

# Memory Of A FREE FESTIVAL

(ASHTON COURT 1978)

In this age of constantly directed, whereas the two rising record and ticket prices this Free Festival was like a breath of fresh air in a smoke-ridden building. A number of recorded bands and the best of the local talent for absolutely nothing is worth making the effort to go and see. As well as the bands, there were a number of stalls selling all sorts of things; from The Anti-Nazi League to Indian food. You could even book your seat on the overland bus to India. Let us begin. It rained nearly all Saturday morning, so making it very difficult to set up the stages to the necessary requirements.

Two and a half hours after the advertised start, the meagre number of people on the site were at last able to hear some music. The main stage was still leaking water, so the smaller second stage was used. Vodi, a five-piece local band (3 boys, 2 girls) played a fairly bright set of songs you might be able to hum second or third time of hearing.

There was little visual impact, with only minimal movement from the band. The sound came over in one dense block, leaving you to pick out any tune. But the vocals were extremely clear and well

guitarists seemed to be fighting, instead of complementing each other.

Vodi don't like to classify their music and feel they have no contemporaries. They also say they are not influenced by the New Wave, yet their music is certainly deeply rooted there. It seems strange that they play New Wave music, when they only listen to reggae and jazz.

This was only their 5th gig and they complained bitterly that they found gigs extremely hard to find. This seems to be a major problem in Bristol. Many bands want to play outside Bristol but without a manager, this is extremely difficult.

On after Vodi were The Glaxo Babies. I found them actually unpleasant at times. Their jagged sound made very uneasy listening, sometimes merely degenerating into a noise. This band just don't fit together - certainly a mixture of personalities - the drummer could play for The Who, the bassist looked, acted, and played like Paul Simonon, the vocalist had an awful voice, made worse by his stage mannerisms and the guitarist was forgettable.

First impressions were that they are more angry

young men singing about the Dole Queue, thinking it's still early '77 (in a morose and morbid way).

However, having slept on it, I am now convinced that they have strived to obtain this sound/noise effect. A quick look at some of the song titles adds to this belief: 'Lost Causes', 'Who Killed Bruce Lee', 'Flesh' and the worst version of 'These Boots Were Made For Walking' ever heard.

The Glaxo Babies may strive for this sound which either roots you to the spot or repels you -if so, that's fine.

Any atmosphere had completely dissipated, by the time The Europeans appeared (as "Eristol's answer to the Common market"?). Any band who play an open-air festival as their 2nd evergig, must know what they are doing. The Europeans certainly did. My first comparison was with Advertising. They look trendy (like Advertising), but aren't. They have the same format as Advertising, but are rock based and only verge on pop songs.

The opener, 'Europeans' (which is going to be the single), established their musical style and their competent musicianship -at times, sounding like the best parts of The Zones (particularly ex-Colortapes' Jonathn's vocals) -which was also the most memorable song of the set. The keyboard orientated songs are the better ones, adding a greater

variety to the music.

By the time Gardez Darkx came on, the weather had brightened up, and there were now a few hundred people sitting in front of the main stage. With the line-up of

guitar, trumpet and keyboards, there was the possibility of great musical variation within the band. It may have been the mix they had, but it seemed that the keyboards and trumpet (especially the trumpet) were not brought to the fore enough.

There was absolutely no atmosphere and any applause was only polite. Even after a subtle plee from Latif Gardez, nobody stirred. As with most Bristol audiences it's either all up - or everybody stays down. It was a shame everybody stayed seated, because the set was excellent.

Latif Gardez has some good ideas, and some very strong songs. Both sides of the single were played with Dave (the newest member, on keyboards) doubling as guitarist. With two guitars, this gave the songs more strength making them the two strongest in the set.

But Gardez Darkx are a thinking man's band, and their songs need further listening to be fully appreciated, particularly songs like 'And It's Called' and 'Nobody Rules OK?'. The newest song was 'Steel Wind' which seems to be pointing

Gardez Darkx in a more jazz-based direction which, I presume, is what Latif Gardez wants.

The most interesting song in the set was the only non-original; Scott Walker's 'Girl From The Street'.

Latif swapped his guitar for a beer can and staggered around the stage, occasionally returning to the microphone for a verse or two. But the song didn't quite work due to its length and the fact that it seemed to lack a particular plan. But if groups don't experiment, they will not be able to find out what works and what doesn't.

Any visuals were left to Latif. In one number he also played his guitar with his teeth, perhaps showing his Hendrix influences. "It's all part of the act!" he remarked. Paul Darkx blew his trumpet skillfully and made extremely silly jokes now and again. The rhythm section was rock steady. Charlie Llewellyn banged away gleefully on his drums while Julian Halibut was just efficient without excelling himself. Dave had versatility on his side.

All that's needed now is a record.

Bath band Interview, have now dropped their R&B basis, and progressed to a more 'new wave' style. They provided a pleasant and slightly varied, though not exciting, set; which became mere background to the other festivities (and the ceaseless chattering in front of the stage).

Jeff Stars' vocals sound too much like Elvis Costello, and Phil Couger plays too much like Bruce Thomas for the band to be really original at the moment.

However, these criticisms aside, they are an interesting band, with intriguing songs:- 'Howard Craine In New Mexico', about an American poet's suicide, 'Feet Start Walking' by Gerald Walker Jr.; 'New Hearts In Action' and 'Love Fallout' (about a bloke stuck in a lift-shaft), and 'The Saint Jean Wires' are particular examples.

But the two most memorable songs were the single 'Birmingham' and 'Here Come The Cavalry'.

As it became darker, the only piece of really bad organisation occurred. Patrik Fitzgerald had to play at exactly the same time as The Only Ones, which meant wandering between both stages grabbing as much of each act as possible.

Patrik Fitzgerald was on for about the same length of time as The Only Ones: 45 minutes.

I saw his first and last numbers. And from what I saw, he seemed to have played all his songs and said all his poems and was starting again. A diminutive figure, his music puts across a great deal

of bitterness about life and people. He started

with a poem about how he was disenchanted with the punk 'change the world' attitude. His songs are very much about everyday things - 'Backstreet Boys', 'Little Dippers', 'Sounds Of My Street'. His lyrics are simple yet effective. They implant an image in your mind.

The Only Ones played to the most enthusiastic audience of the day; and rightly so! They had all just returned from holidays and so preparation for the gig had been small and hurried - hence no stroboscope.

The Only Ones have been together for two years, forming in the most unlikely circumstances. Peter Perrett met John Perry and decided to form a band. They found a drummer but ex-Spooky Tooth drummer, Mike Kellie came into a rehearsal room and pronounced himself the man for the job (sounds like Keith Moon - archives Ed) even though the other drummer was good. Alan Mair joined in even more extreme circumstances. He happened to be passing a rehearsal room The Only Ones were using and noticed "two chicks" he rather liked. He walked in, noticed a bass, played around for a bit and left. Everybody admired him. Kellie happened to know him and so he got the job.

Now on to the gig: - The set is still firmly based around the album (most of which was recorded over a year ago, before their record contract with CBS).

Peter Perrett, in glittered daps, stood on the extreme right of the stage near his amps so he could hear his vocals. He used to stand in the middle of the stage, and even with monitors as powerful as the PA, he could not hear his vocals.

There were three new songs which will, I expect, be on the new album which they are in the process of recording. There was confusion over the release date of it - either November or January. 'She Says' was the opener. John Perry decorating the song with some splendid guitar. Perry is like an artist, intent on painting every detail. He'd continue adding pieces if the songs didn't end. A

slower number, 'Flowers Die' was very reminiscent of Lou Reed's 'Walk On The Wild Side' especially the bass line. The third new number was titled 'You've Got To PAY'. It was only the second time they had played it. After one false start, the superb jerky riff evolved. It was the best of their new songs.

Both sides of the first single were played and about half the album. 'The Whole Of The Law' sounded slightly bare without the sax, and 'Another Girl, Another Planet' featured particularly strong rhythm playing (it is soon to be re-released. CBS felt

they didn't push it hard enough first time). 'Language Problem' with its superb lyrics and 'The Beast' which sounded particularly strong with some excellent guitar from Perry. Koulla came on stage to sing on 'City Of Fun' and the encore 'The Immortal Story'.

Finally, at the end of the day, some kind of atmosphere prevailed, due to a superb set. In September, The Only Ones embark on a seven week tour of England.

So endeth Saturday on a high note.

Sunday, in comparison was a great disappointment. It rained hard and intermittently during the morning and the music didn't exactly help matters. But as with Saturday, as the day wore on, the sun came out and things became a little more pleasant. The music was a great deal more varied as well, with everything from the Musicians Co-op playing balloons and Spivs from Outer Space attacking the main stage, to Indian Classical Music. In fact, there was little inspired music till late in the evening.

The more traditional forms of rock music seemed to be the order of the day (or most of it), with a specially strong representation from Jazz-Rock. Unfortunately I know little or nothing about these forms, therefore constructive criticism is impossible. But bands worthy of mention are : Nix -heavy/

Handover-fist, who displayed the fact that they are an extremely competent musical unit, who enjoy what they do. They sounded a little like Steely Dan in places; Huggett who played 3rd rate cover versions of Rock 'n' Roll greats; Lizard who were probably excellent, but repelled me.

Social Security did nothing to impress. Right from their stage announcement - "Right, this is a bit of Punk RRRRRock " they were utterly predictable, ever supplying the obligatory 1234 before every number. Social Security are a group

who think a lot of themselves, which in the end, is what will stop them from breaking out of this Bristol backwater stardom in which they find themselves.

'Students At Grunwick' - 1234 -rammalamma. As for the lyrical content, I could not say. 'Cider', in which the only audible word was cider, followed. The musicianship was fairly average, but the drummer seemed to be struggling at times, at best merely supplying a steady beat.

The guitarists each place themselves in carefully practised poses. However, they showed a modicum of wit on a song about Blue Peter badges.

Social Security try to look professional, which is the main reason why they don't. However, if they

didn't try quite so hard, tidied up the drumming and varied the vocals a bit, they may last until next year's festival.

Here And Now played in the late afternoon on the main stage. They had been billed to play on the Saturday. I just heard the last two songs in their set, one of them being the excellent 'Opium For The People'. The large audience seemed extremely appreciative but

time was running short and so they had to make way for Gunnercade who played mediocre jazz rock.

The first thing the event organisers ever knew of The Accelerators was an announcement in the NME that they were playing the Ashton Court Free Festival. The Festival organisers did not approach them; nor did The Accelerators approach the organisers - they just turned up, expecting to play.

With this knowledge, you might have expected The Accelerators to be an obnoxious, rash, loud 3-chord wasteland punk band, who

jumped on the bandwagon in '77 and haven't progressed since, hardly worthy of a mention - you'd be right.

As the evening wore on, it became a great deal colder and it wasn't until Steve Hillage came on that things started to get better. He played a two hour set incorporating most of his

better songs and a number of his original cover versions (a what? -literary Ed). I saw just over half his set and by the time I left everybody was on their feet. Sporting his 'Festival bonnet', he supplied us with the 'inner heat' we all needed. Now that Christian Boule has returned, he can afford to experiment more and expand his ideas. It also lets Miquette fill the whole sound out more, now that she needn't play glissando. John McKenzie, now redundant after Man split up, played flawless bass and added welcome back-up vocals but in too small amounts. Steve Hillage seems to be returning to playing longer songs, after his dabbling with short hit-sized ones. Even Lennon/McCartney's 'Getting Better' was given the space treatment. But Hillage is always best when he gets going and the rhythm is stepped up. There are too few of these songs in his set. Even 'Salmon Song' with its potentially powerful riff is somehow played at half-pace. Some songs get going for just a

few seconds and then suddenly revert to a more natural, swishing sort of sound, eg. 'Searching For The Spark'.

While Steve Hillage was doing his stuff, up on the other stage a number of Bristol new wave bands were playing. When I reached the stage, a seemingly pick-up

band were playing. Inspiredly, but of what I could call Tesco Chainstore Massacre, they contained two members of The Media, one member of Vodi and Nick Shepherd (no doubt at a loose end after the demise of The Cortinas). They played all cover versions including the incredible Kinks' 'All Of The Day AND All Of The Night'. Energy poured out of their ears and it was well worth waiting the day just for them.

On to The Media who, through an NME review which mentioned Buzzcocks seemed worth watching. They were also extremely well worth the wait. Buzzcocks didn't really enter into it. The sound system was not amaz-

ing, but of what I could hear, they seemed to have tunes, hooks and a decent rhythm section. Lyrics, except for some choruses and chants were almost indecipherable. The Mediettes added visual as they leapt around in a corner of the already crowded stage.

The festival finally came to an end about an hour after the first complaints from the park officials with a set from The Same. An onlooker dubbed them the

'Baby Feelgoods' and giving them a few years to mature they could be a really good band.