

NAKED LUNCH

Interviews, theories and large pantaloons (a dream come true) by Mick Mercer

First things first. Naked Lunch are more than the three men interviewed in this article. Their ranks are swelled by more bodies alongside (the exact number has long been forgotten). Electronic equipment too. Amplification lies behind and in front comes the areas of speculation, adulation, inquisition; all that sort of bollocks.

They are part of the 'Futurist' movement, a phrase they liketh not but use almost to excess. I like it even less and shall refer to such bands as lampmen from hereon in.

When I joined this magazine the majority of incoming calls came for a leading light amongst the lampmen, one Stevo by name. He was an unknown enigma from beyond the sauve.

Naked Lunch became labelled as a stevo-band and immediately assumed the popularity of a particularly foul leper masturbating over a three piece suite. And yet their vocalist I could find no reason to heap abuse on such a mild mannered gent. So I arranged a meeting. We were to discuss lampmen topics.

I knew nothing of their visuals either and thus stood in Denmark Street awaiting quiffs, sashes and Chanel No. 5. In the event the trio who sauntered casually into view were no more ostentatious than most bands I have met with only a pair of billowing royalist (circa 1650) pantaloons to give them away. Other than that they could just as easily been Motorhead after the car wash.

We dined in some jumped up watering hole where wandering valentino Simon Reeves joined us, before setting off for their more down market domicile.

Gathered loosely around exquisite ashtrays all matters lampmen and N.L. were expounded.

ZZ: Who is this 'svengali' called Stevo?

Tony (voice): Well a lot of people in London seem to have the strange idea that we're a stevo band which we're not, a lot of people in London have this preconception that Stevo and us are one, which we're not.

Stevo's o.k. but he's getting a pain in the ... neck at times. He got loads of gigs for bands which was nice, great, but he's trying to get a monopoly as much as possible which we object to, which is why we don't get on with him as much



as people think we should do. What do you think about it? (a remark addressed to Paul the guitarist)

Paul: Well there's an album track Tony: He's got a compilation album coming out with various bands on it. Most of em are friends of ours. They paid us to go in and record cos they wanted us to be on it but we went in, when we're ill and we done this track which we don't reckon is brilliant but they're gonna bring it out anyway. We can't stop it coming out because they paid for it. But it will be interesting as its the old band, but it's a bit ... (trails off) Cigarette Time.

Tony: We asked to go on as the four dead men. We thought as we went in all having flu it was rather a witty thing to do cos that song they asked us to do we've totally changed, we've rearranged it. What they've got is an original idea shoved down on tape which is okay. I suppose from their point of view, but from our point of view it isn't. People will probably like it but it isn't finished, know what I mean? Seems a bit unfair to put out something to people which isn't quite finished and we aren't quite happy with. You could say we're ripping people off doing that.

ZZ: (Placing foot in mouth) If it's on a compilation album who's bothered?

Tony: We do. Mike: (possible drummer to be) It's got your name on it. Doesn't matter..

Tony: That's the point. We've always been opposed to releasing a record just for the point of releasing a record. Look at all the other sorts of bands. They're releasing records left right and centre without doing gigs. It's really great isn't it? .. all these independents saying things like let's bring out a record boys! We

didn't want to do that and when we've brought something out we wanted it done properly, really nice super production, really tasteful we've got this coming out. Anticlimax isn't it? ZZ: Guess so. You've had the chance to record before? Tony: Yeah. We turned em down. We agreed to the compilation l.p. because it's not singles cos we don't really want to release a single. We thought a compilation track would be quite nice. Very charming and pleasant but we were hassled so much in doing it. So many arguments occurred in the studio with engineers and other bods who appeared on the premises that we didn't really get down to it. That's our story and we're sticking to it.

ZZ: How far do you lot go back? Tony: We go back to November 1979 and we were a six piece. We sounded like Judas Priest! Ballet. (Cackle) That similar thing. Paul: You told me that you sounded like Judas Priest!

Tony: (grins galore) .. "Don't we all look pretty". We did our first gig down Studio 21 in March and then we split up. Y'know you had Gary Numan flying around at the time doing his laid back cool gloomy music and the punk scene was getting a bit boring. The idea was to make something out of synthesizers, dance music that was really interesting, not BLAND, and I think some bands who are jumping on the "futurist bandwagon" have got into the futurism category .. what the hell is futurism anyway.. put on pretty clothes like Duran Duran and say "Oh we're futurists, we're like this that and the other and we're glummy" and they're just as bad as what we're trying to get away from. There's nothing interesting in it. They haven't tried to DO anything. I wouldn't say we're an amazing far out groovy band but we've got rid

of drums and tried to get into totally electronic music, played around with sequencers, never used a drum machine. If you use a drum machine it's not the band itself injecting things. Somebody else built the machine and put the rhythms into it, you're using someone else's ideas which is a bit sterile you know.

To be fair, some of the new bands have been around since the beginning, like The Fast Set. They're very unpretentious and really into what they're doing. Other bands are trying to capitalise on it. ZZ: What is futurism? Tony: Well we're interested to read that we're a futurist band. Paul: And the 'long mac brigade'. Tony: We're not long mac brigade. That's doomy and gloomy; Portobello Road types, spot them a mile away.

Mike: (still prospective sticksman) I went to see James Blood Ulmer and I expected, cos the music is fairly dancey .. I couldn't believe it. All these people in berets and long macs and they weren't having any fun. A band like that all these people "This is a bit jolly for us isn't it?"

Tony: Even a pose pose is a bit unjolly. Mike: I think one thing to come out of Spandau Ballet that's good is the clothing, that's great. Everyone's so depressed, recession and that. There's nothing wrong with going against that and looking good. But when you start taking it where that's the ultimate and that's the only thing you're doing it for, you haven't got the right clothes.

There's something to be said for making a gig an event rather than a spectator sport. If the audience feel on a par with the band. A lot of gigs the audience isn't participating they're standing around looking at each other, and they're

not getting into any sort of spirit at all. If you think right, I'll get home, get dressed up and look forward to a big night out as opposed to Oh it's a gig. ZZ: Not many gigs have any spirit. Not that I've noticed.

Tony: Problem is in London that we've found this in the rest of the country is that people tend to be dressed just right and they worry very much what other people are thinking.

Mike: The state it should be at is if you go up to someone and say "Hey you look really good tonight" but what people say is "Oh I know where you bought that".

Tony: They ask where you bought your clothes so they can copy you. Mike: Contrary to what some people say it is expensive to buy clothes.

Tony: Some people make theirs and they're lucky, some people have theirs made for them and they're very lucky, mentioning no names.

Paul: I buy cheap.

Tony: Yeah but you buy second hand.

ZZ: (Aware of subtle bitching) Is there much rivalry between bands?

Tony: It is beginning to build up into certain camps. Spandau Ballet are very much out by themselves at the moment, very funky, fashion orientated, Duran Duran which I think are trying to leap in as another Spandau though they deny it, and we read their interview and were amazed to see them quoting our Record Mirror interview almost word for word. Then you've got Soft Cell who from what we've heard refuse to play with us, refuse to be on any billing with us whatsoever. We don't mind em playing with us. They're northern doomy gloomy, updating themselves to become more boppy.

ZZ: It seems backbiting comes easier to fashionable bands.

Tony: Yeah but the bands aren't

ultra orientated towards fashion. They're into fashion, but they're living for more than dressing up. They're involved in making music. Tony: With synth bands in particular they can be really boring to watch. That's the problem most synth bands have to overcome over the last year. You go along and watch a band playing 'electronic dane music', three blokes playing synths, one singing and tapes going in the background, it's not very inspiring at times.

ZZ: Were you in other bands before Naked Lunch?

Paul: First band I was in was just me and another guy. I played guitar he played synth. In 76 when we first saw the Pistols. The reason we got a synth was cos there was no-one else into punk at the time in Blackburn, we only did from room gigs.

Mike: Most bands, 'futurist' bands, are post-punk in that that's what started them off.

Tony: Yeah, is there a 'futurist' movement as such. It does appear to be happening up and down the country for a while .. been happening since 1975..

Mike: A lot of original punk bands came from a glam background.. the Banshees met at a Roxy Music gig. There's always been the element of dressing up coming from punk ..Sex Pistols, new clothes, attitudes and everything. People go off in other directions like skinhead punk bands or the other direction like clothes horses. People zooming into Joy Division or wire.

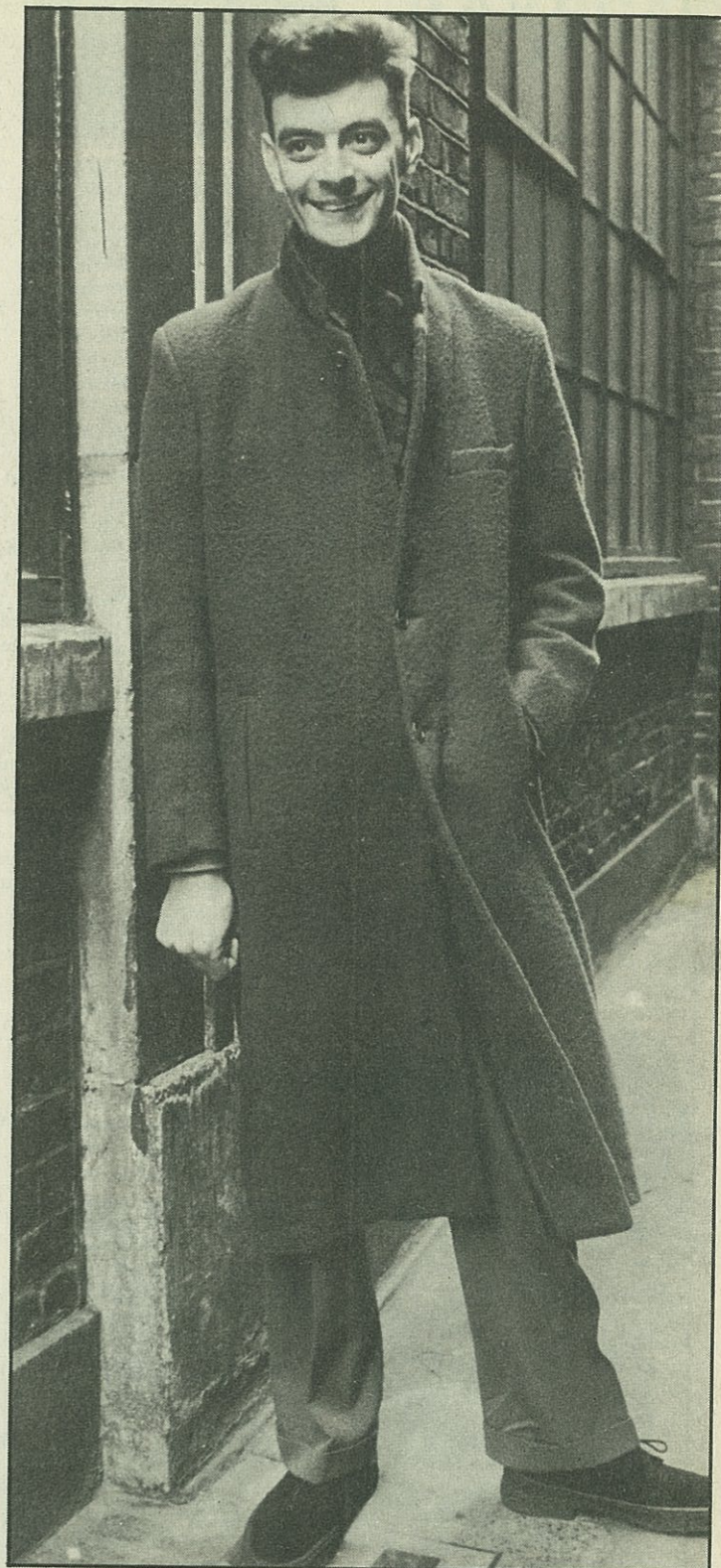
.....Someone mentions Bowie.

Paul: I got expelled from school for being a Bowie clone in '73; got thrown in the pond.

Tony: I wish people in it would learn to laugh.

ZZ: What sort of crowd do you get?

Tony: We get a mixture. We don't say who can or can't get in as long as they're into what they're doing, or don't object to people being dressed up, because you can get some people coming in going



"Bunch of pooftahs, WALLOP!!" We've had long haired heavy metal freaks headbanging, punks pogoing. I admit we did an open air festival. We did a college too, and the students invaded the stage, dancing and going beserk and one of the band picked his synth up in a terrinly uncol manner and dived into the audience.. playing it in the audiences.

Mike: You can get soul with electronic music. Tony: Our backing track never varies but the gigs vary. The only thing that varies is our feelings. We might not play to the height of our ability but there's a lot of people dancing around and we get into it and it's really good fun.

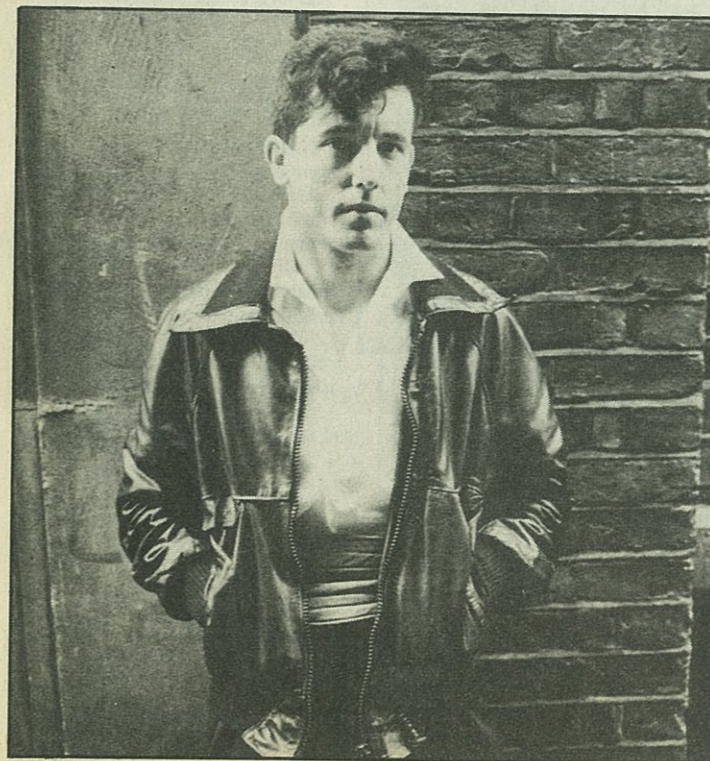
Eventually the conversation drifts to Spandau Ballet again, as it

always seems to.

Tony: There's only one danger with hyping and lets get one thing clear about this six months hype, there was a certain company involved behind them as well who we've spoken to, who are interested in us...

Simon: Come one, name names.. Tony: No I'm not naming em, screw our deal up. They spent a lot of time putting effort in Spandau in the assumption they were gonna get something in return and they didn't and they were a bit upset. They said before they'll do anything like that with us we'd have to have something in writing this time, not any of this trust rubbish, which is unfortunate .. got us sussed straight away."

Mick Mercer



PHOTOS: SIMON REEVES