



PIXIES CAMBRIDGE CORN EXCHANGE

YOU JOIN us, friends, fiends and ferns, on the day that the Pixies have learned their third album, 'Doolittle', has walked and talked in an unexpected commercial esperanto landing them in the national charts—the one that counts, the one that earn serious lucre—at number eight. With a bullet. A dum-dum? Maybe.

Yes today, April 23 1989, in Cambridge, the place that any decent chap or chapess would reject in favour of Oxford (hey, the punting is better there), Pixies are kings of the swingers. Their monkey has been kicked off their backs and gone to heaven. And I'm glad. Oddly enough, all I can remember about going to see real monkeys at the zoo is the way that they wank.

The Pixies are *not* wankers, they are a great rock group. Far

better than their sometimes feeble records will ever let you know.

The only problem is that rock as a communal experience is incontinent(al), pissing on its own remains. Charles—Black Francis, if you will, and sod-off if you won't—knows this. "I think rock and roll is a very safe and unaggressive experience," he says. "It's an artificial experience."

This is odd coming from the Captain Hook of a band who, for the past several years, have been lionised by those who write about music as if it were a chemical equation and who will see the success of 'Doolittle' as a vindication of the indie 'ethic'; a case of David stoning Goliath, youth rebellion fulfilled.

Did you see rock music as a vehicle for youth rebellion or generation gap hostilities, Charles?

"No, no," he says, pulling on a can of Skol. "It's too late for

that sort of thing—music as rebellion. My dad, who owns a bar called The Quarterdeck in Cape Cod where I live, bought me my first guitar and *paid* for the recording of our first mini-album, 'Come On Pilgrim'. I would have liked to have been around when rock meant more than mere entertainment. It must have been great to have been The Stones in the '60s, but I'm happy just to be a good entertainer now."

And so we drink a dram to the man who helped start this scam, Charles' dad, as the lights go down like dead fireflies in the Corn Exchange and the applause turns from a ripple to a torrent.

Minutes pass. We wake up. It's still dark. Somebody has just punched us in the ribs and the Pixies are palpating, succulating and gesticulating onstage. The person who has wacked us in the side is a goff girlie. She dances to 'I Bleed' like she has her head in the grave and her feet in cement.

I'm sorry—hell! No I'm not!—but the first thing one notices as the Pixies roll out their red carpet of songs on this tour is

the audience. It has changed. Every Mission fan, replete with igloos, has converged on Cambridge tonight. When not having sex to it, rock music was devised for dancing to. There's no argument about that. This audience—all bad dress sense and bad breath—patently can't do either. They should have had their feet chopped off at birth.

"Our audiences are changing, are they?" muses Charles. "So what? I don't really care as long as they pay

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● Pictures by JAYNE HOUGHTON



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to get in." This evening's crowd look well-heeled. They must be students. And Charles doesn't like students.

"Students are a waste of time," he opines later. "All they do is read books, talk about changing the world and chain themselves to a couple of fences now and again. I think they should all cut their hair, go to law school and become ruthless politicians, since that's the only way anybody will change anything."

As the people who will not even change a bin-liner stamp their feet through the floorboards of the Corn Exchange, onstage the Pixies blow occasionally shrivelled songs off 'Doolittle' into giant inflatable musical follies.

"We don't usually roadtest our songs before recording them," explains Charles. This accounts for why such an insignificant tune as 'Hey' can become more important than

yet another one of Morrissey's fretful farts when played live.

Hence 'Wave Of Mutilation' becomes an operating table made of babies' skins, 'There Goes My Gun' zooms like an MX missile covered in penile tissue while 'Gouge Away' transforms into the story of Samson and Delilah as interpreted by Charles and relayed in neon lights whose switches are operated by William Burroughs.

But *enough!* As Charlie boy says: "British music mags are masters of hyperbole." Certainly the Pixies bring pretence streaming out of the pores of every writer. I guess all I'm trying to impart is that in concert the Pixies give vent to a sense of dynamics and space that none of their recorded work gets close to.

This evening the sound itself is pure granite, but veined with subtlety. As individuals, the group have as much charisma as dead pigs hanging on

meathooks, onstage however, to filch a mathematical cliché, they are more than the sum of their parts. Bassist Kim, whose everyday demeanour reminds me of my favourite auntie, under the spotlight twinkles like a true star. She's sex on four strings, and when she sings 'Tony's Theme' she has this superheroine grin which translates as: I'd like to invite you'll round for supper, but *my!* aren't there a lot of you out there now listening to us!

To her left Charles — can anybody call him Black Francis and keep a straight face? — is almost oafish. He's lost in a world of his own worries, curses the band for playing so loud and wonders whether he should wear earplugs to the next gig. Though he says he is a Yankee good ol' boy who likes to sit on the front porch of his house with his Mason dad and drink till he falls over, as a singer Charles is no half-pint.

From the serried shrieks that rip the entrails out of 'Tape' and turn the audience into an animal feeding frenzy, to the delicate "whoooo's" that

initiate 'I Bleed', Charles is in superb vocal order. He might not have lips like Cinderella, more like her cast-off shoes, but what issues forth is mesmeric. Charles is more emotive and closer to the spirit of rock music than Bono times Kerr.

What goes through your mind when you are onstage, Charles?

"All the songs are short, which is how I prefer them, so I don't have time to think about anything other than 'Hey Joey, your guitar is out of tune! Kim! You're singing out of tune! Dave! You're playing too fast!' I wish I could get a charge, a spiritual experience, out of playing live but I'm far too *neurotic* for that."

Yep, there is a weirded-out edge that cuts through the Pixies and makes them special.

As the Puerto Rican flows like tequila on 'Vamos' the Pixies become impregnable. They could raze cities with a flick of their eyes, jump solar systems, their sweat could irrigate the Sudan . . . and all that other ridiculous shit. The

point is, it's during 'Vamos' where Charles and Kim get a brief encounter at doing what they do best — harmonising — and it's the moment when Joey Santiago has his muzzle undone. His guitar solo rattles everybody's skulls until brains drip out of noses as he lets rip with outrageous feedback that sounds akin to an arsonist having a fun night out at a petrol refinery.

On second thoughts, maybe that's an inappropriate metaphor since a number of Pixies' songs, such as 'This Monkey's Gone To Heaven', their current effort, betray a concern with the environment. Green is the colour of the Pixies hair in the morning when they rise. And if a red sun is about at the same time then it's a mistake on God's palette, as Charles explains.

"Though I am concerned with the environment and how it's being raped, if anything I'm right-wing politically. I'm not like a Reaganite, spare me that, more like a radical in the libertarian sense. I believe in paying taxes for roads and

education up to the fifth grade. After that — too bad. Though I believe in the sanctity of nature, I really don't care about politics. That's why we don't play benefits though we're asked to all the time. Why should you play for something you don't believe in?"

Why indeed? But in that case why are you appearing at Glastonbury which is in aid of CND?

Charles laughs. "Well I heard Suzanne Vega was playing so it was like 'Oh wow is she? We'll do it!' I only realised after that it was a benefit. I guess we make mistakes sometimes. Glastonbury is pretty green though, isn't it?" Yes.

We walk back downstairs in the Corn Exchange and I comment to Charles that there don't seem to be many fanatical Pixies fans hanging around post-gig. "Yeah, we like it that way. We're glad they come to see us but if we invited them to hang around backstage with us they'd just drink all our beer. And a greater crime no man can commit."

Jack Barron