



Culture Club (L-R): Boy George (vocals), John Moss (drums), Ron Hay (guitar), Michael 'Mickey' Craig (bass).

BY GEORGE CULTURE CLUB IT'S A BOY

When English glossy pop paper *Smash Hits* published their Readers Poll Results for 1982, Boy George ranked Number Five Best Male Singer and Number Twelve Best Female Singer. Not since Bowie's glam-rock period has Max Factor played such a key role in the making (up) of a pop star, but the androgynous appeal of the Culture Club vocalist has proved potent enough for him to justifiably lay claim to the title of Face of the Year for English music.

At year's end, Culture Club's sweet soul sound was found at the top of the UK singles charts with 'Time (Clock of the Heart)', matching the feat of its predecessor, 'Do You Really Want To Hurt Me'. The latter slice of lovers' rock took off like a scalded squirrel up charts around the world, and the band's recent New York debut saw celebrities like Diana Ross and Paul Simon check out the new Anglo flavour of the month. The record's current chart position in Canada was George's first query when I talked to him in London and he was quite aware of the record's success Down Under. An eye for the dollar obviously blinks beneath the immaculate application of eye-shadow without which the Boy would never leave home.

The 'is it a boy or a girl?' response of those first spotting the pretty visage adorning the cover of Culture Club's *Kissing To Be Clever* album has already been matched by ire in the self-righteous breasts of the Moral Majority, while scandal sheets like the *Globe* see George as the manifestation of a scourge of transvestitism sweeping American youth.

When told of this, George loses his composure for the only time in the interview.

"It's ludicrous! Those people have no morals at all. Do they picket Liberace? You can't be evil in the way you dress, you can only be evil inside."

Ironically enough, George and the Moral Majority would make compatible, if unlikely, bedfellows. Or should that be out-of-bed-fellows? You see, George and Club co-founder Jon Moss place a great deal of stress on morality and clean-living and profess to despise the decadent chic of the club-scene they were initially presumed to inhabit.

"We don't drink, smoke or do drugs and I always go to bed early. The press speculates about my sex-life, but I don't have one!"

Musically, at least, the Culture Club sound is far from the aural equivalent of a cold shower. As the band's name correctly indicates, it borrows freely from a range of musics black and white, the most readily identifiable being reggae, calypso and American soul. As with groups like the Specials and the Beat, Culture Club's line-up is seamlessly multi-racial, incorporating black bassist Michael Craig and, occasionally, young toaster Captain Crucial, while drummer Jon Moss' Jewish background has influenced the band's choice of clothing and religious symbolism in their presentation. It is no coincidence that 'Melting Pot', the old Blue Mink ode to racial unity, is a band favourite.

"We wanted to include it on our next album, but it won't make it. We still do it live," explains George.

On *Kissing To Be Clever*, songs like 'White Boy' and 'White Boys Can't Control It' involve questions of racial identity and one gets the feeling that Boy George would happily awake

black tomorrow.

"I think blacks have the best voices. The singers I most admire are not so much reggae but American soul singers. Gladys Knight, Dionne Warwick, Smokey Robinson and especially Johnny Nash. Our new songs are sounding more American, I think there is a swing back to that soul sound."

It is Boy George's compelling, vulnerable voice that is Culture Club's trump card as he is one of the few new British pop stars able to sing soul convincingly. As he claims, "Lots of English singers now sound just like David Bowie or Bryan Ferry. That's not for me."

His list of people he'd most like to sing with is intriguing; Gladys Knight, Dolly Parton or Tammy Wynette. The vision of the prettily painted George crooning 'Stand By Your Man' alongside the country queen is an hilarious one, but George quite seriously tells me "No, not that one. Maybe I'd write a song especially for her."

George's career prior to the formation of Culture Club in 1981 shed more light on his fascination with fashion than his vocal style. He was at various times a make-up artist for the Royal Shakespeare Company, a model, a clothes designer and inveterate London club-goer.

George's first musical splash came when he sang with Bow Wow Wow for a few months while Annabella was considering her future. This period saw him encounter the infamous Malcolm McLaren, the Marshall McLuhan of pop theory, but George obviously remains on good terms with both him and Bow Wow Wow.

"Yes, I saw Malcolm last night. His record is No 9 here, how is it doing there? If you talk to Bow Wow Wow (he was told their Toronto gig coincided with our interview) say hello from me and that I like their new record."

In turn, members of Bow Wow Wow cited approval of George's music while acknowledging he hadn't really suited their own.

Just to illustrate the incestuous nature of the London music scene, Jon Moss and most of Bow Wow Wow were at one time part of Adam and the Ants, while Moss also drummed for seminal punks the Damned and the Clash.

His previous mixing with the trendy set earned Boy George a lot of flak even before the first Culture Club single appeared, but he is now relishing the self-confidence that success brings.

"It's fun when people like the Hemingways of the press misinterpret you and write you off, then you turn around and show them what you can do."

Eccentricity has always been tolerated in English society, so it is no great surprise when George tells us that he finds "England is still a good place to live. No, I don't get bothered on the street much, people here are pretty accepting."

More will certainly be heard of the Boy with the Braids in 1983 and before he is dismissed as a moralist in make-up, you should consider his choice of the celebrity favoured to divert him from a condition of celibacy; the outrageously flamboyant actress Tallulah Bankhead.

"Her biography is the only book I've read recently. I think we have a lot in common." Kerry Doole

CBS Records announces the following APRIL RELEASES

Men at Work 'Cargo'

Pink Floyd 'The Final Cut'

Sharon O'Neill 'Foreign Affairs'

Ric Ocasek (of The Cars) 'Beattitude'

ELO 'Secret Messages'

The Angels 'Watch the Red'