

**C**hristian Riou, vocalist with the CLAYTOWN TROUPE, thumbs quickly through a copy of last month's METAL FORCES before speaking: "I don't know... These days I find myself laughing at a lot of Heavy Metal bands, and I know other people do too. Ten years ago it wasn't like that, was it? You could take bands seriously. Nobody laughed at ROSE TATTOO did they?"

He smiles and shakes his head. We've been given an hour in which to talk, and yet 60 minutes later both of us have only managed to put half the world to rights! When Christian Riou talks, he talks and it's usually worth hearing. Rather like the band's latest record, "Out There", just released through EMI Records.

CLAYTOWN TROUPE's first outing, "Through The Veil", came out in 1989. Hastily assembled and spontaneous in its delivery the album now sounds a little naive when compared to "Out There".

"We were children then, now we're teenagers," Christian tells me. And in songs such as "Ways Of Love" and "Magic Dies", the CLAYTOWN TROUPE have tapped a musical vein that now suggests an affinity with the dark rumblings of SOUNDGARDEN, PEARL JAM and their ilk. In today's musical climate it could be their strongest selling point.

Christian insists that it's not just a marketing ploy: "Those bands have a certain edge to their music, and that's what people are starting to pick up on. They've been influenced by British Rock bands going right back to the '70s and so have we. I heard NIRVANA and PEARL JAM played back-to-back on daytime radio last week, and after I'd listened to them I wanted to hear the CLAYTOWN TROUPE. It would have sounded just right. I make no apology for thinking that we're making the same kind of music as they are. Except we're British and we've been doing it for quite some time now. We're already seeing British bands creeping out of the woodwork that are ripping off the Seattle sound, because they think that's the way to land a record deal. We're not one of those groups!"

Considering Christian's comments it's not surprising to find the TROUPE supporting PEARL JAM on their recent British tour. Originally signed by Island Records on the strength of their live show, the CLAYTOWN TROUPE still view the stage as the best place from which to reach as many people as possible.

"Everyone's buzzing about PEARL JAM, so I suppose it was the tour to be on," sighs Christian. "And we've had some encouraging comments from people that have seen us by accident! The thing about this band is we appeal to a cross-section of Rock fans. We've played shows before, and I've looked out across the crowd and seen people getting into the music who probably wouldn't have come near us two years ago. We're not another old-fashioned Heavy Metal band, we're not Thrash... We're just stuck right there in the middle making music that can appeal to anyone.

"In the past Metal fans with the patches and the denims have been to our shows and found they liked the band. They've looked around and seen Indie fans, Gothics, anyone and everyone. And next time I've seen them, the



**EMI SIGNEES CLAYTOWN TROUPE RECENTLY UNVEILED THEIR SECOND ALBUM, "OUT THERE". FRONTMAN CHRISTIAN RIOU EXPLAINS TO MARK BLAKE WHY, AMONGST OTHER THINGS, HE FEARS FOR THE FUTURE OF BRITISH ROCK**

hair's a bit longer or they've dyed it, maybe they've got a couple of extra earrings, now they're listening to some different sounds. They've met new people at our shows and it's opened their minds up a little bit, and surely that's a good thing!"

The band's press officer reliably informed me a few hours earlier that "How Can Anybody Do This?" and "Magic Dies" - both on "Out There" - are, in his own words, "sexual experiences". Christian is convinced that the CLAYTOWN TROUPE's approach to the subject is different.

"There's ways to sing about sex without going for that *let's-shag-in-the-back-of-the-car* lyric and that's what we try to do," he insists. "I get sick of seeing Rock bands all playing the same style of music and looking the same way - singing about all the women they've had and posing with a Harley-Davidson. When in real life they're all virgins and have never been on a bike in their lives!"

While Christian remains contemptuous of the trend amongst British bands to look up to their American coun-

terparts for musical inspiration, the CLAYTOWN TROUPE spent several months at New York's Hit Factory recording "Out There", after being signed originally by EMI-USA following a parting of the ways with Island Records.

Record companies, new albums, producers, America... Christian has a story about each of them.

"Island lost interest in Rock bands, when the Dance craze began. They were fine to start with, but there was a change of personnel and employees that were looking after us weren't around anymore. I hated the attitude of some record company people; they'd come backstage after a gig and they'd be telling you how great you were and you knew they were talking shit! I used to spend half-an-hour before some gigs hiding in the toilet just listening to what people were saying, finding out what they really thought.

"There's a huge difference between this album and "Through The Veil". The songs on that first album were very short, very direct because we wrote them specifically for the live show. When we wrote this new material we threw out anything that was too immoderate. We

wanted a record that people really had to listen to, and that they wouldn't grow tired of after the first couple of plays.

"David Bianco was a perfect choice of producer for the CLAYTOWN TROUPE, because he has such a varied background from RUN DMC to MASTERS OF REALITY. But I don't think he could come to terms with five English guys getting drunk and jumping naked onto his mixing desk! In the end we drove him mad!"

And America?

Christian actually pauses before answering this one: "It can be a terrifying place. When you look at this crack problem in some cities you realize that Britain could become like in a couple of years time. We sung about this on "Real Life" from the first album. "Rainbow's Edge" from "Out There" was inspired by the film *Jacob's Ladder* which had a tremendous effect on all of us. When we came out of the cinema you could have still been on the set. It was terrifying. So we sampled dialogue from the film at the beginning of the song as it seemed appropriate.

For Christian the stumbling block for many British bands is their blind acceptance of second best to American acts. And the singer is certain that with "Out There" the CLAYTOWN TROUPE have produced an album good enough to take on any of their counterparts from across the water.

"I want to see British Rock music treated with the respect it deserves", says Christian. "I want to turn back the clock. Everyone in this band is in their mid-20s, we're not kids, we're old enough to remember the way music used to be. There are some good bands with good musicians, but they're going for the lowest common denominator and that's a shame. I want people to stop laughing at British Rock." ■

CLAYTOWN TROUPE have just released their new album "Out There" through EMI Records. They are currently touring the UK.

# THE FAR SIDE