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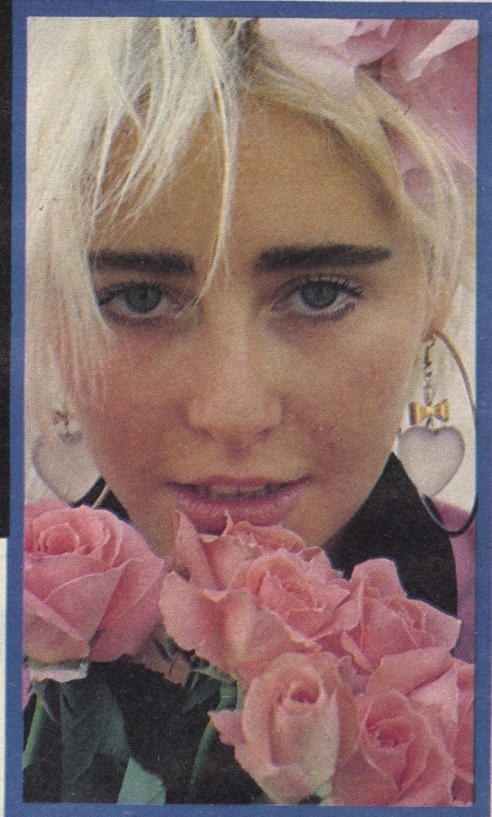
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THE PIXIES

TOO MUCH MONKEY BUSINESS

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THE APES OF WRATH

THE PIXIES' SECOND LP, 'SURFER ROSA', WAS VOTED MM ALBUM OF THE YEAR IN 1988. NOW BLACK FRANCIS AND HIS BOSTON BOMBARDIERS LOOK SET TO SCALE FURTHER HEIGHTS OF ACCLAIM WITH THEIR NEW SINGLE, 'MONKEY GONE TO HEAVEN', AND A FORTHCOMING ALBUM, 'DOOLITTLE'. DAVID STUBBS TRIES TO MAKE SENSE OF THEIR CHAOTIC NONSENSE AND DISCOVERS HOW ECOLOGY, ZOOLOGY AND THE ULTIMATE EARGASM MAKE UP THE PUZZLE. PICS: ANDY CATLIN

"I HAVE TO TELL YOU THIS," SAYS PIXIES' DRUMMER DAVID Lovering. "This is a true story. It was on 'The Johnny Carson Show'. This guy, see, he owned a huge Rottweiler and one day the dog arrived on his doorstep with a dead rabbit in its mouth, neck broken. The guy recognised the rabbit as belonging to the daughter of his next door neighbour. So he thinks, 'Jesus, what am I gonna do?' Finally he can't bring himself to come clean so what he does is, he takes the rabbit from the dog's mouth, washes the neck up under the tap, then sneaks into his neighbour's back yard at dead of night and places the rabbit back in its hutch, like it was nothing to do with him."

"Next morning, he's out in his garden and there's this scream from the lady next door as she looks in the hutch. So the guy asks, innocently, what's the matter. The lady replies, 'I can't believe this. Our rabbit died two days ago, we buried it — and now it's come back!' Turned out the Rottweiler had dug up the rabbit from the neighbour's garden!"

Charles (aka Black Francis): "We had a cat that died, but our dog kept digging it up and bringing it to the porch. They're like that."

ANIMALS, violence and comedy. It's a start. It's The Pixies, no closer to sense than before, but more brutally intimate with their senses. Nobody puts rock under such great strain as The Pixies. They set forth in seemingly conventional post-punk vein — creeping, open-ended basslines, almost formal guitar announcements. You might think they're The Buzzcocks — until they buzz-saw your cock off. There's a blind monster in The Pixies' garage chewing up the rotting bits of wood and rusty lumps of post-punk metal — Black Francis' shriek is possessed by wanton, ravaging, lascivious, elemental forces that rush in from nowhere in the songs, threaten to crack him up or inflate him to superhuman feats of lyricism.

You might think he's just shrieking a lot. But it takes a lot to shriek in the right places. You couldn't do it. The force of The Pixies is completely unwarranted, completely uncalled for. Where does it come from? Charles doesn't know. It sort of sweeps him up, it's all a blur. There's a lot of humour in the songs. They're a very light-hearted bunch. I can imagine them laughing as they recorded "Silver" on the new album, strange, shadowy, sandy terrain for The Pixies, sort of Spaghetti Eastern. But I don't understand it. There's nothing so eerie, so alienating, as not being in on the joke.

There's a lot of humour in The Pixies, captured and frozen, inscrutable to posterity. From the side, Black Francis looks like W.C. Fields. Then he gets up, goes to

the bathroom and comes back babbling like a brook after the acid rain.

Joey Sandiego's guitar is the real X-factor in these songs, the mad monkey, cruelly untutored, off-centre and inarticulate, lumpy, messy waves spewing everywhere but in the bucket, flooding out those dramatic, cavernous pauses in The Pixies' sound with abrupt tactlessness, incompetent yet subtle, or loose like a tiger, waiting to pounce, running round the tree a hundred times, or melting into butter, or simply gashing stripes. After two drinks he's already making loud remarks about necrophiliacs jerking off turkeys on Thanksgiving Day.

"Monkey Gone To Heaven" is the single, rather poignant for The Pixies but even the cellos can't

suppress the unchained, rabid fury from lashing over the brim. "Doolittle" will be the album — it's not so much talking to the animals as being possessed by beasts. The Pixies' return to nature is a return to chaos. But in this state it's their human memories that get scrambled. On "Debaser", it's Bunuel cackling like a hyena: "Got me a movie/I want you to know/Slicing up eyeballs/I want you to know/Girlie so groovy/I want you to know/Don't know about you/But I am un chien andalusia!" On "Dead", it's the Bible as Uriah hits the crapper. On "Here Comes Your Man" it's The Velvet Underground, on "Crackity Jones", it's Charles' headlong flight from Puerto Rico.

Everything is compressed to a coarse, ignoble shriek of rock'n'roll pleasure and anguish... WAAAAAUGGHH!! Everything is reduced to the physical. How could Black Francis, civilised, a regular cinema-goer, be responsible for some of the horniest, freakiest lyrics in ages? "Six-foot girl gonna sweat when she dig/Stand close to the fire when she light the pig/Standing in her chinos shirt pulled off clean/Gotta tattooed tit say No. 13", ("Number 13 Baby"). It's not "sexiest", exactly, it's not "sexy", exactly, it's more a body explosion, as out to lunch and out of context as "Eraserhead".

CHARLES: "I really like David Lynch movies, the way he moves through them but without really explaining a lot of things to himself." And thus (anti) patterns emerge, as on "Tame", as physically immediate as a fly splat on the windscreen making the shape of a snowflake. And thus The Pixies thrash on eyeless, Charles stuffed to breaking point with all the things he's seen and done. An overstuffed but fragile state of being. And still, Charles doesn't know what hits him.

"I wish I could come up with some profound statement about it all for Melody Maker. But I can't, so I'll just have to carry on like this."

SO we might as well begin with houmus. It's as good a place as any. In Spin, Charles predicts that 1989 will be the year in which we all wake up to houmus. What's the attraction of houmus?



PIXIES



from previous page

Charles: "Oh, I dunno, it was a very abstract sort of joke."

Too abstract for me.

"I don't know how you can say that, British humour's so abstract it's not true. I was watching the Monty Python repeats on 'Saturday Night Live', that sketch about growing up an orphan and the guy being so poor he had to sell parts of his body to hungry dogs. Then there was that British series from the early Seventies, 'Rhubarb'..."

Roobarb? Roobarb And Custard?

"No, Rhubarb, it was a Benny Hill-type thing. But there were no spoken words. Whenever they had to speak they just said, 'Rhubarb, rhubarb, rhubarb'. It was just abstract, slapstick humour. I couldn't believe it when I saw it."

"Here's our sense of humour. Last night I played a game of rhymes, starting with 'pipsqueak'. 'I think you're a pipsqueak'. 'Oh yeah, I think you're too oblique'. All those 'eek' words. Leek, beak, weak..."

At this point I develop a headeek, which reminds me. The Pixies' sound is aggressive but not full-bodied — you sing about fragile states, stark on the stalk ends of your nerves. "The Bone Machine", or "Where Is My Mind"...

Charles: "That's a coincidence, I dunno. No, I guess you're right."

And the whole Pixies' sound is like a nervous collapse, tripping up, caving in, stuttering, stopping and starting.

"Really?"

Yes. It's very rickety, flailing on its pins.

"Gee, I wish I could pontificate about it but really, there's no credo."

THERE'S a blank pause. The makeshift waterfall in the Holiday Inn gushes fatuously on. About 400 miles away, a cricket chirps. Charles passes the buck haplessly.

"I guess so, I don't want to manipulate the interview here. I just follow the rules, I don't know what they are... making things evolve, making things trip over one another..."

Do you fight in the studio?

Kim: "I don't think so."

Joey: "Yeah, we form into tag-teams!"

Meanwhile, Charles is still helpfully pursuing the line I've abandoned. "David, do you follow rules when you play drums?"

Were you ever in a seance?

Kim: "I used to be a witch in the Third Grade. I used to do pentagrams on the back porch. Have you ever done when you lay down somebody and put two fingers underneath them, then you do a chant, count 1-2-3 and lift them up? That works, that really works!"

THE PIXIES are aggressive but not hard-hitting. Like Pere Ubu, like David Thomas, they don't rail against objects or get all browbeaten about subjects. Rather they seem to hang there and *suffer* in the middle of the Universe, in the void.

Well, do you suffer?

Charles: "Well, my ears ring. I went to the doctor recently, I appear to be suffering from tinnitus, which is a constant ringing in the ear. It's like a low-level hum which I only notice in conditions of total silence. So either I make sure there's always a little noise to keep me distracted from this ceaseless b-flat in my ear, or I turn down the volume. I have to say this, I think rock'n'roll has become too loud. I've been to a couple of concerts recently which were too loud by half."

So why do you do it?

"For cash."

Then you're not doing a very good job. How come I'm buying all the drinks?

Kim, with fake Zsa Zsa blasé languour: "Everybody wants to be a rock star. I want to be adored by millions."

But in rock'n'roll you either starve or take too much coke. It's not something you do for the sake of your health.

Kim: "I'm already getting wrinkles in this business. If I wrinkle because of this, then I'm through."

Do you know where you're going?

Kim: "To the top!"

Isn't it bad to not know where you're going?

"Well, you don't know where you're going either."

Oh, yes I do. To the bar, to the bar.

COMMENTS DURING MY ABSENCE AT THE BAR

KIM: "Hello, David? Listen very carefully. This is the secret word. And the word is — 'olive'. The next time you hear the word 'olive' you will fall into a deep, deep sleep. One-two-three- you are now hypnotised."

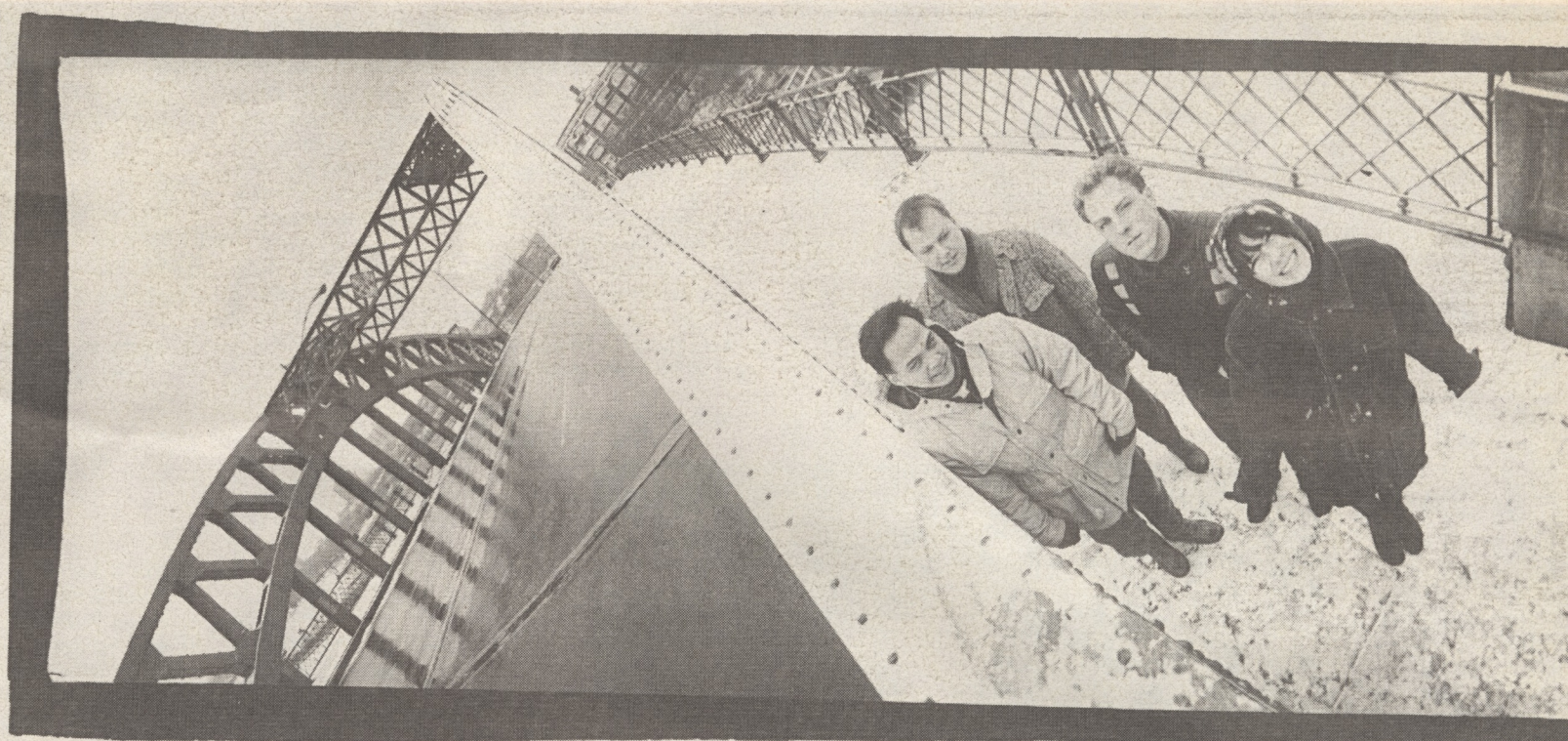
Joey: "Life? You wanna know the way I see things through these little windows? Well, I'll tell you. I'll tell you what's in here. Apathy. Apathy. I'm sitting here having two f***ing drinks cos you're buying! I'll buy the next round — maybe! Perhaps! No, I won't! Cos I'm apathetic, that's why. I rest my case."

GREEN

"MONKEY Gone To Heaven" is almost a touching song, working up from the melancholic chamber strings that run beneath it to an indignant squawk of frenzy, giddy and aghast at the "hole in the sky".

Charles: "Sure, if I'm aligned with anybody politically, it's the ecologists. Over here, they have this leftie image, but even so, I'm green."

After all, capitalism may collapse, it may not. There may be a revolution, there may not. But the crisis points with which the Green Party concerns itself are backed



up by scientific fact. Acid rain, erosion of topsoil, pollution, these things have happened, the crisis will occur unless something is done. There's no "if" about it, no thesis, no hypothesis. It's a physical thing.

"Absolutely, there's solid evidence. And it ties in with my love of animals. We were going to call the album 'Whore', but I sorta settled on 'Doolittle', for want of anything better. I suppose I do have this thing that if we could talk to the animals, they are more in touch with the earth, with its natural cycles and we could learn something from their experience."

"For instance, recently, these dolphins saved an Australian surfer. The shark got his surfboard then went after the surfer, then these dolphins came up, got rid of the shark and ferried the boy to shore."

Joey, drunkenly: "Funny. I was recently saved by a penguin."

Kim: "Shut up, Joey!"

SO why does the monkey go to Heaven? Why the quantum leap in the song from ten million pounds of sea sludge to the monkey?

Charles: "I have to confess that means absolutely nothing. It was the line around the hook and I left it there for its immediate emotional content, not to make a point."

But patterns do emerge from The Pixies' random, lyrical technique. The spanners land in the right places. And they say if you gave a monkey a typewriter and infinity, he would eventually type out the complete works of Shakespeare.

Charles: "These things kind of derive from commonplace expressions like 'monkey on your back'."

Dave: "Or 'Never judge a monkey by its cover'."

Joey: "Or, 'In every cloud there's a silver monkey!'"

Dave: "Or, 'It's as cold as a monkey's tit out there'."

Joey (hysterical): "Roses are red... monkey's are blue!"

Charles: "Will you quit that monkey business?"

Riotous guffaws.

I don't even think Charles intended that one.

POP MUSIC SUCKS

CHUCK: "I don't want to bad-mouth other musicians."

Why not?

"Because maybe it turns out they're nice people."

But they're still wasting your time. Adding unwanted brightness to your day.

"Because they're only doing it for cash. Everybody's doing something for cash."

If I had George Michael's or Phil Collins' cash, I'd be nice. I'd be a regular affable rock sparrer.

Kim: "I think it's sneaky to do it through the media, it's very jerky. Asshole, cowardly. It's like Sinéad O'Connor and U2. Isn't that strange, carrying on that grudge through the pages of the press? If you don't like them, phone them. I'd call George, I'd say, 'You're wasting my time, George.'"

Does the world need rock music?

Charles: "The world doesn't need anything."

David: "It's the only thing now. It's the only contemporary statement."

Kim: "If you have anything to say. I don't have anything to say. For us, there's this kind of jealousy for the first people ever to bash three chords out of a guitar. Wow! There it was, for the first time. I've written 'Sweet Jane' 10 times, I've picked up a guitar, strummed something out and then realised, 'Oh shit, that was Gloria'. So what's left except to fall apart?"

THREE MONTHS LATER

CHARLES, you don't always seem to be aware it's you that writes these songs, plays this stuff. What happens, do you turn into Mr Hyde when you write?

Charles: "Kinda. I don't know how I write these songs. All I know is, I write music. And I think there's such a thing as what you and I would call shit music... and that's okay, for a living, but to avoid that, you have to be a fan. And I'm a fan of rock'n'roll. The fact that there are so many BOZOS out there is too bad, I don't want to put anybody down. But there is this theory, 'Well, it's what people have always been given. You can educate them out of that with

something more worthwhile'. Well, I don't buy that. You only have to look at what people EAT to see how steeped they are in mediocrity. What can you do? That's what you're up against. People, as individuals, are to blame. People are accountable for their own tastes. I'm not saying buttons aren't being pushed, I'm not saying there isn't some sort of manipulation in radio programming, but you can't just blame the system."

"I live in a country where they're beginning to blame everything on conditioning. A guy gets drunk, goes out, runs somebody down in their automobile and they sue the barmaid for serving him the drink. I've had enough of this 'all in this together' mentality. What about the notion that we're all individual souls in this big, dark universe? But I'm sorry, I'm babbling."

Babble! Babble! Do you SHIT these songs, think them up while you're in the bathroom?

"That's where I conceive most of them, yeah! I think up a line, then I work myself into a frenzy, pretend I'm performing. I wait for the 'eargasm', that's how I know it's got what I want."

"As loud as hell/A ringing bell/Behind my smile/It shakes my teeth/And all the while/As vampires feed/I bleed" ("I Bleed").

"DOOLITTLE", the upcoming album is physically weird, in places, bloodshot and deranged. What accounts for the violence of "Wave Of Mutilation", "Gouge Away" and "Dead"?

"They're both biblical songs. I mean, to me the Bible, the Old Testament is very action-packed, very immediate. Almost as much so as an American TV newscast, which is half an hour of violent, dramatic footage with stories written around it. I thought it would be fun to relate the Old Testament in very immediate, brutal, terms. That's all. I dislike writing about concepts, about Reagan. Is it easy to be poetic, to write as I do? I dunno."

So you cut out the metaphysics. That's the key to The Pixies.

Charles: "It's a physical world! I don't know if the spiritual world exists, but I do know that people have bodies that fail them and they die, or they climb mountains. That much I know."

So if there's no spirituality, no metaphysics, there is no order. Hence the Dadaist randomness of The Pixies. A monkey takes his cap off, tears up the sheet, throws the bits in the cap, shuffles and tumbles. Everything crops up again. Like the Spanish chatter that nonsensically punctures the odd song.

Where did you learn that, Charles?

"I lived in Puerto Rico for a while, which is like the tropical Bronx. I was there on an exchange programme. I would have liked to have gone to New Zealand, but ended up in Puerto Rico. It was nice but I was glad to get out. I lived in a male dormitory, 25 storeys, and 50 per cent of the rest of the guys there were gay. Not that I'm gay-bashing or anything but it was a little weird, these guys lounging about the foyer in full drag, a real bunch of queens. So I learned some Spanish, ate lots of rice and beans then got the hell out. It was like signing up for the Foreign Legion."

Last time we met you were going to lose 40 pounds. Did you succeed?

"Well, not quite... I've been eating healthily, I eat when I want, as my girth shows."

Does your circumference bug you?

"Sure, it does. It's not contrived, you know. I'd much rather be sleek and sexier."

Do you offer hope for fat people all over the world?

"Yeah, I think so. I'm a front man. I'm handsome. I think. Women still like to talk to me, I'm not done down by this idea that just because you're not handsome, you're completely worthless."

THE PIXIES: "body" music for the out of shape, a freak of nature, a wave of mutilation, a chance occurrence, a real quake. If I really wanted to know where this stuff comes from I'd be better off asking the Gods, or equivalent forces out there. As for Charles, he just can't stop eating, can't stop spewing. The boy can't help it. The subject matter is out of control. Hence the detachment of The Pixies from what they do. It's not them. It just is. They epitomise rock's SHAPELESS and DISPASSIONATE response to these shapely, passionate pop times.

