



Good News from

# Simple Minds

*The phone rings in a hotel somewhere in Paris.*

"George, how ya doin'? You're nearly as old as me."

"I'm older, Jim."

"I know."

"And what's age got to do with rock 'n' roll?"

"These days, nothin', in fact it seems to be a good thing."

"So, how old are you?"

"Thirty-five, I'm wet behind the ears compared to Mick Jagger."

"Aren't we all."

So, Simple Minds are back as a functioning unit. They have a confident new year album, *Good News From the Next World*, that has taken Jim Kerr to Paris as part of a European promotional tour. America will be taken care of by a forthcoming band tour.

"To be fair, we've never given America the shot it deserved. For the first time in 10 years it looks great, as we're now on Virgin in America instead of A&M and, without making excuses, being a licensed band, you don't get the same treatment. Taking America hasn't been a burning crusade, but it's an exciting prospect for the sheer novelty value."

Not exactly the philosophy that stadium mates U2 have followed in their 15 year demolition of America.

"Not only do they make great music and work their balls off," rationalises Jim, "but from day one, they always believed America was their main place and they worked the whole Irish thing in Boston and New York. They would've played that card like a politician. Fair play to them because up until then the Clash, the Pistols and the Jam had failed to take America, whereas you'd probably see U2 play in Boston before you saw them in Glasgow or Manchester."

Taking stock, it's been four years since the last new Simple Minds album. The less than startling *Real Life* sounded like a tired and predictable, business-as-usual pretence that keyboardist Mick McNeill's departure hadn't altered the balance of the band's music.

"It was the first album we'd done without Mick," as he decided he didn't want to live life that way any more.

Unfortunately, I didn't believe him and I thought he'd be back after a few months break. Not only did he not do that, but we contrived his sound, which made the whole thing a bit still-born instead of saying, as we have on this record, we're not a keyboard band any more.

"We had a mental block, as we thought Simple Minds without keyboards would be like the Doors without keyboards. But you put on this new record and it doesn't strike you instantly that there's no keyboards. It just strikes you that it's Simple Minds, but it's spikier, more muscular and rougher, yet it still has the big sound, and the drama and the epic, where it's required."

"I'm really chuffed with it. It's the first step on a new journey for us. A lot of people ask: 'Why are you still doing this?' The question implies we've had a richly rewarded, enduring career. I say to them: 'Why does an eskimo fish? 'Cause that's what he does.'"

So, precisely why did Mick leave?

"All the usual reasons. He felt he'd given enough of his life to the band. He got married and they were planning a kid. I think he was sick of me as well, which I can understand. I don't see him and it ended not acrimonious, but awkward. There was so much emotion involved, and little camps and wives and ex-wives and all that Spinal Tap stuff."

"But it's worked out for the best as the new album seems much more vital without the padding. We've got an enforced economy without Mick and I think Charlie [Burchill's] the man anyway. When Mick left I thought: 'Fuck, are we a duo now?' I've never been much for duos, as I've always loved bands, but now there's just the two of us instead of five, the concentration is like a laser beam. When there's five, there's always a political thing. If there's three or four of you, you tend to bend with the flow — although great things can come from the chemistry of that. The irony is that just the two of us started the band in Charlie's bedroom. He's got a bigger bedroom these days, but we're still back there."

"When you're 19, it's easy. You're all together and everyone's up for the crusade. Everybody believes the same and

it's the band against the world — very tribal. It's also very adolescent, because the reality is people develop and want to pull this and that way. It tends to come down to who wants it more gets it his way. I could never have given this up, whereas people like Mick could and did."

"Yet, on my high horse a bit, there's something in me that's a bit naff, saying: 'You make a few bob and then you fuck off.' But what's that to a fan?"

If your music's to be worth anything there's got to be a commitment that goes beyond the cash motive.

"There has to be. I can't think of anything more nouveau riche than making a few bob, buying yourself a wee castle, then pulling up the drawbridge. If that's what I wanted, I would've stuck to the dog racing."

*Good News From the Next World* is better than average Simple Minds craftsmanship. It's given a focus, edge and continuity by Charlie, who plays out of his skin, filling gaps, crashing chords and generally making sure Jim's doubts, claims and wilder assertions are carried by the appropriate muscle. 'Hypnotised' and 'My Life' would be fine songs in anybody's book, the latter a Kerr affirmation driven home by a haunting guitar line.

"In that song, I'm reflecting about the band and what I do. I'm generally an optimistic writer, but some of the back biting did get to me and I lost some of my confidence. There was so much going on and I was taking stock of where it puts us individually. It's a statement that: 'This is what I do, and I'm not going to budge, whether it's fashionable, or selling, or not.' These are my values, hopes, fears. There's something very youthful about that song. It's usually the sort of statement an 18 year old would make."

The dreamily romantic 'Hypnotised' is equally fine. A reflection of stable domestic life with second wife Patsy Kensit, perhaps?

"If it was, I'd never admit it. When I'm writing I'm almost meditating and I hear the words in the music. Initially, there's not a lot of logic involved, as it's an emotional response. I see the character in the music before I decide