PORTRAIT OF THE ARTISTS



Artistic freedom Do what you want But just make sure that the money ain't gone 'All Mod Cons', the Jam

Without the haircut, without the eyeliner, without the expression, without the music, Nick Cave's face would still be striking.

The thick Neanderthal brow and the heavy lips are frankly belligerent. When he smiles he's perfectly cocksure. When he frowns it's frighten-

He has not long been hauled out of bed and his makeup is clumsily applied, the clothes look like yesterday's. Still, it's small wonder he looks that way - the band practised for 10 hours last night with stand-in drummer Des Hefner of the Marching Girls. Usual drummer Mick Harvey decided at the last moment he didn't want to come on the tour, he felt the feeling in the band wasn't right - there was no real desire to play. The intention had been to practise all the previous day but bass player Tracy Pew arrived in the country a day late for some unknown reason. It'll tell later on.

Cave has an unnerving habit of taking deep laborious breaths mid-sentence, as if he is bored sick or both. Gradually the realisation dawns that he does this all the time. It doesn't mean

Diary of An Unhappy Man
The Bad Seed. Was there any particular

intention behind it?

Well, it was recorded after we'd booted Phil Calvert out of the group and for that reason it was very interesting to make a record because we had rehearsed and the sound had become far more direct

It seems like a fulfilled Junkyard. Junkyard with a heart?

"It has a very different atmosphere than Junkyard. In a way Junkyard is a kind of essay in grossness. I think *The Bad Seed* has in some of the songs a lot more haunting quality that Junkyard doesn't have at all, both musically and

So you were unhappy with Junkyard?

"Well, once you have actually made your statement and it's there in black and white or on vinyl in front of you, you may be happy with it initially but after a while faults in it begin to punch you right in the face and there's kind of a necessity for you to record something else that

Nick Cave, Auckland Motel.

rectifies the problems of the last recording or

whatever you're doing.
"I think *The Bad Seed* is a far more definitive record than any of the others have been. I see faults in it but I don't find them nearly so glaring."

There seems to be an element of self-parody? "I think all our records have. It's because they're extreme representations of our personalities in a way, so of course they have some parody and are always to be taken with a certain amount of humour. I think *The Bad Seed* has

a massive amount of parody in it.

"As much as I'm very proud of the lyrics of Deep in the Woods' I also think they're hilarious in a fashion. It entirely depends on what mood

The gothicness of that song almost seems to be mocking groups like Bauhaus who aim for that sort of thing.

"It wasn't intended to. I think it is above making a mockery of B-grade two-bit groups. I mean, I know Pete Murphy quite well and I think he's a nice chap but I really don't think he has the greatest ideas in the world

The overall impression was of an EP of love songs, in the sense that they were all about passion in some way.

Most of our songs are, I think. Increasingly so. I don't think I've written a song that isn't maybe 'Big Jesus Trashcan', which I like very much lyrically, but it doesn't directly hit on any particular kind of human emotion. Perhaps

"But that was far more concerned with the sound of words and so forth becoming less and less so within my lyric writing anyway. It's becoming far more literal in the sense that there is a direct meaning from each song. We've recorded material since The Bad Seed which is far more literal. There's no

Why has that change come about?

"I just don't think that earlier on I was a good enough lyric writer to be able to do that. It is much easier to write a song that is abstract in a sense, it sounds good, that is vague in meaning, than to write something that is totally literal is an expression of something you feel and you're not covering it up in any way.

"I just want to be as concise and direct as the music is in a sense. It's like someone who is frustrated by something standing up on a table at a party and screaming out and everybody in the room saying 'Oh my God, get off the table, shut up, you're ruining the party!'. It's kind of



Nick Cave, Mainstreet.



Rowland Howard

embarassing."

You've been criticised in the past for dwelling

on the uglier aspects of life in your writing.
"I can't see any reason to criticise. The world is not an Eden. I'm not interested in writing about unrealistic things like ... happiness and

Is happiness unrealistic?

"It's not the dominant emotion in my life, I must say.

Are you happy often?

"Well ... this is sounding ridiculous now. Basically, from the moment I wake up to when I go to sleep, it's not a totally joyous event. I mean, I'm not a Christian, I'm not a fucking lunatic in an asylum who sits around smiling all day. Perhaps I have a kind of pessimistic disposition.

Will we ever see something conventionally beautiful from the Birthday Party?

"I would hope so, but I most sincerely doubt it. I meet a lot of people who are bubbly and they seem to think everything is hunky dory. But I don't.

There's also a strong element of violence in your music. What is the reason for that? Is it righteous violence?

Do you mean a kind of violent reaction against what's going on around me? An anger? No. I really wouldn't say I'm angry about .. none of the lyrics talk about social problems. I don't look at photographs of Hiroshima and think 'My God, I've got to write a song about this, it's disgusting!'. That kind of injustice is not what I'm interested in writing about - not that I don't think it's an injustice, but it doesn't prompt my pen to action. I'm far more interested in totally individual interpretations of what goes on about you.

'If there's one thing that the group are interested in attempting to show other people, or be didactic about, it's that one must operate by oneself and not succumb to being one member of a mob or of a group thought

Does it annoy you then when you're held up as being the saviours of Rock?

"I'm long used to the fantasies of rock journalists. They do have a tendency to kind of live their lives by proxy of unfortunate musicians and singers. It is ridiculous to say the Birthday Party are the saviours of Rock. You pass over

those passages very quickly. The same writers also made much of the Iggy/Stooges connection early on. Was too much made of that?

"I don't think we've ever really sounded like the Stooges. There are obvious ... I used to take my shirt off and leap around the stage. It was obvious people would immediately think of Iggy Pop. But it was totally facile. But they are one of my favourite groups and they may have been an original inspiration to this group, which we've had no qualms about saying. But these days we can now say we are not influenced by any group. Mainly because there are no groups no contemporary groups - worth taking an

You have spoken of the "limits" of Rock. Can you see the day when you're going to have to leave those limits behind?

Well, being a rock singer isn't the be-all and end-all of my life. I do other things as well, which I'm not all that interested in talking about to Rip It Up, which is a rock magazine, which is in no way being condescending about the magazine. It's just that people are interested in me as a singer, not as an author or anything else.

"I do have other ventures that I would far prefer to be in, in a way. I'm really sick of being pushed around by ... I would really like to be my own boss for a while. Being in a group you do have a certain responsibility to other people and you must do things that you don't particularly want to do. Just practical things, like touring because you're contractually obligated. I'd much rather do something that was totally solitary, like writing. Even though we consider we act totally as individuals, there are certain compromises that must be made within a group, where you must do things for the sake of the group. Which is nice in a way, but I'd much rather be able to do something I could make sole decisions on.

What about the audience. Is there a respon-

"I don't have any responsibility towards them. I go on stage and express myself in any way I feel. If I feel like standing behind the drum kit and slobbering into a microphone without singing any of the lyrics then I'm entitled to do that. can do whatever I like and the audience can like or dislike it. I'm not an entertainer in any sense of the word. I may be entertaining, but I certainly have no interest in getting up and ...

So what is your role on stage?

"In most cases it is a personal expression. write lyrics which are to be sung and which I suppose I could sing all by myself with no audience, but I do get a kind of ... it does make the situation more tense if you're standing in front of a whole lot of people. It can often propel you to greater heights of intensity than singing in the bath or whatever.

"I'm not saying I'm not conscious of there being an audience, but it's not a show that you go and see and be guaranteed some kicks. I'm sure people when they see us this time will be waiting for a lot of things that won't come. A lot won't be satisfied."

Roland Howard's first experience of Nick Cave came when Cave pinned him against a wall and pondered on whether or not to punch him over. He did not. They became friends and, eventually, Roland joined a band Nick had called the Boys Next Door. Even later the Boys Next Door set off for England. It was en route to England they became the Birthday Party.

Roland: The Horror of Popularity
Roland S. Howard. It's the 'S' that really

makes it. Roland is pale and thin and talks in dense streams that tumble on until he runs down and it's time for another question. He uses many of the same expressions as Nick — "and so on", "and so forth", "kind of" — but his voice has a different quality, a just-about-to-burst-into-tears tone that sometimes makes him sound like a upset child. His makeup is better applied than

"All through the existence of the Birthday Party we've thrived off people not liking us and when we're put in a position where too many people like it just becomes very dull and predictable.

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Tears For Fears the hurting

New album & cassette out soon includes "Mad World" & "Change"

