

# Young Person's Guide to Malcolm McLaren

So, in a sense, there's hope for everyone?

"If you're mad enough. I failed all my exams and was one of the worst pupils at school — I was always on the verge of expulsion. And you know what? I never gave a damn then and I don't give a damn now. All that stuff has never been what I considered important."

## The Wanderer

That most curious of fixtures, the revolving door turns and through swings a floppy travelling bag. Malcolm McLaren is wearing a sort of mutant zoot suit, which looks like it's still pinned up for alterations that never did get done. He looks very tired.

He tosses the bag against the reception desk, does the formalities.

"Scuse me!" calls the receptionist as he walks away. "You left this behind." She holds up his pen.

"That's alright, you can keep that," he says.

McLaren has just flown in from Australia, where he has been shuttled round in promotional work for two weeks. He judged the national dancing competitions and appeared several times on TV's *Countdown*. He's also been spreading the gospel of Double Dutch, the skipping game that was the basis for his most recent single of the same name. The sport's getting big all over the world, he says. He didn't really get to recover from jet lag.

"Did you see McLaren?" the receptionist says to a young porter.

"You couldn't really miss him, could you?" the porter says.

## Duck

"What I really wanted to do with that album was to demonstrate very clearly where the origins of most rock'n'roll lie and what it is and why people like construction workers and bakers can do it quite easily without being

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professional musicians. I wanted to show that it is a people's art.

"I also wanted to show that music doesn't stem from London Town. Being from London, I just wanted to jump out and say 'It's happening in Zululand and it's happening much better'."

"I could never have made that record called 'Double Dutch' using London session musicians. A New York street dance from the ghettos of Harlem. Going to Zululand and recording it with Zulu singers; it showed that there were other ways of doing it than sitting in London taking your salsa rhythm here and another bit of rhythm there. I went out and used the real people for a change.

"People denounced me for that, that was the funny thing. They called me a terrible plunderer and that sort of thing. I said: 'Well, where are the police then? What have they been doing for the past three years? What have you been living off since the days of the Beatles? I'm just more up front about it,' and they didn't like that, 'cause the English don't like people being up front."

McLaren briefly squeezes his eyes shut as the hard TV lighting is switched on.

"What's the name of this show then? *Shazam*? Isn't that what Captain Marvel used to say?"



The moment the cameras begin to roll McLaren comes alive. He's an odd, seditious little jester. He seems aware he's speaking to a youthful audience and the interview is much

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more fun that the dry affair on *Radio With Pictures*. There's plenty of it — Phil Schofield's polite attempts at halting or directing him are brushed aside with ease.

There's a little shiver of delighted horror from the *Shazam* team when McLaren starts to talk about bondage clothes and kinky leatherwear.

I Have Seen the Future of Rock'n'Roll and Its Name is Sony.

"The days are going when people are going to buy albums. Music will get bigger but in a different way. People are buying it and doing it in more ways than they ever have before.

"But that doesn't necessitate them buying albums and the industry's paranoid about that but I don't think they have the vision to understand that it's a growth industry, but in a different format than they're used to.

"It might be that some kid just likes the pair of socks that Boy George is wearing and that is the only reason they want to look at Boy George and they get the socks and that's their bit of it.

"They might not actually want the record. That's only 10 per cent of the whole thing.

"If the industry thought like that they'd be more up. They think like in the days of the Beatles when everybody bought records and stayed inside their houses and played them. Those days are over because everybody wants the socks more than the records, 'cause they can be seen. You're more happening if you've got the socks. Who cares if you've got the record? Nobody goes back to your bedroom anyway."

So what will the pop stars of the 80s be like?

"Dance teams and messy singers. "Dance teams because there's a lot of content in jumping out of the closet by becoming sexually aware of your body and all that racial distinction has to be swallowed up.

"Messy singers can just strum away on a simple guitar, revive Leadbelly. Without any of the artifacts. It's not necessary to have all that stuff if you're just a messy singer.

"I think discotheques are gonna become live, rather than have DJs like ghosts, behind a box. They're going to become more like personalities. I think the state of the art is actually the discotheque now.

"I think they'll get lighter. They'll be more like ... I hate to say this ... health clubs to a certain extent. You don't want to be in a dark, dingy hole, all smoky. The dance you're doing is so visual. You can't be all huddled up, you've got to have a bit of space, you've got to demonstrate it, so you've got to have lights."

So the youth culture of the 80s will be colourful?

"Yes. I'm very optimistic myself. A lot of people have the exact opposite opinion of me."

"Bit racy here, is it?"

Eh? Oh, he means like in racist. He's a little puzzled that he hasn't seen a Polynesian in the four-and-a-bit hours he's been in the country. And that there aren't any in the bar.

He seems genuinely interested in having a talk to some street kids. It's a pity he's unlikely to get the chance.

## Soweto-A-Go-Go

"I had a lot of problems in South Africa. All that film and music was smuggled out and to actually film 'Soweto' cost £10,000 in bribes. I've still got a lot of problems with Soweto because the white South Africans didn't like the fact that I paid all the money over to the Zulus and didn't pay anything to white South African publishing and record companies. They've been knocking at our door and accusing me of piracy and plundering. My only response is to say 'I just don't agree with the fact that you own the Zulus and I knew fucking sure if I paid you the Zulus weren't gonna get a penny'."

"That stand caused a lot of headaches in England because England does so much trade with South Africa.

"They're a very proud people, the Zulus. And

**"Music, as pop music, has lost such a lot of credibility because it's no longer got any point of view."**

musical. Those singers on the album, they'd compare to anything out of Motown. There's something about it, some quality, they've got more soul.

The 'Soweto' video was made in Soweto with a black crew.

"I didn't want to film it showing the people sort of downbeat, I wanted to make it very up. Down would be the obvious Richard Attenborough, *Nationwide* approach. You've got to show the people happy, as if it's a place you'd want to go for a holiday.

"I was like Father Christmas in a way, because they'd never had anybody care, ever, about their situation or care to present them in a way that would musically ... kind of promote them. The fact that I may make their music work alongside the likes of Michael Jackson and the Police is a fantastic thing because it puts Zululand on the map.

"Like, if I was to go to El Salvador and find some terrific musical group there and record them and release it in America and try to get a Top Ten hit and all these Americans want to go for a holiday to El Salvador and suddenly find that Ronald Reagan's policies ... aren't correct ... you can use music like that.

"It can be quite political in that respect. I never thought you could, but now, right now, this decade you can use music like that to fuck things

up a lot. Because the world's getting so much smaller, you see. People are finding out more.

"I'd like to put the IRA and the PLO on the same album. I'd like to do a whole thing with all those guerilla groups — the Indian bandits and so on. Because music on that level, it's like an information. It's using music in a different way.

"People haven't been used to using music in that way but they're getting so informed now that I think they'd be interested in an album like that.

"It's like allying sports to music to sports, like in 'Double Dutch', because people like the idea of sport.

"Music, as pop music, has lost such a lot of credibility because it's no longer got any point of view."

McLaren fairly glows in a bright orange sweatshirt purchased in New York.

"It's easy to customise things," he says,

**"My original concept when I formed the Sex Pistols was I wanted them to compete with the Bay City Rollers."**

looking down at the lettering on his chest. 'Punk It Up', it says, 'Duck' on one arm 'Rock' on the other.

"I just walked into a shop and had the letters put on."

## Point That Pistol Somewhere Else

"You were running on tremendous adrenalin. You winged it all the time. You played with fire. It was great, you were living it, so you were never aware.

"My original concept when I formed the Sex Pistols was I wanted them to compete with the Bay City Rollers. But it never turned out that way.

"They were nothing like them. They did more than compete with them, they took the world by storm in a very different way and left a smouldering hole.

"Anarchy crept into a child's dictionary, people understood what it meant. And they loved it because it meant doing everything that you father and mother didn't want you to.

"And to relieve that from the days of James Dean or Elvis Presley was too difficult. It had to be told in other terms. So 'Anarchy in the UK' became an anthem. So did 'God Save the Queen' and 'Pretty Vacant'. They were all songs that related to that.

"All those groups — Adam and the Ants, Boy George, ABC — they're all punk rockers, you know. People don't realise that.

"It was funny because we put Mick Jagger and everyone else aside and they all ran back into their closets and houses in the country and bohemian retreats.

"But as soon as the Sex Pistols died they all came out and cut their hair. Mick Jagger said: 'I'm the Godfather of Punk', he even wore the same T-shirt as Johnny did. Pete Townshend said: 'Hold it, I'm the Godfather of Punk'. They were all godfathers! I thought, what audacity! The Rolling Stones sold more records after the Sex Pistols than they ever sold before."

With punk came not only major changes in music, but changes in society's aesthetics. The broad, curved and flowing gave way to the narrow, sharp and economical. Haircuts shortened, trouser legs narrowed, skinny become attractive again, most aspects of design were affected. People no longer wrote 'LOVE' in bubbly balloon letters, they wrote 'ANARCHY' in stick letters (language, too, was far from unaffected). Would that all have happened in the same manner without the Sex

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THE REVIEW OF THE STONES EP IN THE CHCH STAR SAID  
"THE RECORDED SOUND IS ABOVE EXPECTATIONS."

THE BUILDERS BEATIN HEART ALBUM HAS HAD 5  
EXCELLENT REVIEWS, WITH STATEMENTS LIKE "SUPERBLY  
PRODUCED" (RIP IT UP) AND "SIMPLE CLEAR AND SENSITIVE  
SOUND" (INNER CITY NEWS).

WHICH SHOWS WE CAN GET THE PROFESSIONAL SOUND  
THAT YOU EXPECT. (IT'S ATTITUDE Y'KNOW).

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STRAIN EP.



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