

ESCAPE FROM THE BUNKER!



Teardrops (L-R) Ron Francois, David Balfe, Julian Cope and Ted Emmett.

Photos by Murray Cammick

Liverpool is a depressed city. The docks are dying, industry is slumping, shops are boarded up. Unemployment is common and money scarce. Yet, in recent years, Liverpool has undergone a resurgence in musical talent unlike anything seen there since the height of Merseybeat. Hundreds of bands have sprung up. Some, like Pink Military and Nightmares In Wax, have come and gone. Others, like the Bunnymen, OMITD, Wah! and the Teardrop Explodes, have burst out of Liverpool, ready to take on the world.

People talk about a 'Liverpool Sound', but does it really exist? Teardrops' keyboardist and arranger David Balfe explains:

"When you are there, you see enormous differences between us and OMITD, the Bunnymen and Wah! It's like they are all at opposite ends of the Liverpool spectrum. Yet when you come somewhere like New Zealand or America and people ask you about it, you suddenly see the similarities between them.

"I can now see similarities between us and OMITD. We watched their early gigs, and they watched ours, so there is a certain amount of absorption. But I could only see that when I was on the other side of the world. When you're in Liverpool, you can see all the differences. We spent two solid years denying Liverpool, saying we didn't want to talk about it."

Julian Cope, by reputation Mouth Of The Moment, has his say:

"It was like the typical Liverpool attitude. You wanted to get out so much. 'The Culture Bunker' is very much the way Liverpool is. It's kind of picking yourself up after the bomb has gone off. You want to go in triumph because you know you can come back. It's like:

Is there any significance in that line in 'Culture Bunker':

Waiting for the crucial three,

Wondering what went wrong

"Sort of," says Julian. "The whole point of the Crucial Three was to be legendary. We started out saying: 'In three years' time we are going to be legendary'. We got a couple of songs together, called ourselves the Crucial Three, and that was it. As it is, the whole thing has backfired, at least for me. I'm bored stiff with the whole thing."

"It used to piss me off," recalls David, "because I'd been in all these groups that had done loads of gigs, and then he'd been in a group that had played in a couple of bedrooms and become fucking enormous! They only really had two songs - 'I'm Bloody Sure You're On Dope' and 'Salamine Shuffle'."

Julian interrupts: "One of the later ones was one of Mac's (Ian

McCulloch). It went:

I've got a space-hopper baby

But it's strictly a one-seater,

which was brilliant. Things started to fall apart between Mac and I when we actually played a gig. We did a gig as Uh!"

"I think I did a gig as Uh! once," remembers David.

"Really!" says Julian. "I probably wasn't in it by then. In those days it consisted of me, Mac and Dave Pickith, who we don't need to mention at all. Mac wouldn't do any of the lead vocals, in spite of the fact that at least half the songs were his, so I had to do them all. We did such classics as 'Robert Mitchum'."

"I saw it! I saw it!" shouts David. "It was at Kirkland."

"Yeah," says Julian, "that was the one. It was good, wasn't it? We had Mac on melodica, no, hold on, there were two melodicas."

David recalls: "We were playing too, 'cos I was taking our stuff down the stairs as you were coming up. You had all that crappy equipment, and I couldn't believe you were actually going to play. We were all killing ourselves laughing about it!"

"I've got a photo of it," says Julian. "Actually, it was great. Mac's got shades on and a melodica, he looks like a skeleton. I was sitting there playing this five-quid, beaten-up electric guitar, a Zenta, and Dave Pickith has got another melodica. We did an acid version of 'Robert Mitchum', it was brilliant."

Do you still feel the need to be a legend?

"Oh absolutely," responds Julian, tongue in cheek. "It's a good thing to have, though nobody has really got it. I used to read about the London SS, you know, Mick Jones, Viv Albertine and all that lot, and think 'fuckin' hell, that would have been a really good group', but they never did anything. Same with Flowers of Romance.

"But it doesn't matter. It's like discovering that the Velvet Underground wanted to be huge, but that doesn't destroy it for



me, it makes it better. Ian Curtis had a really high-pitched Mancunian accent, that's why he never spoke during the gigs. He'd just come on and say, in his deep singing voice, 'Hello, we're Joy Division'. Then you'd speak to him afterwards and he'd say 'Aye, we were great, really enjoyed it. Gotta go now, get back Macclesfield and see wife'.

"You want all the anomalies you can get. It's like Lou Reed writing for Pickwick Records two years before the Velvet Underground. He wrote a song called 'Walk On The Wild Side' because Andy Warhol asked him to.

"So many times you come up with a title and then write the song. We've just recorded a song called 'Rachel Builds a Steamboat'. It's completely different from anything else we've done before, which is the way everything should be.

"Our record company in Britain was upset because Wilder was too different from the first album. But to me that was good. I wanted it to be more different. The third album will be very different from Wilder.

"There is no direction to the way we're headed. I've got 26 songs to do that couldn't be Teardrops' songs. Well some of them might be, but I never need to worry about having enough songs."

"I do some solo stuff," says bass player Ron Francois, "so does Troy and so does David. I know what the songwriting thing is like. You've got to have this comfortable cushion of songs in your brain before you can really start writing."

"It was quite a problem for me at first when I left the band," says David. "I'd never written songs, only arranged them. The pressure the first time is intense. You want to create something that's perfect, you worry about every little detail. Everything I did I felt was going in the wrong direction. 'Reward' fucked us up in a way. It was like we'd been a cult band, and then to the whole of the British public we were one song. Suddenly there was this massive pressure on us to put trumpets on everything."

Cope interrupts: "That's why we released 'Treasure' as a single after 'Reward', because I didn't want to follow 'Reward' with trumpets."

The Teardrops' repertoire on this tour consisted mostly of material from the new album, the old singles, and stuff that has yet to be recorded. There is talk of a live cassette using tapes from the Club Zoo escapade, temporarily canned.

Julian Cope has been criticised in the past for being difficult to work with. Lineup changes have been common, but both David and Julian agree that's the way they want it. They see Teardrops as a concept rather than a band, with the music being the focal point rather than the musicians.

"It is more stable than before," admits Julian. "I've changed, I tend to relent a little more. When David left, it was either him or me, at that stage we couldn't have both been in the band. I'm aware that it was my fault."

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