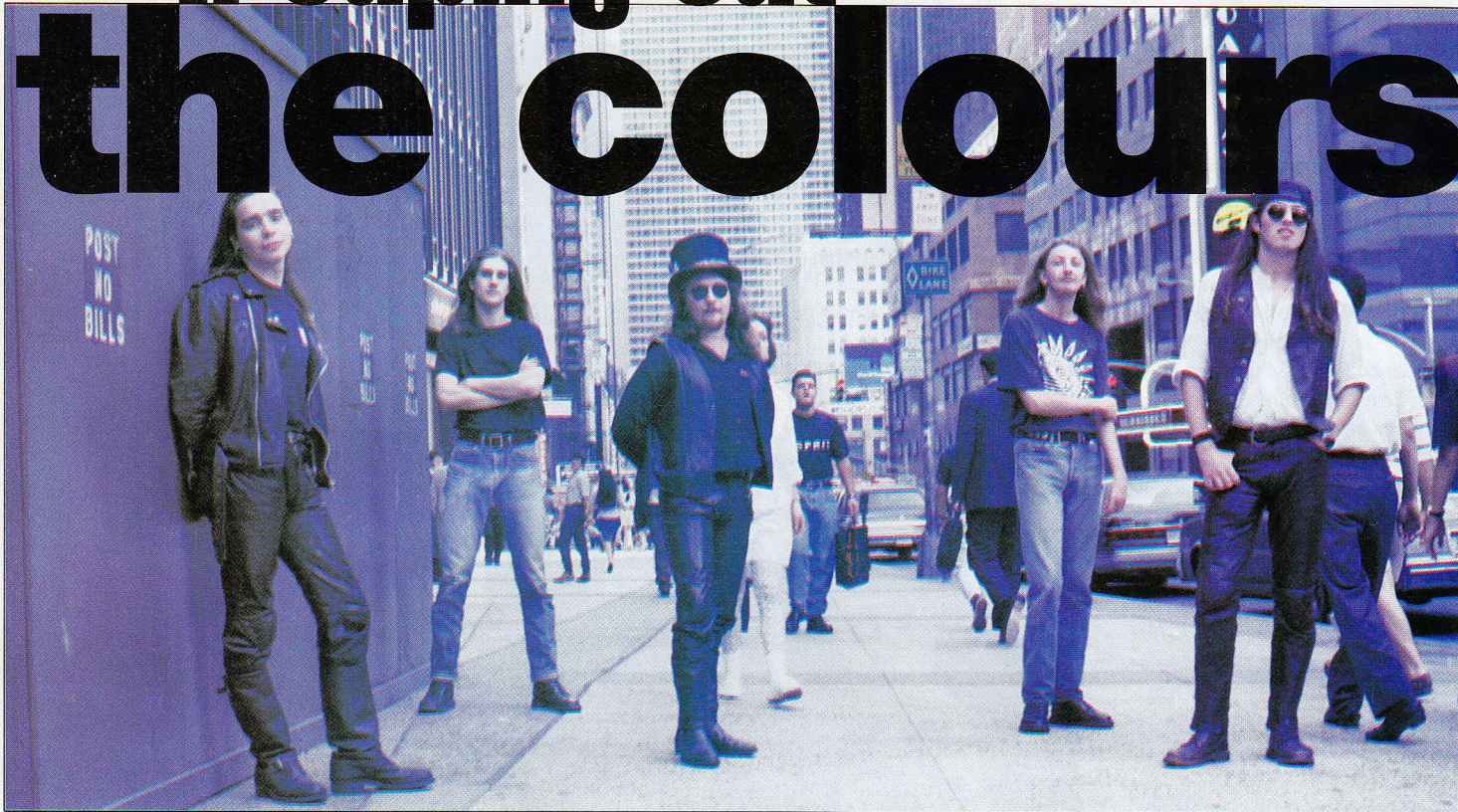


Trouping out the colours



PIC: STEPHANE YOUNG

The usually very noisy CLAYTOWN TROUPE have been suspiciously quiet for some time now. But as TRISH JAEAGA discovers, with a rocktastic new album 'Out There', and a new record deal, the band have got plenty to shout about again.

Yeah, they're back, they're baadd, and this time there's no stopping them! After a widely acclaimed debut album, 'Through The Veil', and constant touring, culminating in a sell-out show at London's Astoria Theatre, things went quiet for quite a while on the Troupe front. In fact the Claytown Troupe have been out of sight for nearly two years now, but that doesn't mean they haven't been busy. Having signed a new deal with EMI in America, and written, recorded and now released a new album 'Out There', the initial Claytown sound has developed into a sleek beast that goes straight for the jugular, while maintaining a brooding, powerful heaviness.

"In the beginning was the word, and the word was testicles..." It's comforting to know that some things don't change. Vocalist Christian Riou's toilet humour is still very much prominent, having even signed into the hotel under the name Juan Testicle. He is, however, still very serious when it comes to discussing the band, and the machinations of the music industry.

"We decided to leave Island after the takeover from Polygram, because we didn't think some of the people who took over would understand what the band was about," he says. "We also needed a change. We took two years to write this new album and when you put that kind of commitment and that kind of work into something you've got to make sure that the people working around it are right."

It seems incongruous that you took time out when things were going so well for the band.

Having built up a large following and won over a lot of the critics, most bands would have capitalised by continuing to churn out the goods.

"We just needed a break from it," Chris explains. "We'd played for years in sweaty little clubs really working hard, then suddenly we were selling out all these big venues. It was like the real impact had gone. We just wanted to go away and redefine and rediscover ourselves."

"Living in New York for a while was the froth on top of the beer. It kind of all brought it to a head, and we're all much better for it. A lot of bands are too scared to wait some time and write a really good album, because they don't get paid by the record company until they've got some product. That wasn't important to us. Let some other sucker go and release an album every year to pay for their mortgages. We just wanted to make a record and release it when the time was right."

According to Christian that time is now, with the new stream of more alternative rock bands.

"In 1990, rock became a dirty word for most people. There's so many good bands coming through now, like Soundgarden, Pearl Jam and Alice in Chains, who are redefining rock as being something off the wall, something alternative, but at the same time with a hard edge which is what it should be about."

"It shouldn't be about singing about cars and girls, it should be about real experiences, which is what those bands do. Unfortunately the majority of the rock scene in 1990 wasn't doing that. Now it seems to be coming more real, which is why the

time is right now to release this record."

Produced by David Bianco in the Hit Factory, New York (where Lennon last recorded), 'Out There' is proof at last that Britain has still got the capability to produce rock bands that can retain their originality without becoming 'Americanised'. Despite their time in the States and signing the deal with the American office of EMI, the Claytown Troupe remain resoundingly British.

"LA is about who you are, not what you are and New York is about what you are, not who you are," states Christian, with a grin. "In New York you can just hang and meet people and meet other bands. We chose to record there rather than Britain because our label and producer were American. It's the album we wanted, how people react to it is their own business."

It seems ridiculous that a homegrown band has to look to the States for recognition of their worth.

"The rock scene in Britain is getting really healthy again, but it still seems that a lot of the music press and the people at the record companies are still very narrow minded," Chris sighs. "They're all very straight ex-train spotters. They listen to rock music, but they don't fully understand it. In America they respect rock because they grew up with it, and they live it. It seems that in Britain everything is viewed through binoculars - everything looks so great far away that they fail to notice what's under their nose."

With the strength of 'Out There', hopefully a few people will be getting their eyes wiped. ●