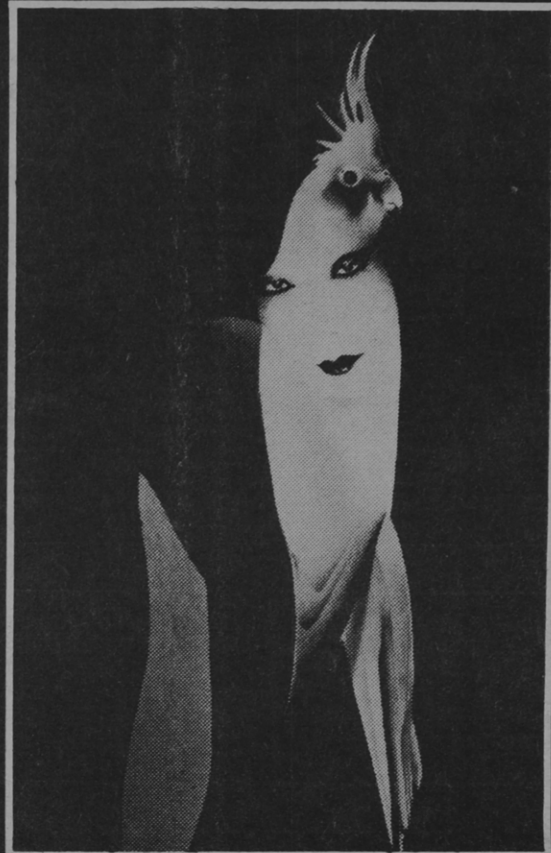
"Mind you, I think the new album is a lot more clear than the first one."

Really? It's kept me guessing. So what's it all about?

"Relationships."

And there the matter rests. You can play the record, read the lyrics, even watch the rather good video clips, and decide for yourself. The Furs aren't preaching to anyone. As the title of the new album implies, talk can be meaningless, or it can mean what you want it to. This is music for open minds.

Duncan Campbell



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