

In the gentle art of subversion, the Fall have been persistent. Since 1978 they've been undermining the myths and morals of the rock 'n' roll edifice in order, not so much to tear it down, but more to strip it back to the raw necessities of honest, unfrilled communication.

In another sense they've become the last true survivors of the late 70s clearout, the last articulate disciples of a truth tainted by the hollow virtues of the 'new wave'. So, for many, the Fall have become unholy priests.

The Holiday Lodge, Christchurch, is a fancy sounding name for what are a collection of ageing, roughcast motel units in Colombo St. A far cry from the usual rock star sumptuousness of the Vacation Hotel or Noah's.

Unit 5 and after a brief chat to Kay Carroll, the band's manager and number one fan, Mark E. Smith arrives from the shops with a bottle of Rochdale dry cider among other things. Pale and thin, Smith is also sporting a black eye and a cut with three stitches over his eyebrow; injuries suffered during a friendly game of soccer against some 'macho Aussies'.

Smith and I have an hour before the band's soundcheck in the Town Hall, the second of their two Christchurch gigs, the first having been played the night before at the varsity, so he grabs the cider and I start the tape. How did it go last night?

"There were a lot of people there, which was great, and they loved it and the band were happy but I wasn't and I told them that it's going to be different. I had a row with the lads over it. Sometimes they tend to slip into formalisation. It goes down well with the audience but I don't think it's a good thing coz it ends in rock and becomes complacent."

By formalisation I take it you mean cliché?

"No, anything can become a cliché and we've got a lot of innovations in our songs but when you get a song off pat it seems to take all of the reason out of it. The band don't know what they're gonna play each night before they go on and this keeps the tension there. And last night the main bulk of the set was new material that no-one had heard before."

Smith's hurried Manchester accent conveys a dogmatism and determination that has kept the Fall on the rails ever since their recorded emergence with 'Bingo Master's Break-Out' in 1978.

What prompted you to start a band?

"I was doing a lot of writing of prose and poetry and then the sort of new wave happened. I used to kick around the bedrooms a lot with two of me mates on guitar and we decided to make a group of it. I thought a lot of the new wave was going wrong as you just got old bands dressed as new wave bands. The really good bands around Manchester like the Worst and the Prefects never got anywhere. And then you had groups who played cabaret for years and they got their hair cut and they were it. That was my main motivating force and I just thought I could do it better than them."

As a vocalist did you model yourself on anyone in particular?

"Naw, not really. I used to like Lou Reed a lot as a kid. I saw him a couple of times and I think I picked up a couple of his mannerisms."

Live, are you aware of any image up there?

"Naw, I try not to take any notice of it. When we were in Sydney people were going 'look, he's got his back to the audience, that's a great new thing'. But it's not, I don't formalise it like that. Last night I had my back to the audience only because the fuckin' equipment was shit. I do it as a means of getting everybody together as a unit. I treat it as a job of work, bein' on stage, and I try to concentrate which is why I was so annoyed last night because when the equipment crapped out we had the road crew walkin' across the stage every ten fuckin' minutes and it breaks the concentration. You can make a lot of things up on stage often by accident, and it's good."

Do you still believe the Fall can change the nature of rock'n'roll?

"I think we already have done. People have been influenced by us but I don't know if it's a good thing. There are loads of groups who just copy us and then water it down."

If they're copying then that's a calculated, self-conscious act and that's surely against the principles of the Fall?

"Yeah, exactly. I've been thinking about that a lot lately and it really pisses me off."

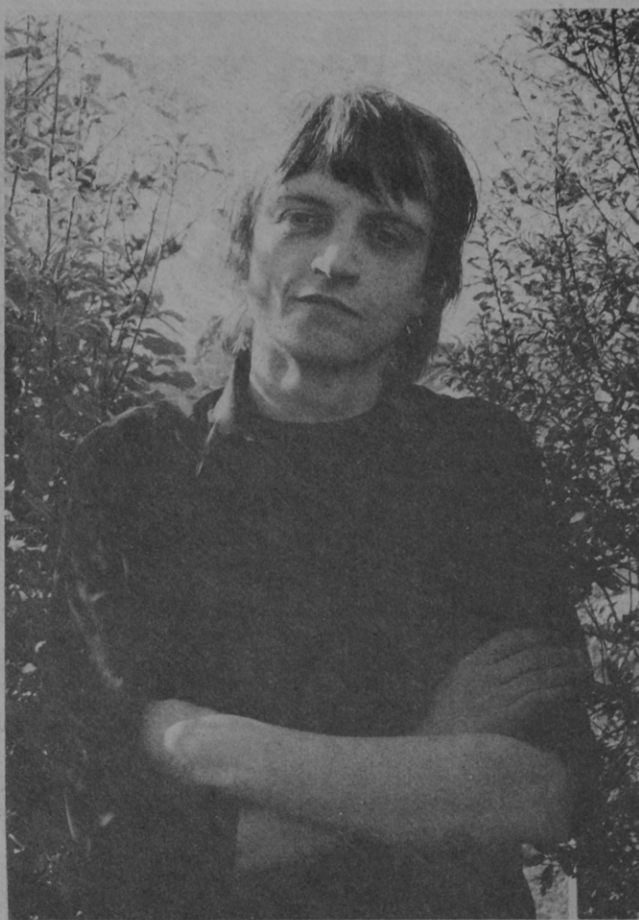
Interlude and look around. Count the number of New Zealand bands who've adopted the harsh no-compromise stance of the Fall. It goes well into double figures. The Dunedin scene alone echoes the beliefs initially touted by Smith five years ago. The conversation turns to Toy Love and Chris Knox whose phone interview with Smith appeared in last month's issue:

"I was very arrogant with him actually because when he rang me up he was sayin' 'do this and do that when you come over here and I said to him you can't even do a fuckin' interview, man so don't start tellin' me what to do. Coz he couldn't, he was goin' 'ahmm, ahmm, ahmm', like this, and I said gerraway and reverse the bleedin' charges on the phone. And he was sayin' get your sound right coz they don't know anything about sound in New Zealand, which was right, that was a good tip."

Did you like Australia?

"We stayed in Kings Cross, what a fuckin' nightmare, I was bloody horrified. I'm no moralist but in the street I was accosted by prostitutes, drunks, people tryin' to borrow money, everything's open 24 hours and there's junkies everywhere. It's all cheap stimulation."

"New Zealand seems to be good like that. There seem to be quite a lot of restraints and sometimes they work for the good. It's very Anglophile here, like the North of England really. The people are friendly like the Northerners. And this is the only country where we've got into the bloody Top 20."



The Fall of Slick

Mark E. Smith's Enduction Hour



Some Fall: Steve Hanley, Paul Hanley, Karl Burns, Marc Riley.

Integrity and the fear of compromise must be important guidelines for the Fall?

"Yeah, but I don't get worked up about it. The minute it becomes routine is just as much of a compromise. To be conscious all the time of should we do this or that is bad. I work in a sort of organic way where I follow my heart."

"Our time on Rough Trade is a typical example of where their so-called integrity became routine. They had loads of bands and they were pressin' the same number for every band, and we were sayin' 'look the Fall's bloody unique and you should be backin' us. And they would say oh so you want to be a pop star now. And I'd say no I don't want to be a pop star I want the bloody respect I deserve, and I'd ask why wasn't the record in that shop and why are you sending it to some stupid left wing magazine and not to a daily paper? And they say, oh that's sellin' out. That's just like all those muddled socialist ideals. And they'd go, this song sounds a bit fascist to us and what are you doing on this song. And I'd say it's none of your fuckin' business. If they'd been a big label and gave me 50,000 pounds then I might've let them have a say."

"I'd had enough of them and they're all middle class. They didn't know what the Fall was about and they were signing all these bands that sounded like the Fall."

The Fall and Rough Trade always seemed like a marriage made in heaven?

"Naw. They went out to sign us and in the end we were that bloody desperate we had to for money, like. They were good in that they always gave you your royalties. Not like our first label, Step Forward, for whom we did those first singles and first two albums but we never saw a penny. That's a fact, we were bloody starving to death. It's 'A New Thing' was single of the year and we had no fuckin' money in our pockets."

Slates was the last thing you did for Rough Trade?

"Yeah, and that was the one we had the trouble over. They thought that the 'Pink Press' sounded a bit fascist, but I told them that that was what I was gettin' at, fascism doesn't have to be the men in suits."

"I was just so sick of the whole Alternative Chart thing so Kay said we'd do *Slates* as a 10 inch and we had the price so low that it wasn't an LP or a single, it was like nothin'. So we avoided the whole alternative thing of being top of the charts."

"*Slates* was also a very class conscious thing and it was a retort to Rough Trade in many ways."

The Fall aren't exactly easy listening, which is the point that they're trying to make — life isn't easy living. They come from the ugliness of the less fashionable parts of Manchester and fashion takes a hammering on the liner notes to their recent single on Kamera, 'Lie Dream Of a Casino Soul':

"Nobody's ever asked me about those liner notes before. Very bitter weren't they?"

The blows seemed to be aimed at the new romantics and the synthesiser bands?

"Yeah but there was also a dig at the Liverpool scene, Echo and the Teardrops. They're OK but at the time they were pissin' me off because they were goin' on *Top of the Pops* and imitating our stage mannerisms. The Fall never got on TV in England and

Echo used to play a lot with us in the early days so it was almost like a betrayal. You talk to Echo these days and it's like they're tryin' to be Dave Bowie."

If *Slates* was the Fall's most concentrated venom then *Hex Enduction Hour* must rank as their most direct and simple album?

"Most people thought it was more complex in musicianship which was a surprise to me because, like you, I thought the exact opposite. A lot of it is very simple. There are two or three numbers there that I wrote on the spot. It's a departure from *Slates*. If we'd gone on from *Slates* it could have become a big rock sound, which we're not into really."

Speaking of a big rock sound, how are the two drummers working out?

"Good, but we've toned it down as it was becoming a bit heavy so we've got Karl (Burns) doin' other things as well, so sometimes we've got three guitarists."

The two drummer line-up is a real Gary Glitter touch:

"Yeah, yeah. Actually the way it came about was that we used Karl last year on a tour of America as Paul (Hanley) was under 18 and too young. We brought Karl back permanently after that. The Gary Glitter and Adam Ant angle did appeal to me after that. But Karl's really there for the balance. He's a very high tech musician and he could play in any technical band easy and Paul's a self-taught drummer."

In the band is there a pride in their musicianship?

"Yeah, there is. But I don't encourage them to practice all the time. I don't think it's good for them. A bloody guitar is a guitar, it's like a piece of wood. I think you get more interesting things from applying it and looking at it differently each time. In the original band with Martin Bramah (now with the Blue Orchids) I gave him most of the tips on how to play, and I can't play."

"It's the same when I write the tunes or lyrics. If it's getting too formalised, slick or proficient I rip it up no matter whether it's good or bad. And I'll change the line-up and peoples' instruments if it's getting too slick."

The most interesting critique on the Fall was written by Barney Hoskyns and appeared in *NME*, 14 November last year. Hoskyns described Smith as a Hip Priest engaged in the fight to promote working class credibility and supremacy. What did Mark E. Smith think of the article?

"It was very retrospective. I was pleased with it although it was pretentious in parts."

Are you fired up with working class zeal?

"No, that was one thing I didn't like about Hoskyn's article. That stinks that sort of thing. I just write about it. It was one of the reasons for forming the group, like there were other groups going on about the working classes and they obviously weren't working class, they were bloody art students like the Stones."

"I wrote about it because you'd get bands from the North and they'd be singing bloody love songs yet where I come from you'd be lucky to find a girl in the street. Or you'd go to a pub and they'd be doin' this sort of laid back stuff and you'd think fuck, nothin' to do with what's happening."

The middle class seem to view their poorer cousins through rose-tinted glasses as if the working class is an easy way to respect and credibility:

"Yeah, right, this is what I hate about the left wing. It's only guilt manifest. I went to grammar school and all the other kids were middle class and I envied them in some ways. I didn't lead a particularly working class life; my dad worked with his hands and we went up and down, but we never wanted for anything and we were dead 'appy."

"I often felt sorry for the middle class kids what with all the pressures on them. I don't hate them but they think they're better off and nobody's better off really."

It seems to me that the Fall are being accepted as the safe working class alternatives and so everybody's happy, but if the band threatened real change then the critical acclaim could turn sour overnight through fear of insecurity. What do you reckon Mark?

"Right, that's what's happening. Hoskyns has done an about turn. I saw him at the opening of this stupid club Factory in Manchester and he comes over like 'I'm with Mark Smith' and I say get out of my way. He was trying to lick up me arse and make like he was a life long mate and I was gettin' embarrassed. Anyway at the time of the interview he had been pestering an old French friend of mine, Claude, who started Slash Records years ago, and we told Hoskyns that the Gun Club and Fear were good. So he starts pestering me and Claude for tapes of Fear, which were pretty rare, so Claude got him a couple. Then he writes these things in the paper that Fear are a load of shit after fuckin' annoying us to hear them. That pissed me off because he used a friend of mine."

"He's been hanging around the Birthday Party and he's seeing an Australian girl and so he's mentioning Australian bands all the time. And the next thing you hear he likes the Blue Orchids now. But he's a fuckin' good writer."

Politically, where are you?

"A lot of people think I'm just a bloody fascist but I don't believe in left wing paranoia and I don't believe in the Tory attitude either."

"The Falkland thing was a shock to me. I thought the Army did a great job, and these communists and revolutionaries in the pubs were goin' 'Thatcher's War' and every bloody group was bringin' out anti-war singles, it was fuckin' disgraceful. At the Labour Club I started rowing with these guys and I said if the Russians came they wouldn't let you sit here bleedin' all day on the dole drinking yourselves to death. And they say the war's costing a lot of money and I'd say what's fuckin' money anyway, I thought you were socialists. Don't kid me, everybody likes a war, as long as I don't get hit, its true innit?"

A lot of writers these days seem to equate mental depression with art:

"I agree and I'm wary of that with the band. Everybody does the paranoid music. I thought that about Joy Division; they were very slushy, very depressing in a maudlin way. And the Joy Division copyists are pretty funny. Like you could go to a club and see this gangly dick tryin' to do this sorta paranoid fit. I prefer catharsis, that's healthy, that's not depressing."

Future noises?

"Before we came over we went into the studio and tried an experiment. Instead of doing the songs we had been rehearsing we did seven songs of about five minutes each and some of them are just me and Karl double-tracked. It worked well as each song is just like a different band and that stuff should be out as a 10-inch record by the time we're back."

Is the Fall the last garage band in town?

"No, although it would be very cosy for us. I think a lot of our stuff is serious, contemporary classical."

Mark E. Smith laughs, rock music quivers.

George Kay



MAIL
ORDER

New Zealand
Records
and Tapes

Write for our
Free List of
Local Recordings.

PO BOX 407
48 BROUGHAM ST
NEW PLYMOUTH
NEW ZEALAND