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reviews the singles



MORRISSEY: "I'm a total sex object find me unmistakably attractive"

Behind the hand-selected security curtains, something stirs . . . After his triumphant Wolverhampton second coming, the *Last Of The Famous International Playboys* is ignoring the front doorbell, preparing for a No. 1 single and fighting a losing rearguard action against the onset of manhood!

JAMES 'I am not naturally evil' BROWN asks MORRISSEY about 'all the new crimes you are perfecting'—and plenty of the old ones as well!

'Dear hero imprisoned' by LAWRENCE WATSON.

The door bell rings once. Morrissey looks uncomfortable.

"I can't imagine who that is, we'll just have to ignore it. But they may not go away. It happens."

There is no second ring but Morrissey is clearly alarmed.

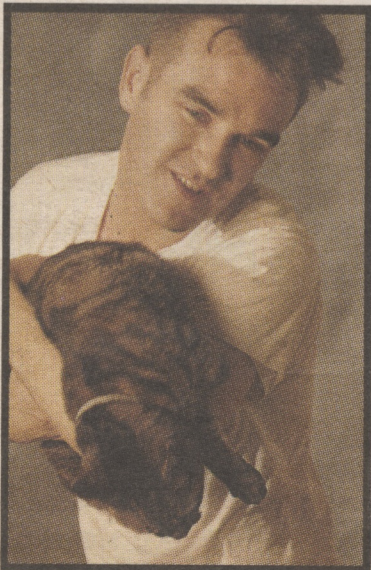
"Some people sit and ring and ring and ring. And circle the house and peer through the windows. It's very tedious and very embarrassing because I don't know why they do it."

"I often think that if people really liked me and understood me and appreciated me they'd ring once and go away. But the people who persist, and believe me this happens everyday, well I don't really have anything to say to those people. To me that's not adoration, it's complete rudeness. How would you feel if I stood outside your garden gate and called your name out everyday?"

It's Monday on the outskirts of Manchester and Morrissey is fencing with the *NME*, his favourite music paper. The topics ahead are sex, crime, honesty, beauty, fame, performance, adoration and, for the sake of capitalism and cliché, 'Last Of The Famous International Playboys', a single.

"Last Of The Famous International Playboys', is the first record that I feel hysterical about," he gushes, exercising his career-making talent for self-promotion. "And I'm very pleased to feel that way. I compare it to 'Shoplifters Of The World Unite'. I heard 'Shoplifters Of The World Unite' once on the radio, a chart rundown. It was a new entry. They had to play it. They had no choice. And I laughed hysterically as I listened to it. I felt a sense of great victory. And that's the same way I feel about 'Last Of The Famous International Playboys'."

Morrissey is tangled up in blue jeans, blue T-shirt, blue deck pumps and blue eyes. His flat is spick'n'span. There's a portable typewriter and a pile of anti-division leaflets on the table in the hall. The television is off, there are no clothes to tidy away, the settee and arm chair are drawn a little closer, the tea is poured, the biscuits ignored. The assorted nuts in the bowl by the window, I'm told, are for the squirrels that inhabit his garden.



Thanks to Minnie the Cat

There's a great deal to be discussed with Morrissey, yet as the short sharp shriek of the doorbell has just proved there are others beside the *NME* who feel it is their privilege to have the man's attention.

"The people who persist. Who stick their fingers on the bell and say 'I know that you're in there and I'll huff and I'll puff'. I can't even imagine those people buy my records or even understand me. I think the audience now has become so large that it's a collection of different people with different visions of what kind of a person I am."

"Some people see me as one thing and some people see another. And the people who see me as a 'pop singer' are the people who persist and ring the door bell. But the people who see me as a valuable addition to music are the people who wouldn't dream of coming near the house."

"I can't really be responsible for what they see. Some people think that I'm a 'nut' for want of a better word and I don't really feel that I manufactured that. Unfortunately a lot of people read *The Sun*, and there are a lot of *Sun* folk out there. I feel at home here but susceptible because of the persistent folk."

"I am obsessive about practically everything, yes, but I can control my obsessions. I am not uncontrollably obsessive."

So you don't go and stand outside people's houses then?

"Not lately, I'm rational, very very rational. Even in days of old when I followed others and I stood by the coach at soundchecks and so forth, I wouldn't dive on top of people and slobber and say all the things you're supposed to say. It was just enough to see them drive by in a coach and assume that they noticed you. I've seen the film of Wolverhampton but I wouldn't call that diving and slobbering. I think that was quite different, it was love. Unmistakeably it was love. I was choked before I sang a syllable really."

Ahh, yes, Wolverhampton. If there's one event to mark the triumph of Morrissey's solo career, and more specifically, to clarify the relationship between Morrissey and his public then it was his performance at Wolverhampton Civic Centre. An event that has already gone down in rock 'n' roll history alongside Bowie at his most androgynous, The Beatles and Stones at their most popular, the Pistols at their most threatening, and the Mary Chain at their inception.

The excitement and atmosphere inside the hall was the most electric I have ever experienced at any public event. Sensible and intelligent fans were transformed into screaming Mozettes (male and female) at the return of their beloved rebel boy. Outside, the air of despondency, the mangled barriers, the police presence, and the silent vigil, could only remind me of the picket line communities of the battered British mineworkers of 1984.

It was a night Morrissey, also, will never forget.

"The concert was a very impulsive thing . . . all the best things happen on impulse I find. I was interested to see how people would react towards me. There was no intention to cause chaos. It wasn't an attention-seeking device, I just needed to see some particular faces. It was nice to be kissed repeatedly. I don't think that happens very often, I also think it's very rare for a male audience to kiss a male singer. I don't think it even happens. Does it happen?"

"You see, I saw those people like Bowie and Bolan and there was hardly hysteria. And never stage invasions. I think hysteria eventually came to people like Bowie but initially it wasn't there. So I thought Wolverhampton was midly revolutionary because of that. I don't think that ever happens. I've never heard of it before."

"For months previous to that I had languished in this very room, seeing practically nobody. And to go from that situation to Wolverhampton where your limbs are spread over . . . are being distributed amongst an audience is an incredible feeling. Can you imagine being kissed by hundreds of people? It's probably happened to you, I don't know. Where do you spend your evenings? It was immensely uplifting. Practically medical really. They appear very aggressive and brusque but when they touch me it's very gentle."

"If there had been more than one night perhaps it would become a little calmer. I think there was a feeling with the audience that 'It's just happening tonight. Not tomorrow, not next week, not anywhere else'. And also if it wasn't just one concert, issues such as barriers would be raised and so forth because of equipment etcetera. I would have liked to have sang. It would have been nice to complete a song without interruption, but for some reason it just didn't matter. The night for me went beyond performing, it was something else, and I'm glad it went that way. But I suppose if it was a complete length tour and a song couldn't be completed throughout the tour then that would be silly."

What about the controlled nature of the gig?

"There was none."

I mean the choice of venue, the T-shirt requirement, the fact that it was being filmed made the event comparable to Wham! at the Marquee.

"It was Wolverhampton, it wasn't London and it wasn't Manchester which thought was an important gesture. It was free which, for someone of my status, is unheard of. So I think those two elements added greatly to the event. There was no heavy security and it wasn't an imposing venue. It wasn't a theatre and it wasn't an aircraft hangar. It was dear old sweet dumpy Wolverhampton."

They closed the town centre down. The first sound I heard when I stepped out of the car behind the hall was the sound of windows smashing.

"Well, a beautiful sound sometimes. But it wasn't window smashing as senseless aggro. It was frothing admiration building to the brink and beyond. It wasn't provocation or dangling a carrot. I felt in order to get in you had to make a slight effort, it wasn't going to be that easy. So I knew that the people who made the effort were the important ones. It was like *The Krypton Factor*, it was a test of endurance. But nobody seemed to mind, apart, obviously, from the ones that didn't get in. That was inevitable. The T-shirts

were a simple way of getting over who could get in the venue because otherwise it would have had to be tickets."

You travelled to the gig in a St Trinians style school bus, didn't you?

"The bus was the wrong choice because it broke down, twice, I had a driver, he also broke down. It was very typical of Old England to let me down."

What was it like to play with your former Smiths? Was it something you had planned for some while?

"Well it was a part of it for me. It made me feel more confident than if it had been otherwise. So I was very happy and very pleased with the onstage line-up. That made me feel very relaxed. It does help to have very solid people around you."

"It's an interesting question whether we'll continue to work together. These days of course it isn't like earlier times when money and contracts were of less concern, generally. The secret of The Smiths was that we did everything on impulse for our own amusement. That's why it flowed so perfectly. But these days I suppose people are a little older and I suppose they need a safer arrangement, which is fair enough."

Was your relationship with Stephen Street strengthened by playing his songs live?

"I think so, it must have been a joy to him, also, to hear his music performed, which obviously he's never experienced before. So yes I think he's happy for that reason. I think the rest of the band were very happy."

Do you find people are still interested in your relationship with Johnny Marr?

"No I don't actually. I think people have put that one away, in the cupboard, as it were."

Have you put it in the cupboard?

"Yes, I have. In all truth I have. It took me a while, but, yes I have now. Ashes to ashes really."

Was there sadness when you realised this?

"Well embarrassment more than sadness because it was utterly, utterly phenomenally stupid. The split should never have occurred. It was utterly stupid. 'You hate my cat, so I hate your cat.' It was pettiness, it was literally my cat and Johnny's dog. But really I'm now more familiar with the ashes of Mrs Gandhi."

How do you feel about the split, with hindsight?

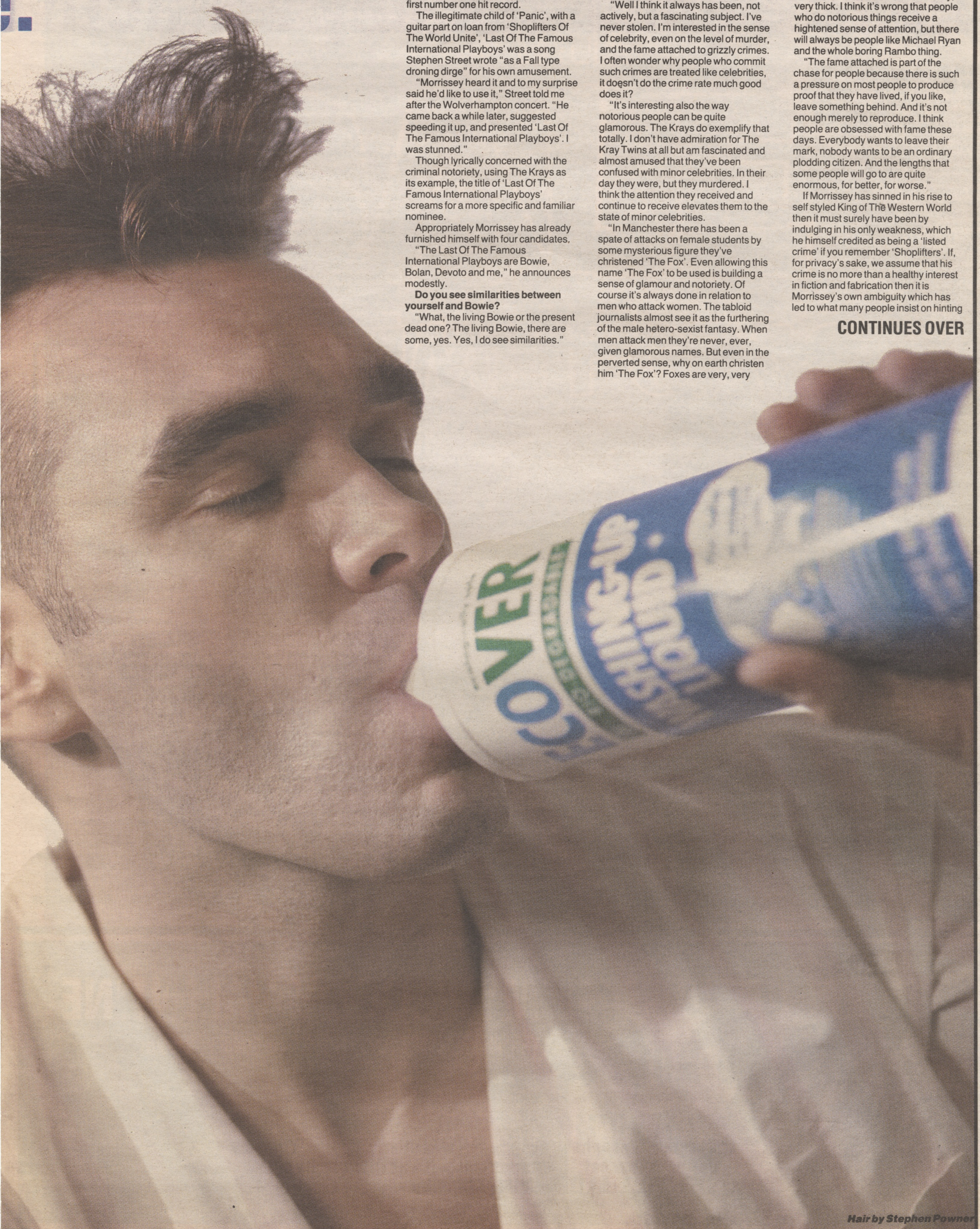
"Well there're personal, there're private, there're public reasons. The Smiths had reached a point where they could dominate the world if they wished to. After years of semi-struggle everything was finally laid out before us and that was when The Smiths ended. I was quite annoyed by that because suddenly there were questions. Suddenly the question was 'Well can he actually make a record now?' and I had a lot of mail saying 'Well it was good whilst it lasted but now it's over' and so forth. So it was a very dodgy period for me and I think my records very accurately illustrated that. I feel as though I'm actually in my third career now."

As solo careers and male vocalists go Morrissey isn't alone in his success. Marc Almond tops the charts, Roy Orbison and Gene Pitney are prime time regulars, Holly Johnson has become credible again, and Morrissey is currently more popular than he has ever been before. His first two singles both entered the Top 10 in the first week of their release, and I have already heard serious suggestion that 'Last Of The

"The split should never have occurred. It was utterly stupid. 'You hate my cat, so I hate your cat.' It was pettiness, it was literally my cat and Johnny's dog. But really I'm now more familiar with the ashes of Mrs Gandhi."

ect. A lot of men and women

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Famous Playboys' will be Morrissey's first number one hit record.

The illegitimate child of 'Panic', with a guitar part on loan from 'Shoplifters Of The World Unite', 'Last Of The Famous International Playboys' was a song Stephen Street wrote "as a Fall type droning dirge" for his own amusement.

"Morrissey heard it and to my surprise said he'd like to use it," Street told me after the Wolverhampton concert. "He came back a while later, suggested speeding it up, and presented 'Last Of The Famous International Playboys'. I was stunned."

Though lyrically concerned with the criminal notoriety, using The Krays as its example, the title of 'Last Of The Famous International Playboys' screams for a more specific and familiar nominee.

Appropriately Morrissey has already furnished himself with four candidates.

"The Last Of The Famous International Playboys are Bowie, Bolan, Devoto and me," he announces modestly.

Do you see similarities between yourself and Bowie?

"What, the living Bowie or the present dead one? The living Bowie, there are some, yes. Yes, I do see similarities."

Is crime another interest of yours?

"Well I think it always has been, not actively, but a fascinating subject. I've never stolen. I'm interested in the sense of celebrity, even on the level of murder, and the fame attached to grizzly crimes. I often wonder why people who commit such crimes are treated like celebrities, it doesn't do the crime rate much good does it?"

"It's interesting also the way notorious people can be quite glamorous. The Krays do exemplify that totally. I don't have admiration for The Kray Twins at all but am fascinated and almost amused that they've been confused with minor celebrities. In their day they were, but they murdered. I think the attention they received and continue to receive elevates them to the state of minor celebrities."

"In Manchester there has been a spate of attacks on female students by some mysterious figure they've christened 'The Fox'. Even allowing this name 'The Fox' to be used is building a sense of glamour and notoriety. Of course it's always done in relation to men who attack women. The tabloid journalists almost see it as the furthering of the male hetero-sexist fantasy. When men attack men they're never, ever, given glamorous names. But even in the perverted sense, why on earth christen him 'The Fox'? Foxes are very, very

beautiful creatures. I find it all so very, very thick. I think it's wrong that people who do notorious things receive a heightened sense of attention, but there will always be people like Michael Ryan and the whole boring Rambo thing.

"The fame attached is part of the chase for people because there is such a pressure on most people to produce proof that they have lived, if you like, leave something behind. And it's not enough merely to reproduce. I think people are obsessed with fame these days. Everybody wants to leave their mark, nobody wants to be an ordinary plodding citizen. And the lengths that some people will go to are quite enormous, for better, for worse."

If Morrissey has sinned in his rise to self styled King of The Western World then it must surely have been by indulging in his only weakness, which he himself credited as being a 'listed crime' if you remember 'Shoplifters'. If, for privacy's sake, we assume that his crime is no more than a healthy interest in fiction and fabrication then it is Morrissey's own ambiguity which has led to what many people insist on hinting

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at as being a somewhat spectacular cover-up.

Like all immediate success stories The Smiths have left in their wake a sea of assorted respectful, bemused, and sometimes embittered personnel. And like all successful rock'n'roll bands who don't splash their underwear, their sex, and their mother's little helpers across the fish and chip wrap of the tabloids there is an equally large stack of unfounded, unproven, and unwanted rumours, lies, and fantasies.

What is remarkable about The Smiths is that no one will really go any further than mutter 'Ooh the things I could tell you about The Smiths', before insisting it would be more than their life's worth to even suggest whatever grotty little snippet they might have you believe.

And yet, apart from a very early interview with our own Cath Carroll where Morrissey spoke directly about the eroticism of the male body (and an interview in a lesser rag that was littered with tawdry references to public toilets), Morrissey has rarely been questioned about the highly sexual nature of his lyrics.

Had Morrissey's lyrics — which gleamed with the same delicious and double-edged sexual delight on 'Viva Hate' as they had on 'The Smiths' — actually been daubed with the same restraint as the ineffective picture-postcard romance that made Glen

Tilbrook and Chris Difford's Squeeze so popular in the early '80s, then maybe his earnest promotion of sexual abstinence might have been swallowed whole.

As it is, without wishing to undermine his aggressive challenge to the staid institution of compulsory heterosexuality and monogamy, I find it hard to believe that it is a Crown Prince Of Celibacy who is responsible for such knowing or flirtatious songs as 'Late Night, Maudlin Street', 'Reel Around The Fountain', 'Hand In Glove' and 'Alsatian Cousin'. Or for the specifically sexual visual control of his image, from the last topless *NME* front cover to the particularly lustful dancing of the young tear-away hoodlum on the new video.

More importantly it is the constant change in his character and song writing, from the sensitive figurehead for a lost and sensitive youth of the dole years to the positively Wilde love and lust for suggestion and sexual confrontation of later times.

Are your lyrics really very honest?

"Yes I think they are very honest.

They're honest to everything. Obviously that word is so dangerous because as soon as it's used you're suddenly suspect. They're very true to me and what I want."

There is a very high and strong sense of sexuality running through your lyrics.

"Well that's me all over. I don't think I've ever said words that don't have that tinge; . . ."

It's not just a tinge.

"Well I'm being modest. That

overblown brew of brimming sexuality, I think that's there. I think what I said was that me as a living, breathing specimen was bereft of any physical whatever. I listen to these Stock, Waterbed and Faceache with all this brimming disco and to me it's sadly clinical, it isn't sex; it's obviously the A-Z of cliché."

You have an ability to capture moments, to describe events and emotions you have presumably experienced, and yet a lot of people seem to think you make these matters up.

"Well the detractors continue and gain strength but it never occurred to me to say, 'I love you because your breasts are remarkably large'. (Afterthought: surely with 'Let me get my hands on your mammary glands' you, Morrissey, are one of the few who have — JB) I never wanted to say that. But similarly I never wanted to be the daft, cross-legged, crump in the grey cardigan; that also is not me. It's something a bit more superior than that."

Do you see yourself as a sex object?

"I think I must be, absolutely, a total sex object. In every sense of the word. A lot of men and a lot of women fine me . . . find me . . . unmistakably attractive. It amuses me. I sit down and wonder why, and then somebody writes me a beautiful letter and tells me why. I find it baffling in a particular sense because, as I said earlier, I can't remember any figure who attracted so many male followers. And a lot of the male followers who are, as far as the eye can see,

natural specimens, have very, very anguished and devilishly rabid desires in my direction. And I find that quite historic.

"Even though an equal proportion of female followers do too, perhaps that's less remarkable than having a vast army of male followers. They're not multi-sexual beings or urban Warholian creatures, they're just your very, very natural living breathing boys."

How do you relate to such an adoring mass of men and women?

"I'm very pleased if that's what you mean. That's *not* what you mean. Well no, I don't respond to it because hard as it may seem I very rarely come into contact with the people who were onstage at Wolverhampton. In fact I never come into contact with them. Not because I move in lofty circles, of course I don't. It's because I don't move in any circles at all."

What about emotional circles and physical relationships?

"Well I don't have them. I have very good friends and we can make phone calls and laugh hysterically for three hours but that's as far as it goes. My friends and I tend to have similar pasts, similar viewpoints, and similar handicaps. We're all natural invalids in our own way. That's the strength of our secret sect."

How far does the adoration and attention of your fans affect your personal relationships with your friends?

"Well I do have a secret sect of friends, a little gang as it were, and we

suppose manhood does arrive at some stage, you can't fend it off."

People have this impression of you as a . . .

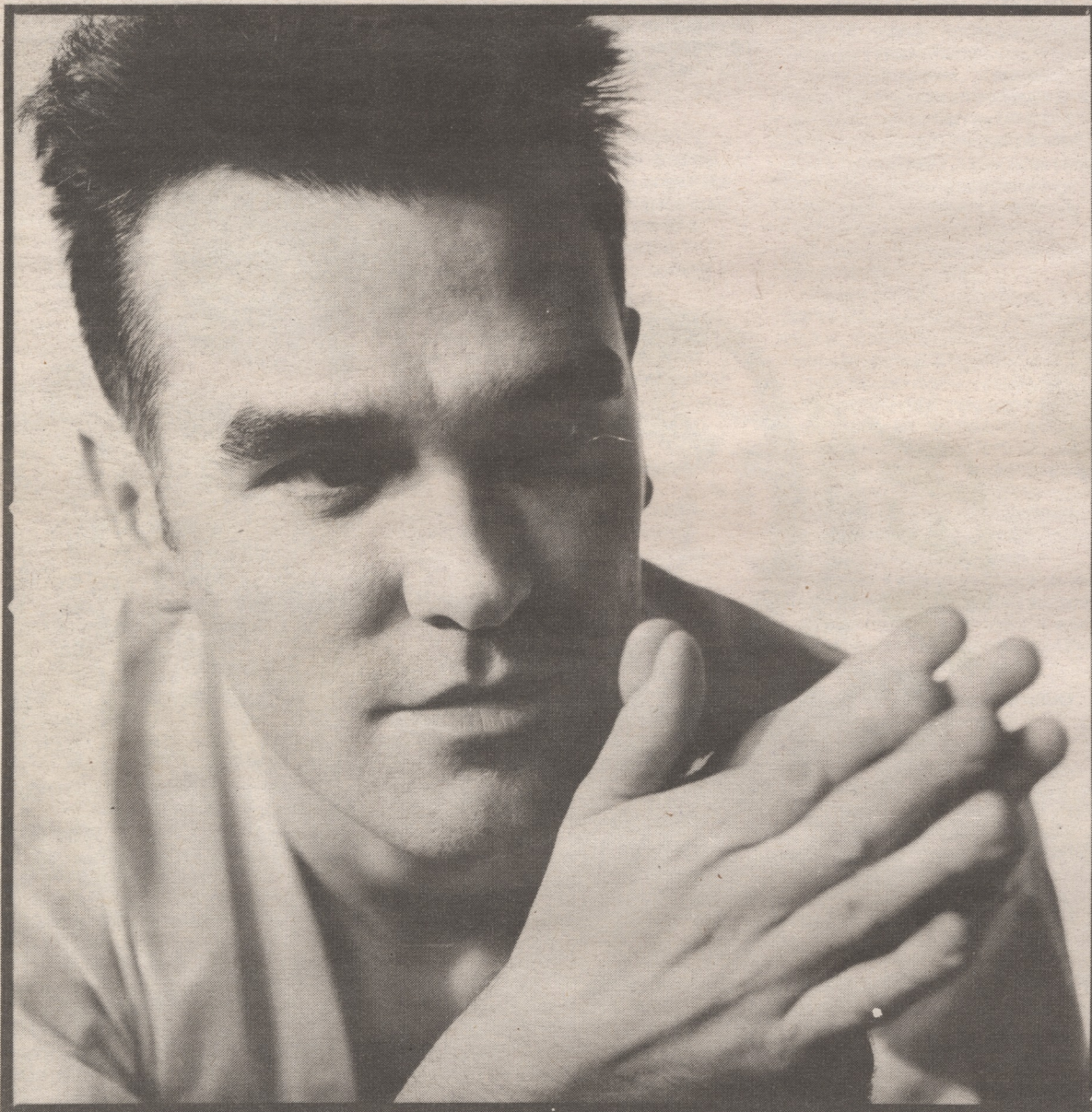
"Yes I know, I've heard about this." **As a celibate, as someone who stands back, and yet the knowledge you put across through your lyrics and the pain, the emotion, the excitement that you capture, they aren't the words of a celibate. Unless the person was quite promiscuous prior to their celibacy?**

"Not true, because I think the people who are knee deep in bodies and flesh can't be bothered to write about those things. If they sit down to construct a stanza they actually want to write about something a bit different. They want to get away from it because flailing flesh is very much part of their lives. It's nothing very interesting and nothing very new and perhaps they don't have a very clear vision of it. They're so steeped in it."

"So I think if throughout my life I had been popular and active, shall we say (chuckles), I might have written about something else. But because I was, as I may have casually mentioned once, plunging, plunging, plunging, I had to scribble, scribble, scribble."

Do you find yourself being attracted to people?

"Yes sometimes. I do have the occasional flushes but they do pass. I sit down and have a chip butty. You don't accept that do you? Yes, I do have flushes, usually at Bank Holidays. Mostly, no, people are a great disappointment to me. I think I am



Return to valium?

**"The Last Of The Famous International Playboys are Bowie, Bolan, Devoto and me."**

do have our window on the world but generally I don't go around pubs and so forth. I'm pretty dodgy, quite slippery, so it's hard to get to me. Unless you absolutely press your face against the window pane . . . but I close those curtains. So it doesn't invade unless people stick their elbow on the doorbell. Then I have to resort to dramatic tactics. I have filled a bucket of water. I couldn't go through with it, but I am about to because there are certain people. I know their faces."

All the times when you have discussed your asexuality and celibacy, have you been giving a fair representation of the experiences that you also draw your lyrics from?

"I think they have been fair. Totally accurate."

Why are you so guarded about the life you write about?

"I'm guarded because a lot of people make fun and a lot of people think I'm clinically mad. So I'm ready to erect a small wall when somebody mentions 'silly butties' — celibacy. I've been around quite a bit now, I'm not a thin swirling creature anymore. And I

interested and then I discover the reality. People are quite light and frothy, which is fair enough. I know some people aren't frothy at all. I think there's a lot of frothiness about, especially in Peterborough."

When you write, are you trying to soothe the way you feel about sex?

"It's beyond 'nudge nudge'. I don't fit into any sexual category at all so I don't feel people see it as being sexual, but as being intimate."

Meanwhile back at the raunch, it is this very clever choice of asexuality, combined with a very physical sexual reality (even if it is only confined to the level of 'look, don't touch') that makes Morrissey so attractive to his hordes. The sweet and tender, untouchable, topless Adonis, always ready to reveal his inner thoughts and passions yet just as eager to veil them in lyrical and sexual ambiguity.

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MOZZER!

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 30

Maybe it is this over-enthusiastic curiosity from fans that forewarns him of a more offensive and dangerous threat to the often remarkable relationship with his art and his audience that he has developed — ie. from the blood-hungry tabloids. If this is the case then Morrissey should be wary of the fate that killed off both his heroes Wilde and Dean, (indulgence and the pressures of fame) and maybe for once I can allow him the excessive protection and molly-coddling he has received from record company and followers. When I asked about the paradox of his two sided character he replied with a standard, "Well I think it's easier to be oneself onstage."

Isn't that sad?

"Yeah but it's just like saying 'Isn't it sad that someone needs drugs to be happy'."

Have you ever felt like that?

"Err, when I was a teenager."

So you've never been a rampant cocaine fiend then?

"I don't even know what cocaine looks like. When I was a teenager I used to make my weekly trip to the GP and come away laden, as it were."

You must have been offered cocaine as The Smiths became more and more the classic rock 'n' roll band?

"I never head the word mentioned, ever. More's the pity, ha ha."

Never on tour?

"No, not at all. I went back to the hotel every night with a tangerine."

Do you feel like you're constantly living out your fantasies?

"I'm not Batman. I'm not The Penguin. I have always been honest and it has always been worth it. There have always been risks from the very first Smiths sleeve to the very latest. I thought male naked buttocks were a risk. Not to me of course, but to everyone else."

It is at these times that even the most ridiculous questions have to be asked of Morrissey.

Did you really do things in bushes with torches?

"I a sense, but it's exciting for me to hear those words."

They're very flirtatious.

"Well I think so. It was my impression that after the initial 'Hand In Glove' session was over and the record had been released, then the queue would form. And of course it didn't but I didn't mind so much."

So do you see your songs as a form of physical interaction?

"I really do mean every word that I say. And, except in a few cases, I think I've made it quite clear about the meaning of the songs and I think I've made some really useful records because of that. If I hadn't been clear I would have just gone in and sang 'Boom Bang A Bang' or 'To Sir With Love'."

Do you see your songs as being specifically heterosexual?

"No I was beyond all that when I was three and a half years of age. I left heterosexuality, umbrellasexuality, whatever, behind. I always said people to me were just sexual. I lied; actually people to me were never sexual. I'm beyond that and I think if you consider what you have to do to be that, you have to be beyond it. Salvador Dali, who died today, he was beyond that, although clinically heterosexual, I believe."

What I can't believe . . .

"Aha! You've said it now."

Your lyrics are so amazingly sexual, very flirtatious, very knowing, saucy, double-edged, steeped in innuendo. Is that all drawn from your past?

"Well, yes, because, as I've said, I've been around for nearly 30 years now you know, I've seen quite a bit. I'm not a teenager by any means, despite outward appearances. I think I'd omit 'saucy', I don't feel very saucy at this particular moment in time. It's not 'nudge nudge'."

"No, it's all a plan for the future. So how do you like the look of that bush over there, James?"

I think I prefer the rhododendrons.

"Yes, most of them do actually."

You laid yourself absolutely bare on 'Viva Hate' didn't you?

"Absolutely naked. Parts of it were quicksand but bravery won the day."

Would you like to appear actually naked on your sleeves?

"Well it might detract from record sales. I don't want to enter at number 92."

Shall we call it a day?

"Yes, I think I've been naked enough today. I feel like putting a very small flannel on."

● **Next week in Part Two, Morrissey talks further about his obsessions: his fame, England, Gary Glitter, The Fall and New Order, his 'children', television, and of the qualities it takes to be a pop genius.**