



2-4-6-8

Tom Robinson Reviewed and Interviewed

Brig: How was the band formed?

Tom Robinson: Well, I knew Danny from way back when, . . . and I met Brian and Mark around Christmas.

Brian Taylor: We had Christmas off and then started the rehearsals.

Brig: You've had a lot of media coverage. Front page of Melody Maker and N.M.E. in the same week: "E.M.I. sign Gay Power" and all that . . .

B.T.: That's not media coverage, that's media crap.

T.R.: It's one of those things where if certain people predict you're going to be successful it comes true. For instance, if Top of The Pops predicts you're going to make the charts and puts you on then you're going to make the charts.

Brig: What was it like doing Top of the Pops?

B.T.: Plastic, very plastic. We, the musicians on the programme, had very little to do with the show at all. The cameramen and the director, they just didn't want to know.

Brig: Why did you do "I shall be released" for George Ince instead of writing your own song?

T.R.: Because the song came first. That's his wife's phone number on the sleeve, so if anyone wants to ring up they can find out about the campaign.

Brig: How's the campaign going?

T.R.: His chances of parole in December are getting very close, but if he lets on about his health he doesn't get it. If he kicks up shit, saying 'Look, I'm getting hallucinations and shaking', and demands an inquiry, they've got the power to keep him in for another ten years.

Brig: What are E.M.I. like about it?

B.T.: E.M.I. said "Would you like a picture sleeve with George Ince on it?" and we said "Great."

Brig: It seemed to me that after E.M.I. lost the Pistols, they tried to sign a new wave band, and they got you and the Rich Kids.

B.T.: Rich Kids are a very good band. I really don't think E.M.I. signed them because of their associations with Matlock.

T.R.: A lot of people have made snide comments about both Glen and E.M.I., and I don't think that's very fair to either of them.

Brig: How's the recording going? Have you got an album coming out?

T.R.: No, not yet. It'll be about February - we've still got to record it.

Brig: There's a couple of live tapes of you going around. How do you feel about that?

T.R.: It's great if people are just passing them around as a way of spreading the music, the word. What is a drag is if people start selling copies.

Brig: What do you think of media coverage?

T.R.: Well, take the Clash. Earlier this year everybody, especially the N.M.E., was building up the Clash, including the N.M.E./Clash E.P., and now Tony Parsons, Julie Burchill, Murray the lot, they're all slagging them, which is really sick because it's 'set em up and knock em down' time. It's really a drag because it's so exaggerated both ways, absurdly good and absurdly bad.

Brig: You're one of the music press' pet bands at the moment.

T.R.: This is dangerous. Having been up there and had that kind of idiot coverage all in one week, the obvious thing is for people to come along and say: "Well, it's not that good". They take a good band and say it's sensational, and you can never live up to a hype of that dimension, however good you are.

Brig: How's the tour going?

T.R.: I've got a headache. No, it's been successful, but not financially. Just as the single took off, we got warmer every night. Every time we played somewhere unknown, they'd give you more of a chance, because they'd know at least one of your songs.

B.T.: I don't like your "Jam" badge.

Brig: (aggrieved) What's wrong with the Jam?

B.T.: They vote Conservative.

T.R.: You've got good taste in ties, though.

Brig: O, well, good luck for the gig.

They didn't need it, though. The Tom Robinson Band were superb, putting their points across with power, conviction and passion. A lot of the New Wave exiles, but Tom Robinson moves. And I for one wasn't ashamed to find tears in my eyes during "I Shall Be Released". The man cares about his fans, too. He made sure that everyone who couldn't get in to the gig got a free programme if they wanted one. I realised that this wasn't just a band - it was a rock'n'roll band. And greater praise than that I cannot give.

MARK HAGEN

The Tom Robinson Band can be contacted c/o ITB, 4 Tilney Street, London W1.

For free posters, stickers and badges, or for information about the band, write enclosing a stamped, addressed envelope.

Since this interview was given, George Ince's application for parole has been turned down, and there is no chance of another application until the Parole Board meets next year. Anyone wishing to help the campaign, or requiring information about it should call 01 - 987 - 6542.

Tom Robinson and his band provided that rare thing - a sold-out Pathfoot concert, and though they doubtless didn't realise it, on their shoulders rested the responsibility of making some kind of amends for the awfulness of the rest of this semester's concerts. Did they make it? Just ask one of the punters who waded through the spilled beer and vomit to cheer them on. Yes, they made it. That and more.

Supporting act 'No Dice' played a fairly well received set. They have all the energy and commitment in the world, but unless they can come up with stronger material, I can't see any prospect of promotion from the second division. But special praise is due to vocalist Roger Ferris for his cool and effective handling of the gobbing, can-throwing morons who threatened to turn the night into the same kind of fiasco as last

semester's 'Damned' concert. He's a pretty good singer as well.

And then there was Tom Robinson - a much more powerful vocalist than he seems in the '2-4-6-8-Motorway' single, and as charismatic a frontman as you could ask for. The Big Hit Single - which, with reckless courage, was performed only ten minutes into the set - is utterly untypical of his songwriting; the average Robinson song is bitterly, furiously, political, and offers no quarter either to its target or to its audience. The only real complaint I heard about the concert was that such a relentless polemic became overpowering; but, really, with writers like Robinson and lead guitarist Danny Kustow, you either take it all or leave it alone - ask for dilution and you ask for the impossible. For my part, I'll take it all gladly. Their kind of sincerity doesn't come around every day.

'Up against the wall', 'Winter of 79', 'Glad to be Gay' and the best version of Dylan's 'I shall be released' ever perpetrated - from start to finish they played with that kind of burning, ruthless energy that reminds you why you fell for rock 'n' roll in the first place.

I'd like to tell you that I saw the future of rock 'n' roll at Pathfoot Refectory, but we all know that future is Abba and Donna Summer. I'll just tell you that I saw a grade A killer band, and one that's set to go a long, long, way. If you weren't there, start regretting. If you were, don't be surprised if you end up telling your grandchildren about it.

ANDY HOLMES