

The Fall (L-R): Mark E. Smith, Marc Riley, Craig Scanland, Carl Burns, Steve Hanley, Paul Hanley.



The Fall

The Fall shrugged themselves together into their first of 12 different forms in early 1977, right in the middle of the punk thing. Immediately transcended their musical environment by making singles like 'Bingo Master's Breakout', which was at once different, amateurish (in a way that other bands tried to copy without understanding the intent) and *NME* single of the week. Mark Smith and his everchanging lads had instant credibility. The extraordinary thing is that in the five intervening years they've retained all the things that made them unique, while their contemporaries have escaped to the States and *Top Of The Pops* or given up trying to be human.

Their early albums, *Live At The Witch Trials* (which wasn't) and *Totale Turn* (which was), were packed with great songs, idiosyncratic lyrics, the occasional melody, scratchy, yelpy, off-putting vocals and a certain feeling that this guy Smith had things well sussed.

I've never heard *Dragnet*, their second album, but *Grotesque After The Gramme* was even less accessible, more challenging than the early stuff, with widely differing recorded sounds and virtually no melody. *Grotesque*, the first Fall released here, got into the Top 30. Good grief! 'Totally Wired', the single which appears live on the album, actually got on *Radio With Pictures!* A hand-held, one-shot, vaguely inept piece of live footage showed that the band couldn't give a shit about presenting themselves in a \$40,000 cosmetic mini-epic or whatever. Good.

Next up, *Slates* was a 10-inch album that cost the earth on import, but was worth it, and now we have *Hex Enduction Hour* and the single 'Lie Dream of a Casino Soul' being released in NZ. When told how much Fall records cost to hard-core, import-buying NZ fans, Smith responded:

"Fuckin' hell, that's ridiculous! While we're over here, we're getting something together with Gap Records."

So, with any luck at all, we may get the whole Fall catalogue for the normal inflated prices.

How The Fall Discovered New Zealand

Three months ago (or so) Helene, who runs Sydney's 'Stranded' venue, and Ken West, who previously imported Snakefinger (immediately prior to the heart attack that prevented him reaching NZ), managed to convince the Fall's manager, Kay Carroll, that they were eminently suited to bringing her bunch of Northern Soul Boys (joke) over to Australasia. The fact that Helene and Ken had helped the Birthday Party lurch around Australia established their ability to handle the unusual and controversial without becoming librium addicts, so with Vivian to handle Melbourne and the mysterious Edward Zimblis (no relation to Roman Totale XVII), they formed the syndicate. A tour was born.

Being a Wellingtonian by birth (nine years in Levin, hardy soul), Helene thought NZ would benefit from the Fall, and maybe even vice versa. So, completely bypassing the normal promotional avenues, Mainstreet in Auckland, Victoria in Wellington and Christchurch Town hall were booked through people in those three cities who had never had any experience with overseas acts. The level of efficiency and organisation was not exactly state of the art, but enthusiasm was very high. Admittedly, being involved in the Auckland part of the tour makes me extraordinarily biased (but don't hold that against me, will ya?). I know the Fall are good, I know that a normally organised NZ tour would not serve them well, so we'll see what happens.

A Phone Interview With Mark E. Smith

Things don't start very well, Smith failing to respond to questions about why he bothers to come to this part of the world ("That's a bit of a ridiculous question"), so I try a different tack: How about big halls and PAs?

"I've no preference. I don't believe in that sort of ... ah ... 'It's great to play to the little clubs', and all that sort of shit that everybody comes out with when they get feeling a bit guilty."

It's only guilt?

"It is, in a way, yeah. Because they sort of fuck up, don't they, when they get into big halls and the sound is bad and everything, and they start pining for small gigs."

Surely that situation can be out of a band's control?

"They should sort that out before they do the big halls, shouldn't they? We have no problem with big halls or little halls, y'know. If you let the PA guy run your sound, it's your own fault. We've got Kay, the manager, does the mixing. We have no trouble telling people what to do."

How do you keep a high level of intensity, doing six gigs in a row with completely different sets?

"We get better. After three or four gigs it's a lot easier. It's usually the first couple that are bad."

What about the Iceland track on *Hex Enduction Hour*?

"Sixteen track. It was ... er ... it's funny, 'cos all the walls were lava, y'know, so you could play really quiet and you didn't

sound weedy. You could actually hear what you were doing while you were doing it, which is really unusual. Expensive, but it was worth it."

So you went to Iceland with that in mind?

"Oh, no, no, no. We just had a day off, so we went in there."

Do you know anything about NZ?

"Not particularly, no. I watched the football team." (Loud laughter.)

New Zealand's not a lot like Australia, Aussies really like bass and drum.

"You can say that again. Every band I've seen here, all you can fuckin' hear is the bloody bass guitar."

Where do you go after *Hex*?

"I'm gonna sparse it down a bit. Yeah, sorta rubbin' out the two drumkit lineup, y'know."

Smith says he's not promoting any particular ideal, nor is he in it for the money. When asked why he's doing what he does, he replies, in a Spike Milligan-type Indian accent, "I hope to find myself through outer sociology". We say goodbye.

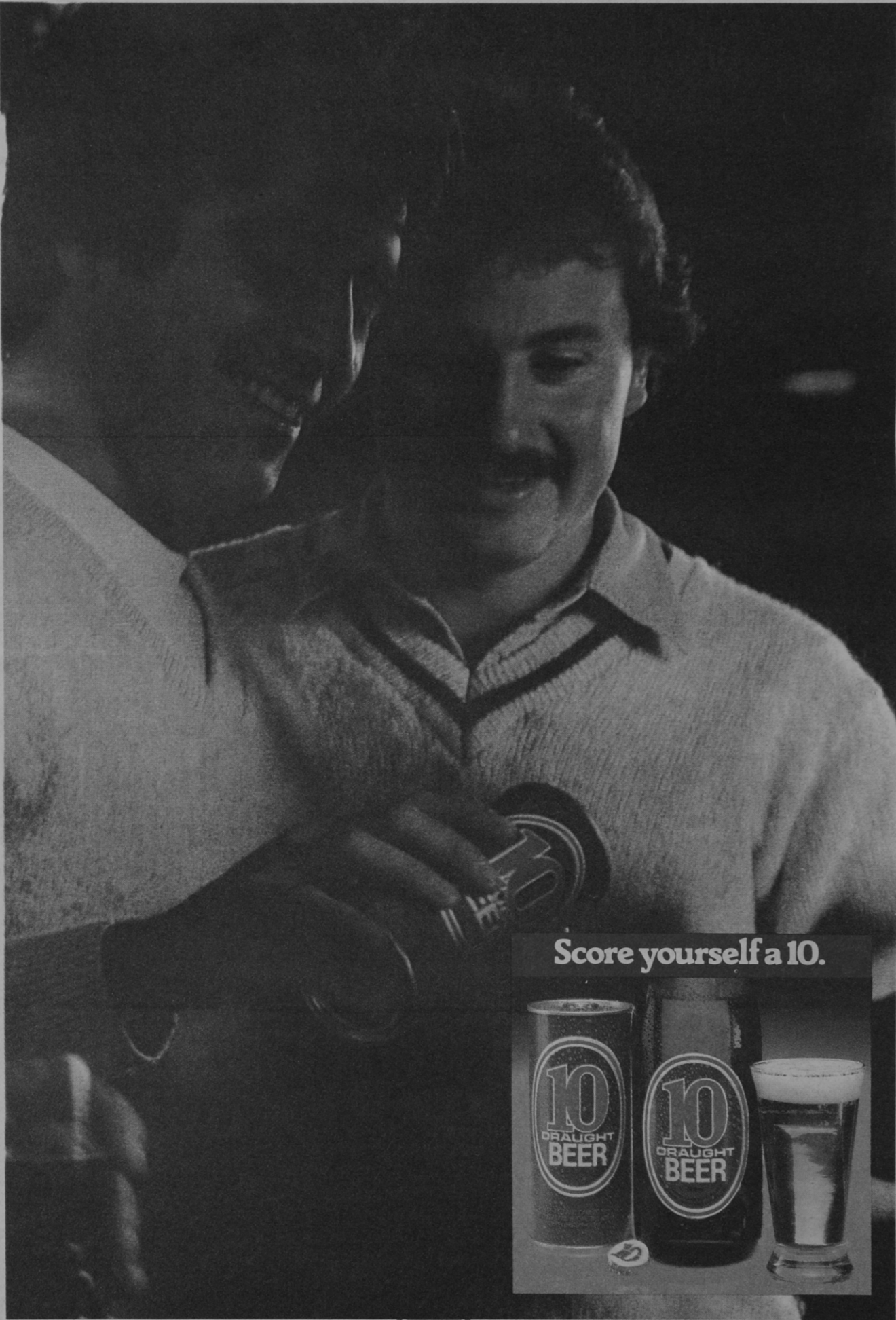
Late News

At the time of writing, the Fall had been in Australia for about 10 days. Karl Burns had his passport stolen by a groupie in the States, and on returning to the UK had his brand new one eaten by a dog, so he didn't make it to the first gigs. Mind you, Smith only just made it to the opening set at the Sydney Musicians' Club. After some minutes of yer Oz audience chanting The Fall don't keep us waiting, Kay Carroll leapt on stage, saying "Hey, hey, he's not Mick Jagger! He's Mark Smith and he's got lost!"

It was true, he had. But he slouched on stage seconds after with his omnipresent bag of goodies, and conducted the evening's festivities with his back firmly and inexorably turned to the audience. Apparently, his grin was immense.

In Australia, controversy is running very high indeed. See ya there.

Chris Knox



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