

GET A HALF-LIFE

● They're not the Stooges and Paul Oakenfold has never been near one of their songs, leaving PALE SAINTS in a slightly awkward position – a '90s 'indie' band. SIMON WILLIAMS finds the Leeds Luddites talking up a quiet revolution nonetheless. Sainly shots: AJ BARRATT

Even if 1990 is remembered for no other reason than being the baggiest 12 months in the history of rock 'n' roll, Pale Saints will at least have the memory of a week-long

blitz in Japan embedded in their minds.

"It was quite weird there," recalls singing bassist Ian Masters. "At first it seems quite Westernised, but then you begin to notice strange things going on, people behaving quite strangely. There's like a feudal structure to all the office workers, and while the women are trying to shake off

their secondary citizen status they're still caught in the old traditional ways as well. Actually, at times Japan was just like Scunthorpe on a Saturday night."

On a more escapist level, Pale Saints were faced with hordes of fainting females in the Land Of The Rising Sun.

"We'd come out of a building and people would throw their coats down in front of us!" gasps drummer Chris Cooper in disbelief. "A lot of bowing and scraping goes on. And our audience was 90 per cent female, so there was . . . erm . . . a mass wetting of knickers. We were told that all bands get that kind of response, which kind of spoilt it for me . . ."

LIGHT YEARS away from the turmoil and fanatical turbulence of Tokyo, Pale Saints are snuggled in a mouldy Leeds public house sandwiched between the polytechnic and the quite terrifying Merriem shopping centre. And just in case one momentarily forgets where one is situated, authentic soccer supporter Chris will willingly sell you a lorryload of Leeds United Progress Association raffle tickets to remind you of the location.

Chris, in fact, was heading to a career as an LUFC lynchpin until two dodgy knees forced him to plump for a drumkit rather than an all-white strip. Equally dodgy Wetherby-based alliances with guitarist Graeme Naysmith followed until 1987, when Pale Saints formed and commenced colouring in all the awkward spaces in the alternative spectrum.

Last February's 'The Comforts

Of Madness' LP was the impressive, highly imaginative culmination of three years of idiosyncratic toiling. Pale Saints had taken every indie albatross (key vocals, jangling guitars, offhand mayhem) and manipulated them into a ferociously delicate framework, refreshing the genre by making the dismally predictable deliciously unpredictable. In retrospect, Chris tentatively considers the album to be "on a par with the Ride, Stone Roses and Sundays LPs," and he has a point.

70,000 copies, eight months and one new guitarist (Meriel) on, Pale Saints are flirting again with their immaculately haphazard formula on the new 'Half-Life' EP. Over the five tracks, the Saints spring from (cough) shambling disinterest to melodic brilliance, ugly ducklings blossoming into gorgeous swans in front of our very ears. Thus far the title track has attracted most attention, its undulating hookline generally considered to be a direct lift from a Manfred Mann song circa '73.

"I've never ever heard Manfred Mann," gripes main creator Ian, predictably.

Maybe you heard the original subliminally.

"I don't listen to things subliminally," he insists. "I can't – it must be something to do with when they took out my adenoids! Our songs should be huge orchestral pieces played on rock instruments, but not so they sound like Rush. I find the format of rock songs distressingly dull and boring because, like with American rock bands doing ballads, you know exactly what's going to happen next. It's the



Pale Saints: Big in Japan (oh, and Leeds)

whole repetitive thing – I get really bored. But if a song's a bit different it encourages you to listen to it again."

So Pale Saints' 'difficult' songs are collages of concepts, three minute movements bursting with various tunes and tortures. Heck, if the group had expanded all the disparate ideas thus far incorporated within their one LP and two singles they could have had six albums in the can by now.

"What, like Galaxie 500, stretching out one idea over a whole song?" frowns Chris.

"Bloody hell, that's a good idea!"

"I think it's a good thing when a

long-player, and Graeme is equally adamant that "you can't beat a good melody. It's alright trying to be weird and putting different structures in, but the song's got to be good."

"And if you've got a good melody people don't notice if the structure's weird," elaborates Ian, "because it sounds natural: the melody sews all the other bits together and makes sense of it all."

So are 'traditional' rock structures heading out the window, Ian?

"Well, I think we are the vanguard for the destruction of

"I find the format of rock songs distressingly dull and boring because you know exactly what's going to happen next. It's the whole repetitive thing – I get really bored." – Ian

record leaves a bad taste in your mouth," muses Meriel. "When you can't get into it at first and you get really pissed off, they're the ones I usually like the most eventually."

"I've always thought that we haven't had a method," ponders Ian, inbetween muttering about Burroughs-style trickery. "But we have a kind of method for writing songs: it's just such a ramshackle method they never come out the same. I think one of the things that bands have got going for them is their limitations and the way they don't know how to go about doing things, and they find their own way of doing them. All this conformist rubbish being squirted into your head doesn't do you any good at all."

But at the bottom of all this low-key mayhem lurks that old stand-by, The Good Tune. Chris rants enthusiastically about the hummable delights of The La's

rock 'n' roll," sneers the singer. "Ho ho, yes, that's really likely to happen, isn't it?"

IT'S THOSE very 'limitations' which made Pale Saints' early live performances such unsteady affairs as they wobbled along, seemingly content to play devil's advocate with tiresomely clumsy indie ideals. "Lack of musicianship" is the frank excuse for those onstage stutters, but has a recent laborious trek around Europe with labelmates the Pixies transformed inadequate amateurs into prowling professionals?

"No, it's just made us more aware of our weaknesses, playing with them bastards every night!" moans Chris. "There's far too many to mention, it would depress me if I told you them. We've got to practice for six hours a day, basically."

"I'm going to a fishmonger for my bass lessons," confides Ian, "because I don't want to pick up any bad habits from bass tutors."

Ivo (4AD *supremo*) would like us to reproduce the CD sound exactly live," admits Chris. "If we don't, he starts moaning."

Do you share the same immaculate ambitions?

"No, but we don't aspire to crapness either."

"I think it's really boring when bands sound record-perfect on stage," grimaces Meriel, sympathetically.

"Yeah, I got bored at the Cocteau Twins the other night," agrees Ian. "I love the songs, but if I want to invite 800 people I don't know around to sit in my bedroom and listen to my Cocteau CDs then I'll go ahead and do it!"

By persevering with peculiar tactical manoeuvres, Pale Saints now find themselves in a treasured minority, a band which has neither embraced the baggy palaver nor taken a crash course in American culture.

"Do you mean that we're stubborn?" demands Ian. "I've never thought we were that far away from the mainstream of what you might call 'indie' music anyway, so it's never seemed as though we've been ploughing our own fields and just managing to get away with it."

"There's a lot of records being bought not for the music at the moment, isn't there? But there's no way you can control people who buy them. Although Pale Saints fans aren't like that – their hearts are in the right place. They're all probably under doctor's orders as well..."

"Yeah, we've got a hardcore following which isn't hard," admits Graeme sheepishly.

"They're all big softies aren't they?" grins Ian. "They come up to you at the end of the gig in tears and you have to give them a big hug and say, 'It's alright, everything's fine, you can go home now'."



"All this conformist rubbish being squirted into your head doesn't do you any good at all."