

Not Was are on high-rotate on MTV.

"Truthfully, I think we've got better over the eight years [the band has been together]. We're still extreme but we've stretched out to meet the audience halfway, trying to write some better songs.

"The core of *What Up, Dog?* is 'What Up, Dog?', 'Dad I'm In Jail', 'Earth To Doris', because those weird tracks have been what David and I have been doing for 25 years. Songs like 'Anything Can Happen' and 'Spy In The House Of Love' are almost there to provide the leash for the stranger songs — to me *those* are the weird songs. But record companies start lifting singles out and the whole context changes. I like using the pop songs but I still don't think of us being a pop band."

Songs like 'A Street Named After My Dad' and 'Shadow And Jimmy' seem to reflect an enormous social conscience and a great melancholy.

"Good point. We worked really hard on 'A Street Named After My Dad'. It started out as a cheap pun: "In the land of the freak, in the home of depraved." We were trying to write the great American piece. It's

so easy to be heavy handed like some people, I won't mention any names like Jackson Browne ...

"America is easy to criticise but like anything it's neither black nor white. You could come over here from New Zealand, land at Kennedy Airport, walk around for 20 minutes and find enough sickness to write an album's worth of stuff. We're always looking for the middle ground, and when David came up with that lyric it landed right where we wanted — in the land of the wistful. He paints a nightmare but it harkens back to the days when we were promised something better, in the 50s. It maintains a certain hope, too, which is there somewhere — I just haven't stumbled on it yet. That's my favourite song on the album."

Other songs like 'Boy's Gone Crazy' and the title track seem a portrait of a country cracking up.

"I don't know if it's an indictment of a whole country. But you could make a pretty strong case for the decline of Western Civilisation commencing right here."

Then again, the United Kingdom isn't looking too healthy these days

— Mother England, or what?

"Someone was asking me, why are the British charts so strange?" Don muses. "My analysis was that even though they're really way ahead in terms of trends and there's a strong avant-garde sensibility, there's still this British music hall tradition; at once a much hipper culture and yet the squarest culture on earth combined."

"If there was an overall blueprint for the band, it was what David called serving up chocolate-covered razor blades to people. Palatable musical songs that serve as a Trojan horse, very insidious."

That's why the pop charts are like that."

And in a way, Was Not Was trade on the same blend: a weird lyric, but on top of black music, the Detroit sound, which is much more traditional.

"Yeah. If there was an overall blueprint for the band, a pillar that we built the thing on, it was what David called serving up chocolate-covered razor blades to

people. Palatable musical songs that serve as a Trojan horse, very insidious. And we've done well with that."

What sort of music do you listen to, Don?

"Uh, diverse. I'm a radio dial switcher. Lately I've really been into Duke Ellington. People lump him into

the big band era, but they're missing the boat with him. It's the most emotional stuff, as cartoon-like as George Clinton. I've been into Leonard Cohen lately ... We did an American TV show with him."

Really?

"Hosted by David Sanborn." That sounds like a good combination.

"Everyone played together too! Us, Leonard Cohen and Sonny

Rollins. It was so wild to see Sweet Pea singing with Leonard Cohen and Sonny playing at the same time."

What did Sweet Pea think of Leonard?

"The same thing: "What is this shit? What does this mean?!" But he got the vibe that Leonard should be treated with some respect."

"Which is *not* what happened with Lita Ford the other night," says Don, starting to giggle again. "We went to this convention in San Francisco where artists go and shake hands with the radio people and stuff. It was real crowded, they had cocktails, and I was standing in a corner with Sweet Pea. And Sweet Pea was a little drunk, he'd had a few rum and cokes, and we noticed *Tiffany* standing two people away. So I said, look Sweet Pea, there's Tiffany."

"Now, as Sweet Pea tells it, he went over to say to Tiffany, 'Congratulations on your new hit single.' But the way it came out was like Sweet Pea sticking his nose about an *inch* from Tiffany's face and going 'HEEEEEEEY TIFFANY DARLIN!!' It scared the *shit* out of her."

"Now Tiffany was engaged in a

conversation with Lita Ford, a heavy metal guitar player who used to be in the Runaways, and who has just had a big hit with a video which tests the limits of what you can put on American TV — Lita is a very tough girl. So Sweet Pea didn't realise that he'd cut in on a conversation between Lita and Tiffany, so Lita says 'Motherfucker don't EVER knock into me!' So Sweet Pea turns around and says 'BITCH get your hands OFF me, you don't even KNOW me!'"

Don Was laughs. "Things kind of went downhill from there."

So is this a template for the famous days of Was Not Was?

"May I say that the night when John Lennon put the tampon on his head, the legendary night at the Roxy when he heckled the Smothers Brothers — we're gonna make that look like *nothing*. Give the Was Brothers some money and power, and we'll terrorise Hollywood."

People of the world: spare that man a dime.
CHAD TAYLOR

The Hard Word

"Very few people have ever had the experience where they sit back and say, 'I am a movie star'. And I know it. I knew it at the first showing of *Easy Rider* at Cannes by how the audience reacted. I *knew* it. And it was *great*."

— JACK NICHOLSON on handling stardom.

"With the commercial success of such "socially conscious" groups as Midnight Oil, Tracy Chapman, U2, etc, 1989 will be the year the record industry inundates us with vague pseudo-political songs, addressing issues on which nobody really disagrees."

— DAVID LOWERY (Camper Van Beethoven) forecasts 1989.

"*The Joshua Tree* reminds me of my favourite Velvet Underground records. I don't know why."

— THE EDGE gets explicit.

"Seeing him dressed up in his white suit, trying to look slick and hip. And the gold ring and the gold chains that say, 'Look how rich I am'. It's a shame no-one taught him how to be cool."

— ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER on muscle buddy Sylvester Stallone.

"She's not a rocket-scientist, is she?"

— TRACY ULLMAN on Princess Diana's academic leanings.

"I actually bought the CD of *Never Mind The Bollocks* the other day. It's great ..."

— JOE ELLIOT of Def Leppard heads into the 80s.

"In all these videos you see musicians acting tough. Musicians aren't tough! They're the wimpiest people in the world. Mick Jagger prancing around like a tough guy. Is he kidding? You could bust him in half."

— middleweight champion RANDY NEWMAN.

"I made a graph which was to do with the invention of umbrellas. What happened was, for centuries and centuries there were no umbrellas, and then suddenly there were an awful lot of umbrellas, this vertical line shooting straight up, and then it tailed off. And funnily enough, this graph was identical to that of our record sales in Japan."

— something to get the conversation going at dinner parties, researched by Simon Jeffes of the PENGUIN CAFE ORCHESTRA.

"We don't make art, we make hamburgers."

— POISON (it took all four of them to say it).

"It really annoys me when people expect me to be funny all the time. You don't expect welders to weld all the time, do you?"

— odd-job man LENNY HENRY plys his trade.

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IF IT'S NEW, IT'S NEW WAVE.

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