

PICTURE: CHRIS HUGHES



**Red House Painters (l to r): Gordon, Anthony, Jerry and Mark . . . weep . . . sob . . .**

## PAINTER YOUR WAGON

**Mark Kozelek didn't sleep at all last night. He doesn't look at me. He doesn't laugh. He doesn't like his photograph being taken. He doesn't like interviews much.**

This, undoubtedly, is how the leader of the most intensely sad and beautiful new band of 1992 really *should* behave. With the **RED HOUSE PAINTERS**, Kozelek sings articulately and movingly about his troubled relationships, his fears and his self-imposed isolation, using music as a confessional, or as therapy, rather than as a career. Without his band's stealthy, elegantly precise backing and stuck in front of a tape recorder, he sits shyly, sucking ice cubes and claiming—wrongly, as it happens—that he can't express himself.

"I don't drink, I don't use drugs, I live a pretty solitary life. If my girlfriend f—s somebody else, or if I f— somebody else, or we're not getting along, it's always my reaction to write about things. I'm not afraid to examine myself. I take my life very seriously, that's all. I don't wanna think too much about 'This is weird, Mark; you're solitary, you write about hating people, so why are you on the stage singing?' I dunno, it's weird."

A little history may be in order here. Mark went into rehab 11 years ago when he was 14, then spent every night for three years at Narcotics and Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. Ever since, he seems to have led a near-monastic existence.

"I got to where I was 17 or 18 and I decided I just wanted to live my life. Before I was dependent on drugs, then I was dependent on people hugging me and talking about my problems. I didn't want to depend on anything."  
Then, however, he became involved in bands—

including the excellently-named God Forbid—before drifting out to San Francisco and forming Red House Painters. After a few gigs and demos in the late '80s, they eventually—with the help of local soulmates American Music Club—came to the attention of 4AD's Ivo Watts-Russell, who, enraptured, put out six of these demos from 1989-'90 as the 'Down Colorful Hill' album last September.

Now they're putting the finishing touches to a new double album for release next March, which, if songs like 'Evil' and 'Mother', showcased at their recent London gigs are anything to go by, promises to be an even more intoxicating opportunity to see inside Mark's troubled, immensely talented psyche.

"For two years I lived with a girl named Susan, who I wrote 'Medicine Bottle' ('*Down Colorful Hill's* harrowing stand-out) about," he says, circuitously explaining the next album. "Since we broke up a year ago I've been through so many relationships, and my songs now are a lot more about being really fickle with women, and not knowing who I like, and being really insecure about who likes me."

Mark Kozelek thinks about finding someone else to sing his songs, so he can hide all the time. He thinks about whether he really wants to be doing this with his life at all. He thinks comparisons with Morrissey are inaccurate because Moz is "a lot smarter than I am. I'm more emotional. I just sing about shit that's directly involved with me."

He is charming in spite of himself, in spite of his alienating introversion and the over-riding sense of melancholy he generates . . . Just like his band, in fact. Treasure him while you can.

**John Mulvey**

PICTURE: STEFFAN DE BATSSELLIER