

'MALCOLM McLAREN'
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

Pistols and Malcolm McLaren?
"I don't know. I'd like to think that if I didn't do it, someone else might have; that it was in the air anyway — I was only acting as a catalyst, being in the right place at the right time."

Well, some people were predicting something of the type. There was Mick Farren's 'Titanic' essay, which ascribed the future to four young men in a garage somewhere ...

"Yeah, the only thing with guys like that is they didn't have what I had, I suppose. I came from a very different background. I had a different pretence, I was very visual."

"I had no interest in the whole period from 1965 to 1971. I didn't actually experience any of that, I stepped out. I went to art school and didn't listen to music, so I had a very fresh and objective approach which was really based on the late 50s and early 60s, what I listened to as a tiny kid and my sense of style and visual approach and my politics as a student." (McLaren was involved with such anarchist-inspired movements as the Situationists during the 1960s).

"I was able to put that together with more humour than anyone else. That was a big thing in my favour. I could afford to have people laugh at me."

"A lot of these musicians, they were very coarse and got very uptight if anyone made fun of them. The greatest asset Sid Vicious had was he could afford to make a fool of himself on stage. People love that, it's marvellous."

It's sometimes seemed that the people who didn't like punk were the ones afraid to laugh at themselves.

"Yeah. No humour. Soulless, I thought. And therefore not very sexy. They're frightened, they're closets. That's right."

And others got miffed at the *Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle* film. They seemed to take it as an insult that the music they'd pinned their allegiance on was being pilloried. They got told they'd all been fooled by an evil little man called Malcolm McLaren and they didn't like that. Right?

"Yeah. That was the humour of it all, it was wonderful to do that. My premise for making that picture was to try to be never written up in one of those awful NME rock history books as one of an era."

"And I thought 'I'm not going to be part of that bullshit'. I refused to get locked into that."

"I knew they'd hate all that. They'd accuse me of being a svengali but I *played it to death*. (Laughs). It was like taking Fleet Street and going over the top with it. They hated me. Fabulous. I'm proud of that."

The film went through a few changes while it was being made. Was that its original intention?

"That was, again, not to allow it to be incarcerated in the annals of rock history, but keep it as an enigma that no one fucking knows, you know, that was it? I think that's what keeps things alive."

McLaren's finished his Riesling (he wanted something drier but the bar didn't have anything else ...) and my Steinlager's gone. A waitress comes by, picks up glasses from a nearby table.

"Excuse me," McLaren says. "Could you ...?"

The waitress, who looks to be in her late thirties, glares at him as if he's made a lewd comment, turns and heads off in the opposite direction. What sort of place is this?

"That's all right," McLaren says philosophically. "She's probably just a bit straight ..."

C30, C60, C90, GO!

"The great thing about cassettes is you never feel precious, do you, giving someone a cassette? Giving someone a record seems sort of ... but if you've got a cassette in your pocket you can say 'Have a listen to that — I got it over there last week'. And that bloke takes it down the line to someone else. It's a very rapid way of spreading ideas."

"With a record player, you gotta get the thing clean, you get the bloody thing on ... It's so 1910 — it's not 1983!"

"The record companies still think that home taping is the curse of the industry. It's been one of the greatest assets that popular music has had invented for it!"

Duck Duck

"I still like *Duck Rock* anyway, 'cause all those singers are so bloody good, you're seduced by that. I like the format, some things work, some things don't — bit too much of Trevor Horn now and again."

"Music today, people sing about things they neither like or hate or love — they don't sing about anything. I think most of them are just cardboard cut-outs."

"Too much of a bloody overproduction sometimes I thought. I had to compromise on that — I was really fucking upset. I was made to feel small sometimes. I was made to accept his expertise."

"Being an artist for the first time I was too fucking diplomatic. I should have shit on his head sometimes. He was too damned Mr Producer."

But he did get the odd awesome sound — especially on 'Buffalo Gals'.

"Yeah, I like the sound of 'Buffalo Gals'. It worked, because it's a very mechanical thing. It's superb. It's when you got into those other things. Too much bloody string quartets stuffed on it. All that synthesiser thing to lift it up, make it a bit more poppy. It got a bit hippy with the 'Chango' thing, he got involved in all this weirdness and didn't leave it as it was."

"His technical expertise actually worked in the context of making 'Buffalo Gals'. No kid in the Bronx had been able to get such a great sound with that technique — that's what made it new. That's why it's such a big record in Harlem."

So is there any other producer you'd like to work with?

"I don't know, I'll probably have to work with him again. The record company wants it that way and I've got to finish the contract."

"I'd like to work with someone very young and unknown — I might be able to — but producers are just mechanics. They ain't the concept and when they are the concept the bloody record is usually just *sound* without content."

Punk It Up

"I've never not been a punk rocker and I'm not ashamed to say I am. I think it's great and shall remain so in mind, however much people ridicule it for being unfashionable or whatever."

"Punk rock wasn't about fashion. Punk rock was an attitude. And you know the greatest thing about it? People sang about things they hated. Music today, people sing about things they neither like or hate or love — they don't sing about anything. I think most of them are just cardboard cut-outs."

Pop Goes the Funhouse

"When punk rock died all those bands didn't want to be known as rock'n'roll bands. They said 'No, we're *dance* bands, we're *fun* music'. And this word fun became a horrible grey word. They'd taken the essence of what fun really is. Fun is subversive."

"If there's fun at all for me in rock'n'roll, it's making lots of trouble and I thought all that idea of Haircut 100 wearing bow ties and looking like they'd been invited around by the bank manager to meet his daughter was innocuous and to me it took out any reason for rock'n'roll."

"It's another aspect of the industry where they always want to sell teddy bears. Duran Duran, Kajagoogoo ... I like teddy bears too but I also like being rough and tough. I think everybody wants to be rough and tough and irresponsible and step out of a very ordinary life that uses music just to soften the blow."

"And I don't want to soften the blow and I don't think punk ever did that. It *hurt* people and I think people wanted that. I did."

Duck Duck Duck

"A Buffalo Gal is a rather adventurous sort of a girl who wants to go and live in the woods. Get out and mess around."

"There was something terrific about that word *Buffalo*. I thought of this big, rumbustious giantess of a woman, waiting for the world to catch up with her as she stormed about the place. There was something thrilling to me — it wasn't dainty or petite. I liked the toughness of it."

"I love the poor look, the Spirit of the Hobo."

Duck Rock has been big in Harlem and you've talked a lot about wanting to reach black kids. What's in it for white kids?

"Rock'n'roll has become to me more than just the 4/4 beat. It's a lifestyle, it's a critique and to me it's really what makes my heart beat."

"Oh, there's something in it for white kids. I wanted to do something white that was in essence as pagan as that black R&B that spurted out all over the world."

"Could I find something white that was equivalent and as magical? I had to go back quite a way and discover the origins of dance a bit. The only thing I could discover the square dance, which was an old-fashioned love ritual, a game of pursuit and capture."

"And this Appalachian caller relates so much to the rapper in New York. So I thought I'd take it to New York and say 'Hey, do something with this'."

There's controversy in America at present over the all-music cable TV channel, MTV. MTV virtually refuses to play black music, claiming it has a mainly white paying audience and white people don't want black music.

MTV wouldn't play 'Buffalo Gals'.

But Who To Plunder Next?

"It was funny, in Australia, I got rid of the record company and there was loads of these young kids outside. They weren't necessarily interested in me, they were Duran Duran or Boy George fans and they thought I was the guy who could tell the addresses of all these guys and so on — I didn't mind."

"And so I got all these young kids in my room and thought they were great, one of the better moments of my whole time in Australia. And I went back to their houses and they were all

going mad 'cause I was, y'know, 'Buffalo Gals' and Boy George and Sid."

"I looked at these kids and I thought 'If I was in Australia I wouldn't be fucking around Molly Meldrum's house, I wouldn't be recording with Vander and Young. I'd work with those little kids. I'd actually get them happening on the street."

"I could see, I could physically see something could be great. Because they knew more about Boy George than Boy George knew about himself. It was funny, I thought they had more in it. I've always thought the audience was much more interesting than the group."

"And it was like 'Well, you know Malcolm, when Boy George comes to Australia I'm going to ask him for an autograph and if he doesn't give me one I'm gonna say, 'Well who the fuck do you think you are?'"

"I just love that kind of emotion, it's fantastic. I thought 'You're the kind of person I would like to make a record with'."

"As a matter of fact, I think that's what I'll do as I'm talking to you. I'll probably make a record with the fans of all those groups. I think they've got more to say somehow."

Rock Is Dead, Or So It's Said

"Rock'n'roll has become to me more than just the 4/4 beat. It's a life-style, it's a critique and to me it's really what makes my heart beat. People malign it through a lack of ... I dunno, maybe just for the hell of it, as a fashion."

"Rock'n'roll means loads of things to me. It means sex, it means subversion, it means style. I always thought those were the three ingredients that made any record a classic, it had to have those three things."

Out of the Peter Pan and Into the Fire

So much of what you've done has hinged on youth culture ...

"Yeah, but the generation gap's closing down as days go on and people get more unemployed, especially in England."

"But I suppose you can't help working with the young, because they're the ones with the energy, with a bit of anarchy in them. They haven't yet gotten responsible. Luckily, I've remained irresponsible and a fool. I'm technically one of the most unprofessional people you're ever likely to meet."

"For all my expounding on cassette players I could barely work one myself. Hopeless. I just go for the concepts. Sometimes I think I'd better really learn how to do some of these things, understand them. But at the end I don't bother because perhaps it's better left. Technology is useful but you can have your friends do it for you."

Epitaph

"How would I like to be remembered? Loved by a few because he was hated by so many. I like that idea. I never want to be loved by everyone. You can't get anything done then."

Epilogue

"Look after yourself mate." His handshake is a loopy, upside-down affair with the left hand but the intention's there."

An entertaining, even inspiring man to speak with. An independent, highly motivated man who had a major effect on the popular culture that took me through my late teens and beyond. A man who doesn't vote or fill in census forms. And friendly."

An exploiter? Certainly. An egotist? Naturally. But also an anarchist."

The best kind of villain there is.
Russell Brown



MUSIC FOR A NEW SOCIETY

ON ALBUM & TAPE

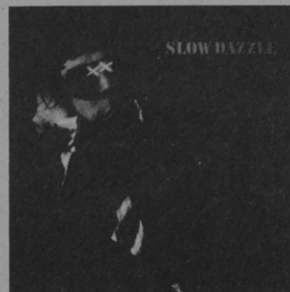
ALSO AVAILABLE
ON ALBUM ONLY



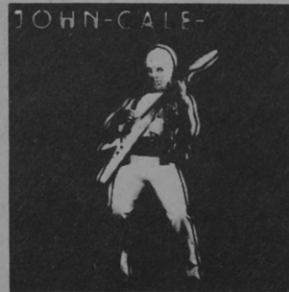
June 1, 1974



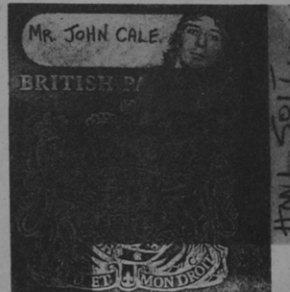
HELEN OF TROY



SLOW DAZZLE



Guts



HONI SOIT