

# ALORS UNTO

● When the Saints come marching in . . . quietly . . . sideways . . . with smug, knowing grins. Awkward bastards *par excellence*, the PALE SAINTS are holed up in Paris with beermonster tour-mates the Boo Radleys, a stunning new single and loads of the usual part-baffled, part-baffling attitude. SIMON WILLIAMS tries to squeeze blood from stones. Paley loitering: STEFAN DE BATSELIER

“One step beyond!!! Nah na naaaaah” . . . Crash! Bang! Nah nah nah naah nah nah . . . Wham! Topple! Smash!

Backstage at L'Espace Ornano in downtown Paris, The Boo Radleys are letting their hair down. The Scousers are also letting down their parents, relations and anyone who knows them by bursting into foot-stamping, table-rocking, bottle-bashing, dressing room-trashing renditions of Madness songs at the drop of *un chapeau*.

Escaping down the corridor, the Pale Saints' dressing room is the public library of death next to the 36-Hour Non-Stop Rave From Hell: singer Ian Masters has been cornered by an intense-looking French student type; guitarist Graeme Naysmith is somewhat forlornly attempting to break into a bottle of Jack Daniel's; drummer Chris Cooper wanders over to apologise for selling me some duff raffle tickets two years ago.

The only evidence of any post-gig continental rock 'n' roll mayhem is the not-quite-so-distant-enough sound of a rumbling holocaust from the other side of the wall . . .

Nah nah naaah . . . CRASH!

Welcome to a paradox.

**SEND THE** winsome, pallid Pale Saints out on the European trail with a gang as uncouth and depraved as the Radleys? Jeez, someone up there must be splitting his heavenly sides, right? Beauty meets The Beast and scampers off whimpering to stick its sensitive features into a hyper intellectual novella. In theory.

The reality is slightly different. The following morning, Pale Saints are gathered in a Montmartre cafe, and they are suffering. Chris models an enigmatically puzzled smirk. Meriel Barham—distinctly unfresh from a five-hour binge at La Locomotive—is staring suspiciously at what appears to be a cup of liquified spam. Somehow, the Saints went marching on the piss when they should, by rights, have been tucked up at the hotel with their Kafkas and coffees. Bastards!

Then again, Pale Saints are that kind of band. Perverse when you're expecting religious choruses; down-to-earth when you anticipate celestial starbursts; “You sometimes wonder what's going through people's minds when they write about you, because it seems so completely off the mark,” grumbles Ian Masters, and, unlike everyone else, he's hitting the nail smack bang on the proverbial head.

Since nipping into a deal with 4AD via a fortuitous Lush support slot at Camden Falcon way back when, Pale Saints have forged an entire career from being awkward, wayward and wandering souls. They were tipped for public glory with the 'Barging Into The Presence Of God' EP, but clung to the abstract peripheries for dear (half) life.

They've stared balefully at the world while others gazed at their footwear. They've made either the most meaningful or meaningless music in the history of the effects pedal, depending on which side of the line you stand, and straddled that very same line with gymnastical aplomb. At the end of the day, one can't help feeling that Pale Saints have spent the past three years—both on record and in print—taking the piss.

“We have got a serious attitude towards all this,” begins Ian, defensively. “It's not jokey music, it's not meant to be disposable or something that will endure a few listens.”

“Full of mystery and romance, our records,” beams Chris. “That's what it's all about, really.”

“A lot of goosepimply flesh . . .” helps Ian.

“Shivery spines, quivery bits . . .” leers Chris.

“ . . . With a bit of indigestion thrown in for good measure,” finishes Meriel, oddly.

“It all depends on what perspective you have on it”, asserts Ian, returning to the original point. Whatever *that* may be. “It's easy to take yourself seriously when you've been in a studio for four months and taken 18 hours to do some trivial part of one of the songs. You've concentrated so hard during such an intense process and, by the time you get to the mixing desk, your ears are shot and you can't hear anything at all. But then it's finished and whatever happens after that is largely out of your hands.”

So what you're saying is that the Pale Saints that make the music are radically different from the 'fun loving' Pale Saints who bounce around in the real light of day?

“Well, we're not Guns N' Roses,” he states with stupendously colossal understatement. “We don't have to live the music.”

Just as well.

**THE RAISON d'être** for this continental excursion is the release of 'Throwing Back The Apple', the new Pale Saints single. 'Throwing Back The Apple', eh? Is it really worth asking such notoriously inscrutable tykes to divulge its, meaning? Nope.

Fundamentally, the 45 follows the patterns sprayed by 'The Comforts Of Madness' and 'In Ribbons', two albums which both hit nine out of ten on *NME's* savage reviewometer.

Thoroughly deserved they were too, as they plundered the larder of ethereal noise and mixed all the ingredients the wrong way round until the cherry sat at the bottom of the baking tray, the crispy base was on top and nobody knew what the bally hell was going on. Except that what they were hearing was twisted, brave, foolhardy and extraordinarily good.

“Sometimes I worry that we're developing some kind of Pale Saints cliché, like with the time signatures and all that,” frowns a concerned Chris. “We'll be doing something that's quite straight and it'll be like, what can we do to make it as awkward as possible? I really don't like that approach.”

“We have to do all that when he's out of the room,” says Ian, grinning an elfin grin. “He gets a bit upset if we ruin a perfectly good pop song.”

“It's the Let's Be Contrived button!” shouts Meriel, who's looking more and more like Annie Lennox's sister the longer her hangover hangs over.

The one 'orthodox' track which emerged truly unscathed from the Saints' sacreligious scufflings was their cover of Nancy Sinatra's 'Kinky Love' last year. A glorious, sassily reverential swoon sealed by Meriel's dreamboat harmonies, it amazed everyone who believed Pale Saints to be incapable of playing pop straight and, not surprisingly, chuffed the more simplistically-inclined Chris to ribbons.

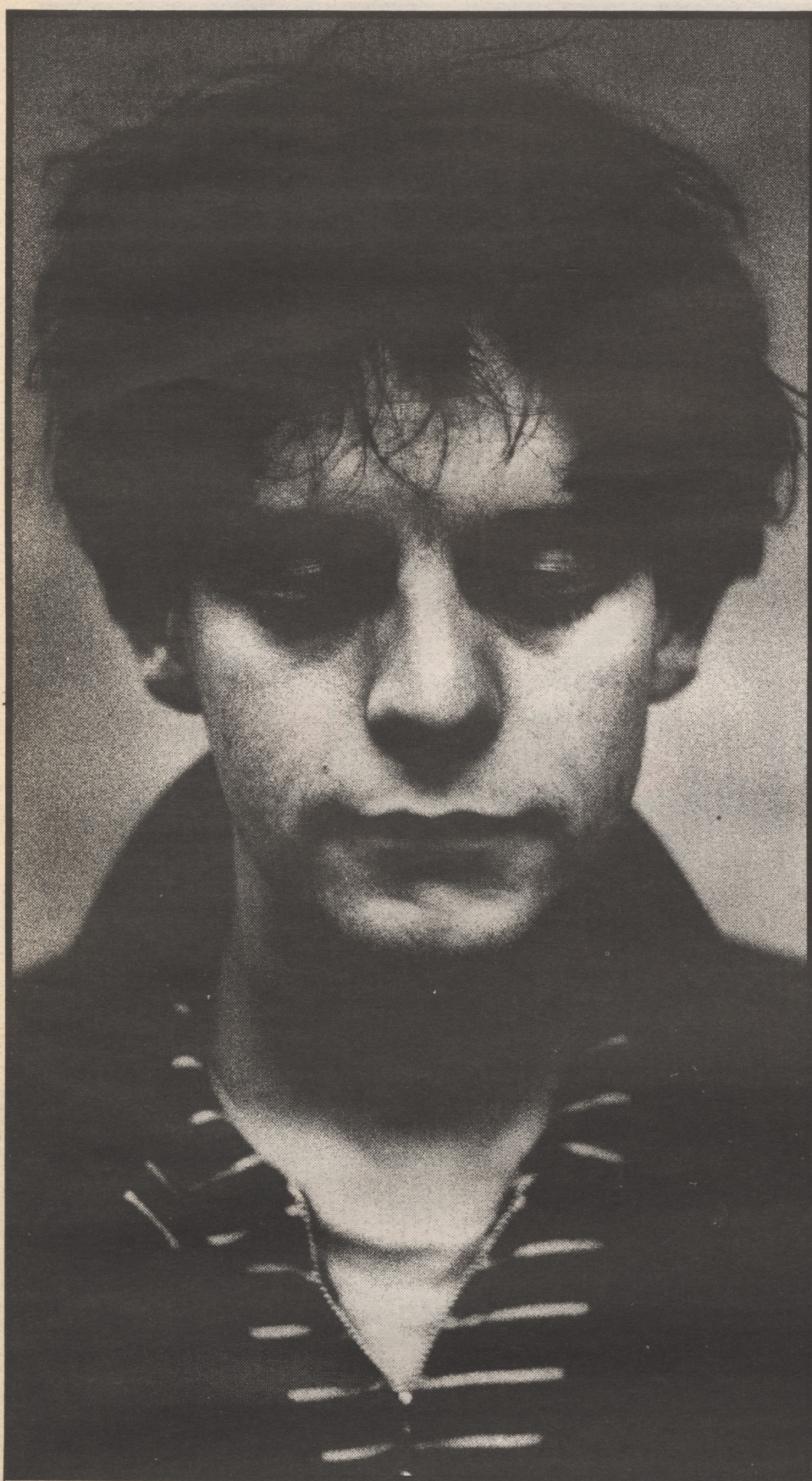
“Oh, I enjoyed that moment, I really did,” nods the drummer, feverishly. “Ian was trying to destroy



Saint misbehavin'—not! (l to r): Chris, Ian, Graeme and Meriel



# THEMSELVES



**The inscrutable art-führer of perversity and evasion, Ian Masters**

it by putting drills and bubble machines on it, so I was really glad it came out like it did."

Ian proffers a sheepish stare and mutters something about wanting Meriel to record the vocals underwater. Chris, meanwhile, starts rumbling on a roll towards the band's commercial potential, and everyone else leaps out of the way.

"It doesn't keep me awake or anything like that, but you take a record like 'Kinky Love' and there's absolutely no reason why it shouldn't get in the Top Five," he announces, correctly. "I couldn't understand why it wasn't getting played on daytime radio — it's a pop song!"

"It didn't get played because we're in a little category marked 'difficult'," decides Ian, with a triumphant sneer. So are the Saints' 'difficulties' set to ensure that their records are forever destined to peak at Number 61?

"I hope not," replies Chris, gallantly. "I'd hate to be one of those bands like The Only Ones, where ten years later everyone goes around saying, 'Oh, they were really good!' but they sold nothing at the time."

Is there anything more important than music in the Pale Saints' lives?

"Do you really think we'd tell you that?" demands a sleepy Ian.

No, but it was worth a try. And yes, I *did* hear you mumble 'buttonholes' under your breath.

**IAN MASTERS** possesses a stare which is more baleful than a barnload of hay. It is an expression which says 'You don't know whether to hug me or headbutt me', and it would be right. It says a lot about the band's (im)balance between the absurd and the superb, the weird and the fearsome.

Last night they played a typically untypical set to 600 French people, a shimmering brew of

carefully-worked pieces which contrasted dramatically with the Boo Radleys' rampant opening slot. Yet even though the tour isn't transforming the Saints' sound in any way, this co-headline jaunt suggests that they're not as aloof as they sometimes appear; that they aren't floating around in a beautiful bubble looking down disdainfully on Planet Pop. It's making them *real*.

"It's a challenge playing after The Boo Radleys because they just cover the audience with noise," confesses Chris. "It has been said that we're an anti-climax after their wall of sound because people just stand there and watch us. But I don't want them to think, 'Oh, this is interesting', I want them to freak out!"

"But it's great when you see people hold their heads like this," says Ian, manipulating his face into strange, rubbery shapes with his hands. "I find that's just as encouraging a reaction as people throwing themselves around."

"I wanna see people beefing or making love when we're on stage!" blurts Chris, undaunted. "When I see people just standing there I wanna throw my cymbals at them!"

"It's such a wasted opportunity," sighs Meriel. "There's all that opportunity for physical contact with loads of people, and I'm not suggesting that everyone should start groping, it's just really sad to see that many people close together and not exploiting the situation and it's . . . oh, this is going to sound dreadful, isn't it?"

Oh, *absolutely*. Meriel receives metaphorical adoration in the form of Pez dispensers. Ian balefully lies about receiving pyjamas from some anonymous source in the post. Twists are added, tables are turned. Do Pale Saints want to be loved?

"Oh, we crave attention!" beams Ian.

Expect the unexpected.