

At the end of last year Altered Images had taken time off from an extensive British tour to record a clip of their new single 'I Could Be Happy' for the Old Grey Whistle Test. It was during this interlude that I spoke to an optimistic John Image who was on a London line.

So let's slip back into the present tense.

Altered Images are five Glaswegians who don't quite tally with Glasgow's hard drinking rock 'n' roll traditions. Singer Clare Grogan and ensemble, John (bass), Tony and Jim (guitars) and Tich (drums), exude an enthusiasm that's often mistaken for naivete.

These days to be Scots is to be fashionable, as far as the music press is concerned, so to what extent is their rising popularity attributed to their nationality?

"None. Because we kept away from this Scottish scene that has suddenly grown up. But since we've made it into the charts this will help Scottish bands, but before that it was only music press hype and not anything with substance. We've kept away from it all as we didn't want to be accused of capitalising on any fashion."

In effect John is denying the existence of a 'Scottish rock 'n' roll consciousness'!

"Yeh. Because a lot of bands up here are just bitchin' against each other — it's just like anywhere there's bands coming out, like it used to be the Liverpool scene and before that it was Manchester and now the press have nowhere else to turn to so they've turned to Scotland. The band's have always been there. It'll be Wales' turn next."

When Altered Images started out they made no secret of their reverence for Siouxsie and the Banshees and this led to inevitable categorisation:

"Because of this girl singer thing we were just called Banshees' clones. But 'Happy Birthday' came out and destroyed all that so instead the press decided that we were so young and naive in an attempt to categorise us."

Bitching about the press aside, there were plenty of sceptical side-swipes when the supposedly gullible young Images signed with the CBS empire instead of doing the now compulsory formative independent label jaunt. Any qualms about signing with the

biggest record company around?

"No. It's really weird 'cos there were a lot of independent and big record companies after us and all of them said no matter what you do don't sign to CBS. But the funny thing was CBS were offering us the best deal and giving us the most control. If you've got ambitions you've got to sign with the biggest record company and they've been brilliant to us. We're

with Epic and with us they've now broken a contemporary band in Britain and so it's boosted them. We've had phone calls from the chairman who likes us a lot. There's a family atmosphere on the label."

Smiles all round but back to the Banshees' connection, and Steve Severin particularly as he has produced Altered Images' first album, with the exception of the

title track, which was handled by the more experienced Martin Rushent.

The album lacks thrust and character, faults caused by Severin's indifferent production and the band's pleasant but insubstantial material. Pop innocence/exuberance or angular realism with a sweet little singer out front? A choice or a compromise? Whatever, it was a dilemma Steve Severin couldn't solve:

"Working with Steve was good as he was a close friend. When we started out we didn't know who to trust but he offered to produce us and for a time it worked well but he didn't have the experience for a commercial sound so we had to go for someone like Rushent. It's been five months since we recorded the album and there are things on it we could have done better that we'll improve on the new album (*Pinky Blue*) which will be produced by Martin Rushent."

"We've got six or seven new songs and we'll be doing a cover version of Neil Diamond's 'A Song Sung Blue'. It's something unexpected, a challenge. The first time we did it on this tour we got so many requests for it that we put it as an encore."

Ambitions?
"At first our ambition was to appeal to everybody and with 'Happy Birthday' we've done that. We even get played on the Tony Blackburn show. That's one ambition and we just want to go on and cover as many markets as possible. Later on if we get big enough we want to branch out and maybe do film soundtracks."

"Just now we're concentrating on getting into the charts again so that we're not a one-hit wonder. And once we sustain ourselves in Britain we can think of Europe and elsewhere. We've got it roughly planned out and as we're all really young, 18 or 19, we can afford to just build gradually."

Since the phone interview Altered Images have certainly found their niche. Their *Happy Birthday* album was tentative and multi-influenced but now they're pure pop as borne out by the excessively high sugar count of *Pinky Blue*.

All in all it's a childlike success story — pinch them they're dreaming.
George Kay

The Great Kid Creole and the Coconuts COMPETITION



First four correct entries opened on closing date will receive a picture disc of their new album 'Tropical Gangsters'.

Post your entry to 'Rip It Up', PO Box 5689, Auckland 1, by Sept 30.

The Kid Creole Questions:

1. Names of both dudes in the band?

2. KC & the Coconuts last album was?

3. On what label do they record?

KID CREOLE & THE COCONUTS TROPICAL GANGSTERS

KID CREOLE
AND THE COCONUTS
are washed upon
the shore of B'Dilli
Bay-Island of sinners
ruled by outcasts
where crime is the
only passport and
RACE MUSIC
the only way out!

