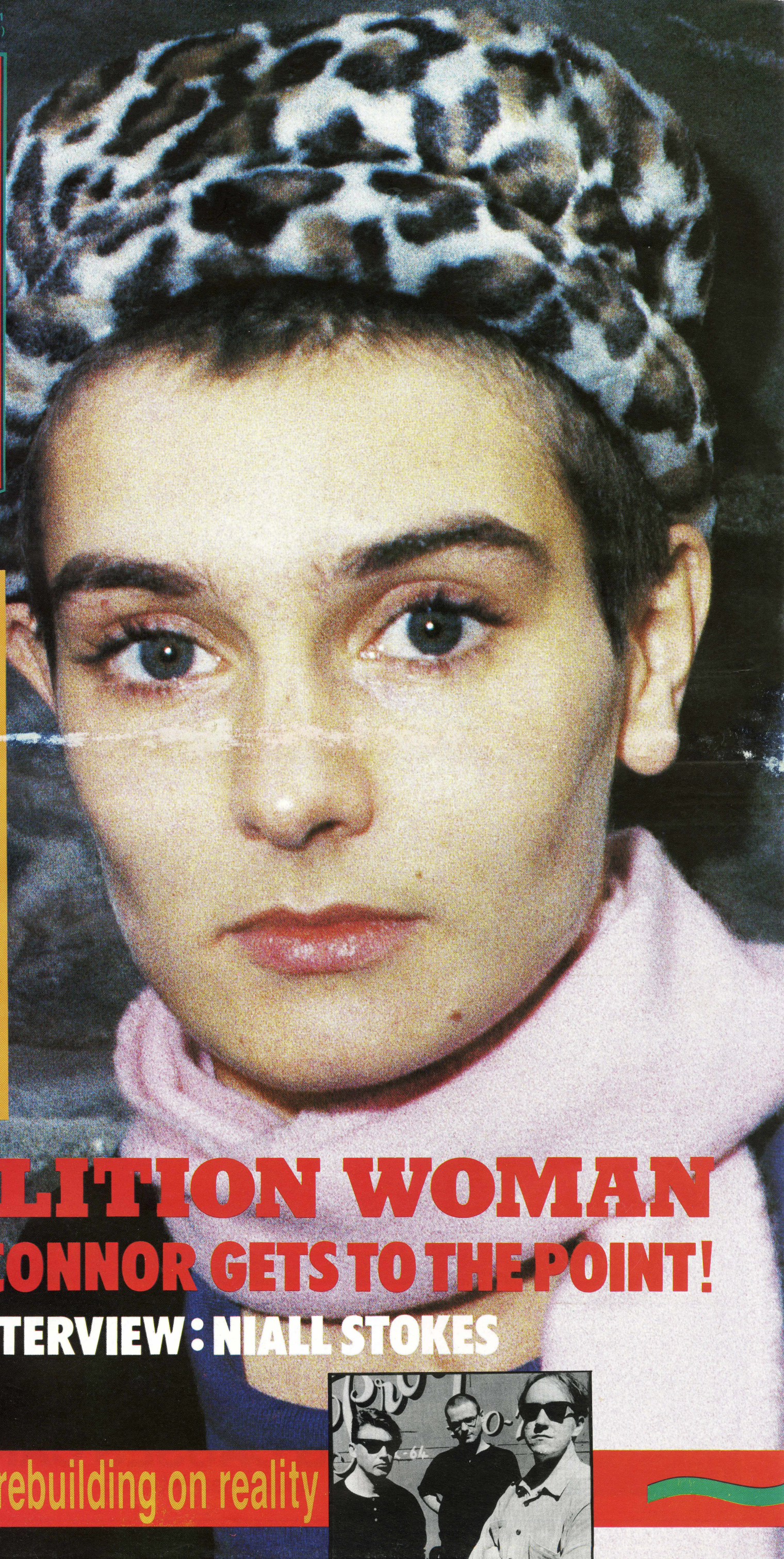


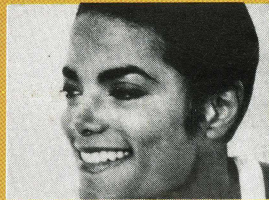
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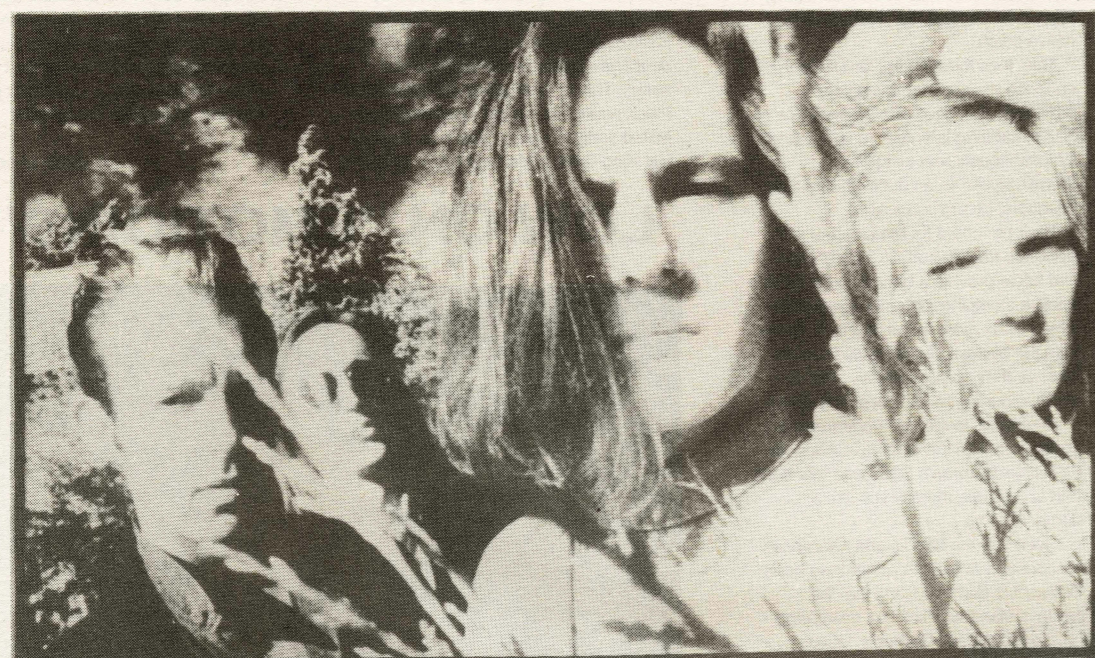
INTERVIEW: NIALL STOKES

a house: rebuilding on reality



HONOUR AMONG THIEVES

LAST JANUARY WHEN PSYCHIC ZAK MARTIN PREDICTED A YEAR OF INTERNAL CRISIS FOR THE HONEY THIEVES, FEW TOOK HIM SERIOUSLY. HOWEVER, 1991 HAS PROVEN TO BE A VERY TRAUMATIC PERIOD FOR THE BAND WHAT WITH CONTRACTUAL DIFFICULTIES AND, MORE SERIOUSLY, THE DEPARTURE OF FRONTMAN DAVE LAVELLE. FORTUNATELY, THE WORST IS NOW FIRMLY BEHIND THEM AND THE QUARTET'S PROSPECTS ARE STARTING TO LOOK BRIGHTER THAN EVER. DELVING INTO THE PAST AND READING THE THIEVES-LEAVES FOR THE FUTURE: **GEORGE BYRNE.**



A band of Thieves with new frontman Shane Walsh third from left

WHILE MOST A&R men — paid and unpaid, the latter unfortunates usually being referred to as 'Rock journalists' — tend to use traditional methods for determining a band's likely future it seems we've been urinating into a howling gale all along.

Consigned to scrapheap along with such archaic oddities as vinyl singles, Guinness Light, Raggle Taggle and English dreams of a clean sweep in this year's European club competitions (Ha! Ha! Ha!) are outmoded concepts like an ear for a good song, a grasp of how a band fit into the prevailing scheme of things and an ability to guess whether or not their manager might ever end up owning his own television station. No, in future I'm afraid these tried and mostly trusted talents will be surpassed by expertise in divination techniques, including tarot readings and pendulum delving! Titter ye not and consider the case of The Honey Thieves.

In January of this year The Honey Thieves were on an almighty roll. Less than a year treading the boards and they'd been lapping up critical superlatives, steadily built up a loyal fanbase, released an acclaimed debut single with "Drive" and were about to pick up the Philip Lynott New Band Award from the prestigious Hot Press/Smithwicks Awards panel. There had been several major labels sniffing around the band in the preceding months and nobody in their right mind would have predicted anything less than an ever-ascending career graph for this fiery Rock'n'Roll quartet. Well, nobody except psychic Zak Martin.

A fortnight before The Honey Thieves picked up their well-earned gong at a reception in Parkes Hotel, the aforementioned Mr. Martin — as an adjunct to an extensive Hot Press interview — delved and divined on behalf of a handful of bands picked by H.P. — none of whom he'd ever heard — and came up with this prediction for the promising newcomers:

"This band rang loud bells for me. They're practically guaranteed to be successful. However, they will have a major internal crisis during the coming year which will throw some members of the band, but if they can keep their heads through all of this it will be plain sailing all the way. Finally, they

should avoid signing contracts during the first six months of the year."

Sure Zak, sure, and one-twelfth of the world's population should take greater care as regards money matters but needn't despair because romance is well-expected and we're all going to get laid this weekend. . . hooray!

March saw the release of the band's second single, "Secondhand Man" which followed its predecessor into the Irish charts. All, therefore, appeared to be going well, but come June The Honey Thieves' express came right off the rails with the news that singer Dave Lavelle had departed in what could hardly be described as amicable circumstances, being replaced by former Hysterics frontman Shane Walsh less than a week before an appearance at Felle. So what happened?

"It wasn't a sudden thing," says guitarist Derek Turner, "some snap decision followed by the whole thing erupting. Dave became a very negative force within the band, within the whole idea of The Honey Thieves."

"We tried to sort things out over a period of six to seven months, there were loads and loads of meetings but I think he just changed as a person. Like, when this band started out we could all relate to each other and Dave was particularly good at communicating the idea of The Honey Thieves to people. We got a lot of great press at the beginning and that does blow people's heads sometimes and by around November last year he really began to change."

Derek asserts that in the early part of this year the band was "being pulled asunder" with no new songs being written and morale at an all-time low. "We were going through the motions," he says, hoping that things would work themselves out but they weren't, it was all going downhill rapidly."

The crunch which led to the departure of their flamboyant frontman came (cue theme from "The Twilight Zone") when the matter of contracts arose in the Spring. "That was the last straw, really," says Derek. "When the publishing contracts were being bandied about that character became so at odds with what the rest of us wanted that a split became inevitable."

For his part, Dave Lavelle refutes suggestions that he underwent some kind of dramatic personality change, and simply maintains that he received independent advice which counselled against adding his signature to the piece of paper

put in front of the band, and his resistance to the pressure from the other three members made a split sadly unavoidable. Derek is, understandably, reluctant to divulge on record the exact details of the offer which led to the parting of the ways and observes with a sigh, "It was all very sad in the end, I'm sorry it had to end that way between us and Dave but . . ."

The loss of their frontman inevitably led to murmurs that The Honey Thieves were a classic case of 'too much, too soon' and — gosh, now there's a thing — that they'd been hyped out of all proportion to their talent. Derek Turner, however, doesn't regret the media blitz — entirely unsolicited by the then managerless band, don't forget — which surrounded their first steps onto the stage.

"Looking back I genuinely don't think that we were hyped," he says. "But then being so close to the whole thing I know for my part that we weren't, we had these songs written, played a handful of gigs and the word went around like lightning. It's not our fault that there wasn't that much else happening when we first appeared last year and the press came to check us out. If people had thought we were shite I'm sure they would have said so, but we weren't. . . you know that."

As the bulk of this interview has so far taken place in the past tense let's dispel the aura of gloom by taking a look at The Honey Thieves as they stand today. Their third release — the "Crawl" EP — has just been released and contains easily their best four recorded songs to date. Produced by Phil Tennant, the tracks have punch and a Pop sensibility which has been slightly lacking in their first two efforts. New singer Shane Walsh sounds, well, a lot like Dave Lavelle actually, in terms of phrasing, which isn't surprising really seeing as the tracks were actually recorded using the erstwhile chanter, Shane's vocals replacing Dave's following the split.

"Sure, those songs were written when Dave was in the band but I still think they're great songs and we'll continue to play them in the set," says Derek. "If we were to deny our past it would be extremely foolish, even though since Shane has joined we've come up with nine or ten new songs that I'm really happy with."

"Honestly, there's been an explosion in the songwriting in the past few months," he continues. "There's been a release of something that I feel has been held up for the past six or seven months. Peter our bass player has been taking control of harmonies, even I'm singing backing onstage now — God help us! — and all of us are writing like madmen. I reckon The Honey Thieves are a much more musical band these days, and while we haven't lost that in-your-face guitar sound there's a lot more going on behind the wall-of-noise than before."

However sprightly the shape they're in at the moment, things couldn't have seemed all that rosy when the band undertook their first British tour proper in the weeks following Felle. With the bulk of their U.K. press having centred around the release of "Secondhand Man" some six months previously The Honey Thieves wasn't exactly a name-tripping from the tongues of the British gig-going public, as the opening night proved.

"Yeah," grins Derek, "fifteen people on a Tuesday night in Leicester wasn't what you'd call a great start, especially when you're trying to break a new singer in but by the end of the tour — we did twelve gigs in fourteen days — things were really starting to gel."

Indeed, Derek is at pains to point out the significance of the jaunt to the band.

"We knew we were going to lose money but we were determined to do it for our own peace of mind. After seven or eight months of bad unrest it got things back into perspective very quickly. It was absolutely crucial for Shane — and for all of us — to get out there and throw ourselves into the shit end of things and I knew that if we could come back with a mental and moral victory then it would have been well worth it. As it turned out it was well worth it and you just can't put a figure on the kind of boost that gives a band."

"And another thing about that tour," adds Derek, "was that apart from a few Irish people at the London gigs no-one — fuckin' no-one — gave even the slightest bit of notice to the fact that we'd a new singer, they appreciated us for what we were rather than what we had been and I'm sure that's going to happen at home as well."

"Realistically, in Dublin we've a core audience that just about fills the Baggot and we're still a very young band in real terms, with not even two years gigging under our belt. This EP is easily the best thing we've ever done, the new songs are well happening and the mood in the band couldn't be better. Really, I'm looking forward to this Irish tour that we've got coming up before Christmas, an English tour with The Ramones and I seriously expect that come January or February nobody will want to know about all the shite that went on this year. . . or even remember it."

Well Zak, the ball is in your court! ■



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