



SELF-CONFESSED
'TROUPE'
LYN GUY GETS
REVVED UP TO THE
TONES OF
BRISTOL BAND
CLAYTOWN TROUPE AND
TALKS TO THEIR LEAD
VOCALIST CHRISTIAN RIOU
ON THE RELEASE OF THEIR
SECOND ALBUM
'OUT THERE'

When CLAYTOWN TROUPE emerged with 'Through The Veil' in 1989 I was - to the least - impressed. Despite various critics slating them for being uncomfortably similar to THE CULT, the band exuded a fresh and exciting

vibe that quickly gained them a considerable cult following. Then they vanished for two years! Now they're back with a new album about to be released on EMI Records and have just been on the road with PEARL JAM.

With the prospect of headline dates looming on the horizon and yet another blast of 'Out There' (as the new opus is titled) ringing in my ears - yours truly is as excited as Troupe vocalist Christian Riou. A self-confessed 'waffler' - he keeps me glued to the phone for exactly one hour with an intense stream of conversation. So let's start by hearing why the band quit Island Records and subsequently signed to EMI.

"What happened was when Island sold out to Polygram a lot of the old bosses who were really behind the band all left and were replaced by 'non-Rock' people. I heard through the grapevine that Chris Blackwell (Island MD) said he didn't want particularly Rock music on the label anymore. We weren't getting on tremendously with the new people around us because they didn't understand the style of Rock band that we are, so we left and the next thing we knew was that EMI were

interested. A month later we signed to them and it's been perfect, because they can afford to employ good people; whereas Island can't afford to employ the amount of people that a major record company needs. It was quite a smooth move."

I've had a tape of 'Out There' since late last year. Why has it taken such a long time for all the details to be finalised on releasing this album?

"That was our decision. One thing we've never been impressed by with other bands was this constant releasing of records and constant touring. We just didn't want that, we wanted to go away for quite sometime and then come back with a record and give a whole new load of people the chance to discover the band, plus we just wanted to go away and re-define our sound a little. If this record takes us back up to the Astoria level that's fine, but we know we're gonna be starting again at the club scene - the grass roots - which is what a Rock band is all about."

I gather you've spent quite a lot of time in the USA. What sort of reaction have you had over there?

"They're really receptive to the band. We played at the Concrete Foundation convention last September and we had a great time. They're more receptive to new styles of Rock that stretches the boundaries, so any form of music can thrive in America because there's not so many labels and there's a lot more people. We released 'Wanted It All' as a single over there last October and all the Heavy Rock radio stations were playing it plus it started moving into AOR circles. We just did it as a tester and we were really shocked at how well it did. We actually moved to New York for a while because we felt that if you want to do well in America you've got to understand America and the Americans."

Do you feel then that CLAYTOWN TROUPE has more of an empathy with the US scene than the UK scene?

"I don't think there is a UK scene. There's a lot of bands out there but the Rock scene has been completely split up. The bands are all so different. In America the music they're listening to is more alternative Rock which is why places like Seattle are producing bands like NIRVANA, ALICE IN CHAINS, PEARL JAM, SOUNDGARDEN - all those left-of-field bands who are so exciting. It is

more of a 'scene' than Britain and I can relate better to it. You can see all those bands working together. In America, because things are so slow moving, bands get the chance to flourish whereas in Britain it's like you're in one minute, you're out the next."

I get the impression from what you're saying that there's more of a brotherhood amongst the bands in the States.

"Yeah, they all accept each other and relate to each other. Whereas in Britain it's like if you have any degree of success there's a thousand people lining up to kick your legs away. We found this. I mean, we were quite successful, we sold a lot of records and we played some big gigs. But very few people stood up and made a point of supporting us. Everyone was closet Claytown fans, because we're not so immediate or fashion orientated."

Did you record the new LP in the States?

"Yeah, in New York. We recorded all through last summer at Hit Factory - the studio JOHN LENNON had been in the night he got shot. It's got quite a heritage. You see people like PAUL SIMON coming in and KEITH RICHARDS wandering around - which is quite exciting for a bunch of English lads like us. The studio itself was great. It was a good decision to record over there because you take

English money over there and it suddenly becomes worth double, so we could work in a better studio and make a better record for as much as it would cost us to do it in a medium sized studio in Britain and come out with a medium sized record. We worked in a big studio and we came out with a big record and had damned good fun in the process."

Who produced it?

"A guy called Dave Bianco. He's done a lot of remixes for Def Jam. He did AEROSMITH, LITTLE CAESAR, DANZIG and some work with THE BLACK CROWES, but he'd never produced anything. We just happened to like him so we said 'come and produce us'. I mean, we'd worked on these songs for a year so half the work was done anyway. He just had

to come in and tweak the knobs as it were. He really enjoyed it and we really enjoyed working with him because he knew exactly where the classic Rock sound was coming from. We were very happy."

Would you say that you have achieved what you set out to do with the album then?

"It's the album that we wanted. How people will accept it - I don't know. You have to accept it for what it is, not what the band stands for or where the band has been before. I

find it really exciting compared to the first one. I love the first one but I just find this one so much more exciting to listen to. The way I see it, we're more of a Triumph than we are a Yamaha Virago, we're more classic in our design and sound. You put a Triumph motorcycle next to a Yamaha motorcycle and a Triumph is gonna sound far more real."

There's been quite a shift in emphasis away from the Red Indian influences of 'Through the Veil'.

"Well, part of my life is involved in that but it annoyed me personally the way we used that whole ethnic thing. We pay a great deal of attention to the natural order of things and the tribal people do represent that. The natural order of things is not embodied in a motorcar, it's not embodied in a tower block and that's something that we recognised and we pay respect to it on our records. It's that simple really."

I recall you being criticised for supposedly following a similar path to THE CULT because of your Red Indian imagery.

"Yeah, that's why we stayed away from it this time. But the people that bought the records - the people that came to see us - looked beyond that pigeonhole that we got and that was always a comfort to us. Looking back on

it, we could have been more subtle but I thought 'fuck it - we might as well go in with a sledgehammer rather than a matchstick!' The Indian thing did get people's back up, but more in the media than on the street."

The lyrics on the new album seem to be quite bitter and full of angst. Where did you take your lyrical inspirations from?

"I think with this one it was just that I had more time to think about it and get stuff out that wasn't at a level that I could write about for the first album. With the first album we wrote the songs, we toured for six months and we signed a record deal and then we were on television and we were selling out gigs. It was also so quick - the first album was written in a month you know. With the words for the new album I just wanted something that was completely against the 'chick in the back of my car and I got pissed up on Jack Daniels last night' kind of bullshit. So I drew from personal experiences, more from my own feelings than I did for the first album - just to put some black in the whiteness and the drabness of modern Rock bands lyrics. I wanted something that people can relate to and everyone looks at the world in that way generally and occasionally you get happy. My words are truth."

What effect are you hoping the album will have on your fans?

"We just want to give them something fresh, something exciting; something that's a little seasoned as well. We wanted to give them a piece of leather rather than a piece of cloth - if you see what I mean. What's important for us really is to see kids that are opening up their minds to Rock really. I hope we can do a little bit to open up their minds to the fact that everybody is not the same - 'cos there are different kinds of people right across the board in the CLAYTOWN TROUPE audience - and offer them something a little bit different, a little bit stylish."

How did you latch onto the PEARL JAM tour?

"I've known them for a couple of years and we feel that we're the closest band in Britain to them. We've upset a lot of people by getting this tour because we've been away for two years. But we asked the band about doing the tour months ago when we heard they were coming over. We even talked about the possibility of them coming over to support us when we released this album if they hadn't done anything in Britain by that time. As it is, I'm fucking honoured to play with them 'cos they are my favourite band."

And there is still the inevitable 'last word' to come...

"If we deserve any success we certainly deserve it off this record, because it is so much better than the first one. And I think it's time there were more bands like us standing up speaking their minds and creating real Rock music."

LYN GUY

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