

COPING WITH KEVIN



A Teardrop talks

The Teardrop Explodes is a voice, a vehicle for Julian Cope's quaint, almost whimsical, world view. Of the original Liverpool Cope-Wylie-McCulloch trio he remains the most enigmatic, the most elusive in terms of classification and prediction.

The phone rings in a London hotel. The Teardrop Explodes, Gary Dwyer (drums), David Balfe (keyboards), Troy Tate (guitar), Ronnie Francois (bass), Trevor Luke (trumpet) and Julian Cope (vocals and twelve string), have two days before completed a sell-out tour of Britain and on the previous night Cope completed no fewer than eleven Australian phone interviews.

"I just got less and less serious as the interviews progressed," he laughs.

The accent is mild scouse, the tone soft but assured. The sound of intelligence, I presume, and rightly.

Are you still known as Kevin Stapleton?

"No, part of me's Kevin Stapleton but that's just a facet."

That sounds like a piece of David Bowie image projection.

"Although I'm not that bothered I'd like to try what he does."

I'm not a big fan of his music but I'm a fan of his projection because he's kept it together so well. He's not a great artist but he's made himself appear like one by keeping himself so elevated. I'd like to make my projection more wanton than Bowie's. He's not consumed by what he does. The whole fun of being in this business and being in a group is trying to get away with things, creating your own precedents as opposed to following them."

In the Teardrop Explodes, Cope creates the precedents and

this has caused more than enough instability:

"Yeah, the changes have been my fault really as I'm the central focus and unfortunately I'm not an easy person to work with so I tend to expect people to fit in with me and if they can't then they have to leave."

Why are you hard to work with?

"My ideas are unusual and they change a lot. I've got so many things I want to do. It got to the stage where on one song I played everything except drums because I wasn't confident with anybody else and that caused a lot of resentment in the group. But now I've got a lot more confidence in the group."

What of David Balfe, who left then re-joined?

"He feels good now. He's the only person other than myself who writes music in the group and I feel very confident with him."

Last year you initiated the Zoo Club concept. What was the idea behind that?

"We started off doing very big gigs against my will last year and I was getting fed up with that. So around November of last year Bill Drummond and I formed Zoo Club which gives us a chance to play small and intimate clubs in Liverpool and Dublin and to get back some rapport with the audience. We worked on that for a few weeks then followed it up with a British tour which was really successful so now I feel good about doing big gigs as well. Live we're striking the sort of balance that I want now. People are accepting that we're weird whereas before they thought we were just a weird pop group."

I wonder if this weirdness is natural:

"It's not calculated at all as I'm not very good at calculating things that's why the Teardrop Explodes has been so hazardous to date."

So what makes the band unique?

"I think a lot of it is friction and just a tremendous desire to do something special and when that special thing doesn't come off it just wipes me out and makes me feel like not doing anything at all. I'd rather do crap than do something that's just average."

Cope is individual enough to shun fashion yet at the beginning of last year his wayward eccentricity was all the rage. Since then there have been other developments in rock 'n' roll. Is fashion important?

"In rock 'n' roll it's really important but to me it isn't. At the moment in Britain it's very important but I just think it's bullshit. I'm not very good at fashion. I wear what I wanna wear. Every so often it's fashionable but mostly it's not. I'm not gonna worry."

In the last year have you felt that you've been out of step with what's happening?

"Yeah, especially with this funk thing, short hairstyles and baggy pants. In Liverpool we got into those things quite a while ago but London is quite slow. In Liverpool it wasn't so much a fashion just a thing we got into for a while."

The recorded history of the Teardrop Explodes is becoming impressive. The first album, *Kilimanjaro*, although widely praised on release and propped up by songs of the calibre of 'Treason', 'Poppies In The Field', 'Thief of Baghdad' and 'Ha Ha I'm Drowning', crumpled under the direction of five producers and a fifty per cent dud song content. In a word inconsistency?

"Yeah. The songs were written over a period of two years, some of them when we couldn't play at all. It's really a compilation album. The second one is very consistent as the songs were all written in three or four months and it was all just one person writing the songs."

Which brings us to *Wilder*, a progression in consistency, a lesson in maturity, melodic subtlety and instrumental dexterity and destined to be in this year's best album count. Surely?

"It's one of those albums that people will realise and appreciate in a couple of years. I know in my heart that it's a very pure album in direction and in songs. There's no bullshit in there and I feel very strongly about each song. At the time we recorded it we were kind of successful so I wasn't bothered about selling records only about making a really great record."

Album comparisons?

"The second one is far more moody. The interpretation of the songs is far more important and the instruments are used to suit the songs as opposed to just having a group playing on the songs. It's a far more introverted album. We've written a lot of songs since then and the new one will be as much a change from *Wilder* as it was from *Kilimanjaro*."

Lyrical it's best to leave songs uninterpreted, the uncertainty and the mystique being more intriguing than any literal explanation. But the titles of the two Teardrop albums are another story:

"With *Kilimanjaro* I've just got a love of 'k's'. Les from the Bunnymen suggested *Kilimanjaro*. It has a lot of syllables and it's kind of effusive and it seems to represent the word play songs on the album."

Wilder was originally called *The Great Dominions* then half way through we knocked out five songs and put five new ones in and so I said to David that we should change the name because it's become wilder and he said let's call it *Wilder*. It's wilder as in stranger not wilder as in heavy metal or anything."

From the specific to the general, it's time to see what motivates Julian Cope's songwriting:

"Very basic things like relationships with girls, inability to come to terms with relationships, a lot of things about my parents and my upbringing. Much of it is just like a child's view of adulthood, a distance from what is actually going on. The songs are about indecision, about the doubt that I feel. They're anti-dogmatism, just a lot of ideas and little suggestions thrown up."

Musically, what do you hope to achieve?

"I just wanna try everything and I'm finding it more difficult to settle on one kind of music. More than anything I would like to be the way Traffic were — you could see them as a pop group or even a weird jazz group. But certainly not a group that relied on fashion or anything."

Are you still plugging Scott Walker?

"Not so much now. The album is out and it sold quite well and although I was a big fan of his I was never as consumed with him as people seem to think. It's just that I wanted that album to come out as I thought it was really special. I'll always be a Scott Walker fan."

Are you a rock 'n' roll fan as in being interested in other artists?

"Yeah, I buy loads of records, everything from DAF to the

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I'd love a Beer.

