

JOHN SQUIRE IS STAYING UNDER AN ALIAS IN A HOTEL IN TOKYO, JAPAN. PRIVACY IS A RARE COMMODITY WHEN YOU'RE INVOLVED IN THE PROMOTIONAL PROCESS OF TRYING TO BREAK GROUND FOR YOUR NEW BAND, IN THIS CASE THE SEAHORSES, SQUIRE'S SEQUEL TO THE STONE ROSES.

THE BAND IS IN TOKYO FOR THE MT. FUJI FESTIVAL, AN EVENT THAT WAS TO END IN TRAGEDY. THE SOFTLY SPOKEN GUITARIST EXPLAINS.

"A POOR BASTARD DIED OF HYPOTHERMIA. IT WAS TORRENTIAL RAIN IN THE FIRST DAY BUT MOST OF THE BANDS SOLDIERED ON EVEN WITH EQUIPMENT CUTTING OUT AND WATER SLASHING AROUND THE STAGE. THERE WERE DOZENS OF CASES OF HYPOTHERMIA AFTER THE FIRST NIGHT AND ONE OF THEM DIED. ALL I CAN ASSUME IS THAT PEOPLE WEREN'T PREPARED. THEY JUST WORE T-SHIRTS AND STAYED OUTDOORS ALL NIGHT.

"WE WERE SCHEDULED FOR THE SECOND DAY BUT THEY CANCELLED THE WHOLE THING IT WAS THE FIRST SHOW THERE AND IT MUST'VE TAKEN THEM TWO TO THREE YEARS TO TALK THE AUTHORITIES INTO PUTTING THE SHOW ON BUT I DOUBT VERY MUCH IF IT WILL HAPPEN AGAIN. YOU'RE DRENCHED IN SWEAT AS SOON AS YOU LEAVE THE PLANE BUT SOMEONE DIES FROM THE COLD. BIZARRE."



## dear john

### An Interview with the Seahorses' John Squire

#### Doing It Yourself

The current success of the Seahorses with their top ten album, *Do It Yourself*, and singles, 'Love Is the Law' and 'Blinded By the Sun', is astonishing, but it owes a lot to Squire's near god-like reputation with the Stone Roses.

"I think first time round with the first single and the initial album sales were down to my connection with the Roses but I don't think that's the case anymore and the album has started re-climbing the charts. This band keeps getting better and better. Everything's getting more cohesive, more casual in that it's less nerve-wracking playing live for the new guys.

"So far we've done about 25 shows and we'd only done three before we recorded the album. So it's a totally different band now and if we recorded the album again it would be a thousand times better as we now know each other, that's the main difference. We're becoming a proper band. There's been so much media attention in the UK and it's hard to grow up in public. After our upcoming American tour I think we'll be in a position a new band should be in when its discovered with a few gigs under its belt."

The three other Seahorses are totally wet-behind-the-ears unknowns. Plucked by Squire from obscurity. How have they handled the pressure of the big-time?

"They've taken it well. There's lots of things to deal with and there's been a lot of focus on me and some disparaging comments about the rest of the band. It must have been difficult to deal with and there's been some savage reviews from the British press which were pretty shocking considering the work the band has put in. But on the whole it could have been the best thing that ever happened as it pulled the band together, brought out their fighting spirit and made them realise how illusory the whole media thing is."

The band was basically speedily recruited from the pubs and streets of York and then flown to LA to record the album with producer Tony Visconti. Why the rush?

"I didn't want to be out in the wilderness for too long. I did see a lot of very obvious

mistakes being made with the Roses and I learned a lot of lessons. I don't know what drives me, I'm just driven and I need the feedback that I get from live performance so I needed to get a band together. There's times during shows, especially now that things are becoming more cohesive, that you look round at everyone and sometimes you just go into a huge smile and think that this is the best possible time and place to be in."

Rock 'n' roll is full of Cinderella stories and Seahorses' vocalist/writer Chris Helme's is one of them. Busking outside Woolworths one Sunday afternoon, a mate of Squire's asked for a tape. Hired for his singing he ended up writing two of the better songs on the album, one of which, 'Blinded By The Sun' was the band's second charting bullet. Surprised?

"I was totally surprised, delighted. I saw myself as the sole writer. When I first saw Chris he played 'Fake Plastic Trees' and a bunch of cover versions and one song I didn't recognize he said was his. I thought that would be it really as I could see an embarrassing situation where he would present a song and I would have to say that it wasn't good enough for this band. But I think his songs are some of the best on the album and it totally changes my perception of being in a band as I'm used to being the initiator of everything that goes on. But now someone else is turning up with a song that's nearly completed — it has a beginning, a middle and an end and all it needs from me is a guitar line."

Do It Yourself is an odd album, there's a whimsical, surreal Englishness about it that recalls 70s hippie art schools and getting-it-together-in-the-country, man.

"Chris makes the songs sound more English because he comes from York which is like stepping back into the middle ages. You walk around there and there's medieval instruments and bizarrely dressed clowns on every corner. It's a walled city. It didn't strike me but there were a lot of comments made on the radio and in the press about Chris having a folksy twang. Initially I thought that they'd

made the connection with the bio that describes Chris as a busker and so he must be a folk singer. I don't hear it myself."

Your guitar playing is very much rooted in the English R&B styles of Jimmy Page.

"I love Page's guitar playing but that's not where I started. I was trying to learn how to be a punk rock guitar player before any books were written about it so I was buying books written in the 60s about playing blues and R&B. So I suppose that's where I'm coming from trying to play blues and R&B like a punk."

"I picked up on Jimmy Page later as the powers-that-be within the punk hierarchy said that it was a heresy to listen to Led Zeppelin or anyone with hair longer than two or three inches. So it wasn't until 1981 or even later that I started listening to Page."

Still on the 70s tangent and that decade's wonderboy producer, Tony Visconti, was brought in to do the Seahorses' album.

"He was one on a list of about 20 producers that were suggested by Geffen. We didn't take long to make the record and although Tony did have some great ideas you're wrong to assume that he turned the band into a 70s rock group with the benefit of his experience. The songs sound pretty much like they did at rehearsal. I wanted Steve Albini to produce the album but they said they tried to find him but couldn't. But I suspect they wanted to keep us apart as I know he's not the most predictable producer."

He probably wouldn't have suited the Seahorses.

"I don't know, I've never met him but I would've liked the option of making that decision for myself."

#### Sacred Stone

Earlier on you talked about some of the obvious mistakes that were made by the Stone Roses. What were they?

"We worked for two to three years without a manager, we said no too often and we were probably spoiled by the first album."

And for three years you were stuffed by a court injunction in your row with the Silvertone label.

"No it wasn't three years, it was more like a year."

So for the other four years between the release of your first album and *Second Coming* you were just sitting on your butts.

"Things changed totally as a result of getting out of the first record contract. We got a million pounds from Geffen so we all had fat bank accounts so the band started buying houses and cars and three of us had kids so we became totally different people. I suppose we grew apart."

"I bought a car for ten grand and a new stereo and I put the rest in the bank and got on with learning how to play the guitar because I didn't consider myself to be good enough."

Had you been able to record *Second Coming* a year or two after the first album, would the band still be together?

"Could be. Although I don't see that interim period as being particularly damaging. I think it was the time together that was the problem. In 10 years the band had run its course and I don't think Reni wanted to do it or felt for it anymore. He didn't want to be photographed, he didn't want to be bothered with all the extras of being in a band."

Bands exist to play and create and grab the moment. Did you ever feel with the Roses that you'd lost the moment?

"No I didn't. I didn't start thinking about disaster until we were left in the studio. People were disappearing for weeks on end. It was a rare sight indeed to see all four members in the studio at the same time. Then I started to think the Stone Roses had blown it and they wouldn't go on."

So have you ran into any of the old band recently?

"I saw Mani the day before we came to Japan. Primal Scream were rehearsing next door to us in London. He's very happy, he's right into his new line-up. We have a lot of experiences in common. We both confessed to bursting out laughing at the wrong moment about things that have happened in the past."

Thank you, Colin.

GEORGE KAY