



If the interview was like the band it would fulfil every one of your mood swinging desires. The highs would be hard out and furious, the lows would gently shrink into the shadows and you would come away drained — like you had been on the most devastating trip of your life. But even Billy Corgan's revelations of terminal band tensions, being a geek, marriage and striving to become the best band in the world can't compare to their musical pyrotechnics.

If **SMASHING PUMPKINS** haven't played an earth shattering part in your life yet, you need to know that their brilliant debut *Gish* earned them rave reviews, along with the tag of 'band most likely to twist the music world off its head' (or something similar). Everyone marvelled at the timelessness of this Chicago four-piece. They had pilfered rock's greatest elements and from them created this fantastic new sound, new vantage point, new meaning.

Two years on and they are about to release their second album, the stunning *Siamese Dream*. Like *Gish* it's been produced by Butch Vig, who apparently put aside his other commitments just to be a part of it all. It's going to be huuuuuge.

The Pumpkins' songwriter/singer/guitar player, Billy Corgan, was talkative when I called. He raved like a man possessed, like his tongue would be cut out if he didn't say everything on his mind. In other words, he was the perfect interviewee. And why not? So much has been happening...

"I went crazy. I wrote an album. I got married."

So very much has been happening.

"It took me quite a long time to come to grips with having a wife and being in a band. In my mind for a long time being in a band meant you couldn't have a wife."

What changed your mind?

"Well, I was really unhappy."

And you're happier now?

"Yeah, it's made me happier and it's created a stability in my life. Everybody sues into the rock and roll mythology — drug taking, stumbling down the street, ya know, 'I'm such a poet', but in reality I don't want to be a Smashing Pumpkin 24 hours a day. I want to be a human being who happens to be in a band. And so it was important for me to place importance on my existence beyond the band."

You've said so often that you create out of pain though — do you think this happiness is affecting your creativity? Are you writing happy songs?

"No not really, I think that um, it's just a lot easier to scream and jump up and down and be in pain. I'm creating material that sounds a little more positive, I don't think happy would be the right word. Believe me, I have enough pain to last me a lifetime. There's no shortage of hurt," he says — with a smile.

We all know the grunge monster is dead, buried and decomposing.

Gish arrived before the hype, *Siamese Dream* is being released after the hype (scenes don't last long these days do they?). It almost looks like the Pumpkins were waiting for the madness to subside.

"I will say that if we had been ready to release this album six months ago I would have been pretty reluctant to, because people were still in a post-Nirvana mentality. Now I think that people have seen Nirvana was more an anomaly, ya know. Nirvana is Nirvana because they are a great band. But Nirvana didn't necessarily herald a whole new entire movement."

But it would have been tempting for you, being heralded as the big hope for 92, to just whip out a quick album and capitalise on it all.

"I've always said that we move in our own timetable. We've never been part of a movement or a scene. We've just gone along doing what we do. Before grunge we were doing what we were doing, and during grunge we

were doing what we were doing and ya know.

"There were a couple of people that hinted at capitalising on the moment, but I've always tried to take it at my own pace. And a lot of people tried to talk me into putting out *Gish II*. Like record company people though that *Gish* would have been a big album if it had been promoted bigger. So people were thinking don't tamper with a good thing."

But *Siamese Dream* is a huge step up — there's a sharper depth to it.

"I think a lot is different. I mean it still sounds like Smashing Pumpkins, but I think in a lot of ways it's a lot more melodic and I think the songs are way better and it sounds more like a...well, I'll tell ya, the thing I'm most proud of is I think the lyrics and what the songs are about are much more engaging."

Romantic as it sounds, it's not true that Gene Simmons came to Billy in a dream and said "Joe Strummer is a Pumpkin, drunken and smashed" (some

smash hits

people will believe anything). When bands have been asked 'where did you get you name' 6,073 times they just tend to get inventive. And the first hint of fabrication is when musicians start talking about visions and dreams. And do you know why the album is called *Siamese Dream*?

"I kind of had this vision of, like, Siamese angels — like locked at the back with distorted, twisted, mangled, deformed wings. That was originally going to be the album cover, but the album was too pretty and I didn't want to put this grotesque image on the front.

"But if you want to be symbolic about it all it's about the intangible hidden connection between individuals. The important people in your life. The connection that two people can have can be a blessing and a curse, it's that whole Siamese thing. My problem has always been when people entered my life it was hard to let go of them — hence the kind of Siamese connotation."

A lot of Billy's song material is about coming to terms with inner turmoil, realising what's been lost too late. After *Gish* the heightened inner turmoil within his band almost destroyed them. The volatile disagreements became more frequent, drummer Jimmy had a nervous break-down and was forced into drug rehab and Billy became even more demanding.

"I think it was going to happen sooner or later. I think that for myself I used the band as an escape and an excuse to get away from my life. And things that I hadn't dealt with from my childhood and my adolescence and stuff just started creeping back. And being in the public eye and having people throw things at you, and call you names and having critics tear you apart, it made me feel worse. And suddenly I couldn't use the band as an excuse anymore.

"There were no tours to go off and hide on. I was like forced into, like, 'hey I've got to write a record'. I couldn't play rock star anymore I had to come back to reality. And I'm not saying I was big headed and drugged out it was just a good escape for a long time.

"And the band relationships had been kinda strained and those just came to a head and I don't know it's really unpleasant to talk about."

How did it all come together? You've created a blinder of an album, you sound like such a tight unit...

"It didn't come together. We manage to still make music. I think the thing that keeps the band together is we care about each other personally. How we feel about each other as band mates is one thing, how we feel about each other person to person is still pretty good."

During the interview Billy wanders around his home with his portable phone, eating, drinking, hanging. He's determined to prove he listens to "like, everything" and reads me out the artists on a compilation tape he's making for himself: Flaming Lips, Glam Rock Hits, The Auteurs, David Bowie, Cheap Trick, Come, the Pretenders, Judas Priest, Roy Orbison, Hank Williams, Pink Floyd, Drop Nineteens, Brian Eno, Thin Lizzy, Pantera...

"I don't care if they're the geekiest, stupidest band in the world — if they make great music I'll listen to 'em."

There's that word — geek. As American as apple pie, the cute yank pigeonhole for anyone slightly 'weird' and the socially dysfunctional. There's a song on *Siamese Dream* called 'Geek USA'...

"I'm a geek for one. Everyone tells me I am," says Billy quite casually.

But you're a huge rock and roll icon.

"Believe me, people still think I'm a freak. If I told you over and over that you were a freak you'd probably start to believe it."

It's been drummed into you?

"Since I was five years old."

Surely it must have changed with the band — I mean you said it was an escape.

"Not anymore. Because now I have to be a functional, intelligent,

politically correct rock star. I can't afford to be an idiot"

Why?

"Well I could be an idiot, and I could also lose my career too. It all comes down to a series of choices."

So commercial pressures dictate a certain image.

"Absolutely. I have plenty of power to be myself, but there's a line that gets drawn. Like they want a record every year and a half. If you have a mental crisis that lasts a year then that's tough shit because you have to come up with a record. And if you don't come up with a good record then you're going to get bludgeoned in the press, no one will come to see you play and suddenly your career becomes a laughing stock."

So this is your career, something you have to protect?

"To be honest, and this may sound all arty and dramatic, I see it as a way of life. It's not a career, it's like, being an artist. I am a commercial artist because I need money to do what I do and I get paid to do what I do. But I feel first and foremost that I am an artist — I am a songwriter, I happen to lead a band and play guitar and sing as well."

Smashing Pumpkins have been going for five years now, is it doing everything what you want it to? Is your 'way of life' heading in the right direction?

"No. I think this band could be so much better it's disgusting."

Is that where all these band pressures arise?

"Uh huh. Honestly, I think we could be the greatest band in the world. If everyone really really tried I think we could be the best."

Do you really think they are not trying?

"I don't think they feel and see it the way I do."

How do you feel and see it?

"I want to be the best, I want to be the best at what I do."

So what would it take to be the best? Different band members?

"I would take a different level of commitment. God grants you with a certain amount of skill — whatever it is. I mean maybe you can build boats, whatever. I have a certain amount of skill. I don't have the most skill, I think there are people that have more god given talent than I do. But I think I understand what I do in a way that is unique and I think that my approach to music — the way I play it, the way I record it and how I present it — is somewhat different and I think combined that I could take all those things, with the help of other people, and make something that's above and beyond."

"I mean you could argue and say, 'well, there's better songwriters than you and there's better singers than you, there's better guitar players than you', but somehow I think I can make it work in a way that maybe people with more talent couldn't. Maybe it comes from always being an underdog or maybe always feeling like I'm in this struggle with God and all that kind of shit."

What if the band is doing their best — but that's just not enough for you?

"I disagree. Other people have mentioned that too, but I disagree. I think the band are fooling themselves into thinking that they are. I mean really, what separates people? There is talent and there is hard work and an obsession and dedication to what you're doing. And I think that's what separates me, I don't think I'm immensely more talented than anyone else. I think that you can will things to happen, within reason.

Like becoming the best band in the world.

"Yeah. I think that's a completely achievable goal. If you think about who some of the biggest bands in the world are and you listen to some of their records you realise that it's not as hard as it seems to be. I mean a band like INXS is humongous," he sniggers "but I never hear any of my friends talk about 'em.

"Here's a perfect example, and I try not to talk about this band too much because we've been compared hundreds and hundreds of times. When Jane's Addiction existed — that to me was the best band in the world. And in seeing that band and understanding how the band worked and listening to the music, to me Perry Farrell willed that band.

"When they were on stage and they were playing a shit gig, that guy willed the shows to happen. It was his presence and his force of personality. I mean he so badly wanted to shock people and create whatever makes rock and roll happen. I mean here's this guy, he's crazy looking, he's got the weirdest sounding voice, he's a motherfucker — but somehow they were this humongous band. They didn't have hit records and people still talk about them though they've been defunct for three years now."

Whether they become the best band in the world doesn't matter all that much, Smashing Pumpkins will still be remembered well after they cease to exist. They're one of those bands that mean something — you don't have Smashing Pumpkins playing casually in the background, you listen, you feel, you exhaust yourself in them. And armed with albums as strong as *Siamese Dream* and led by a bandleader as determined as Billy, here's hoping they'll be with us for a while yet. If they get any better music journals will run out of superlatives.

"I still believe that great music manages to be symbolic of the time it was written in — I have that kind of idealistic belief."

It still does. Smashing Pumpkins deserve your obsession. They are the now.

JOHN TAITE

INXS • TIM FINN • EXPONENTS • PUSH PUSH • SHONA LAING • JAN
HELLRIEGAL • STRAWPEOPLE • WHEN THE CATS AWAY • DAVID PARKER
• J.P.S.E. • STRAIGHT JACKET FITS • THESE WILDING WAYS • MIDGE
MARSDEN • DEAD DOG • PAT URlich • GREG
JOHNSON • ALOLE TASMANS • PAUL NESTER • PETE
BERRY • INXS • TIM FINN • EXPONENTS • PUSH PUSH • SHONA
LAING • JAN HELLRIEGAL • STRAWPEOPLE • WHEN THE CATS AWAY •
DAVID PARKER • J.P.S.E. • STRAIGHT JACKET FITS • THESE WILDING
WAYS • MIDGE MARSDEN • PAT URlich • GREG
URlich • GREG JOHNSON • ALOLE TASMANS • PAUL NESTER • PETE
SMITH • MIDGE MARSDEN • PAT URlich • GREG
SMITH • MIDGE MARSDEN • PAT URlich • GREG
• SHONA LAING • JAN HELLRIEGAL • STRAWPEOPLE • WHEN THE CATS
AWAY

air force
DIGITAL

Excellence in Sound

phone Tim or Rhonda 377-7669

32 Channel Automated 24 Trk, Pro tools Digital Workstation with 32mg Sample Cell