

Cartoon Pop

The Thompson Twins



To open with an unashamedly bald statement, the Thompson Twins' *Into The Gap* is a quintessential 1980s pop record, all contradictory arguments may be addressed to me on the back of a \$10 note, etc, etc ...

Quintessential because it embodies, on a synoptic scale, the restless and somewhat apprehensive spirit of this still-young decade.

On a personal level you have songs like 'Doctor Doctor', with its transitory and casual view of love, while 'No Peace For The Wicked' is a wry view not only of the trappings of stardom, but also of the global scene (the song was written at the time when the women of Greenham Common were drawing big headlines). The fact that the album and its attendant hit singles are charting enormously suggests that the message is at least accessible to the masses, even if only because it's wrapped around some decent tunes and some inspired arrangements. Pop music it most certainly is, but don't ever call it mindless.

It's early in the morning in Tokyo, where the Thompson Twins have played five concerts, and Allannah Currie is now dealing with the never-ending round of interviews. But true to her nationality she is friendly, funny and full of life. When we last spoke to her, in March of 83, *Quick Step and Side Kick* was riding high in the British charts. Even its biggest fans admitted it made a better impact on the dance floor than on the radio.

"It was a breakthrough for us, we were very pleased with it, and I still am; I can still listen to it. But after listening to it for a year, we figured we were really good at writing dance tracks but not so good at writing melodies. So this time, with *Into The Gap*, we actually wrote it the other way round. Instead of putting the grooves down first, then the melodies and the lyrics on top, we wrote the melodies and the lyrics first, then spent a long time building the textures."

The approach paid off handsomely, because

"texture" is a word that well describes the sound of *Into The Gap*. The arrangements are almost tactile in their presence, so you can enjoy the songs on various levels. They are active without being fussy. The inclusion of a bonus album of remixes adds another dimension to the tracks. As with reggae dub versions, you can appreciate the instrumental subtleties that contribute to the overall atmosphere. The remixes are Tom Bailey's conception and obsession.

Ironically, 'Hold Me Now', one of the year's great ballads, went to Number One on the American dance charts, which was the last thing the group expected. Currie acknowledges co-producer Alex Sadkin (Wailers, Grace Jones) as an important part of the Thompson Twins' sound.

"He's really there in the studio as a stable force. We can go crazy, experiment and muck around, but Alex is there when things have gone too far. At the same time, he doesn't interfere when he's not needed. He knows when a song is finished, which sometimes we don't realise, we get so involved in it and keep wanting to put other things in. Alex will say, 'No, that's enough'."

Into The Gap came together over numerous chaotic sessions, following on from the American and British tours of mid-1983. In July of last year, Currie, Bailey and Joe Leeway took off to the countryside, armed only with their instruments and a 16-track recorder. Working in three different rural settings, they poured out their ideas and impressions, arguing frequently, as the songs emerged that finally made *Into The*

Gap.

"I don't work very much on melodies, that's Joe and Tom's area. They went into one room and worked on the basic song melody, and I went into another room and worked on the lyrics. We'd scream and yell at each other up and down the corridor. As soon as the song came together, there was a fusion, there was real excitement.

"I find all the best stuff we've written, we've done in half an hour or an hour (laughter). The three of us are very different people and we've all got different musical influences, so when all of us get excited about one thing, it usually means it's good, despite taste or anything else."

Witness 'Hold Me Now'.

"We wrote the song basically in about half an hour, although we spent another week touching it up, like a painting. But we wrote it in this attic of a country house during a summer heatwave, and we'd all been going through a terrible time emotionally and I think that's where that song came from. When we'd finished it, we were just jumping around."

The "emotional" problems were connected with personal relationships, something this magazine is too tactful to investigate further. For the record, all three Thompsons are good friends, even though they often fight.

Video is now more than just an adjunct to the music, especially in America, where MTV is steadily taking control of pop tastes. Thompson Twins video skirts the wide-screen approach of Duran Duran or the slightly psychotic imagery of Talking Heads, instead stressing the leading figures as faces and personalities, the people who make the music. The video side is Currie's department and she's proud of it.

"Because we write together we all have different ideas, certain songs have certain colours and moods. But when I come to getting the video together, it's easy because I know where various ideas came from, so I can put all that feeling into it.

"I think videos are great because they can expand an idea, but I think it's important not to be too specific with videos, the same way as in writing lyrics. You've got to leave space all the time for people's imagination because that's the key to great music and great art, I think."

So how does video rank as a popular art form?

"Well, we've been travelling for the past four months, through Britain, America, Canada and now Japan. In England, video is not so important. It's still the record, and it's still Radio One, basically, that makes or breaks the record. In America, MTV has taken over the youth, but in Japan it's not so important.

"However, in America, I think in a year or two, you won't just go down the road and buy a single, you'll buy the song and its video, or even a video single."

Have Thompson Twins videos made MTV?

"Yeah, all the time (laughter). We're really pleased about that because there's a big revolution that's happening in American music which is very exciting. For many years they've been stuck in the 'rock 'n' roll, jeans and T-shirt, if it ain't got guitar, it ain't real shit-kickin' music' routine. When we went there three years ago, people were looking at us as though we were weird, poofers, that sort of thing. They didn't think we were real music. But over the last two years there's been this mass turnaround and I think a lot of it has been due to MTV.

"I think people are very frightened of new things, and if they see you on MTV in their front rooms and they have time to get used to you, they accept you and they start to like you."

Popular music is a multi-media field these days. Currie plunged into it through the necessity to learn, and says people must be able to use it without fear.

"You have to learn to take control, you can't be flabbergasted by it. Everyone should know how to use videos. You've got to be all things, though, you've got to be able to give a good live performance as well. You have to be multi-faceted in your talents."

The Thompsons' other strong point is their visual image — three distinct characters who wouldn't look out of place in a comic strip (the name, after all, is taken from the bumbling detectives in Herge's classic *Tintin*). The look they project is basically an extension of their own personalities.

"It's just been a form of evolution, I mean, I've had this same hairstyle for about eight years, I think. Then you work in front of cameras and see yourself on video a lot, you start streamlining yourself. I think it's important to express yourself through the way you look, get your outside looking like your self-image.

"But basically, it's just fun. I don't judge people by the clothes they wear. They're just something to keep warm. Still, it's good to work with that visual image.

"England is very fashion conscious. The trouble is that it's a very fickle thing, fashion comes and goes. In London, something is fashionable for a week, it's that quick a turnover. And if you are a fashion band and all you have is image, then you will only be fashionable for about six months."

Having lost some of our most promising bands to the UK recently, it seems a good opportunity to ask an expatriate Kiwi, with seven years' experience under her belt, just what it's like over there these days.

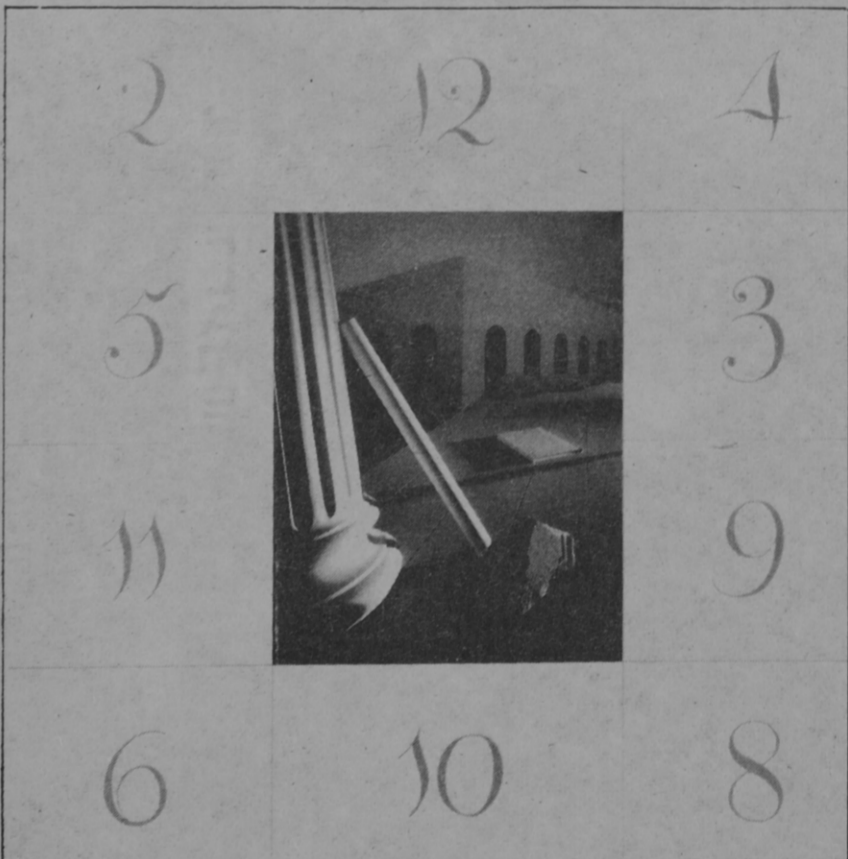
"It's very tough, there are loads and loads of bands, you have to get a record deal and you have to get the finance to do it. The independent record scene is not very big any more, so gone

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NEW ORDER

12" SINGLE

'Thieves Like Us'



ACR (A CERTAIN RATIO)

12" SINGLE

'I NEED SOMEONE TONITE' 'DON'T YOU WORRY BOUT A THING'



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