



Wheels on Fire

An interview with 18 Wheeler's Sean Jackson.

18Wheeler? Sounds like some sorta mutant bicycle.

"We actually got our name from a defunct porno mag," chuckles Sean Jackson, in his northern Scottish brogue. "It was a gay black truckers mag (that's why it's called *18 Wheeler*), and we just thought it would be a good name for a band."

Yes, quite, anyway, 18 Wheeler are the new wonderkids on Creation. Their second album, *Formanka*, has all the innocence and exuberance of a band thrilled to exploit and expose their influences and add the twist of their own unique perspective. But back to the beginning and Sean's early life, which reads like a slice of *Rob Roy*, what with the born and raised on a Scottish croft scenario.

"Just disregard any bios you get sent about us. I was born in a tiny village in the highlands, it was almost a croft. I lived there until I was

18, and then I went to the University of Glasgow, where I met some like minded people and formed the band."

Was that where you did your doctorate?

"No, that's all rubbish. That bio was done two years ago in the back of a bus or something, and it's come back to haunt us."

So you're not catatonic with a drink problem?

"That's actually very true," laughs Jackson. "I feel subdued, as I had a few last night. I enjoy drinking mainly beer and occasionally whisky, but with whisky you usually end up disgracing yourself."

The band grew up on an obvious early diet of Beatles/Byrds/Beach Boys, before discovering Dinosaur Jr., Mudhoney, Nirvana, etc. But their closest kindred spirits are the Mary Chain and, in particular, Teenage Fanclub.

"I know the Fanclub now, but I didn't know them when we started the band. Norman

[Blake] came up when we were playing in Glasgow and said he liked us. I know Norman reasonably well now and his list of favourite records would coincide with mine, so our influences are very similar. If you asked Norman what Teenage Fanclub are trying to do, he'd give you the same answer as mine: trying to write great pop songs.

"So, there's a kindred spirit as far as that goes, and we get hammered for it here because everyone thinks we're trying to rip off Teenage Fanclub, but it's not true."

But the word over here is you guys are hot.

"The music press is giving us a hard time, but they tend to be patronising on anything that comes out of Scotland. A lot of them were down on Teenage Fanclub for a while, but their new album's just come out and it's turned the press around because it's a great album."

"The press seem to want intellectual manifestos rather than music, especially some little tossers at *Melody Maker* who don't seem to understand what pop music's about. It's about hitting you on an emotional level. There's no manifesto behind it, a great song's a great song."

"But there are people who appreciate what we're doing. Nick Kent wrote a really great review of our first album. He lives in Paris now and doesn't do a lot of writing. He was comparing it to Love's *Forever Changes*, and he described our album as an almost perfect record. Someone like Kent, who knows what

cism and restrained and integrated grunge. Funny title too."

"It's named after a bar in Prague, in the Czech Republic. We spent quite a bit of time there last summer as one of our close friends was teaching over there. It used to be called The Thirsty Dog, and I think Nick Cave mentioned it in a song as well. People used to smoke dope there and stuff, so the police would raid it every few months and close it down. They've since pulled it down. Just a crazy bar really, one of many."

Is *Formanka* better than your first album?

"It's more successful. Our first album was pieced together over a year in four different sessions because we weren't happy with the sound, so we kept re-doing it — a very protracted process — and I haven't listened to it since we did it. It's got some brilliant songs, but it's possibly over long and so doesn't hang together."

What's overlong, since *Formanka* clocks in at around a modest 27 minutes.

"I like short albums. Brevity in pop music is everything. We always seem to write songs that last about two and a half minutes at the maximum, so with 10 songs on it, you're left with a short record. And *Formanka* was an easy album to make as we knew what we were doing before we went into the studio and did it in one stretch."

The album is full of delightful songs right from the opener, 'Bodha', which is about "the

cultural despondency around at the moment", to things like the fragile beauty of the Beach Boys inspired 'Cartoon'.

"Yeah, writing songs on the piano, unless you're going to sound like Elton John, I find it quite easy to slip into the Brian Wilson mode of songwriting. As long as I'm not compared unfavourably as shite to some of the Beach Boys' songs, then I don't mind. Some of their songs are the best things pop music has ever produced, and trying to emulate those is fine by me."

"To the future, and Jackson reckons the next album will be more ambitious, with strings attached. So, rock 'n' roll is the life for him?

"I'd like it to be, but it's hard if you're not breaking even, and bands have a finite life span that can last for one or 10 albums. So, I'm not thinking too far ahead as far as this band goes."

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