

Animal Magic

SCULPTURES WITH DEADSPRATS

Catalogued by Dave Massey

IN BRISTOL last summer there was a gig which sported on its bill the embryonic versions of MAXIMUM JOY, SCREAM AND DANCE and MOUTH (who in time-honoured tradition didn't show up)—and a curiously lumbering beast called ANIMAL MAGIC. Their performance was in a turgid Gang of Four/PIL slurry which never gelled and so it was a surprise to find that in the New Year ANIMAL MAGIC had shed the excess baggage, grabbed themselves a horn section and were producing a sleek, exuberant and direct modern dance craze that both excited and educated.

A demo recorded in the local SAM studio was enough to draw the interest of Recreational Records boss Chris Parker, and the four tracks were whipped out sharpish on the 'Get It Right' 12" EP in March. Since then Animal Magic have managed to secure Radio One sessions with John Peel (which has been repeated four times) and Kid Jensen and their current single 'Standard Man' stands poised to make even bigger waves.

Animal Magic are a sextet comprising Howard Purse (guitar and vocals), Mark Taylor (bass), Mark Hymas (sax and vocals), Gill Baker (trumpet), Rob Boswell (drums), and the most recent addition on percussion, Jamie Hill. All of the group have been playing in an assortment of combos in the area, the most notable being Jamie's brief tenure in the trio of percussionists in Mouth, and Howard's work with local loonies Fish Food. The music reflects the variety of influences and backgrounds, yet is held together by a totally honest and energising instrumental approach mixed with the off-beat humour of Howard's lyrics, far removed from the Pigbag/Max Joy/Rip Rig tag that automatically gets thrown around brass-backed rhythms from Bristol.

Ironically two of the group live in a house formerly occupied by members of Pigbag, and they are pleased that their success could open the doors for other Bristol bands. Animal Magic have been gigging steadily and if audience reaction is anything to go by, they could follow their lead. There seems to be a unity between the group and their audience in that everybody goes crazy and has a good time, the only difference being that the group are on stage playing their instruments. Ethnic Rhythm is certainly IN at the moment so did they feel that in their rising



L-R: Jamie, Mark Sax, Mark Bass, Gill, Rob, Howard

popularity they could suffer the back-lash dictates of Fashion?

Howard: "Perhaps, but we feel that it's important to keep contact with who we play to. It's like the original rock and roll ideal that the group on-stage 'up there' was the same as you, and the same thing with punk. When I was in Fish Food it was something we felt strongly about, making sure that anyone could 'do it', and I hate anyone being elitist. There's plenty of people who are popular but not necessarily fashionable; we're not into fashion as such, and we certainly don't go out of our way to be uncouth and wear Doc Martens... (laughs)"

Howard was at one time an Art student in London where at the time he fell under the spell of Johnny Moped, that practitioner of cyclodelia who, according to Howard, was last seen getting on a bus in Kentish Town. He is also an admirer of the artistic work of Don Van Vliet (better known as Captain Beefheart) and Joseph Beuys, and through his lyrics has wanted to develop that similar emphasis on images: hinting and helping rather than dogma and dialectic.

"I've found out that when you start to preach and end up getting personal, people switch off because they don't like having ideas rammed down their throat, or they find it embarrassing or outside their sphere of understanding. So I write about things that interest me and that are unusual, but

present them in such a way that the image is very powerful."

Animal Magic are not a 'political' group but are concerned with the paramount importance of individuality, and it's with a song like 'Standard Man' that an effective message is conveyed.

'Rub me on the back with a ball-point pen and I come out the same every time.'

Unemployment stifles individuality and all of the members of the group have experienced that evil, but didn't necessarily regard their activities as an escape route from its effects.

'I think it's a matter of choice rather than trying to escape', said Rob who had just turned up for the interview. He hurt his leg trying to climb a lamp-post and has currently been dubbed The Cortisone Addict by other members of the group due to the treatment he's been getting.

'All I want to do is to be able to survive while doing something I enjoy', added Mark Hymas, who also has artistic talents judging by the array of pictures adorning the walls of his room.

As far as the group organisation is concerned there will be some changes on the way, the most important being the recruitment of a suitable vocalist to relieve Howard of those duties. The sextet are also in the position of having to

decide if they want the services of a manager, because at the moment their individual contributions to the day-to-day running of the group need co-ordinating.

Another consideration where progress has been made is that existing instruments have been replaced by better equipment. Mark has a new bass, Rob a new drum-kit, and there are plans for Gill to learn trombone, Mark Hymas to expand his saxophone range and Jamie to continue with some piano solos which were introduced on one track on the Kid Jensen session. It's part of the process of making progress and Animal Magic are learning fast from the experience and they have some useful friends to help them, especially someone like John Peel. What had impressed him so much?

Gill: "I think we were helped because he saw us at the (Bristol) University Rag Ball as he was DJ'ing there. I heard him on the radio saying he'd had a really awful week-end and the only good thing about it was when he saw us, and that's probably why he repeated the session so many times!"

So, from a summer past to a summer coming, Animal Magic have finally lived up to the potential in their name and there's little doubt that they're getting it right this time.

DISCOGRAPHY

SPORT 52 12" Get It Right/Grip/Crow Black/Go funky-doo-lally
SPORT 8 7" Standard Man/Human Being