

Bunnymen: Liverpool to America



Left to Right: Les Pattinson, Pete de Freitas, Ian McCulloch, Will Sergeant.

The hotel bar is littered with distressed television crews and photographers. Their target is the four young Liverpoolians trading under the mysterious moniker of Echo and the Bunnymen, but they're quickly scurrying off back to the security of their private rabbit-holes. It's not that they're being deliberately rude, just that they're unconvinced of the benefits of having their mugs appear on yet more television shows or in more rock magazines.

When bassist Les Pattinson is finally cajoled into a few minutes with a local music video show, his opening comment is a criticism of its content. It is quite clear that Echo and the Bunnymen are not overly concerned about making friends with the media and record business, and they're similarly not exactly salivating for the carrot of major North American success.

"We're only here for three weeks, but it seems like three months," asserts the soft-spoken Pattinson. "There's a point in touring where you just become a robot going through the motions. It doesn't feel as if you're doing anything."

But in fact the band is doing something in North America now.

"We've only been here for three weeks at a time before, but the difference between then and now is staggering; it's great!"

Yes, it has been great to see the continent finally begin to wake up to the Bunnymen's musical charms. Selling out medium size venues at a time when so-called major acts cannot draw flies is impressive, and the recent release of the fourth Bunnymen opus, *Ocean Rain*, should be a boost.

It seems patently unfair that much-hyped outfits like Big Country and U2 have met with such large success here earlier than the Mersey men, for they were playing a powerfully atmospheric guitar-based rock while Bono was languishing in Dublin and Stuart Adamson's career was on the Skids.

A remark that the U2 guitar sound appears to have been influenced by Bunnymen Will Sergeant's fret work is met with chuckling agreement by Pattinson.

"Yes, I'm glad you recognise that; we take it as a compliment. I think we're getting noticed now because our records are not commercially-oriented. They're done the way we want them to be. A song like 'The Killing Moon' is just a good song, not a typical dance song or anything."

In Britain, Echo and the Bunnymen have pulled off the difficult task of remaining both hip in media eyes and popular with the record buyers. Their sense of musical adventure has led them to such gigs as headlining the celebrated 1982 WOMAD Festival backed by the Burundi Drummers, as well as an appearance last year at the prestigious Royal Albert Hall in London, a venue well-suited to the group's majestic sound.

That date caused some controversy, but Les claims that "everyone who went enjoyed it. If you're good, you can counteract the snobbery of such prestige places. People get set in their ways as to who should play places like that."

"They think of the Stones or Status Quo, but get offended that a punk band of four years ago play it. I like to change people's ways of thinking," he smiles subversively.

Hopping over pop music conventions comes easily to Echo and the Bunnymen. The boyish good looks of lead singer Ian McCulloch and Les Pattinson have long been noticed by the English pop glossies, but, unlike the Durannies and Goo-Goos, the Bunnymen sincerely try to keep away from that type of exploitation.

"I hate all that teenybop magazine type stuff, and we hate doing it. Our manager and press officer will do some of it behind our backs. I was on the cover of a mag in England called 'Oh Boy', and for two weeks after I couldn't go outside because of the little girls out there. That 13 year old girl mentality is really weird. Some people take advantage of it, there are no Queensbury Rules."

Although the band tries to keep the pin-up set at bay, other visual elements have always been

important to them. Their album jackets have been consistently breathtaking shots of the boys in the wilds; an eerie forest, a deserted Welsh beach, an Icelandic glacier.

Surprisingly, Les Pattinson expresses a dislike of the covers.

"They're the only thing I find slightly pretentious, but I guess there's always someone who isn't totally happy."

Similarly, the group's venture into feature films (*Shine So Hard*) and videos have not met with much of Les' approval.

"When you do videos, it never comes out the way you imagined. It's always hard to control. The film was really embarrassing. We just can't act. We're probably as good as Duran Duran!"



GUITARMAN

Snowy White — the name probably won't mean much to anyone but enthusiasts.

But Snowy was not only a member of Thin Lizzy until he went solo about two years ago but played live with Pink Floyd for more than four years.

The guitarist has also worked with Peter Green, Al Stewart, Cliff Richard, Cockney Rebel and Linda Lewis. After all this time as a sideman it's logical to expect that Snowy would have trouble adjusting to thinking as a solo artist but

he claims otherwise:

"It wasn't difficult at all, really. Because in Thin Lizzy I was in an environment where I wasn't particularly comfortable. This way round I'm doing a lot more hard work and there's a lot more responsibility but somehow I'm able to just be myself — which is what I promised myself when I left Thin Lizzy, that I'd never again get stuck in an image that wasn't me. I'd just concentrate on the music and playing the guitar. So it has in fact turned out to be easier."

And, indeed, it's hard to imagine Snowy in an even slightly metallic outfit after hearing his debut album *White Flames*. It's a cruisy, melodic affair, a laid-back mix of blues, rock, jazz and funk. In fact, beneath the overall sound, quite diverse.

"Yes, it's a very diverse album. It really consists of a number of ideas that had been hanging around in my head for years."

The album was actually recorded on the producer's own mobile unit at the band's practise rooms, with the sheer intention of saving money. The success of the 'Bird of

Echo and the Bunnymen have existed as a quartet for nearly five years now, Pete de Freitas replacing the original drummer, a machine called Echo. "We originally started with a drum machine because we couldn't find a drummer we liked," recalls Les. "The only reason we changed was that it couldn't read dramatics, but it was good. It became a hip idea after us."

Pattinson attributes group unity to the fact that "we see each other all the time. It is far better to be friends than business associates. I hate that word business."

"Pete and I and sometimes Will all live in a big old flat right outside Sefton Park in Liverpool. We haven't paid rent in six months because the Council want to sell it, and we're fighting them. It has got ten rooms and it is all run down, just like the Monkees' house!"

Both the band's lifestyle and music can be seen as an Eighties Anglo version of late Sixties American psychedelia. Echo and the Bunnymen have long been tagged psychedelic and Doors-like, a label that is difficult to dispute when snatches of 'Moonlight Drive' and 'Light My Fire' creep into your repertoire.

"I think we're more psychedelic now than when we were most often tagged as such," claims Les. "I was heavily influenced by psychedelic music when I was a punk. I'd comb my hair down and wear sunglasses, and look totally weird. That era was a great time in music."

It is Ian McCulloch's virile vocals and stress on lyrical themes like love, lust, and death that most conjure visions of Jim Morrison, but the band's sound, spearheaded by the aggressive guitar work of Will Sergeant, is a distinctly contemporary one.

The new album sees a further expansion of the musical Echo.

"It's a lot more diverse than the other albums. We've got a 30 piece orchestra in there, but they're used very simply. We recorded it in Paris because we wanted to get away from English studios because they're all so governed by the engineers, saying you can't do this or that. We've found we'd waste time with producers, and this time we had a fair idea of how we wanted it to sound."

Les Pattinson sounds a mite ambivalent about the degree of success Echo and the Bunnymen has achieved.

"I think you can adjust it to your advantage, and not let it get on top of you. After you've done one concert and got reviewed, you think, that's it."

"There's no more to do, and you can become a legend. It doesn't work like that, but it would be nice to do!"

Kerry Doole

Paradise' single has made the bank balance a little more healthy and the half-completed second album is being made in a conventional studio.

Snowy clutches a battered Les Paul in the photo on the back of the album and says it's his only electric guitar. That seems unusual for a guitar maestro ...

"Yeah, everyone says that. It's a 1957 Les Paul and I've had it since 1969. You really get used to a guitar and I don't see any need to go out and buy another guitar when that one gives me all I need. That one's lasted me well. It's been baked in the back of a van for a month in North Africa, it's been frozen in the North of Sweden, it's been everywhere between."

When asked to comment on other guitarists he respects Snowy mentions Peter Green, Eric Clapton and the black blues guitarists. He confesses he doesn't pay attention to much else. He'd like to get Green to return a favour and play on a track or two on the new album, just for a jam.

Russell Brown

"Have you heard about..."



COSSACK
VODKA