

● **Saints alive, Vicar!** You thought **PALE SAINTS** were set to blur the edges of rock'n' reality with their super-frazzled indie-rock, yet as their debut LP *'The Comforts Of Madness'* storms up the indie charts the boys from West Yorkshire admit a fondness for Burt Bacharach, the Bay City Rollers and The Sweet!

A shocked **MANDI JAMES** hears tales of drunken postmen and tartan trousers. **DEREK RIDGERS** puts some colour in their cheeks.

**I**t's a weird day. London is falling apart at the seams. Roads are blocked, trains have stopped, people are being mashed by falling debris.

Schizophrenic elements are causing chaos and havoc. There's an air of suppressed hysteria. The bully-boy wind buffets and blows me into Rock 'n' Roll Valhalla, the infamous Columbia Hotel where many a TV set has winged its way out of a window.

Huddled at the far end of the room, silhouetted against a rattling window and grey sky, sit one of the brightest hopes for the '90s. I have seen the future of music with my own eyes – and they look so *ordinary*.

In their collective form, Pale Saints are so dazzlingly unaffected, so unequivocally normal I can't quite equate the music with the people. Not that I expected the unexpected, just something, well, you know, a bit different. It's like talking to the boy next door – but then I guess home is where the art is.

Hailing from Leeds with a sound held together with dodgy wiring and sticky back plastic, Pale Saints could well have been any other archetypal indie band struggling for a break. Yet beneath their impoverished state and knackered instruments there was something that tweaked the ears and got the muso instincts quivering.

On the seventh day they married 4AD and smacked us with the delicious *'Barging Into The Presence Of God'* EP. Superlatives were hurled at the band left, right and centre and I rekindled my crush on bold, beautiful guitars.

Whilst the public gushed and drooled, picked and pruned, Pale Saints paid little attention to the fuss, stuck their fingers in their ears and virtually withdrew from the real world for two months. Drawing on material they'd had stuffed in their back pockets since time immemorial, the band toiled, sweated, twiddled strange knobs and turned tired but triumphant vinyl into a debut album, *'The Comforts Of Madness'*, under the name Pale Saints.

Trying my damndest to pick their brains for the secret of their success, Pale Saints are loathe to give much away.

"I don't think it's important what people say about you," begins Ian the pale, frail looking vocalist. "We existed before anything was written about us and we managed to carry on then. Obviously it's depressing if people constantly say shitty things about you, but there's no point worrying. Primarily it's most important for us to like the music we're doing."

Their natural reticence to describe or pigeonhole their sound has led to inevitable

# PALE AND ARTY



**Saint misbehavin': the Pale ones**

comparisons to kindred noise merchants JAMC and My Bloody Valentine.

"It's a very lazy way of describing music, isn't it," continues Ian. "It's very subjective all this comparison – you might as well describe music in abstract terms like... erm... such and such is like a pool of fire."

Thankfully their music sounds like nothing of the sort. *'The Comforts Of Madness'* is awash with depth and colour. It's not perfect – a couple of tracks sound formidable – but there's an irresistible melancholic mood. Pale Saints aren't dour bastards, but they know how to indulge in their piques and passions. Of all the quality tracks on the album, it's *'Little Hammer'* which stays lodged in your memory, simply because it's been stripped down to its purest form.

"I wrote the chords on acoustic

guitar anyway and it suggested a gentler kind of arrangement, so there didn't really seem any point in rocking it up," explains Ian. "The song is partly about when I got told I had a heart murmur, I was a bit distressed – I think I almost had a heart attack when I was told. But then I found out it wasn't true, just a complete mistake. It was the sound of blood going through the arteries... or something like that."

Like all good things in life, their music is borne from a gut feeling, a kind of chaos and irrationality. "I don't know if any of us are competent enough to be totally calculating about our music," muses Ian.

PALE SAINTS like to blur the edges of reality. The ambiguity which underlies their music is partly due to inaudible lyrics – the vocals are washed out in the mix – yet the intonation implies the

**"I can be alright until five minutes before we're on stage, then I start dropping me sticks and laughing hysterically during the songs" – Chris**

whole gamut of volatile moods. So are they the sensitive creatures their records hint at? I'm met by three blank faces.

"That says a lot doesn't it, not answering the question," replies Chris with a Cheshire cat grin. "I have me moments of passion – but we won't go into them."

"Are we really in any position to say whether we're sensitive or not?" retorts Graeme sensitively.

"Yeah, what the hell do you mean by that?" demands Ian, slamming his coffee cup on the table. "We're not bloody touchy that's for certain."

What a wag. The cover version of *'Fall From*

*The Sun'*, by cult American group Opal, reveals the band's rather more unconventional, slightly exotic tastes. Probing deeper, they pledge allegiance to Kendra Smith (one time singer with The Dream Syndicate) Roy Orbison and Screaming Jay Hawkins.

"I'll buy any record I can get for under £2.50," confesses Ian. "But I'd much rather experiment on something I haven't heard before than go out and buy something I know I'll like."

Before Graeme and Chris know what's hit them, Ian's pledged allegiance to Burt Bacharach – effectively tarring the rest of the band with the same brush.

"I've got about 850 of his LPs," he enthuses. "I've got some really dodgy ones. Have you ever heard the soundtrack for the *Los! Horizon* film?"

We are stumbling across suspect territory here.

"I used to be a bit mental on The Sweet as well," continues Ian brazenly, kissing any chance of a cool reputation goodbye. "I used to think that several of the band were women because of their page boy haircuts."

"I used to be into The Bay City Rollers. Me mum wouldn't let me have the tartan trousers, or the T-shirt with the transfer stuck on the front. I had a tartan scarf, though!"

In between tasteless childhoods and fame, fame, fatal fame, Pale Saints drifted individually through mundane jobs and hopeless bands. Despite protests from Chris that he was locked in the coal shed as a child, forced to leave school at 14 and work in the mill – he actually had aspirations to become a footballer. Blown out by rickety kneecaps he did the next best thing – and became a postman.

"It's pretty miserable getting up at five every morning, but sometimes when the sun was coming up and it was dead quiet it was beautiful. It used to be great hearing people argue though. They'd hear you come up the garden path and keep dead quiet till you'd gone, then start again."

"I used to have a friend who was a postman," adds Ian "and as he did his round he'd steadily get more and more pissed and wrecked. I think half the letters ended up in his wardrobe."

Ian spent his youth at college in Birmingham, "then moved to Leeds because it was nicer and no-one seemed interested in forming a band in the Midlands."

So has he fulfilled a life-long ambition in fronting Pale Saints?

"Er, no. It just occurred one day to join a band – I never really thought I was capable of it. I just thought that if I don't try it, I'll always regret it."

And as for Graeme, I guess he played guitar before he could talk. He's quiet, shy and unwilling to be drawn into conversation.

The three eventually met "at a bus stop outside Wetherby" after Graeme and Chris answered an advert Ian had in a music shop.

"I was hoping never to have to say the word 'Wetherby' in an interview," moans Ian. "It's one of those sleepy Yorkshire villages where nothing happens. Oh god, I'm going to get my head kicked in for saying that."

Some things never change. Ian will continue to land himself in it, they'll continue to get homesick and live shows will be wracked with nerves, heads down and adrenalin pumping.

"I can be alright until about five minutes before we go on stage, then I start dropping me sticks and laughing hysterically during the songs."

Chris still moonlights with Edsel Auctioneer, whom he knew before the Pale Saints were even a twinkle in his eye.

A long line of commitments has also meant the Saints missing Leeds play at home (perhaps a blessing in disguise). A glamorous life it ain't. Chris is quick to point out: "The only exciting thing that's happened to me since I've been here at the hotel is that I got pinned down by an 80-year-old woman when it was her birthday, who tried to put her tongue down me throat."

As the tape recorder clicks to a standstill, the band visibly relax at the thought of packing up and going home – only to be informed that the stormy weather has brought travel to a standstill. Ian grows paler still, Graeme sinks back into his shell and Chris begins to laugh hysterically. When you're a home-loving kinda guy, sometimes fame and fortune can be a pain in the arse.