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THE WONDER STUFF Miles' erm, 'favourite' things



MEGA CITY FOUR Van will I be famous?



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Laying down the lore



MORRISSEY COMES (

(FOR A DRINK)

Shock! Horror! Girls throw themselves at his feet!
Luridly manicured skinheads fling bouquets! Europe
quivers beneath his majesty!
MORRISSEY talks to the NME!
As his tumultuous tour juggernaut hurtles toward
Britain, the man who launched a thousand Angst letters

As his tumultuous tour juggernaut hurtles toward Britain, the man who launched a thousand Angst letters waxes lyrical (natch) to an awestruck STUART MACONIE about adoration, boot boys, Smithology, rockabilly and patriotism. But not James Dean or that bloke in Electronic. He's 'frighteningly happy' and working with 'the best musicians' of his life.

Gobsmacked at such David Icke-style revelations? Then

Recent developments: KEVIN CUMMINS

rom the look of things, reports of his death have been greatly exaggerated. He sits casually on a barstool, sipping large glasses of Pils and smiling.

He's an unmistakable figure, even though there are certain unusual accoutrements; the beer, the magenta nail varnish, the T-shirt, with its garish illustration of legs ending in half-mast jeans and fearsome 16-hole 'Docs', and bearing the legend 'Skins: Alive And Kicking'. In fact, I don't think I'd be surprised if he pulled a Woodbine from behind his ear.

Woodbine from behind his ear.
He sits at the centre of a
boisterous, wise-cracking group.
It could be any bunch of Saturday
night bar-room revellers. But it is
not. "So this is what they mean by
an entourage," he jokes,
indicating the group around him
with a sweep of his hand; the
journalist, the press officer, the
video crew, the personal
assistants and, at his right hand,
the band – four young bucks in
quiffs, tattoos and drainpipes,
enjoying the beer and the
atmosphere, looking for all the
world like figures from one of
those films that he built an
iconography around; Saturday
Night And Sunday Morning, A
Taste Of Honey, The Leather

He looks at home. Indeed, were it not for the way the conversation naturally, nervously gravitates towards him, the way the eyes flit to him more readily, the extra weight his words carry, Morrissey could almost be 'one of the lads'.

A SPRING evening in Berlin. A night off for Morrissey, the most interesting bloke in showbusiness and the man that you have to have an opinion about. Let me assure you that nothing, not even the Manic Street Preachers' latest shirt stencil, is as guaranteed to set the NME ablaze with hyperbole, insult, slander accusation and threat as this man. To some he's a mystifying dandy with ideas above his station, to others an off-the-rails god now flaunting his feet of clay. But, to a few, he's an enormous, capricious talent who's come through a hail of slings and arrows of outrageous fortune with the stoic optimism of Captain Mainwaring, and remains one of pop music's greatest treasures.

Did I say a few? I make no bones about belonging to the latter camp. The cross that Morrissey has to bear is, of course, that he happened to be part of the most important and original British pop group since punk, a group who altered a generation's ideas about what pop records could be, what they could mean to you and where they could stand in your life. (There's a great joke to be made here about Ed Banger And The Nosebleeds

but I just can't bring myself to

Smiths fans are, of course, relentlessly sneered at by the professional rock lobby. When the white boys discovered dance music in 1986 (where had they been all their lives?) Smiths fans came to embody the dreaded 'indie kid'; the anaemic, provincial wallflower of the born-again raver's imagination. Prejudice like this had dogged The Smiths' every step since 'Panic' (ludicrously accused of 'racism') and hounds Morrissey to this day.

He knows it's over, but friend and foe alike will not let it lie. Enemies use his glorious past as a stick to beat him with and well-meaning allies pen gushing, pedantic, idiotic tributes to the letters page of the NME each week. We should all be wary of re-writing history. Only a fool rates 'Ouija Board, Ouija Board' higher than 'This Charming Man' but, equally, only a twerp doesn't realise that 'Suedehead' or 'Driving Your Girlfriend Home' or



"I can't recall a following quite like them."

the forthcoming single 'Pregnant For The Last Time' are more than a match for 'Never Had No-One Ever' or 'Death Of A Disco Dancer'

And, without becoming embroiled in an ungracious slanging match, Johnny Marr may have significantly upped his average with Electronic, but Moz's post-Smiths work still leaves that of his erstwhile

colleagues standing. Two shining talents were left orphaned by the Morrissey/Marr divorce, not one.

But onwards, to Berlin.
Morrissey's outrageously
successful continental tour is
drawing to a close after ecstatic
receptions in Dublin, Paris, The
Netherlands and Cologne. Ahead
lie three major Scottish dates and,
beyond, an eight-week tour of the
United States culminating in an

appearance at Madison Square Gardens. His star is still very much in the ascendant across the Atlantic, as evidenced by the fact that tickets for the show at the LA Forum, a 15,000-seater in Los Angeles, sold out in 14 minutes.

Add to this the fact that the first tracks with this new band, Pregnant For The Last Time', 'My Love Life' and an inspired reading of Bradford's 'Skinstorm', all fly in the face of those who pronounce him dead, and we perhaps understand why those around him claim not to have seen him in such a terrific mood in years. Morrissey never asked to be a solo artist and he never attempted to hide his grief at the death of The Smiths. But he is looking forward with good humour and apparent relish and you would have to be peevish in the extreme, not to say stupid, to deny him that.

AS DUSK falls over Berlin, we settle down to speak in a hotel room several floors above the city. What follows is a sizeable proportion of our conversation, presented practically verbatim on the grounds that you'd prefer to listen to him than me.

So, how is life "on the road" treating you?

Well, I'm as healthy or as sick as I look. If it was a profession, for heaven's sake, I'd find it depressing. But, as it is, there's something magisterial about sweeping through Europe like this. Although if somebody had the temerity to describe me as a 'rock star' I'd spit straight in their eye. But, yes, it does appeal to me in a strange way.

It's those strange fractured moments that make it all worthwhile. Yesterday, someone hit me on the head with a bicycle. I

all fly in nounce s

was having my picture taken, on the floor naturally, eyes heavenward. And they hit me with their bicycle so I had to decide whether to throw it into the Rhine or whatever it's called or pretend to be a gentleman, which I'm quite good at. So now I finally understand the plight of the so-called football 'hooligan'. And I'd like to help them in any way I can (laughs).

No Happy Mondays' T-shirt for this

Why have you decided to tour now?

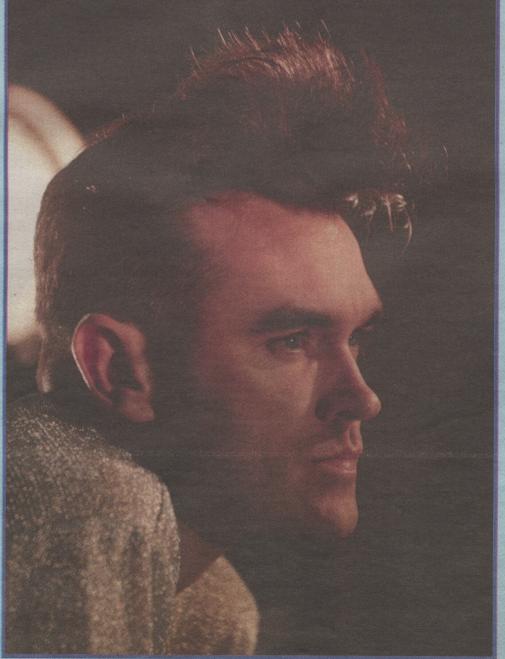
Well, I could have rushed at it like a bull at a gate two years ago but it wouldn't have been right. It wouldn't have gelled with the musicians I was working with. And the Smithology was still clinging like wet seaweed around my ankles so I couldn't really move

... but suddenly it was gone. And I met some musicians who, well, made me see the light and made me very happy about what I'm doing. So here I am . . . in Denmark!

"Saw the light" sounds terribly dramatic.

You must remember that I was hideously dogged by all the

"What amazes me is the number of people who say my solo records aren't as good as The Smiths. It's a logic they don't apply to the records of any other ex-Smith. So what they're in effect saying is 'Morrissey, we consider you to have been The Smiths'."



Quifftastic!: The new Ronnie Dawson

widowed Smiths nonsense. And I became angry. For years I had to compound to journalists and the public, the genius, or the greatness, of The Smiths. I was bruised from that struggle. But with the untimely death, it seemed everyone wanted to discuss, in enormous detail, the ins and outs of The Smiths. And I became infuriated. It's the dreaded nostalgia. Not cherishing something 'til it's gone. Which is why, before you can get a word in edgeways, these days I'd be happier to talk about me-today and tomorrow - if that's possible.

If you mean you don't want to talk about The Smiths, I'm sure it's possible.

At the moment, I look on The Smiths as a dead cat that must be buried in a shoebox at the bottom of the garden. And that is not to spit upon anyone who might walk in here wearing a Smiths T-shirt. I would never do that. But my past is almost denying me a future. The irony is that, in days of old, I was always accused of being steeped in the past - in Will Hay and The New York Dolls. But now I want to talk about today and the writers want to talk about the past. A curious reversal. So, as for The Smiths, I have my tin hat on and I'm bringing down the blackout.

Fair enough. So what's it like to go onstage and know that the audience are simply aching to touch you?

Oh, well (laughs) the way you put it! It's drastically simple. At the risk of sounding more pompous than I am, I was always more loved than admired. I think musicians are admired. But I was always loved and I felt it. And I prefer that. I mean, Eric Clapton is admired. But who could love him? His own mother, perhaps.

Without getting too scientific, the audience reflects the artist Greasy Heavy Metal maniacs attract greasy Heavy Metal maniacs. But if, like me, you try and do something with a certain amount of passion or vocation or love, then the people attracted are like that. They understand me.

Do your fans represent a

constituency? Yes, they do. They are a reasonably separate group within the pop audience. I can't recall a following quite like them. If you look at most pop audiences, you can trace their notions back. But if you look at the people who like me, they are a strange and unique phenomenon . . . apart from the ones who've gone off me, of course!

But can you understand what drives them to invade the stage and touch the hem of your garment?

When I'm being cold and analytical I think it's simply because it's permissible in the pop arena. If I was in Marks & Spencer and I met half a dozen of these people they'd be very polite. It's to do with the arena and the atmosphere that permits expression. You can't behave like that in the streets, which is sad. Such thunderous emotion is waiting to get out, and dim lights and loud music can bring it out.

But when I'm being less selfcritical, I think they really do think a great deal of me. And, curiously, since we left Dublin, in Paris and Holland and Belgium and now here, it's got more extreme. I can't say why, since their English isn't very good and I speak nothing else. But since I'm not promoted anywhere to any degree except America, I'm comforted that it must be by word of mouth. They're a private and extraordinary club.

detection of Engineer Street, and

accept this statement as what a great group this is. carry on a dialogue with your

alcohol except when I'm forced to, which is twice a day, so please shatteringly clear. I do hope people will not constantly want to write about The Smiths and the 'good old days'; the days when we got bad reviews and we didn't play very well sometimes. These musicians are better - and the harmony of the set-up . . . well, let's just say it's all very precious to me. And I hope people realise that now instead of in the year 2001. I don't want people to wait 'til I'm hit by a milkfloat to realise Do you think it's true that you've used the interview situation in a better way than your peers - for example, to

"The best musicians I've had the joy of working with." Not necessarily. I'm perfectly aware that this conversation is not just between me and you (pause). There's someone listening at the keyhole, and we both know who it is! But, truthfully, I always get

waterlogged by the false intimacy of the interview. It's a bit like appearing on television. It's not that I'd say anything untrue. But you know how artificial interviews

Think about your job interview with the NME...no, don't. I'm sure it's too sordid!

But, by common consensus, you are the world's best

Oh, you're too kind and I'll bet you a pound you won't print that. But, being self-critical, I come to the conclusion that that's because everyone else is such a walloping buffoon! Given the competition, it's easy to shine . . . or at least gleam in a reasonably buffed manner. The rock press currently is having to create personalities out of a dull herd of new groups and artists. I'm not fooled.

Is it fair to say that you had a love affair with the British music press that went sour? Well, that has happened but it doesn't have to continue in that way. It went sour in about September '89 when I simply became bored with answering the same few questions over and over. Also, the tide had turned and I was beginning to get sand kicked in my face. I think there's a credo in the media - you have a fiveyear run and then they think surely they're rich and happy enough to continue without the triviality of our affections. I think people just get bored with the same old faces and that certainly happened to me. And despite what people say, I accepted that. After talking 19 to the dozen for so long it was fascinating to sit back and watch others at play and see who emerged. Nobody did. You're kidding yourself if you think the Manic Street Preachers mean anything to anybody.

Are you contemptuous of journalists now?

No. In fact when I was very tiny I had great ambitions to do the very thing you're doing now, but luckily I found something with a bit more . scope. Admit it, it must be the height of tediosity having to write excitedly about all those groups you can't stand! This will seem an unreadably bloated remark but, as time goes by, my individuality is affirmed by those writers who can't stand my guts. They are constantly handing me backhanded compliments. There are certain journalists who profess to think I'm useless and they cannot fill in an application form for a driving licence without mentioning my name. I must mean more to them than their own mothers. And in their endless, poetic hatred of me, they have made me important. To the point where it doesn't matter whether 'Sing Your Life' enters the Top 30 or not, or whether my record sales in England decrease or not.

How do you view your supposed 'decline'? (Laughs) Well, a piece on my 'decline' makes the covers of all the glossy magazines. Of course, if I was truly in decline, no-one would write a word about me because they'd be too busy

writing about other groups. I assume you're putting the word 'decline' in inverted commas, and this 'decline', apparently, is more important than any other group or artist in the world. And anyway, one way or the other, pieces about me, whether they praise or damn, are never tedious. They're always a good read.

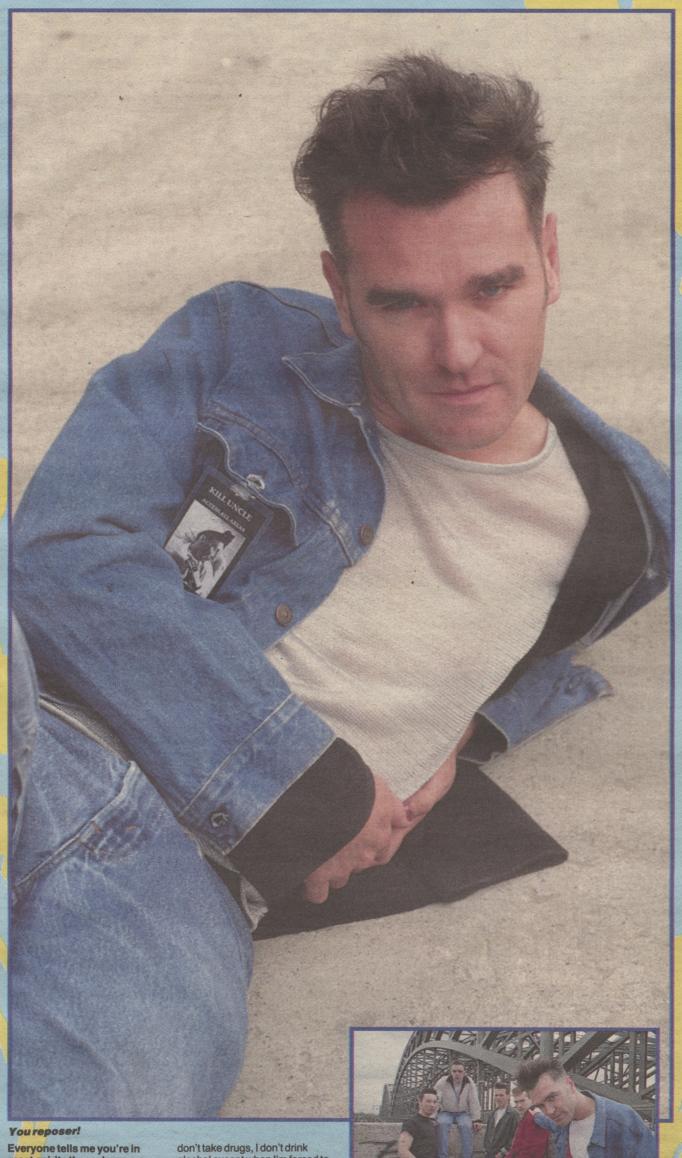
But you yourself have referred to the 'funny little singles' you've put out of late. Isn't that very disparaging?

No, not necessarily. I do think they're quite funny. But it's definitely Reevesian humour. I know Vic Reeves and I see a lot of myself in him. If he'd been born 30 years previously his mother and auntie would have locked him away in a very dark room. It's a form of madness. And we're very lucky to be able to convey it in some entertaining, socially acceptable way. It's termed eccentricity rather than madness. And there are millions like me out there-dreadful thought-who want to sing and write and climb over the wall. But they never will. I'm afraid the hole in the net is only big enough for one or two. So, though my lips will freeze when I say it, I suppose I'm one of the lucky ones (laughs).

And what makes you so special?

Well . . . it's because everyone else is so deadly dull, I suppose. Need I go on? If you examine my position, and I know you have, you'll see that Morrissey's position in British pop is completely central but completely

CONTINUES OVER



great spirits these days. I've been pinching myself so much that my legs are brown. I'm frighteningly happy. Everything I've worked for these past 24 months has come right, and the core of that is the four individuals I'm working with, whom I hope you won't overlook. They are central to everything I do and they are, though you won't believe mewell, you might in five years - they are the best musicians I've had the joy of working with.

I can already hear people gasping at that remark. They will gasp, but with relief I hope. Surely they're glad that my library ticket has been extended. They are simply the best, and the last week of concerts have been the best I've ever experienced. I

Could we go back. Your perfect audience is skinheads in nail varnish?

Yes, it's mushrooming and it's very heartening. As you're perfectly aware, the audience for all those groups from that little island of Manchester all dress in completely American style which befuddles me. So the sight of streams of skinheads in nail varnish... it somehow represents the Britain I love. Wouldn't it be awful to find yourself 'followed', as it were, by people you didn't want? You must find this yourself...

How do skinheads represent the Britain you love?

Well, correct me if I'm wrong, but I thought the skinhead was an entirely British invention. If I was ever asked for an autograph by someone wearing those awful Cure baseball boots, I'd take it as a sign from Hell that the curtain was coming down. It would be Hell's hottest hob.

Do you pine for a mythical Britain?

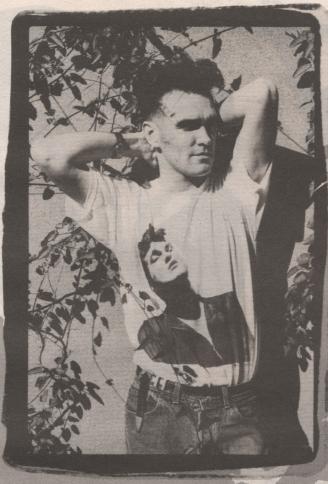
Perhaps. It's certainly gone now. England doesn't only not rule the waves, it's actually sunk below them. And all that remains is debris. But in amongst the debris shine slits of positivity.

If you aren't a racist are you a patriot?

Yes I am. I find travelling very hard. I miss England. But the last few interviews I ve given have all centred around (and not at my instigation) the decline of the Ealing studios and Alistair Sim. It gives the impression that I do nothing from morning 'til night but think about the once proud Empire, which I never do. It's another ghost that needs exorcising, rather like the one that says my fans are all pathetically devoted Virginia Woolfs who can't dance.

But you can't deny their devotion. Why do they feel this way?

Because they know I've never



"All the great British writers were exiled, though I wouldn't have the gall to put myself in that company."

been a slag. Never been, in simple language, a whore. I've never chased the money. Which in this dastardly business is something. When you close your hotel room door on EMI Belgium, you're something of a troublemaker, Even EMI in England . . . they promoted 'Viva Hate' very well but now they don't know what to do. I am not promoted in any sense of the word. Good heavens. EMI could not get one of my records played on the radio in England if the future of the company depended on it. I feel the same in '91 as I did

in '83 – that whatever I've achieved I've earned it. The only things that have been handed to me are invoices and lawsuits.

I suppose what will happen is that my singles will stop making the British Top 40. Records are hits because the record company decides they'll be hits. EMF are the perfect example of this. But my situation is precarious. I wouldn't say I expect to be dropped but I could be in the archives before this interview is over. In America, Sire could not be more enthusiastic.

Consequently, they seem to want

me there. My records are selling as well as they ever did during my time with The Housemartins (much laughter)...

What was the last record you got excited about?

Err...'Rockin' In The Cemetery' by Ronnie Dawson. It's the first track on the tape we come on to.

Ah, rockabilly. Your supposed new love!

Well, I have vague recollections of songs like 'Vicar In A Tutu', 'Shakespear's Sister' and 'Rusholme Ruffians'. I recall talking in early interviews about Eivis. People always overstate the case. If I mention one rockabilly artist, it doesn't follow that I'm running around in drainpipes and a huge DA. I simply find a lot of rockabilly exciting in a way that modern pop songs aren't.

How would you like posterity to remember you?

remember you?

If it doesn't sound too much like Malcolm Muggeridge, I'd like people to say that I wrote with blood, not ink. Did that sound like Malcolm Muggeridge? Alan Bennett? My reputation goes before me and I can only follow. And it isn't particularly contrived. I never went to a theatrical agent. And no matter what people say, I've won. In a strange sense, the battle is over. It was over when 'Viva Hate' went in at Number One. Everything else has been a fantastic, ongoing bonus.

When Oliver Stone does get round to the movie, will you be flattered?

Yes, I will. And I quite like your idea of Dirk Bogarde playing me. Well, after all Dandy Nicholls is dead.

And what of the other, shall we say, central figures in your drama?

But there are no others. But if you insist, I'm sure certain members of New Order would fit the bill!

Do you love your enemies? I sympathise. And then I arrange to have their heads kicked in. I do have friends in high places. Tower Hamlets, for instance...

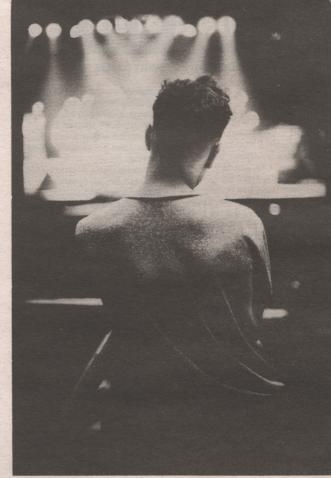
BUT WHEN you want to live, how do you start, where do you go, who do you need to know? When the best tunesmith and the best singer/lyricist of a generation meet, sparks inevitably fly. The dissolution of The Smiths left both Morrissey and Marr unexpectedly

single, and both have drifted, at

times uncomfortably, from partner to partner.

Morrissey's solo outings have involed a shifting array of backstage personnel; Stephen Street, Vini Reilly, Andy Rourke, Langer & Winstanley, Mark Bedford and latterly Mark Nevin. This lack of a stable collaborator, the search for a 'steady', has been the source of some mirth within the music press. And haughty suspicion never ran so high as when Morrissey announced that his new band were a gang of North London

CONTINUED PAGE 53



Backside of the Moz.



ORRISSEY

rockabilly rebels, including ex-Polecat Boz Boorer

Moz's keenness for "th'lads", as he half-ironically refers to them, to be taken seriously is manifest. As our interview concludes at around 11pm, we arrange to repair to the hotel bar, but first he politely but firmly repeats his request that I have a word with his band. We meet over a few drinks and immediately however tough your carapace of cynicism, you're infected with their ingenuous enthusiasm.

The switch from the capital's pub circuit to delirious hordes in continental stadia has been rapid; a transition that's left them bemusedly grateful. Boorer is something of a minor legend in the rockabilly world, the others guitarist Alan, bass player Gaz and drummer Spencer - are as far removed from 'indie kids' as it's possible to be. They grew up blissfully unaware of The Cure, Bauhaus and The Sisters Of Mercy or, less blissfully, The Fall, Joy Division, Aztec Camera or indeed.

"We were never Smiths fans," says Alan cheerily, "and I think this is one of the reasons that we've got on so well with Moz. The fact that he was in The Smiths doesn't really mean a lot to us. I think he's glad about that, because it means we take him for what he is, which is a good bloke, rather than because of his past. He was keen to have a band, a real band, rather than a bunch of session men behind him. And as a band, we get on very well."

For drummer Spencer, teenage years involved "The Who, The Kinks, Jimi Hendrix and running riot with the mods and skins down Carnaby Street."

For Gaz, it was "punk, ska and '50s rock 'n' roll." They're all vaguely aware that The Smiths and Morrissey meant something inordinately special to large numbers of people, but beyond that, as Gaz points out, "I love the stuff we play on stage. But I'd never really been exposed to Morrissey's stuff before. If someone had sat me down with his stuff I might have got into him earlier, of course.

Spencer never heard The Smiths, but he was dimly aware of the name, "It was the sort of music that, if it came on the radio, I'd turn it off." Alan is similarly neutral about The Smiths but feels that 'Bona Drag' is an excellent record. "I'm a big fan of his recent

They bumped into Morrissey via a "rockin' club in Kentish Town", and the English rockabilly sub-cultural style clearly being attractive to Moz, were subsequently asked to appear in videos for 'Our Frank' and 'Sing Your Life'. Session work followed and, ultimately, Morrissey's decision to use them as his permanent band. The sound is gutsy, organic and guitar-based, obviously a sound Morrissey loves. Spencer shows me his blistered hands and reminds me, surreally, that "balls-out is my

Boz is something of an old hand at this. Having done studio work with Morrissey before Christmas, he had heard rumours of a tour but thought no more about it until receiving a frantic summons from his wife whilst he was watching some old blues veteran in Burnley

"I just took leave of absence from the demo studios where I work and here I am! At first, we all took it one day at a time, but now it looks as if the band might have a future.

Working with everyone from Sinead to Deep House has, he claims, made him pretty adaptable, but he's full of praise for the younger lads: "Considering they've only played rockin' music before, they've

adapted very well. All of them are understandably delighted at the frenzied audience reaction to date. "A multiple orgasm," as Spencer puts it. And they're not in the slightest nonplussed by the audience's obvious intense concentration on Morrissey himself. "He's the main man," Gaz says. "It's his show

and I'm just glad to be part of it." The "main man" arrives and takes his place at the bar, scotching any expectations that he'd be tucked up by ten with a Horlicks, some pressed flowers and The People's Friend. Instead, we get a genial drinker, wryly caught up in the jokes and backslapping bonhomie. He is painfully amused when I tell him that the new Nolans single is a disastrous, Tina Turner-style clomp through 'Panic'.

"There's always been talk of cover versions, The Eurythmics and several others, and I've always been very excited but they've come to nought. I do know that Chrissie Hynde is doing 'Every Day Is Like Sunday'. I've heard a demo version and, well, my cheeks are moist.

Caught up in the esprit de corps, I attempt to charge a frighteningly substantial drinks round to my room. Oh, how our teutonic hostess laughed when we remembered that I was staying in a different hotel. After this our orders came with glacial speed and stern-jawed disapproval, and it occurred to us to sample other aspects of Berlin night-life.

Berlin's decadence must be well-hidden these days, we muse, as we cruise the streets hellbent for kicks. Moz and support act Phranc act the goat in the street in a heartening manner, playfighting, wrestling, and generally sparring affectionately. Someone spies flashing 'disco style' lights at the top of an office block but, with no working lifts and no visible staircase, we can only stand and imagine the

debauchery overhead. Someone spots a man with a quiff who is instantly and, in my view, erroneously seized upon as something of a style authority and night-life connoisseur. I am right. He directs us to some dreadful hole where the only fun is

watching Moz queue up with the herren und frauto have his hand stamped. Inside, stout-looking youths play pool badly whilst some patently demented girls shuffle listlessly to an old Donna Summer B-side. This is the last time I remember seeing the band. I sincerely hope they've since turned up.

Outside, Phranc remembers that there is supposedly a great club next door to David Bowie's old house. Tragically, no-one can remember where this is, but knowing German precision, it's

probably on

Davidbowiesoldhousestrasse." When the pizzeria turns its nose up at us, common sense tells us to call it a night. Several questions remain unanswered; about the future, about nail varnish and about why the Germans put those paper doilies on the stems of beer glasses, but Morrissey's current ebullience is undoubted, to fan and cynic alike. When he is taken into that field and shot, Popstrasse will be an infinitely less interesting place to

Next week: Morrissey's lyrics, where the hell does he get them from?



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