

"January 29, 1977"

NEW MUSICAL EXPRESS



"I hate respectable faggots" Pic: CHALKIE DAVIES

## "LET'S GO CRUISE THE GAY BARS"

TOM ROBINSON MEETS JULIE BURCHILL

IT'S EIGHT O'CLOCK in Fulham's Golden Lion, and Tom Robinson is due to play at nine thirty. He says maybe we could go cruise the fag bars till then. With all the delicacy of a steamhammer, I say I hate those places. What kind of creep would go there?

Tom Robinson, apparently. "Sometimes I used to get so lonely there was nothing else to do."

The idea of this boy being lonely is ludicrous. Were he heterosexual, there's no way Tom Robinson's angelic visage wouldn't be plastered all over every pubescent boudoir in the land. He's all eyes and curls and real pale skin, the stuff teen dreams are sculptured from. If he wanted to sing "her" instead of "him", he'd make a mint.

Tom Robinson, singer-songwriter, late of Cafe Society and an institute

for the maladjusted, now of the Tom Robinson Band and Gay Switchboard, is tired of waiting for Konk. In particular he's tired of waiting for the Kink who controls Konk, one Ray Davies, who signed him when Tom was with Cafe Society, three years ago. The contract has four years yet to run, and Davies has released just one album. It's Ill-Will A-GoGo between these two, and not without reason.

We mean to talk about music, but instead we talk about the Sex Pistols and the misguided misogyny of T. S. Eliot and how it feels to be a faggot in the U.K. '77. It's o.k. You wouldn't choose it if you were given a say in the matter, but you get used to it.

Tom though has gone over to the enemy. He says he had his first experience with a girl two months ago. "Me and Ray Davies were at this party, and she couldn't decide which one of us she wanted. First she'd come on really strong to me, and then to him. And Ray's so beautiful: part

of the reason I signed with him is because he's so sexy.

"I was amazed when I ended up with her".

Didja like it, Tom?

"Well . . . yeah. It was really interesting. It was so different. Not a patch on the real thing though!"

We exchange Knowing Smirks. Tom's 27 and says that this was his first girl, ever. He spent the years from 16 to 23 in a home for maladjusted boys, which can hardly have been conducive to heterosexuality. But he loved the place. "It was a haven, after hospitals and being pumped full of drugs".

Tom wears a Rock Against Racism sticker and curses Eric Clapton. A Sell Out. The natural condition of the Seventies, Selling Out. All down the line. He reels off the names. Dana Gillespie, Joan Armatrading, Roberta Flack . . .

Nona Hendryx, I counter. Patti Smith.

"Oh . . . I was talking to a guy from Patti's band, and he said she was a real closet case."

I thought the only thing Patti kept in her closet was Tom Verlaine, but you never can tell.

Tom looks up and says the Stones are like a dinosaur attached to an iron lung. Has he always been political?

"Believe it or not, the thing which made me political was touring with Barclay James Harvest, when I was with Cafe Society. Barclay James Harvest are such a bunch of rednecks . . . they used to con the money out of these kids and herd them into a hall and feed them song after song of knitted-cardigan-by-the-T.V. middle class platitudes . . . it just annoyed me so much. But of course Cafe Society were respectable boys. I hate respectable people. Most of all I hate respectable faggots.

"Right . . . the whole syndrome of two guys setting up house together with a garage and a mortgage and talking over the fence to the neighbours . . . it's just so sick. Because the minute their backs are turned, those same neighbours are gonna be sniggering behind their hands. We should accept we're different, and live by it".

How do the people who hire you treat you?

"Well . . . in this pub, if you're a closet case and you just come in and eye all the boys over your glass, you're likely to get your nose opened. But if you're honest with them and don't pretend, they'll treat you fine".

Whereas the world will treat you fine if you're a closet case and crucify you if you're honest . . .

Tom recalls how someone from the Festival Of Light called up LBC to rant wildly when Tom sang on there. The D.J. almost lost his job.

How's Ray, Tom?

"Oh . . ." Tom's eyes grow ominous. "I'm signed to a seven year contract and it's got four years to run . . . there's nothing I can do."

Won't he let you go?

Tom shakes his head. "When I dedicated 'Tired Of Waiting For You' to him onstage at the Nashville, he was there and was so angry that two days later he sent me a letter offering me a release from the recording contract. That was over a month ago.

"Nothing's happened."

What are you living on?

"Well . . . we just live on what we get from gigs. We just want to play, as much as we can. The thing is, people have to pigeon-hole you, make you safe. Once I'm pigeon-holed and filed away as a faggot who sings faggot songs, I'm not a threat anymore. But I don't want to be known as a fag. I want to be known as a singer."

Just then a man approached and informed Tom that they'd obtained a gig at a London college.

"Oh great!" said Tom.

"For their Gay Association".

© JULIE BURCHILL



# TRB

## TOM ROBINSON BAND

### PRESS CUTTINGS

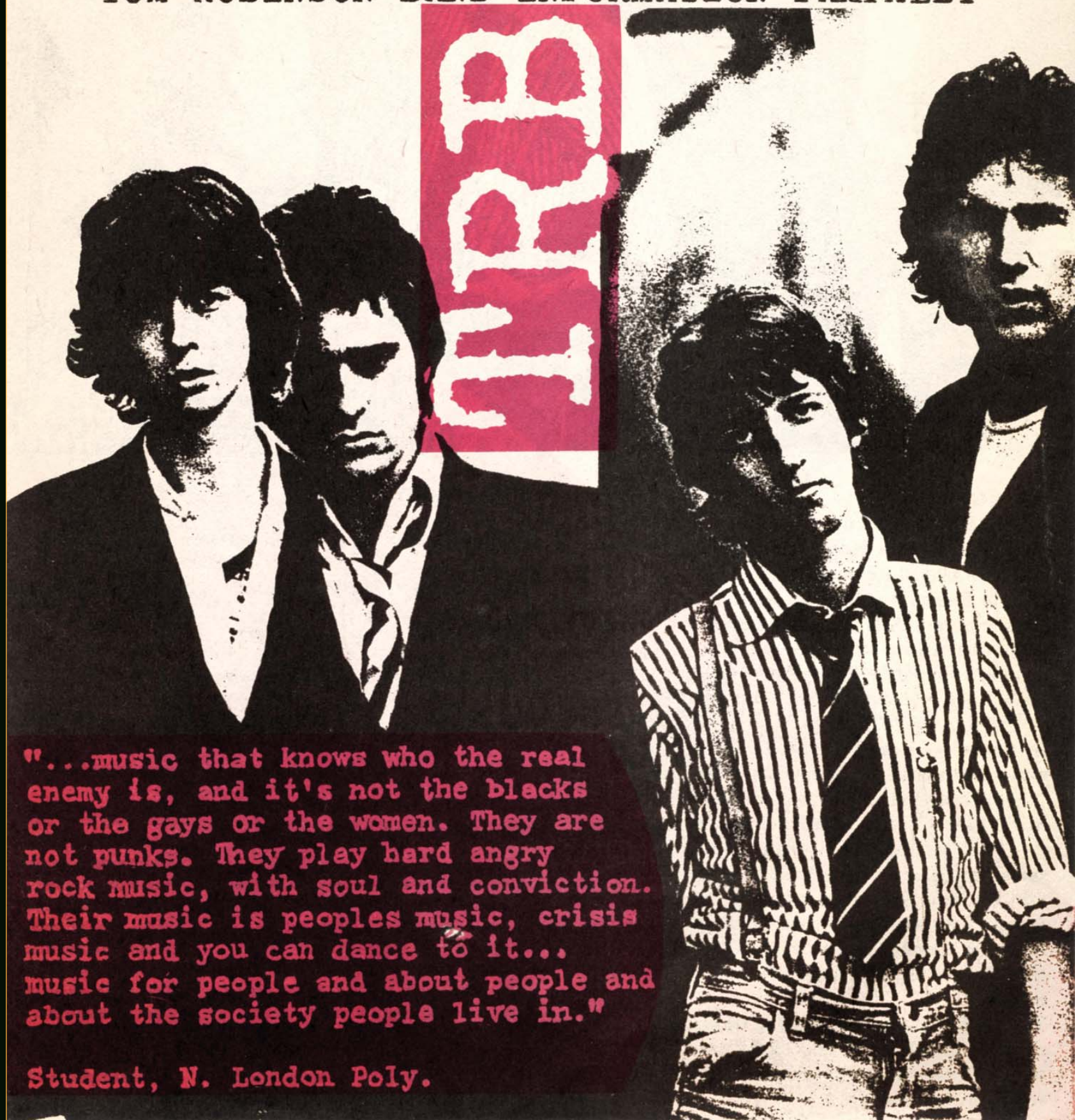


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THE FALL OF 77



TOM ROBINSON BAND INFORMATION PAMPHLET



"...music that knows who the real enemy is, and it's not the blacks or the gays or the women. They are not punks. They play hard angry rock music, with soul and conviction. Their music is peoples music, crisis music and you can dance to it... music for people and about people and about the society people live in."

Student, N. London Poly.

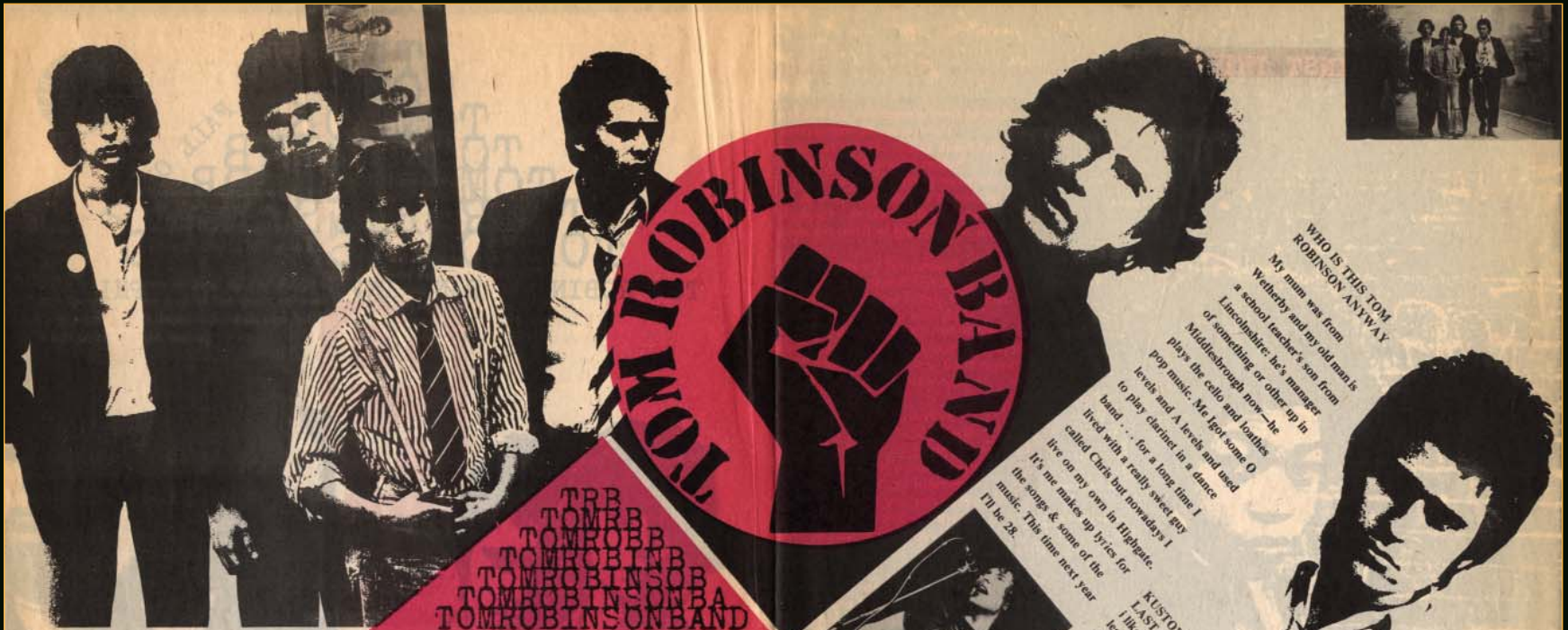




# TRB

# TOM ROBINSON BAND

# PRESS CUTTINGS



### BACKGROUND

The TRB emerged from N. London music scene centred around the Hope & Anchor at end of last year. We played for anyone that'd have us: seedy pubs in Finsbury Park/The Institute of Contemporary Arts/Uckfield Youth Club/Chelmsford Prison/Stowe School/Tonypandy Royal Naval Reserve Club/Rock Against Racism/Aberdeen University/The Brecknock in Camden Town.

In August we signed to EMI Records—(Yes, the mobb that signed the Pistols, so what)—the first single released at end of September is

**MOTORWAY:** a fave stage number kinda catchy. (We'll tell ya what the words are actually about some time later). Flip is I SHALL BE

**RELEASED:** for prisoner George Ince currently doing 15 on what looks suspiciously like a police fit-up ask Clement Freud or Ian Mikardo MP if ya don't believe us. An Album's due to follow in a few months.

The TRB will continue playing up and down the country though to the end of the year: current week's gigs are always listed in Sounds and NME if you want to come and see us.

### WHO'S WHO

- Danny Kustow ..... gtr. punk/teen appeal backup vcl.
- Brian Taylor (The Dolphin) ..... drum delinquent/backup vcl.
- Mark Amber ..... pno/org/
- T. Robinson ..... boss/bass/vcls
- Mick Exeter ..... HGV/hard labour heavy dooty beard.
- Colin Bell ..... wheeling/dealing/ telephones etc.

### MARK AMBLER SPEAKS OUT

I first started with classical piano lessons when I was 8, and then had lessons with Stan Tracy (he still doesn't get the recognition he deserves), and then I went to the Royal College of Music which was really posy, and I left after a year because I did crest FA. Then I started my A levels, but at a school that has packed up now because the bloke in charge ran off with all the money. And I was very ill so I did get my English,

Music an' Zen Budism, so in other words the only qualifications I have are a proficiency cycling certificate plus numerous stupid grades in music. Anyway seeing all I wanted to do was make a lot of money and buy a villa in Spain with my shady lady, I decided to become a rock&roller. So I picked up an MM and rang up all the ads. Eventually I got accepted as a bass player with the TRB, but then I told them I could play keyboard so I was accepted as a keyboard player. Anyway thats all I know.

### WHO IS THIS TOM ROBINSON ANYWAY

My mum was from Wetherby and my old man is a school teacher's son from Lincolnshire; he's manager of something or other up in Middlesbrough now—he plays the cello and loathes pop music. He got some O levels and A levels and used to play clarinet in a dance band ... for a long time I lived with a really sweet guy called Chris but nowadays I live on my own in Higgate. It's me makes up lyrics for the songs & some of the music. This time next year I'll be 28.

### KUSTOW'S LAST STAND

I like playing with Tom he's a good band leader for every wrong note we play on stage we have to rehearse an extra four after which we hate him. I went to the work in a hotel & on building site a bit of tom and when I was CIRAD I left for the big lights of London did a bit of work in a hotel & on building site an I kept having more flirts with my old man then he kicked me out some an I started getting in with bad company late this showband then I heard cafe society some old group had broken up an I came back to London cos he asked me to join the TRB an I said 'eh well alright, I've been here ever since.

### BRIAN'S CORNER DOLPHINARIUM NEWS FROM SUNNYSIDE FISHTANK

Good Morning campers, The time is 5.30am and all is well at sunnyside aquarium except it is pissing down. Breakfast will be served in ten minutes in Wolverhampton. Today for your delectation we have the normal boring jumping through the silly hoop, and triple somersaults in the pike position. Also we have a campers' visit to behind the seans: marvel at the trainers playing cards (pontoon I s'pose—ed), be amazed at the cooks preparing the food specially imported from Herringay N4, and there are lots of fins for the kids to do with a long stick that's got a hook on the end.

NB. the Management hold no responsibility against loss of limb.25p deposit on wellies. THE BOSS.





# TRB

## TOM ROBINSON BAND

### PRESS CUTTINGS



#### UP AGAINST THE WALL

Darkhaired dangerous schoolkids  
Vicious suspicious sixteen  
Jet black blazers at the bus stop  
Sullen unhealthy and mean  
Teenage guerillas on the tarmac  
Fighting in the middle of the road  
Supercharged FSIE's on the asphalt  
The kids are coming in from the cold

High wire fencing on the playground  
High rise housing all around  
High rise prices on the high street  
High time to pull it all down  
White boys kicking in a window  
Straight girls watching where they gone  
Never trust a copper in a crime car  
Just whose side are you on?

Consternation in Mayfair  
Rioting in Notting Hill Gate  
Fascists marching on the High Street  
Cutting back your welfare state  
Operator get me the hot line  
Father can you hear me at all?  
Telephone kiosk out of order  
Spraycan writing on the wall

**CHORUS:**  
Look out listen can you hear it  
Panic in the County Hall  
Look out listen can you hear it  
Whitehall up against the wall  
Up against the wall.

the tom robinson band have a monthly duplicated news bulletin which is distributed at gigs. copies available free from linda cooke, 25 montpelier grove, LONDON NW5 and include information on ROCK AGAINST RACISM, RELEASE, SPARE RIB, GAY SWITCHBOARD, NATIONAL ABORTION CAMPAIGN and GEORGE INCE.

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March 19th, 1977

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## SINGLES

### The answer is a Brick...



THE CLASH: first meaningful event of the year?

**THE CLASH: White Riot/1977 (CBS).** Last year's words belong to last year's language and next year's words wait for another voice. Look out, listen, can you hear it?

It's pointless to categorise this with the other records: "White Riot" isn't a poxy single of the week, it's the first meaningful event all year. Try and discount it. Go on, say they sold out to the enemy at CBS, say it's another idle London fad irrelevant to the lives of working people, say it's all a clever hype that's conned everyone, say it's just the 60s rehashed an' you can't make out the words.

Say what you like, you still can't discount it coz Clash aren't just a band, and this is more than just a single. There's a book written by a trad fan in 1963 saying how shoddy The Beatles were, how ripped off from R'n'B, how they could never last in the world of Tin Pan Alley. They didn't last in it, they took it to pieces.

Whatever your standpoint everyone basically agrees there are two sides. You know it's coming, we know it's coming and they know it's coming. Clash are the writing on their wall. The recorded version of "White Riot" is one minute 58 seconds of buzzsaw guitars, Simonon's pumping offbeat bass, an insolent slurred vocal and sheer musical aggro. Won't pick up much airplay coz you can't make out the words — it'd pick up much less if you could: "Black men gotta lotta problems but they don't mind throwin' a brick... white people go to school where they teach you how to be thick... White riot, wanna riot of my own..."

Flip is "1977", already well known to those in the know: "No Elvis, Beatles or Rolling Stones in 1977".

Hmm, so how come the riff is pure Kinks? No matter — forget the medium, and message you can get from any other single in the shops. This one has the message. Blag it, steal it, borrow it, tape it off the radio if they'll play it. Buy it an' you're a wimp, miss it and you're a real turkey.

**DAVID DUNDAS: Another Funny Honey (Air).** "Jeans on" soundalike, complete with mild attack of the strings. The String Section is an abomination which should've been stamped out along with the Black Plague. Every "commercial" record in the pile, black or white, from gushy ballads to jolly pop tunes to hardline disco fodder is contaminated by cancerous violins creeping in through the gaps. A string section, left unchecked, spreads into every available nook and cranny in the song until the artist drowns in a nightmare of syrup and candyfloss.

Why those singles aimed uncompromisingly at the Top 30 should be specially prone to the violin virus is a mystery — maybe the TOTP orchestra is contagious. Dundas hasn't got it too bad here and may pull through, no thanks to Roger Greenaway. Intriguing line: "dirty habits destroy my blood and it's beginning to show".

**100 TON & A FEATHER: Just To Be Close To You (Pye).** Jonathan King's okay. His records stink. A few honourable exceptions: this isn't one of them.

**LYNSEY DE PAUL & MIKE MORAN: Rock Bottom (Polydor).** Our song for Europe. The title sez it all.

**HENRY MANCINI: Theme From Charlie's Angels (RCA).** For sheer skill in Musak orchestration Hank is still streets ahead of upstarts like B. White and I. Hayes. This could've been a smash in the discos if he'd shot the drummer and producer in time.

**JOHN CHRISTIE: Always Be Your Valentine (EMI).** Within the MOR field, for what it's worth, Dave Clark's production pisses all over the MacCauley / Cook / Greenaways of this world. John Christie sounds, a bit like Christopher Rainbow:

"... They were people we knew, they blew out dinner for two, and I drank too much French wine." A miss.

**THE BATCHELORS featuring CON CLUSKY produced by TONY HATCH: Tom Between Two Lovers (Galaxy).** Violin count 10, TOTP quality 1, lyrical content 0, originality 0.

**EDDIE RABBITT: Two Dollars In The Juke Box (Elektra).** Two minutes 22 seconds of classy rock'n'roll. Slinky piano/bass backbeat, apt guitar work and authentic vocals: "Two dollars in the juke box, five dollars in the bottle... and ten more just in case that don't do the trick." Adding pedal steel was a bit suspect, and the production's too immaculate to really please the purists. Flip reminiscent of the American Housewives.

**VICKI BRITTEN: Flight 309 To Tennessee (Arista).** Julie Burchill's right about Arista — first The Kinks and now this ghastly MOR drivel: "She was a beauty queen... she came in between... Writing credited to Ronnie Scott — Whaaat? Actually The Kinks are rather good, come to think of it.

**LIAR: Straight From The Hip Kid (Decca).** Bet they're great live. Nice writing, guitar work that's pure vintage Kossoff, band that sounds like it's enjoying itself. Be enormous in a year or two, but this song's nothing spectacular.

**WOODY WOODSMAN-SEY'S U BOAT: Star Machine (Bronze).** "What's his name, lost his fame, what a shame... His Cadillac, was taken back, who's to blame... It ain't easy, it ain't easy... Melody and chords pedestrian as the lyrics. Quite nicely played and Gerry Bron's production (vocals particularly) is crystal clear. You can hear every word: rather a pity. If U boat ever make it big it'll probably be thanks to the love, care, money, time and promotion lavished on them by their record company.

**MIGHTY DIAMONDS: Coming Through (Virgin).** "Reggae!" "SHIT!!!" "Reggae!" "SHIT!!!" All you members of the love and peace generation at the Reading Police Festival who threw dirt-filled Coke cans at The Diamonds last year, you got cloth ears, closed minds and manners of pigs. Okay, U-Roy

was nothing special but The Diamonds sang their hearts out for you and you didn't even listen. All the love and peace you could want were up there on the stage — at the climax the lead singer raised his arm to salute you, caught a flying can, and held it aloft in triumph through to the end, singing all the while.

"Coming Through" is about what people like you do to your sisters and brothers and about what the law did to you all weekend. The Diamonds are gentle and mild about the whole thing, slightly puzzled by it... the thing that I can't



REVIEWED THIS WEEK by TOM ROBINSON

understand, I'm just another man". But too bad, they say, it's your hangup — I'm coming through anyway whatever you throw at me. It all seems a bit saintly compared with Clash.

Curiously the 'A' side is a bland ditty called "Country Living" with birds tweeting and that spine-jarring backbeat ironed right out. Sounds like a self-conscious attempt at packaging for a more commercial market — not quite a string section number, but getting on that way. What Happened?

Neil Spencer points out that Alan Toussaint's was the producer in which case A.T. has a lot to answer for. But on the flip "Coming Through" is so strong it stands up to even Toussaint's emetic cosmetics. Live, they were sensational. **BERNI FLINT: I Don't Wanna Put A Hold On You (EMI).** All MOR singles are MOR but some are more MOR than others. This one's in with a chance since Berni Flint is young, outrageously goodlooking, and has been winning *Opportunity Knocks* for the past 57 weeks or so. Don't really see how it can fail. Sigh.

**THE MANHATTANS: It's You (CBS).** Tired production line 'soul' with nothing to recommend it. Utterly ordinary.

**MINNIE RIPPERTON: Stick Together (Epic).** More production line soul, but danceable with mildly infectious chorus. Shame really, when "Loving You" was so unusual. S. Wonder credited as co-writer.

**DRIFTERS: I'll Know When True Love Really Passes By (Arista).** Jeez! Come back Lieber and Stoller, all is forgiven. Unspeakingly turgid song, limp back vocals castrated by insipid white production. Dear Christ, what can Clive Davis be playing at? **STYLISTICS: 7,000 Dollars And You (H&L).** Groan... oh no. Shoulda stuck with The Drifters' part-Tinians trumpets, Mancini organ and perfunctory L.A. percussion. Lyrically The Stylistics are twee at the best of times, but this is excruciating — it'll make TOTP for sure. A smash. Urgh.

**JIMMY HELMS: Putting It Down To You (Pye).** Ah, this sounds better. Anything would sound better than that bilge. A harmless and unexceptional ballad — pretty ordinary but quite well put together. Bearable lyrics, good singing — could even be a minor hit if it makes the playlist.

**DRAGONS: Misbehaving (DJM)** Hardworking Bristol band well worth seeing, with strong London reputation carved out at the Golden Lion. Pleasant single with creamy Pilot/Hollies harmonies, clean cascading guitars and fat tasty drums all put together with a purity and commitment you can't fake and which you can't knock. C'mon you base DJ's, give 'em some airplay. Personally I prefer something altogether nastier. But given a couple years in the biz...

**AVERAGE WHITE BAND: Going Home (Atlantic).** Unmistakable AWB sound — crisp incisive drums, skeletal bass line, unique sax sound, semi scat vocal, superb Fender guitar. The Average White's arguably have only one number in their repertoire, which they play with consummate skill. Call it what you like: "Pick Up The Pieces", "Cut The Cake", or "Going Home" — makes no odds. They play it again live on the flip, where it's called "I'm The One".

**SAMMY HAGAR: Catch The Wind (Capitol).** How to transform lightweight pop into blistering soul as on Cocker's "Help From My Friends". Donovan's inoffensive ditty's a rather ambitious canvas to work on, but Hagar's voice got the range and quality to bring it off. The ponderous, melodramatic orchestrated production has neither, however. Zilch.

**GARY WRIGHT: Are You Weeping (WB)** Simultaneous and aggressive use of at least

five keyboards; of all white whizzkid synthcrats (Rick Van Emeraz & Co) Wright is easily the least obnoxious. Drives along quite nicely — mainstream Spooky logically developed through the late 70's. Zzzz.

**GARY BENSON: Can't Let You Go (State)** Martin Ford was MD for my ol' mates Barclay James Harvest and their 90 piece backing orchestra, succeeding the peerless Robert Godfrey. Here responsible for bland MOR production of bland MOR ballad. Ms. Coon sez G. Benson is better looking than David Soul. I say big deal.

**RY COODER: He'll Have To Go (Reprise).** Sun goes down over the prairie, rockin' chair on the porch, liquid Mexican accordian, authentic down home guitar, tequila in the bottle, easygoing bass and drums — almost hear the boardwalk creaking underfoot. Normally hate this kinda music (an old Jim-Reeves hit for Christake!) but Cooder's such a master it's completely irresistible. Honest playing that sends shivers down the spine. 'B' side is Leadbelly's "Bourgeois Blues": musically impeccable, vocally a pastiche Led himself could be proud of. Ethnically v.suspect — can blue men sing the whites?

**PETER GABRIEL: Solsbury Hill (Charisma).** Never heard Gabriel's Genesis becoz I hated 'em, so approached this totally without prejudice. In a morass of tediously predictable singles (for TOTP add strings, for discos add wah wah) "Solsbury Hill" stood out like the Titanic. Acoustic-based backing in great hypnotic

swathes of 7/8, restrained orchestration, real attack on the vocals and a complete departure from the routine Verse/Chorus/Middle 8/Instrumental format. Great lyrics ("don't need a replacement" rhymes with "what the smile on my face meant"). A bit calculated — maybe, but what the hell. Enjoy it.

**PIERO UMIANI: Mah Na Mah Na (EMI International).** Bloody stupid record which eats into your brain. Idiot scat singing that'll have Muppet fans helpless in the aisles. Me included. Probably a smash. Don't buy it.

**ELVIN BISHOP: Twist'n'Shout (Capricorn).** White boys who got rich playing de blues in the 60's turn their hands to reggae in the 70's. If Elvin's actually taking lead vocal on this his black rip-off technique's improved 9,000 per cent in authenticity since Butterfield days. Eat your heart out, Slowhand.

**NEIL SEDAKA: Ebony Angel (MCA).** OK, so "The Queen Of 1964" was offensively patronising to women in general and groups in particular, but after all it was cleverly written, quite a catchy little tune, and (as Mister Sedaka himself wrote to *MelodyMaker*), only meant in fun. So letting bygones be bygones, let's give Neil's newie a spin: "I told you that we're getting married... now don't you try changing my mind" Ah yes, I'm all for this equality bit. "Baby the times are a-changing, and I want the whole world to see... you're my Ebony Angel, who cares what people may say." Oh I see, she's a darkie as well as a woman. Dashed decent of the chap to offer to marry her at all really, in the face of public opinion. Can't understand why she's being so reluctant — rather ungrateful, what? Dreary, overproduced and patronising.

**JERRY LEE LEWIS: "Old Black Joe"/"Return of Jerry Lee" (Charly).** Guitars of rock'n'roll have the most loyal fans in the world. If you're either and don't know about Charly Records, check 'em out at 9 Beacon Road W6 where Waxie Maxie has just tracked down and released these two Jerry Lee originals, including the rare flip. Actually it's sad to see all that dedication spent on a man who spurns his fans, and who's gotta be the Great Original Redneck of all time. (Bet the coloured fans go a bomb on a white rockabilly send-up of "Old Black Joe" down in de cottonfields.) If rock'n'roll's your bag, why not groove to the bands happening here and now who're really keeping the faith alive, like Shaky and the Sunsets.

**DARYL HALL & JOHN OATES**  
Their new single  
**BACK TOGETHER AGAIN**  
RCA







**I**F YOU go round the north edge of the City of London, swing left into Whitechapel Road, round past Tubby Isaac's shellfish stall and keep on through Mile End and Leytonstone and straight up the A11, you'll arrive about an hour later in Chelmsford. Like any of those Essex suburban wasteland towns, it has little to recommend it but what it does have is a prison and the Tom Robinson Band were performing there for the benefit and delectation of the "inmates".

Outwardly, H.M. Prison Chelmsford displays all the concrete paranoia of a state bent on adhering to an outmoded concept of penology: mausoleum brickwork, wood covered steel plate doors, TV cameras and Startrek 'air-lock' double doors operated by a prison officer from behind bulletproof glass.

Inside, despite having a reputation as an easy going prison (as they go), there's still twenty foot metal mesh fences with barbed wire coils on top and when it comes to rocking time, the prisoners are still led to their seats ("and you better stay in 'em") by warders, and the dogs and their handlers are never far away.

The phrase "captive audience" was self-evidently never more true. And knowing that there's no real free choice being exercised by the audience makes the band more than a little nervous at 'curtains up light time'.

Any band that goes to play in a prison enters into a finely balanced equation between "Us" and "Them", "screws" and "cons" and, however they feel, the band has to decide which side they're on. Tom's bunch plumped unequivocally for the cons and were consequently feeling trepidations at the responsibility.

How that responsibility can be unthinkingly abrogated was cast into relief by the Sex Pistols' visit there a while back. John Rotten Esq.: "Go on, smash up your seats, have a riot." The cons didn't — for the Pistols it would've been just another ban, for the cons it would have meant losing remission, precious days, months, years out of their lives. And, when they didn't wreak havoc, Rotten told them: "You're all dummies ... that's why you're in here ... you're stupid."

Naturally the bitterness that ensued from that little encounter still rankles and, as Tom was told about it before going on, he was determined not to make the same arrogant mistake.

And he didn't. You could still hear the tremors of uncertainty in his voice when he introduced the band at the end of the first number, but by halfway through 'Martin' which they did third, it was clear they were winning.

It's a delightful ironic wisp of a song done with Tom singing, arm round guitarist Danny Kustow. No drums, just a little bass and Danny's walking fingers picking on his prized 1959 Les Paul (he allegedly takes it with him everywhere — well wouldn't you if you had a guitar like that?). To understand why the song marked the breakthrough the band/audience ice, all you have to do is listen to the words.

*"No-one's ever had a brother like Martin  
No-one ever had a brother like him  
Well we used to nick motors for a joy ride  
Till we rammed this Black Maria in an XJ6  
To give my brother time to get clear  
I had to punch a few policemen in before I  
was nicked*

(pause for big, but big cheer from the audience)

*Got borstal for taking and driving away  
And beating up the boys in blue  
But Martin never missed a single visiting day  
With all me racing mags and a little bit of  
news  
Smuggling in ciggies and a little bit of booze  
Well, it was worth it for a brother like  
Martin."*

If you heard that Tom (with Danny) had spent seven years in a home for maladjusted boys you might assume that his empathy for the 'edge of the law' life came from that experience. But you'd be wrong. "Finchton Manor (the home) was great. I have almost nothing but good memories of it," he said.

"We had a greasy slicked hair Fifties rock 'n' roll revival band called the Flying Vultures and a 12-piece dance band — I learned how to do all the arrangements for that from a book by Professor Walter Piston.

"Alexis Korner is another old boy. Finchton was so good that local authorities had to queue up to get their kids in. The guy who ran it (it's closed now) was amazing. He could suss you all out in two minutes of seeing you."

AFTER 'Martin' they kicked into rocking with 'Long Hot Summer'. Tom tells the crowd it's about the heat in New York, which is a little



TOM ROBINSON (right): playing to the ultimate captive audience at Chelmsford prison and bravely slotting in 'I Shall Be Released' as an encore.

## Up against the wall

**In which Tom Robinson goes to jail, does not pass GO, and does not collect £200, etc.**

white lie because it's really about the Stonewall Riots when the New York gay bar fraternity (and sorority) kicked merry hell out of New York's finest. Allen Ginsberg said of the riots: "It was the first time fags lost that hurt wounded look."

And that's important for Tom. He's gay and proud without a trace of a hurt, wounded look, and honestly now, who else could get away with singing the band's theme tune/mill-stone, "Glad To Be Gay" to a crowd of hardened East End street-wise prisoners?

He got away with it partly because it's an excellent song with gallows humour lyrics and partly because of the first line, "The British police are the best in the world", which drew another very loud, very sardonic cheer.

And he did even better with 'Up Against the Wall', the chords of which are clearly stolen from Lou Reed but words-wise it's very much their own.

*"Look out listen. Can you hear it.  
Panic in the County Hall  
Whitehall — up against the wall"*

And, to complete the hat-trick, he won 'em over yet again with the Kinks' oldie 'Set Me Free'. For the benefit of the incarcerated assembly he changed it from 'Set me free, little girl', to 'Set me free, Mr. Reese'. Even beyond that there's a story and a half behind this song. Tom used to be in a band called Café Society who did a pretty dire album for the Kinks' Konk label and got tied up in endless hassles with Kinks' mainman Ray Davies.

"He's a great guy but he's no businessman. He let us do everything but record. They needed the studio for themselves or else a fuse had blown. Whatever excuses, we only got three weeks studio time in two years and that in bits here and there".

So Tom left Café last autumn, mostly in the hope of getting out of the contract with Konk, and formed his own, originally pick-up band. And to rub some salt into the wound he started singing "Set me free . . . Mr. D" which led to a noted-in-the-gossip-columns verbal confrontation with Ray Davies at the Nashville and which seems to have got him out of his con-

tract. The present line-up of the band came together only about two months ago. Old friend Danny "heard about the band and squirmed his way in", taking over as sole guitarist when previous wonder-axe-man-by-all-accounts Anton Mauve left ("he's so talented but he blows everything"). New boys, Mark Amber (keyboards) and Brian Taylor (drums) were the result of an ad in a music paper and several hundred hopeless auditions.

AS AN ensemble they're only just beginning to hit their stride. Mark's losing his former overplaying cleverness and Brian's unusual round-the-top-of-the-kit playing style which is an initial shock, now slots in as a good (if occasionally off the beat) bottom line.

And Danny — Danny thinks he's already a guitar hero the way he struts and preens on-stage, mostly looking like he's got constipation unfortunately. In fact he's disarmingly modest about his playing — wrongly because it's good. He teased a solo on 'Long Hot Summer' that would have made any guitar player smile.

And he sure can play Lou Reed riffs alright — the last number was 'Waiting For My Man'. The music they did well — maybe Mark's synthesiser is naggingly intrusive — but they do it as a gay/drugs parody and that *don't* work.

No matter. Back for an encore. Rock a little and then . . . 'I Shall Be Released'. Given the situation, a brave and daring gambit — it succeeds perfectly, the cons lapping up the fact that somebody seems to care about them. They don't want to leave yet, though it's past closing down time, and insist on calling Tom and the band out to shake hands and bat the breeze a little with some outsiders.

Later, back in the dressing room, a screw said: "That was very dangerous, it could have gone very wrong". He obviously didn't see the same audience kicking at seeing some real live music and appreciating that a band had turned up at last. (There's supposed to be a show every month but the Maniacs and someone else had blown out, so there's been no rocking for three months). What could Tom say but "We'll be back". Well, he did wonder why bigger bands don't play prisons, only the bands that can least afford it.

But, this time round, that was it and all they could do was pack up and go home — just as they were pulling the truck out of the gates, ten million were settling down for 'Porridge' on BBC1, blithely unaware of what it's really like beyond the walls of sitcom humour.

BIRO PENMAN



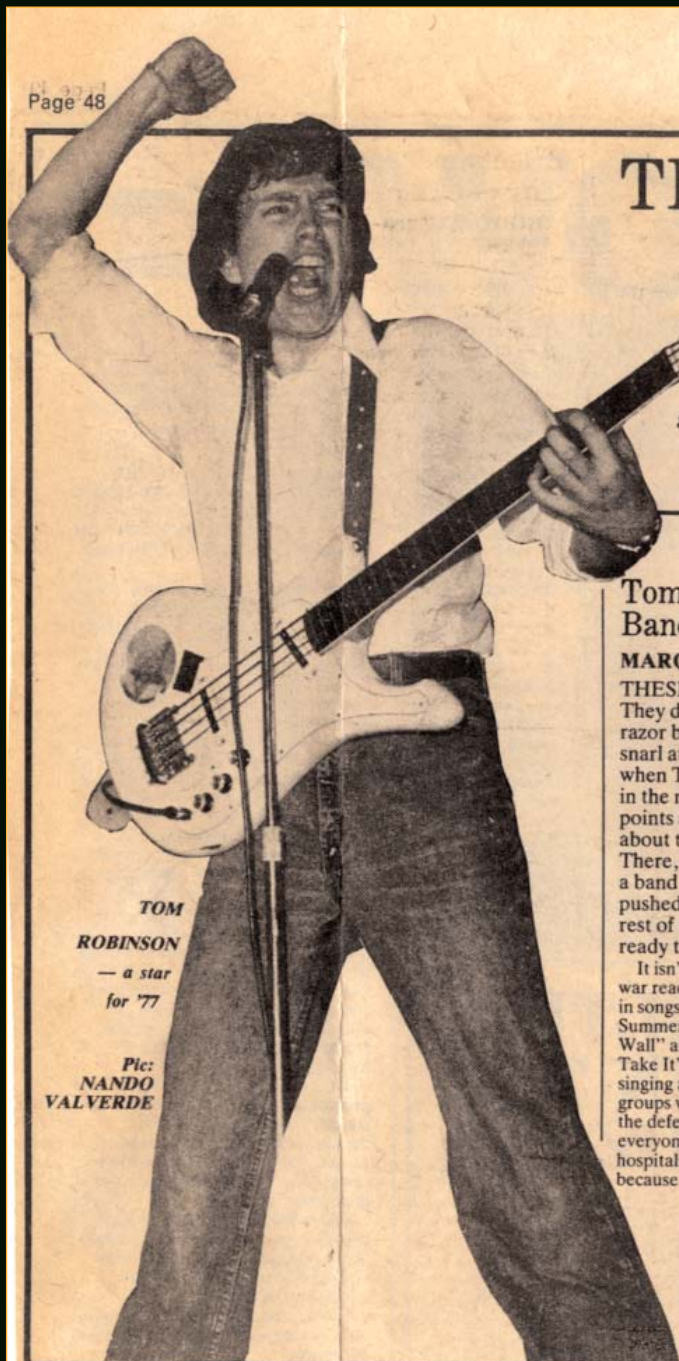




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NEW MUSICAL EXPRESS

September 17th, 1977



**TOM ROBINSON**  
— a star  
for '77

Pic:  
NANDO VALVERDE

## THE MOST IMPORTANT NEW BAND IN BRITAIN

(At least, that's what the ON THE TOWN Editor says, so he's running TWO reviews — and running! Send any complaints to the third taverna on the left, Agathopes, Syros, somewhere in the azure Aegean . . .)

### Tom Robinson Band

#### MARQUEE

THESE MEN are angry. They don't wear chains and razor blades, they don't snarl at the audience; but when Tom Robinson stops in the middle of the set, points at the door and talks about the people Out There, you know that this is a band that has been pushed into a corner by the rest of the world and is ready to fight its way out.

It isn't the stylised hate and war reaction of The Clash, but in songs like "Long Hot Summer", "Up Against The Wall" and "We Ain't Gonna Take It", Tom Robinson is singing about all the minority groups who are no longer on the defensive, crying for everyone who has been hospitalised for a week because they look-talk-walk

differently. He's telling you that there's no more room to sit on the fence, it's "time to decide which side you're on."

Robinson is the band's obvious focal point, punching a bass and singing clearly and strongly enough to get the message across. Danny Kustow moves like Mick Jones but doesn't borrow his riffs. Between them Tom and Danny break four strings in one evening.

Drummer Brian Taylor steps up front to sing "Riding Along On The Back Of An E-Type", while organist Mark Amber leads a chorus of "Auld Lang Syne" — but Tom's singalong monologue about his fictitious brother Martin is genuine 1977 music-hall. Don't be fooled by the fun and the remarkable rapport between band and equally committed fans, because songs like "It's Getting Tighter", "Winter Of '79" and "Glad To Be Gay" will send shivers down your spine.

This is one of the most relevant bands I've seen this year, but a lot of people are going to miss them because they can't identify with a group who are glad to be gay. That's like ignoring Bob Marley because he's black. Songs like "Power In The Darkness", with its damning GLC rap, and lyrics about fascists in the high street with everyone else on

the run mean something to everyone.

"Motorway" is the new single, and the album is going to make a major impact if people have confidence to buy it and play it. This band want their freedom. Does that frighten you?

After the set the audience stood chanting "Smash the National Front!" Two policemen came into the club, picked me out of the crowd and asked me if I was "John Williams". Why me? That frightens me.

Kim Davis

### Tom Robinson Band

#### DINGWALLS

THE LAST TIME I saw The Tom Robinson Band they were a trifle weak sounding and not really together. Only Tom and Danny were short-haired and the other two guys seemed a bit out of it. Naturally now they've "sold out" (Tom's words) the other two have got their locks lopped and lo, they seem to have gelled, got it together etc, somewhat.

This is only too apparent by the fact that their following sings along even on a

complicated opus like "A Brother Like Martin". Something told me I was about to be stunned by a band performing at a peak.

From "Ford Cortina" onwards the set literally took off into dizzy heights of mesmerisation, hypnotism and transfusion. Fast links kept everybody dancing through "Right On Sister", with the audience punching air en masse, Tom furiously strumming his bass and Danny blowing snot down his shirt front!

A word about Danny and his guitar — remember Ronson's solo on "Moonage Daydream"? Well, Danny plays with that kind of power — burning sustained notes, a power within. His solo on "Winter of '79" was truly frightening, and set the serious tone for "Better Decide Which Side You're On", a tour de force which positively shocked me. Pause for a gobful of air and it's anthem time . . .

"Corrupters of youth, it's there in the papers — must be the truth! So sing if you're glad to be gay — sing if you're happy that way."

I'll mention the other songs 'cause the titles say a lot about the way this band feels about 1977 in UK — "Power In The Darkness (Freedom)", "We Ain't Gonna Take It", "I'm Alright Jack" . . .

Danny breaks a string, the band scream to the set's end, I notice the deafening volume has ceased, collect my senses, yell for more!

A genuinely moving "I Shall Be Released", a manic "I'm Waiting For My Man" featuring Rich Kid Glen Matlock on Tom's bass and Tom on Iggy Pop impersonations — shredding his clothes off his back and falling onto the arms of the people in front!

A stunning performance from the most powerful band I've seen since the Pistols — and that is the highest praise.

Sue Denom





# TRB

## TOM ROBINSON BAND

### PRESS CUTTINGS



September 24 1977 15p

STRANGLERS/STONES/TROWER albums

# SOUNDS

Who is  
this man  
and why  
are these  
people  
doing this  
to him ?



Tom Robinson gets mobbed at Dingwalls - pic: Stevenson

+







Page 26 SOUNDS September 24, 1977

"The British police are the best in the world. I don't believe one of these stories I've heard..."

**S**QUASHED into a hired car, on the way back to town from a gig, guts already beginning to ache from the two oversalted hamburgers and one cup of sweet and nasty tea you've only just gobbled down, 'I Shall Be Released' purring softly from baby cassette player, round the roundabout twice trying to find the right road... closely followed by a large blue Transit, fluorescent flashing 'Stop' sign.

"Do you always go round roundabouts twice, sir?" Tom eases out of the driving seat, follows the female fed over to the van, his smile a picture of co-operation. The male copper sticks his head through the window of the car and tries to engage us in friendly conversation over the top of the now louder cassette player.

Tom has to show the fed how to use the breathalyser. She seems slightly upset that, when the bag is inflated, the crystals are still in a state of pristine, untrammelled innocence. But she does perk up a little when she discovers that Tom is in a rock 'n' roll band. After all, he might be famous and good public relations never harmed anyone, did it?

"Have you been on 'New Faces'?" "No. But he has." Tom replies politely, pointing at Brian. "Oh well, thank you sir. Good night. That's the right road." Back in the car and on the right road, Tom remarks: "Next time we come here, we will be famous, they will know who we are and they'll probably lock us up for it."

Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, let me introduce you to the crises and contradictions of Tom Robinson.

1. Tom Robinson is a songwriter.
  2. Tom was, until late last year, in an acoustic group, Cafe Society, who made one album for Ray Davies' ill-fated Konk label.
  3. Tom formed the Tom Robinson Band early this year. Its line-up settled down to himself on bass and vocals, Danny Kustow on guitar and vocals, Mark Amber on keyboards and Brian Taylor on drums and occasional vocals.
  4. The Tom Robinson Band play some of the gutsiest rock 'n' roll and sing some of the bravest lyrics I've ever been lucky enough to hear.
  5. The Tom Robinson band have recently signed a recording contract with EMI, the label's first signing since the Pistols' debacle.
  6. Tom is gay. He's neither ashamed nor boastful about it. He just informs you of the fact and if you don't like it, you know where you can put it, don't you, John.
  7. The rest of the band aren't gay.
- All of which are a few basic facts to keep in mind while I outline the events which lead up to my being stopped in a car for going round a roundabout one time too many.

**I**N THE current polarisation of music between BOFS and bright young things, quite a few bands have been passed over because they didn't quite fit into such a neat dichotomy. At one extreme, if you didn't sound like Zappa you were derided for being unmusical. And at the other end of the spectrum, if you showed in your approach a knowledge of anything other than the Dolls, the Ramones and Iggy, you were unceremoniously dumped onto the dust-heap of history.

That could well have stifled the Tom Robinson Band. Their lyrics were pointed and direct enough, if incalculably more literate and



TOM ROBINSON

## UP AGAINST THE WALL -LIFE WITH THE TOM ROBINSON BAND by Pete Silvertown



intelligent than garbage like Slaughter And The Dogs, to please all but the most amphetamine-overdosed buzzsaw guitar social commentator. But their music was nearer that of a standard, if tasteful, rock 'n' roll outfit.

Nearly stymied by the "if you're not with us, you're against us" pose, they could have ended up as a band in search of an audience, reduced to eking out their starvation and frustration with a few jerk-off left-wing benefit gigs.

So why didn't they? Firstly, because of the blindingly obvious qualities of Tom's songs and the punch of the band. (They've had a lot of reviews in the papers this year and I don't think I've seen one unfavourable one. No complaints there, although they do have another bone to pick with the press.) Secondly, because, in good Hollywood B movie flick tradition, they gritted their teeth and hung on in there, convinced their day would come.

Okay, so lots of bands and great ones at that have thought the same but they've all of 'em been brought down by the grim reaper of all time. The TRB aren't gonna be though — or rather I don't believe they are — because the wait hasn't been too long, the band have tightened up and changed over this year and, most importantly, Tom himself has had ample past



DANNY KUSTOW/TOM ROBINSON

pix  
by  
Stev-  
ERSON





# TRB

# TOM ROBINSON BAND

# PRESS CUTTINGS



September 24, 1977 SOUNDS Page 27

experience of false starts, notably the prevarications of Mr. Ray Davies over the release of Cafe Society records which reduced the band to a two piece when Tom left and have now split it up altogether. Won't get fooled again ...

Nonetheless, the gap between saying what you think and shouting it out good and loud while playing at London's Brecknock and getting the self-same point (let's not call it message, huh) across via the warping mechanism of a music-biz multinational like EMI is a not inconsiderable one. There's evidence supporting that in the Pistols affair with EMI and then A&M and, to a lesser degree, the Clash's occasional contretemps with CBS.

Now look, I ain't accusing nobody of selling out. It's obvious that if you think you've got something to say and reckon a lot of people should hear it, there's no point in whispering it to your mate round the corner and expecting it to spread miraculously by word of mouth. And the big companies are only too willing to help ... if they make money. Penguin print Marx for profit not politics. But those big companies do prefer to do it on their own terms and those terms can, whether over a long or a short period, alter the original intention.

**W**HICH IS WHY I was very interested in going down to Shepperton Studios to see the

TRB polish off their first single and find out the current state of play with EMI straight from the horse's mouth so to speak.

Of all Tom's songs, the one chosen for the first single, 'Motorway', is probably the least, shall we say, controversial. It doesn't deal with fears of a right-wing backlash like 'Winter of '79' or the realities of life on the street like 'Up Against The Wall' nor is it a phial of vitriol lobbed at everything "an Englishman holds dearest to his heart" like 'Power In The Darkness' or a sardonic commentary on Tom's own lifestyle such as the bitter as tears in your beer 'Sing If You're Glad To Be Gay'.

'Motorway' is a simple song of joy about a trucker hauling his thirty ton Scania down the M6 and watching the sun rise, its only controversial aspect being the fact that the only reason he's able to drive all night is that he's got his "double white line". Anyway if the Steve Gibbons band can get away with a homage to drug dealing with 'Tulane', even doing it on TOP, who's gonna worry about a little ol' line like that, EMI?

Anyway it's a great song. Like all Tom's songs, it's packed with the sort of concrete positive metaphors that Chuck Berry used to have a patent on. And when I heard the rough mix of the backing track in the studio I just leapt around singing along and shouting that it sounded just like a coarse Tamla record. And nearly got thrown out of the studio for my pains. Not by Tom but by the producer, the Who's sound engineer, Bill Pridden, doing the honours here with a barn of a room and the Island mobile.

Bill's done a great job (though he couldn't find a small speaker for me to hear it on — I never trust those massive studio jobs — everything sounds good on them). He's got the football crowd singalong ambience spot on and given the TRB the biting guitar sound they've needed all along and have never until now quite found.

But Bill was EMI's choice, not the band's. They'd been working with John Miller since earlier this year and had done a version of 'Motorway' with him. But EMI didn't like it. So a new producer was found and it was EMI who made the decision. The first of many compromises, with the office not the band calling the shots?

That was what I wanted to know but it wasn't until the next day I was able to ask Tom. Getting the vocal track down didn't go quite as smoothly as had been hoped and EMI suddenly got ultra-conscious of money being wasted by our lazing

around, talking to the band and taking pictures. Besides, how honest can Tom be with his Artist Development geezer from EMI (sounds more like Motown's infamous grooming schools than rock 'n' roll to me) sitting five feet away?

So we reassemble and switch on the tape recorder the next day, travelling up to the gig in the hired Cortina. Much to Tom's chagrin, it's a mucky yellow Series 3, not the Mark 1, 1600E grey Cortina he covets in the song of the same title. He does admit, however, that the new ones are more comfortable to drive.

Seeing how Elvis got his Cadillac when he put his John Henry on the line for RCA, I ask Tom how come he didn't get his grey Cortina out of EMI. He laughs.

The ice broken, I press on to the more serious points about the relationship with EMI. Was there any pressure to put out such a relatively uncontroversial song?

"We were planning to use 'Motorway' whichever company we went to, even if we pressed it ourselves. We were quite determined to go ahead with or without a record company. It wasn't that important that we had a record deal. We had a truck, we had our gear, we were



MARK AMBER

reasonably self-supporting. We were going to press it ourselves anyway so we could get it out to the kids on the street."

So why a record deal then? "Totally simple. We want more people to hear our music. And the better the record company, the more people will hear the music. And EMI is, I think, one of the best record companies in London, if not the world. Therefore, it will be heard by more people."

Isn't the change of producer some kind of compromise?

"We've made a compromise. They've made a compromise. When we came to the label we had choice of producer according to our contract. But they didn't like his approach. John (Miller) had a classically crisp studio sound. EMI had seen us with our crappy PA, bum notes and distortion and that's how they saw us."

"So we said, okay, we'll go along with the change for the A side but we want to keep John for the B side — 'I Shall Be Released' — which, as you know, is for Georgie Ince who's doing fifteen years on very flimsy evidence. EMI didn't want him to do that either but they compromised and we came to an agreement."

"But so far as the lyrics go, there's been no compromise."

"It could very easily be the thin edge of the wedge. It could be them trying it on early in the game. The A&R department flexing its muscles to see how far it could push the band. On the other hand it could also be in the best interests of all of us, if it gets the best sound on record."

Actually, I agreed wholeheartedly with EMI on that issue. I've heard John Miller's version and it has the attack of an asthmatic mouse, leaving Tom high and dry punching out his

lyrics in front of a musical vacuum. Bill Pridden's treatment has turned it into the wonderful rock 'n' roll dance record it should be.

But then the relationship with John Miller was more than just band/producer. John had given them support help and studio time when they were at their lowest ebb, crying in the wilderness, Tom moonlighting with Irish showbands just so he could eat a decent meal now and again. And John did it all for a hope and a promise. But then rock 'n' roll was never known for its extremes of sentiment (and John'll be compensated anyway).

John Miller was also a link with the past in so far as he produced the second Cafe Society album — which has yet to be released. Now, if you've heard the first Cafe album (which is very unlikely) you'll know that they were the epitome of soggy singer-songwriter acoustic-guitar valium 'rock'.

"But I gradually became aware of what there was an audience for and what there wasn't an audience for. In two years of Cafe Society we'd had two reviews. I did four nights by myself (for Gay Pride Week) and got reviewed in Sounds twice and in Streetlife. So I thought I must be doing something right and it showed me that there must be something wrong with Cafe. But I didn't then know what I was going to do."

The Gay Pride Week shows were a turning point for Tom. For the first time he found himself able to sing songs that spoke about his deeper, more honest feelings (and I'm not just talking about his being gay). It was where he premiered what has come to be seen as the band's anthem, 'Sing If You're Glad To Be Gay' which I know the band felt had become a mill-stone round their neck at one point. "Now we see it as a v-sign to Mary Whitehouse" chorused the previously silent Danny and Brian.

But still, why the change to rock 'n' roll?

"It seemed to me that 77 and 78 were going to be years of big trouble on the streets. And that's where the average music fan is. They're either still at school or just left school and are in a boring job."

"Whatever music you make you've got to be in touch with their lives. I could see they were going to want much more basic, more simple hard-hitting rock music."

"But I'm not in it for the money. There's easier ways to make money. Like property speculation, for instance. So long as I've got a roof over my head, something to eat and grey Cortina, that's me happy."

"I live for my hour on stage. That's what I'm hooked on. That's what I live through the other 23 for. To me it doesn't matter whether I'm playing or singing or jumping up and down waving my knickers in the air. It's performing that counts."

"Then, if within that, I can contribute to making the world slightly better place to live in, I feel as if I've done something. It's not even a question of a better world for people in general. I'm most concerned with me. But I know that a better world for me means a better world for you."

"Motives don't matter. It's the end result that matters. If you see a guy starving on the street and you give him a quid just to impress your girlfriend or boyfriend, it doesn't matter, 'cos at the end of the day that guy's still got the quid."

Your songs have any real effect? "Nah. F— all. Nobody ever changes the world by singing pop songs. But if you can change it one iota it's worth doing."

**I** KNOW somebody told Tom that listening to his songs was like reading the Agig Prop column in Time Out. I wondered how he'd react to the charge that his political poses were shallow, empty, trendy.

"This is when you write down "long pause, dot, dot, dot" ... Look maybe it is trendy to get almost bottled for singing 'Glad To Be Gay'. Maybe it is



BRIAN TAYLOR

trendy to get your roddie's head kicked in in Wales just 'cos one of us said "fuck" in front of a lady who was too lady-like to hear a word like that but wasn't too lady-like to kick someone in the balls. Maybe it is trendy ... I hadn't noticed."

**B**Y THIS time we've arrived at the gig and discover that it's just another case of a local club owner knowing his Wednesday nights are slack and hoping to cop a little more money by turning it over to real live rock 'n' roll for the night. The band, especially Tom, are visibly brought down by the prospect of playing to a tiny audience most of whom don't really understand what they're doing there anyway.

You might get Mick Jones coming along to most of your gigs in London and he and Glen Matlock might have to squeeze hard through the crowds to get up on the stage to play a little with you. But, out here, you're on your own, boy, with a crowd that's waiting to be astounded and ain't gonna do anything to make it easier for you to do it.

Sod the Fillmore West in 1967, this is the real acid test of a band.

What do you mean, did they manage it? Of course they did. Okay, so a few people went back to the bar but those who stayed were more than warm in their appreciation of the band.

They do their standard set, albeit a slightly shortened one. Tom does his best old trooper routine, playing the crowd like he was holding five aces, totally winning them over by the third number, the whimsical but not at all twee 'Martin'. If you believe in yourself and believe other people will too given half a chance you're half way to convincing any crowd. They even applauded 'Glad To Be Gay'.

When I asked Danny Kustow how he felt about singing such an overtly gay song and by extension, being in a band with a gay singer, he admitted that it pissed him (and the others) off that the papers always concentrated on the gay angle, especially as how he was personally more interested in women.

But, living up to his Jewish middle-class street urchin vibe, he added: "When I sing 'GTBG' I get a vague feeling that I could be singing "Sing if you're glad to be Jewish". I don't know what it's like to be gay but thinking about it that way helps it make sense for me."

Coming from someone else, that might sound stupid but Danny's both naive and clever enough to mean it. It's the same sort of sinuous line he peddles with his guitar. This night, neither he nor the rest of the band were great but they turned in a solid professional set and, what's more important, they proved they had the bottle to go out and confront on unknown territory. They're not like some 'political' bands (and I'm not talking about the Clash) who feel afraid to move out of the secure womb of benefit circuit. The TRB get out and do it, hang the consequences.

Going into the club, Tom wondered aloud if this might be the time one of them got bottled during 'GTBG'. It wasn't.

Don't reckon it ever will be. With the front he's got, only a nutter would have the nerve.



TOM/DANNY







October 22nd, 1977

NEW MUSICAL EXPRESS

Page 7



PIC: PENNIE SMITH

## 3-5-7-9

### (Laying it on) the little white line . . .

**T**OM ROBINSON is livid. He's barely hauled himself off his motorbike and out of the rain before he's ranting and raving about NME's coverage of the Tom Robinson Band's signing to EMI.

"EMI Say Yes To Gay Power," says Robinson, almost managing a sneer as he reads out the headline, virtually the first thing you see when opening the week's paper. Robinson, clad in full motorcycle-rider's wet suit, throws the paper my way and his temper disappears almost immediately.

I mumble something about a writer can never be responsible for a sub-editor's actions, while thinking Robinson has got a bit of a nerve carrying on like this. After all, it's not going to do him much harm having a page three lead news story devoted to him, big pic and all, now is it?

He only formed the band in January and at this stage of the game the TRB (as he likes them known) are a pretty unknown quantity to all but regulars of the various public house hostelrys around the metropolis and their odd counterparts around the country. And Robinson's previous group, Cafe Society, who died a fairly ignominious death the year previous, weren't exactly Front Page News.

Suppose Robinson, normally charming, polite and reasonable, must be a mite sensitive about having his sexual preferences dragged up in print, as he's later to tell me. "Gay Rights is an issue but I'm concerned with far broader rights than Gay Rights. It's almost a side issue. It's a side product of general oppression of people's own liberty, the liberty to decide what you do with your own body. And that liberty is seen in women's oppression above all... Oppression of coloured people who aren't allowed to work at certain things.

"You have to fight for the main thing. There's no point in picking out one little area."

Phew. Sounds a bit late Sixties that, a bit rising up middle-class concerned,

but there's no denying that Robinson's well developed social conscience is — uh — right on. Apart from Robinson's rock aesthetics, all that hooplah about how The Beatles lead us up a blind alley, not to mention the standard New Wave schtick about how it (the music) has to be relevant, there's little to take issue with in Robinson's stance.

And really the things Robinson stands for are essentially the same as those one John Winston Lennon, or come to that numerous other rock leftists, took a stand against at the turn of the decade — in fact when Robinson, gigging at the Marquee last Monday, castigated his audience for purchasing TRB badges (the orange on black clenched fist) that were free. I was instantly reminded of similar gatherings around eight years ago.

**I**N THE two months since Robinson and his cohorts — Danny Kustow (guitar), Mark Amber (keyboards) and Brian Taylor (drums) — tied the knot with EMI (the company's first major signing since the Pistols fiasco) word that the TRB is a hot combo has got around.

Sniffing about at the Marquee tonight are, to name but two Biz Heavies, Steve O'Rourke, the Floyd's millionaire manager, and Pistols' producer Chris Thomas. As usual for Robinson, the audience is a mixed lot, always a healthy sign. There's more than a few spikey heads on the horizon, but your elder brother wouldn't feel out of place either.

EMI have been prattling on about how difficult it will be to gain admission to these hallowed portals this evening, seeing as how the last time the TRB played here the guest list was nigh on 200 names long, that and how popular the band are these days, but while I wouldn't like to stand a round for the club's

occupants, I've seen it fuller. Just.

So who comes to your gigs, Tom? "I think it's only the real cool punks, people like the Clash themselves," he says name-dropping. And then with candour: "I'd like to say our audiences are comprised of people whose rights are being eroded, but I think most of the kids who come to our gigs are middle class rock fans. They think 'Jolly nice, here's somebody standing up for somebody else' You've got a lot of middle class white kids going to Marley concerts."

"People expect ninety per cent of our audience to be gay because of this reputation certain bits of press have helped engender. In fact the audiences are no more than 30/40 per cent gay. It's not greatly in evidence."

Nor are Robinson's three colleagues in fact homosexual, though they'll defend Gay Rights as much as Robinson does. Tom himself isn't overtly gay, and among rock artists more camp performers are not difficult to find. Robinson's onstage persona is in fact full on macho with punk overtones, though he does say he's had his bellyful of self-conscious macho pigs.

So does he think his honesty about his sexual tastes alienates any of the band's potential audience? "I don't care a shit if it does," he says with admirable pride.

How about EMI's attitude to the group? After all, they ditched the Pistols after they'd made too much of a stink with 'the establishment'. "On the contrary," Robinson opines, "EMI want to ensure they don't make the same mistake again (i.e. losing a viable rock property). It was made amply clear before we even signed what I stand for — minority rights, if you like. Now, let's scrub that — I stand against The Backlash."

Robinson is referring to the right wing backlash that's been gaining momentum these recent years. something he sings about in graphic detail in "Winter Of '79". The only Robinson song (I think) which refers solely to repression of gays is his anthem "Sing If You're Glad To Be Gay", otherwise his material deals with the general resurgence of the

BY  
STEVE  
CLARKE





# TRB

# TOM ROBINSON BAND

# PRESS CUTTINGS



Page 8

NEW MUSICAL EXPRESS

October 22nd, 1977

## 1-2-3-4 from over page here's some more



grey forces of the right. He has a song called "Up Against The Wall" where, with obvious relish, he plays the part of a right wing authority (singular) sounding off against blacks, gays, scroungers, long-hairs, and other threats to the British way of life blah blah.

"It's not that we stand for this, this, this and this. We stand for this." says Robinson spreading his arms.

He's an active campaigner for the release of George Ince, currently inside doing 15 years for a bullion robbery, and dedicates his version of Dylan's "I Shall Be Released" to him — the song is on the B-side of "Motorway" and Ince's picture is on the single's sleeve. Robinson also adds a verse to the song to illustrate Ince's plight. Oh yeah, Robinson is a great Dylan admirer. He's been known to break down into tears just talking about Dylan's paean to his wife "Sarah".

**S**O WHAT effects does Robinson's political radical views have? "We're a pop group. That's all we

are. You can't expect a pop group to have a vast sociological influence and change the world or anything."

Later though, when he's narrating the story of how, when in Cafe Society and playing support on a Barclay James Harvest tour, he thought it was about time he laid some of his own views on his audience, he says, "You get people coming in there aged 14 upwards and you have a certain responsibility to those people to tell the truth as you perceive it."

"Barclay James Harvest were telling the truth as they perceived it. And I didn't like that truth. I thought 'Okay, if it's cool for them to tell the truth as they perceive it, then why the hell shouldn't I tell it as I see it, a different kind of truth?'"

So what truth were Barclay James Harvest telling? "Their songs were not committed to anything except the status quo. What it boiled down to was 'I work damn hard, I pay my taxes, you lot come here on the dole ...' "It's right wing."

**R**OBINSON, now 27, comes from a solid middle-class background. His father has worked as a solicitor and a company director. He makes no attempts to affect a working class accent or manner, but referring to his up-bringing, he quotes Clash manager Bernard Rhodes, "What is important is not where you've come from but where you're going to."

"People have a constant potential to change otherwise there'd be no hope for any of us. We might as well sit at home and commit suicide."

For example Tom recalls playing with Cafe Society: "The fact that for three years I was playing sweet pseudo-Crosby, Stills and Nash harmonies with acoustic guitars with a nice, very inoffensive band that was making music for people to listen to and say 'How sweet ...'"

"All my social worker friends used to come along and sit in the front row and they'd say, 'That's jolly nice.' And pat you on the back ..."

"But where were the punters? Where were the fans?"

Tom spent many of his formative years at Finchden Manor, a home for maladjusted boys. He was there for seven years — from 16 to 23, and prefers to keep schtum about just why he was there. There he became involved with, several bands, including a full blown rock 'n' roll outfit The Flying Vultures.

"There was no formal therapy at Finchden," he says. "You were left entirely to your own devices providing you were there at meal times and went to bed at quarter past ten. Finchden had a 65 per cent success rate. Borstals have 30 per cent success."

It was there that Tom met the group's guitarist Danny Kustow. "It's a fantastic place. It was learning how to live and love people, you could slow down."

Kustow didn't keep in touch with Robinson after leaving Finchden and earned his living at various mundane jobs — before going to Israel for six months where he fought for the Jews in the 1973 Arab-Israeli hostilities. "I was bored. I wanted to see some excitement. And I got it," says Kustow.

On hearing that Robinson was looking for a new band after leaving Cafe Society, (who included yet another ex-Finchden Manor boy), Kustow renewed his acquaintance with his old school mate.

**T**OM himself had formed Cafe Society on leaving Finchden. With them he recorded one album for Ray Davies' Konk label. Robinson is aware that much has been made of his split with Davies, and wants to make clear the terms his two erstwhile colleagues received from Davies when they dissolved the group.

"Ray released them on the condition that they pay him three per cent of all their future record earnings plus extend their publishing contract for a seven year contract. And reduce their percentage from 60/40 to 50/50."

Someone who knows both Davies and Robinson says the two are very similar. Certainly there is a hint of the Kinks' leader in Robinson's performances. "Martin" a song about an imaginary brother, could have come from the pen of Davies with its slightly camp interpretation of vaudeville traditions.

While Robinson himself isn't by any means a hard-nosed rocker the band as a whole know how to rock out on their night. At the Marquee they are in great form. Robinson himself is perhaps the least interesting musician, playing adequate if not scintillating bass (although he was short-listed for the Sharks' bass slot after Andy Fraser had quit). Kustow, though, is an exceptional player, reminiscent of the likes of Mick Ronson and the late Paul Kossoff but transcending plagiarism by the sheer intensity of his playing.

In fact as an entity, the TRB's

sense of dynamics more than smacks of Free's *modus operandi*, even if drummer Brian Taylor, another gifted musician, plays very much like a young Keith Moon, rather than Simon Kirke.

It's Robinson, though, who dominates the group onstage. His songs are well constructed and often strewn with commercial hooks and tough melodies. Prior to punk-rock, Robinson would not have been described as a pop singer and the same holds true now.

Yet neither Robinson or his colleagues (two of whom are in their teens) can be considered as part of what is now touchingly termed old wave.

"We're just trying to make music that's relevant to the lives of the people that listen to it. An audience wants to go and hear a relevant band, a band that has something to do with their lives."

"They don't want to hear something that's do only with that band and not them, and it's up there on a stage miles away from them."

Not surprisingly Robinson is keen to praise the Pistols, whom he first saw last year at Oxford Street's 100 Club. Then, he completely missed the point. Now, he reckons they're the most important rock band since The Beatles.

"The Pistols have their fingers right on the pulse of a time. And they knew they were right and they believed in it enough to hold out against everything."

"They're saying 'We don't care'. They're taking a totally nihilistic stance. It's an improvement on everything we've had for the last ten years in this country."

"They've helped redefine musical values, which must be constantly re-defined for the music to stay alive. By the standards of his day Elvis Presley and the people on his records did not play well — by the standards of the swing bands and Frank Sinatra and all that shit that had gone before. "By the standards up until The Beatles, The Beatles were shit. And you can go and take a book out of Hornsey library and it'll say so. It's called *Anatomy Of A Phenomenon* and it's written by a Trad Jazz fan. And he's saying what musical rubbish The Beatles were and how unprofessional they were."

"Each time something really important comes up, people say it's musical rubbish because they're judging it by the standards of the previous ten years."

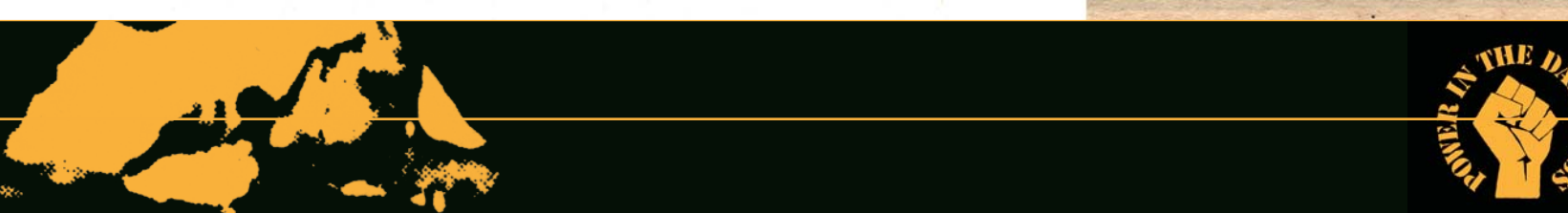
"Playing isn't a primary consideration with us. Otherwise I would have sat down with five session musicians wearing glasses. I wouldn't have formed the TRB."

Surely, he wants the band to be tight? "That'll happen all in its own time. We don't sit down and practice for days in and days out getting the bass patterns right. We don't go off to the country and get it together. Within three days of forming the band we were gigging. And we've gigged ever since. And if the band's got tighter then it's through playing."

"The Pistols weren't tight and it didn't matter a fuck. "I think Yes are totally irrelevant — dinosaurs. I think the Rolling Stones should have broken up five years ago. I think Yes should have broken up. They should all have the courage to form new bands and explore new directions. Like Rick Wakeman did — even though it came to nothing."

**A**LL THIS might be, but unless I'm severely mistaken, Robinson is where he is now, poised for a major breakthrough, spearheaded by the chart single which "Motorway" will undoubtedly become, for essentially the same reasons as any good rock performer worth his salt has ever been. And one wonders, however admirable his social / political attitudes are, whether his audience gives a toss.

Clearly, though, his being gay won't hamper his chance which is perhaps a step in the right direction and not mere social posing.





## Melody Maker

# CLASH HIT A BACKLASH

OCTOBER 22, 1977 15p weekly USA 75 cents

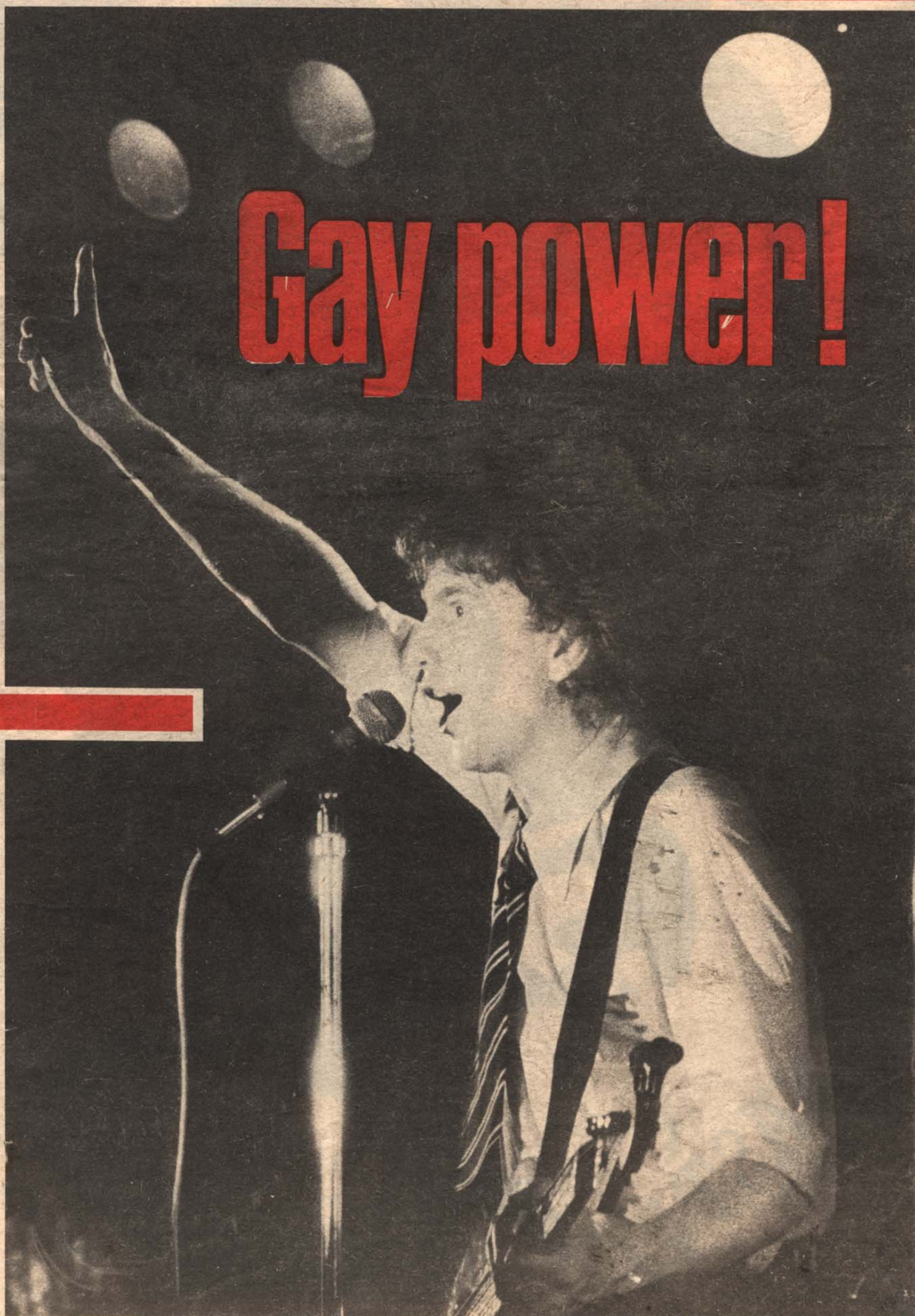
AFTER its controversial firing of the Sex Pistols, EMI Records may be heading for another problem. Tom Robinson, pictured right, is the label's hottest new rock signing—and he preaches Gay Liberation wherever he goes.

● Robinson, signed by EMI six weeks ago, has been packing in ecstatic crowds to clubs all over Britain. Although his debut single, "2-4-6-8 Motorway," is innocuous hard rock, the band's stage anthem is "Glad To Be Gay." And Robinson says he wants it out as a single.

● EMI, who foresee no furor over their signing because they believe "Tom has taste," say they have no plans to censor such a track, but no release has yet been planned.

● Meanwhile, the Robinson band continues its successful trek of the clubs, and is a red hot favourite with London favourites at the 100 Club and Marquee—where Tom was photographed by Barry Lummer.

● This man Robinson—a profile, page 30.



# Gay power!

THE CLASH, one of Britain's premier new wave bands, this week ran into a series of bans and objections by local authorities as their big tour struggled to get underway.

Councils still fearing scenes resulting from a new wave band have been putting major obstacles in their way, Clash claim.

This tour is promoted by Endale Associates in conjunction with Bernard Rhodes, Clash's manager. Within two weeks of releasing the tour plans amendments were announced. The Edinburgh date on October 26 switched from the Odeon to Leith Theatre; the Norwich date on November 6 from St Andrew's Hall to Ipswich Corn Exchange and the Birmingham date on November 7 from Odeon to Top Rank. In all cases the venues switched to non-seated halls after the management refused to remove front row seats—or stipulated what the band considered excessive security.

This week further alterations were announced. The Liverpool Stadium date on October 22 had been cancelled because of insurance problems.

The November 6 date has been changed for a second time. It switches from Ipswich Corn Exchange to Carlisle Market Hall. Endale Associates said the Ipswich Corn Exchange had suddenly been made unavailable because of a previous booking for a "military brass band."

Lastly, the date on November 10 has switched from Bath University to Bristol Exhibition Centre. Because of the small crowd capacity, the demand for tickets could not be met. In addition, the student committee who organised the concert could not reach an agreement about the event. But Bristol corporation said the concert promoter, Ray Parnell, had been asked to make alterations to exit doors and electrical installations to improve the safety of the centre.

Final dates and venues as MM went to press, were: Belfast Polytechnic (October 20), Dublin Trinity College (21), Dunfermline Kinema (24), Glasgow Apollo (25), Leith Theatre (26), Leeds University (27), Newcastle Polytechnic (28), Manchester Apollo (29), Stoke Victoria Halls (30), Sheffield Top Rank (November 1), Bradford University (2), Derby King's Hall (3), Cardiff University (4), Carlisle Market Hall (6), Birmingham Top Rank (7), Coventry Locarno (8), Bournemouth Winter Gardens (9), Bristol Exhibition Centre (10), Cambridge Corn Exchange (11), Hastings Pier Pavilion (12), Southampton Top Rank (13).

● STRANGLERS, whose current tour has sold out quickly, have been banned from playing Dublin's Stadium.

November 12 and 14. The band said this week that the promoters had cancelled the booking for fear of "adverse publicity" if it went ahead. The promoter was trying to find an alternative venue.

### Bing



What made him king  
PAGE 12

### Nick



The Lowe profile  
PAGE 8





Page 30—MELODY MAKER, October 22, 1977



# Power in the

## Tom Robinson's

Power . . . in the darkness  
 Frightening lies from the Other Side  
 Power . . . in the darkness  
 Stand up and fight for your rights:  
 (Freedom . . . we're talking 'bout your freedom)  
 Freedom to choose what you do with your body  
 Freedom to believe what you like  
 Freedom for brothers to love one another  
 Freedom for black AND white



Freedom for elitism, male domination  
 Freedom for the mother and wife  
 Freedom from Big Brother's interrogation  
 Freedom to live your own life . . .  
 (Town Hall Tyrant:

## Interview by

**T**HE LAST I saw of Tom Robinson that night in Liverpool, he was bathed in sweat, downing a bottle of lager, and peeping nervously out of the corner of his beady left eye at two policemen who were paying a routine call on Eric's club. Robinson looked bothered.

His band had finished its performance ten minutes before the police arrived. It had been hard, winning over this crowd of dubious Merseysiders, for Tom's songs show a burning predilection for protest. Talking openly and challengingly to the crowd about his homosexuality, Robinson also distributes pamphlets at his concerts, publicising such causes as the National Abortion Campaign, Gay Liberation, the Free Prisoner George Ince Campaign and Rock Against Racism.

If it's a crowd that just wants to boogie, he could be in trouble, for Robinson demands that people stand back and listen to his message.

Tonight, it had been uphill. But about three-quarters of the way through his set, he connected. Liverpool loved the band.

Robinson was elated as he stood around, chattering all those usual after-the-show withdrawal symptoms to anyone who would listen.

"Every gig outta London's like your first ever," he was saying, and then the police arrived. "What's up," he whispered. His voice sank. Nothing was up. The police were doing a routine check on a club just as they do on many establishments the breadth of the country. All the same, Robinson became perceptibly jittery.

He looked at me, glanced at the cops again, then vanished. Lager bottle still in hand. The police went away and we all continued drinking. I've not seen Robinson since.

His instant exit at the sight of the law seemed a perfect example of immediate polarisation of rock and the law, handsomely portrayed in Robinson's tirades which are fast becoming anthems for embittered sections of society.

Robinson is a custom-built 1977 rock star, utterly committed and striking no poses as he makes speeches from the stage against the National Front, attends marches and demonstrations such as the recent Lewisham fracas, and writing venomous lyrics as relevant to minority groups in the Seventies as were Pete Townshend's to his Sixties audience.

Lest you should run away with the idea that here we have a Left Wing agitator hell-bent on merely using rock as a political weapon, it must be said right at the outset that there's a fundamental strength that sets him aside from vacuous sloganeering—Robinson's band is sheer dynamite, pounding out good, tight, slashing rock that comes alive in a sweaty club.

Above all things, he says, he's a musician. But being gay puts him in what he regards as a persecuted minority. Better to sing about that, he thinks, than about Kansas City or the boulevards of Paris.

So Tom Robinson is preaching for the people whom he thinks need a campaigner. As the title of one of his popular songs has it, "You'd Better Decide Which Side You're On."

For Robinson and his band right now, it's a fine balancing act, because he recently signed to the conservative EMI label for an estimated £53,000 advance on royalties over five albums.

"Very strange feeling," says the highly-articulate Robinson, as he tackled steak in a Liverpool Berni Inn. "Six weeks ago, I hadn't a penny — and a meal consisted of a 9p packet of soup from Sainsbury's."

**R**OBINSON believes that the one thing that separates him from many hundreds of better musicians is his single-mindedness. A fierce determination gripped him at 3 o'clock in the morning on October 12, 1976.

He knows the time and date well, because he is a painstaking person, and he wrote down what happened. He jumped up in bed, realised that the band he was then with was not going to make it big, and vowed to get out and form his own unit.

His band was Cafe Society, an acoustic trio. They had done moderately well playing London clubs, and also going out on concerts as support act to such top-liners as the Kinks, Leo Sayer and Barclay James Harvest. They had been going for three-and-a-half years, though, and Robinson was, to put it mildly, restless.

"I looked around and saw the Sex Pistols



exploding all over the country, the Clash tearing the place apart, and here was I sitting in my beady-killing mystic.

"I knew I was never going to make it as I was. Having told myself that, I went back into a really calm sleep because I knew what I had to do, even though it would mean stabbing some good friends in the back." This he prepared to do.

Next day, he told the other members of the group he was leaving, warned the record company by post that he wanted out, and "immediately went round all my old contacts and started blagging gigs for a group I didn't have."

He put an advert in the Melody Maker, seeking "musicians who want to be in on some amazing scenes this year . . . dynamite drummer and rock-solid bassist for 70's band gigging Nashville, Golden Lion, Hope and Anchor. No bread." He had no such gigs in sight but was oozing confidence.

The result now is his current line-up: Danny Kustow, a rich-toned, blistering and sympathetic lead guitarist; Mark Amber, a busy keyboardist who provides the Tom Robinson band with its instrumental density; Brian "The Dolphin" Taylor, a boisterous drummer; and Tom on bass guitar.

They had been together five months when, six weeks ago, the record companies started to sniff a winner.

After building up the kind of feverish following in the clubs that can never be hyped, they started packing in capacity crowds at such London venues as the Brecknock, the Nashville, the 100 Club, Dingwalls, and the Marquee.

Things have moved very quickly. Led Zeppelin's Robert Plant and several other musicians went to see them, and ere long the general buzz reached record companies.

The mighty EMI beat Jet Records to the signing, and the band's debut single, "2-4-8 Motorway," is doing well. The Tom Robinson Band looks unstoppable; there can be no turning back for a band that combines razor-sharp music with iron-clad commitment.

For while the music is splendid in this band, it's true to say that there's no shortage of fine rock music around. What separates Robinson from the mob is his open stance as a homosexual, and his campaigning for certain rights which have brought him into, er, dispute with the National Front.

On stage, he's a charismatic, commanding figure who positively leads his band and takes the lead vocals with either heavy aggression or disarming smiles, depending on the song. It's his toothy smile that's engaging. Off stage, he's an interesting conversationalist, a bit of a chatterbox, a stickler for detail.

He's as fascinated as you or me by his appeal, a self-confessed gay rock singer. But asked why he believed heterosexual girls would go to his shows, allowing that they traditionally went to shows where they "liked," the guys on stage, Robinson thought long and hard.

"The front row is all girls, nearly every gig. Hmmm. I think the great thing for young women coming to our gigs, and the reason they enjoy it, is because they feel they're not going to get some kind of heavy trip laid on them."

"They can just enjoy the music for its own sake, talk to somebody whether it's a guy or a woman, and there's no great big deal going down. The guy isn't about to get all heavy and say: 'Oy, do you wanna come back to my place, darlin'?"

"Yes, that's it — they feel unthreatened. And at a lot of gigs you can't, if you're an unaccompanied woman. So that's good."

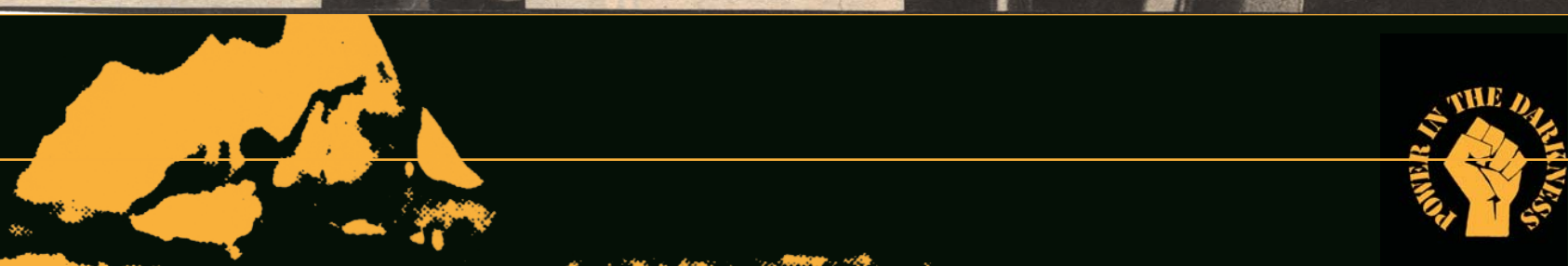
**H**E decided to stand partly on his gay ticket when he redirected his career at the end of last year. His old band Cafe Society had been signed to Konk Records, run by Ray Davies.

The Kinks star had seen Cafe Society at London's Troubadour, where they played each Tuesday throughout 1973 and 1974. The contact with Davies had been made through John McCoy, a Teesside promoter who managed singer Claire Hammill.

Robinson was a fan of Davies, and despite what happened later between them, he pays a glowing tribute to Ray: "He was the first person anywhere in the music industry to take an interest in me personally, and he really gave us some ideas, sorting through the themes I had in my head and tips on how to perform everything."

"He gave me my first break and if it hadn't been for him and Cafe Society and Konk, I wouldn't have known how to approach the Tom Robinson Band at all."

Davies it was who taught Robinson the machinery and politics of the music industry. But later, when Tom wanted out and said he intended to form his own band,





# Darkness

## Greatest Hit

Freedom from the reds & the blacks & the criminals  
 Prostitutes, pansies and punks  
 Football hooligans, juvenile delinquents  
 Lesbians and left wing scum  
 Freedom from the niggers and the Pakis and the

unions  
 Freedom from the gipsies and the Jews  
 Freedom from the longhaired layouts & liberals  
 Freedom from the likes of YOU!  
 Power . . . in the darkness  
 Frightening lies from the other side  
 Power . . . in the darkness  
 Stand up and fight for your rights.

## RAY COLEMAN

Davies and he became involved in a bitter, protracted legal dispute over contracts and publishing of songs; the battle is still very hot and may drag on for a long time.

No matter, Robinson has lots of time for Davies as one of his heroes, and gets quite emotional when he recalls Ray playing "Waterloo Sunset," alone, at the Troubadour, with other friends, including Alexis Korner, sitting in the small congregation.

"Magic, pure magic. The man is one of the few real geniuses of British rock 'n' roll. Make that rock. Shakin' Stevens and the Sunsets are the gvnors of rock 'n' roll in Britain. Rock 'n' roll and rock — big difference."

Davies advised Robinson not to be overt about his gay persuasions. "Ray would say: 'You should keep people guessing, it's better on stage that way,'" says Tom. But came the winter of '76, and Robinson could take no more of the public shilly shallying which being in another band forced upon him.

Actively involved by now in Gav Lib causes, he wrote this song.

"Sing if You're Glad To Be Gay"

The British police are the best in the world  
 I don't believe one of these stories I've heard

'Bout them raidin' our pubs for no reason at all

Lining the customers up by the wall

Picking out people and knocking them down

Resisting arrest as they're kicked on the ground

Searching their houses and calling them queer

I don't believe that sort of thing . . . happens here

Sing if you're glad to be gay

Sing if you're happy that way — hey

Sing if you're glad to be gay

Sing if you're happy this way

Pictures of naked young women are fun

In *Tibits* and *Playboy*, page three of the *Sun*

There's no nudes in *Gay News* — our one magazine

But they still find excuses to call it obscene

Read how disgusting we are in the press

In the *Telegraph*, *People* and *Sunday Express*

Molesters of children, corruptors of youth

It's there in the paper . . . it must be the truth

Don't try to kid us that if you're discreet

You're perfectly safe as you walk down the street

You don't have to mince or make bitchy remarks

To get beaten unconscious and left in the dark

I had a friend who was gentle and short

He was lonely one evening and went for a walk

Queerbashers caught him and kicked in his teeth

He was only hospitalised . . . for a week

So sit back and watch as they close down our clubs

Arrest us for meeting and raid all our pubs

Make sure your boyfriend's at least twenty-one

So only your friends and your brothers get done

Lie to your workmates and lie to your folks

Put down the queens and tell anti-queer jokes

Gay Lib's ridiculous, join their laughter

"The buggers are legal now — what more are they after?"

● Words and music by Tom Robinson, reproduced by permission.

It wasn't, he avers, written out of bravado, and certainly not to grab headlines; he couldn't think of a more difficult pitch to defend, in a quest for popular appeal. And he could certainly have made a success out of music without using this personalised theme.

It was a song conceived partly out of irritation at the "keep them guessing" technique employed by many other big rock stars.

Robinson sees his statements as the final instalment in a direct line of descent from the Camp Rock period of five years ago. On January 15, 1972 (Tom remembers the date well), David Bowie was front-paged by the *Melody Maker* at the time of his "Hunky Dory" album.

Inside, under the headline "Oh, You Pretty Thing," the matter of gayness was discussed in some detail. It all made a resonating impression on Robinson. "There's this slight attitude about the way Bowie talked, that glint in his eyes . . . but you know Bowie got the Camp



Rock posture from Lou Reed and he in turn got it from Ray Davies. Surely everybody remembers 'See My Friend.'

"By the time Ray hit the States in '66 he was known, over there at least, to be a Camp performer, showing his backside to the audience and saying: 'Do you like it? It's the nicest one in show business.'

"Ray used to say it was a careful plan to tease the audience into unity, and he still says I ought to be a little more subtle, keep them guessing, because they find that more interesting if they're not quite sure. I didn't choose to play that particular game, but that was Ray's advice."

**B**UT NOW, it's 1977 and for these brutal times, Robinson says nothing but the truth will do.

"The time's come for people to stop beating around the bush, whatever they're into in life. Either you put up or shut up. For me personally, the hint of it was enough to please me, as a self-oppressed, self-hating, lonely, acne-riddled youngster as I was at the time . . . to actually hear a guy singing songs which you suspect might be about another guy . . . you know, for the first time in your life, that song could be about you.

"I don't know if you can understand this, but up until then, all the other songs had been about somebody else, and suddenly I'm thinking: 'Hey, this is very nice, this is how I feel.'"

Before Bowie, the only other song which mirrored how he felt was John Lennon's "You've Got To Hide Your Love Away." Robinson recites the words to that verbatim, hanging on every word, positive that they were written by a spirit who understood.

Today, Robinson's words plead for gay women as well as men: "I feel very passionately that everybody has the right to do what they bloody well want to with their own body if nobody else is being hurt.

"However, I want it on record that I was with a woman the other night, and it would be a shame if in singing out about the rights of gay women and men I would then be regarded as a traitor if I then went to bed with whoever I wanted to.

"The words they call us, some even shout out to us at gigs, y'know — they hurt. But when people say: are you gay, queer, a homo, a pansy, a faggot, a poofter, or any of these nice little names they've got — I say yeah, what's it to you?"

"But as far as Joe Public is concerned, whatever else you do, if you're interested in other guys, or if you're a woman with a woman friend, you're a queer. Still, we must get used to it, I fear — certainly to call ourselves bi-sexual is a cop-out. Some of the top musicians in rock make me laugh."

As far as the rest of his band was concerned, he said he did not know about their personal habits.

"As far as I know, I just think none of them is — you know, I took them on as musicians. Funny thing, everybody is taken to be heterosexual unless proved otherwise.

"It wasn't a prerequisite for anybody joining the band — I wanted good musicians. I mean, Joni Mitchell presumably doesn't grill people who apply for a job in her band, saying: 'Are you a woman?'"

It would be easy to shout: "Publicity stunt!" at Robinson, and he's aware of the fact.

"People pre-judge us by our publicity, and some have the horrors about coming to see us. It's been suggested to me that I actually wrote political lyrics to some of the songs, or actually owned up to being gay, to simply promote the band, make more people come to our gigs, and get sensationalist coverage by the media.

"My God, we'd have had an easier ride if I hadn't. People STAY AWAY from gigs on the assumption that we are a gay rock band and they'll be standing in the middle of a bunch of screaming faggots. Incidentally — so what if they are? Screaming faggots are extremely nice people!

"Straight people think 'I don't want to go to those gigs to mix with those kind of people.' They think if there's a homosexual lurking in a band, it's going to be a certain kind of scene. But surely they can see that it's better for me to own up than keep it quiet?"

"The other preconception is that they're going to be lectured, preached at, taught didactic songs. This is not the ultimate idea. I write some lyrics for the band, which is how some songs have that flavour, but basically we're all into it because it's a rock band, and it has to be the music that people enjoy before we can do anything else with it.





Page 32—MELODY MAKER, October 22, 1977



continued from previous page

"If it doesn't work on the basis of good, enjoyable rock 'n' roll, it doesn't mean a thing. I've been a professional musician for three years. I would still be playing music, even if I stopped being a professional tomorrow. Music first. I'd be a hypocrite if I set out myself as a social reformer or a revolutionary."

It's difficult to accept this line from Robinson, however, because the emblem of the band, used in their stickers and badges and adorning the pamphlets handed out at their performances, is a clenched fist.

If that doesn't spell militancy, I said, what was it all about? If rock 'n' roll was the medium, there was also a message.

"Yes, but the medium IS the message, in a way. Maybe the motivation is wrong anyway, but listen, if you are a songwriter working in a rock band and you enjoy yourself playing music, and you're making music people can dance to, and they can enjoy for their own sake, then within that the lyrics do have to be ABOUT something. May as well be about what I believe."

If people like them and can relate to them, even better. If they can't and they don't show up at the gigs, I'll soon know that what I'm saying in my songs is unpalatable in commercial terms. That, one suspects, would be untenable for him.

THE more one talks to Robinson and observes

## 'Clash and the Pistols equivocate. We don't'

him, the clearer he emerges as a Machiavellian character whose guiding light is merely a chronic determination to be famous, and a liberator of the oppressed.

Certainly he's touched upon a nerve for thousands of Leftist causes, which is surely the very stuff of rock 'n' roll. But it's one thing to feel that way—and quite another game to convert it to fine music, a happening which sends you from his shows in a buoyant mood.

At London's 100 Club two weeks ago, the queues were forming an hour before the gig began, and so packed was the crowd for the band's electric performance that it was not possible to move around once a position had been staked for the night. Sardinesville.

At the Nag's Head, High Wycombe, they were, apocryphally speaking, clinging to the rafters, and at Eric's Club, Liverpool, the traditionally cool provincial attitude to Robinson's directness was well and truly defeated so that by the end, an encore was earned and another victory was scored.

"You come away from a punk concert these days and you feel HATE, KILL, SMASH SOMETHING. You feel bigoted, very often," Robinson says.

"You come away from a Waiters concert and you jump in the air, you go WHOOOOH! Clap hands, click your heels, jump around and feel really happy. That's what I want people to feel when they



TOM ROBINSON BAND: 'We're sitting on a time bomb because we're sticking our necks out'

come away from our gigs — uplifted, positive, going up, achieving something, united together.

"That's what music has got to be doing, and I would hope people could find some kind of strength and solidarity. That's the word people should get solidarity from the TRB, rather

than coming to find a political lecture."

Nevertheless, the opening song by the band on most gigs is a classic commentary in the tub-thumping manner of protest songs. "Winter Of '79" mirrors precisely the doom Robinson sees ahead, as Britain lurches towards a middle-class backlash:

"The Winter Of '79"

All you kids that just sit and whine  
You shoulda bin there back in '79

Say we're giving you a real hard time  
You boys are really breaking my heart

Spurs beat Cardiff, what a game  
The blood was running in the drains

Hit the city on the trains  
And really took the place apart

That was the year Nan Harris dies  
An' Charlie Jones committed suicide

The world we knew busted open wide  
In The Winter Of '79

I'd bin working on and off  
A pint of beer was still ten bob

Me brand new Bonnevillie got ripped off, I  
More or less give up trying

They stopped the social in the Spring  
And quite a few Communists got run in

In The Winter Of '79

It was us poor bastards took the chop  
When the tubes gone up and the buses stopped

The top people still come out on top  
The government never resigned

The Carib Club got petrol bombed  
The National Front was getting awful strong

They done in Dave and Dagenham Ron  
In The Winter Of '79

When all the gay geezers were put inside  
And coloured kids were getting crucified

A few fought back and a few folks died  
Yes, a few of us fought and a few of us died

In The Winter Of '79

This song epitomises the desperation that's implanted deep into the recesses of Robinson's mind, and which it takes a long time to reach when talking to him. If he could ease up a tiny fraction of the intolerance, hatred and prejudice in the world, he said, it would be

worth it.

Above all, he was determined to speak as a 1977 person. "Conditions are getting worse, and when this happens, the hatred, distrust and prejudice build up. 'd originally like to have been a Liberal, but there are 10 Liberals in '77."

"It's make-your-mind-up time, because it's becoming increasingly true for both extremes that if you don't stand on one side or the other, you'll get well and truly caught in the cross-fire."

"I'm trying to reach out to the non-committed person on the street. He's the one who's gonna cop it... we've gotta get together."

"Listen, I've played in pubs where a black guy liked the music and he came up afterwards and said: 'What are the words about?' And then I've told him and he says: 'Hey, steady on now, you know black people ain't got nothing to do with no queers! Coloured folk is respectable people.'"

"Time will tell how the Pistols show up in the long run of music, and time will decide for us."

HE'S 27, and, naturally, a Guardian reader. Born and schooled in Cambridge. His father, a schoolteacher's son from Lincolnshire, plays cello.

Tom once played clarinet in a dance band, and early in his life was taught piano, but he renounced this as the stage instrument in his current career because: "If you notice Keith Emerson or Elton John, they can't move from the keyboards, whereas some of their songs demand some physical movement."

"Guitar appealed because you can move around the stage when you're playing and singing. Don't like static instruments. Same with drums — too restricting."

He attended a co-educational Quaker boarding school, and his father, who is heavily into Bach, believes that most pop is useless and that "anything after 1850 stinks, unless it's baroque," according to Tom.

Young Robinson was forced to take piano lessons from age four to 13, but made poor progress. Eventually, he was bought a guitar, and drifted towards Cambridge area pop groups the Lost Souls, the Ravens, the Nomads.

After boarding school and with a string of A levels and O levels he came to London at 20 and went to the Musicians' Union seeking a job as a bass guitarist.

"People are different, really. There's still this kind of idea of a male, heterosexual, Anglo-Saxon, middle-class or upper middle-class Mister Wonderful that too many people have to conform to, and everybody's striving towards that ethic."

"Working class people who will never be middle-class in a million years are struggling to acquire bour-

geois ideals and fridges and dreaming of meeting the Queen one day at a garden party.

"You see black guys wearing bowler hats and suits, twirling umbrellas, but you know they'll never be let in at the Dorchester, or if they are they'll never be accepted into white society."

"So you've got also gay guys kidding themselves, living together as a perfect set-up in a house, and everybody accepts that on paper, but of course the neighbours get behind their backs and snigger over the garden fence at them. They, we, will never be respectable in a million years."

By the end of '79, things will be very nasty for all minorities like him, says Robinson. "The backlash is already on its way, and that's just a personally held belief, not a band policy. I fear things getting worse, not better."

Didn't that make his lyrics potential killers as far as the band's future was concerned?

"Yes, it makes it a time bomb we're sitting on, because we're sticking our necks out. With the Clash and the Pistols, they equivocate."

"You can't make out a deliberate stance in any one issue with them, which is the classic pop formula for success — like Bowie came on with during the Camp Rock thing. Everyone was teased — is he, isn't he?"

"But the Tom Robinson Band is unequivocal. Things are moving so fast, you can't afford to f— about."

"OK, so maybe this issue will be I'll end up in an internment camp, but that's how it is. You've got to face up to '77, live for today, say things today that need saying. Last year's words belong to last year's language, and next year's words await another voice."

"You've got to speak this year's language in words for today. And when you've said your piece, you take your place along with the others, and you're either shown to be a total fool or a charlatan or a fraud by the passage of time, or a prophet."

"I'm absolutely determined and committed to improving the band — that's what separates our success now from what was achieved by my old band. And you know, if EMI threw us off the label tomorrow, for whatever reason, I wouldn't even break stride."

The EMI situation is, at first sight, delicate. The company's last hugely controversial act, the Sex Pistols, were paid off so that EMI did not have the embarrassment of dealing with a burgeoning career of what people upstairs in The Boardroom would regard as morally questionable.

This time, with the Robinson position as uncompromising and potentially as lethally controversial for EMI as the Pistols, there seems unanimity because it is a band that's seen to put music above message.

Also, EMI bosses say that Robinson has "taste" when discussing his gay ideals.

Bob Mercer, director of marketing and repertoire at EMI, sees few problems ahead, mainly because he regards Tom as "a very intelligent and controlled person."

"There's an anti-Establishment attitude from most bands," says Mercer. "Tom Robinson has had a particular stance in connection with Gay Liberation, but EMI does not regard itself as a censorship outfit."

What were the chances of confrontation between artist and record company over such areas as militant lyrics or album cover designs? And was EMI aware that in Robinson there was a prickly character who would stop at nothing?

"We often meet that attitude from musicians," Mercer answered. "It's always easier, not harder, to deal with someone like Tom Robinson, whose perception is profound."

Not a hope, they said — but they pointed him to a clerical job at the classical music publisher J. B. Cramer, £19 a week, 9.30 until 5.30, and the routine of it pleased him.

"I'd go back like a shot. At 5.30 you could shut the door and your work was behind you and you could then go and enjoy whatever pleasure you wanted to, and that's great."

Having worked with others under the corporate name of Cafe Society, he faced the problem when launching his own band of whether to assert his name, risking the possible future wrath of the others seeking a coalition, or "deciding on some other absurd name like the Fuzzbombers or whatever."

Typically, Robinson's single-mindedness won the day.

Interestingly, the factor that decided him to promote his own name was practicality. "Because I'd been in the moderately successful Cafe Society, I had a very, very minor name of my own."

"So if by putting Tom Robinson upfront it would mean there would be an extra five people at the gigs, it was worth doing it. And after a couple of months, who'd be stupid enough to change it?"

"Democratic? I'll say. Because it's me who's the front man, nobody's trying to prove anything. There's no problem. We all have an ego, but we're all sensible enough to realise that all we ever do is for the good of the band."

"The thing I live for, and have done ever since the TRB was formed, is performing on stage — for that one-hour 'fix' per night. And I live the other 23 for that, so that making records and all the rest of it is just a means to be able to perform."

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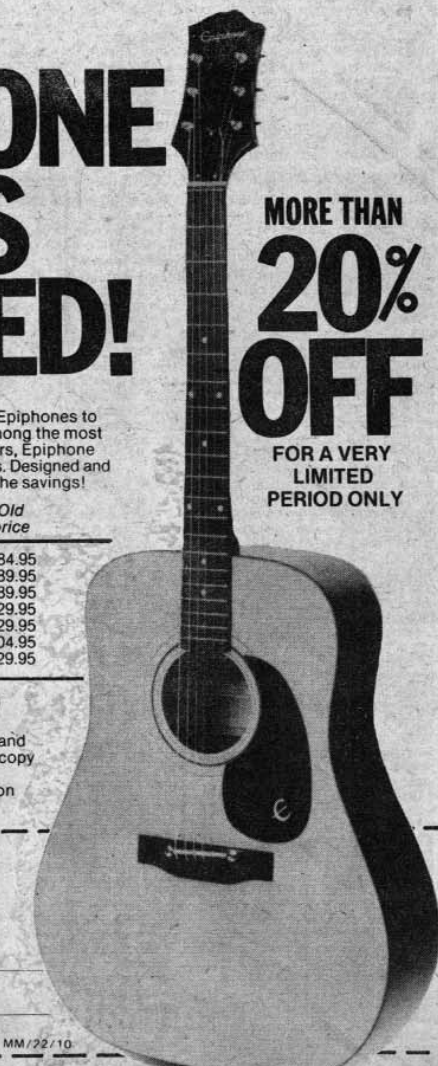
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# Tom Robinson

from page 32

"The power of reason wins through if you are not dealing with an impractical mind. He's very perceptive, understands the music business, leads a great band, and EMI is convinced it will be one of the biggest successes in the land."

America beckons, too, and it's certain that the gay publicity will be a powerful piece of ammunition in that country.

The massed band of EMI went after the band at the Brecknock pub in Camden Town six weeks ago. Early reconnaissance had been carried out by A&R men Nick Mobbs and John Darnley, but Mercer led the final swooping force of between 20 and 30 at the Brecknock, and he recalls that the whole party "went absolutely crazy" with determination to sign the band against all contestants.

It is a fact that while other companies had offered more immediate cash to Robinson, he and the band opted for EMI because they fancied "their machine." After that pub gig, Mercer and the hit team took the band for a meal, talked into the early hours, and they signed next day.

Three weeks ago, Robinson attended an EMI regional sales conference in Manchester and impressed all with his intimate knowledge of how the record industry functions.

Asked about such hard-headed pragmatism, he told me coolly: "If you want to have more people than you can actually play to in one place at one time, to hear what you're doing and listen to your music and your views, then you have to make records."

"If you're going to make records, you may as well do so with the best company you can get hold of, EMI, and once you've reached that position, you must do it wholeheartedly rather than mess around."

What of his controversial possibilities and the prospect of friction with the company that axed the Sex Pistols?

"Well, yeah, I guess that fring thing could happen to me but then I think they see now how silly they were with the Pistols. Really, the point is that EMI is a public company and therefore vulnerable to interference from people who don't understand musicians."



TOM ROBINSON: 'I'm very lonely. This band's my life.'

"But anyway, nothing's gonna get in the way of this band. EMI offered me terms that were well above the normal contract, but if that goes wrong, I won't let it stop me. The band is on course, so to speak."

"I'll tell you what I've told everyone all along the line. I'm a musician and I like the applause. I'm in this thing for the ego trip; I don't want anyone coming back to me later and saying I lied."

"You know, you read about the Clash and the Pistols denying they want to be pop stars, and it doesn't make sense. They can come on as nasty as they like, but they want to be pop stars, and I don't see why they should be forced into a position where they say the reverse."

TALKING of the punks, or the new wavers, Robinson didn't seem to care with whom he was bracketed. But one of his most potent songs was clearly aligned with the kids on the streets:

"Up Against The Wall"

Dark haired dangerous schoolkids,  
Vicious, suspicious sixteen  
Jet black blazers at the bus stop  
Sullen, unhealthy and mean  
Teenage guerrillas on the tarmac  
Fighting in the middle of the road  
Supercharged FSIE's on the asphalt  
The kids are coming in from the cold.

High wire fencing on the playground  
High rise housing all around  
High rise prices on the high street  
High time to pull it all down  
White boys kicking in a window  
Straight girls watching where they gone  
Never trust a copper in a crime car  
Just whose side are you on?

Consternation in Mayfair  
Rioting in Notting-Hill Gate  
Fascists marching on the High Street  
Cutting back your welfare state  
Operator get me the hot line  
Father can you hear me at all?

Telephone kiosk out of order  
Spraycan writing on the wall.

Lookout, listen, can you hear it  
Panic in the County Hall  
Look out, listen can you hear it  
Whitehall Up Against The Wall  
Up Against The Wall.

You get the distinct feeling that if there's one person with whom he parallels himself, it's Pete Townshend. The mere mention of the Who star's name sent Robinson into paroxysms of admiration.

"Nobody can touch him, for what he's achieved for rock music in the world generally, and for the way he was talking about politics generally back in 1970 and 1971. It pre-dates everything we've got now."

"A guy like Townshend is, to me, like a colossus in rock, more important than anyone. And because of the magnitude of his achievements, it's unfair to compare him with other people — like Charles Mingus said of Duke Ellington, this guy should be banned from the opinion polls!"

"Mingus said something about first place being set aside for Ellington year after year, and then let's talk about the rest of us. I feel that way about Townshend."

You judge it from number two downwards, after him.

"And out of all those Sixties bands, the Who's the only one that's still going with the same amount of commitment beneath them that they had early on. Others have become a caricature of themselves, a charade. Too much negativity going down."

He's warm towards jazz, likes Miles Davis, but cites Manfred Mann's "Five Faces Of Manfred" album as one of his all-time favourites. Richard Thompson is named as "one of the absolute greats of British songwriting."

To contrast with the stern aspect of his lyrics, there is the Cockney accent, perhaps a heritage from Ray Davies, which Robinson carries off quite amusingly on stage.

There's an ode to a "brother" called "Martin," which is a simple song of friendship, but the tongue-in-cheek joyride which clinches his sense of the ridiculous is a song immortalising the Ford Cortina:

"Grey Cortina"

Wish I had a grey Cortina  
Whiplash aerial, racing trim  
Cortina owner, no-one meaner  
Wish that I could be like him

Twin exhaust and rusty bumper  
Chewing gum at traffic light  
Stop at red but leave on amber  
Grey Cortina — outa sight

Fur-lined seats and lettered windscreen  
Elbow on the windowsill  
Eight-track blazing Bruce Springsteen  
Bomber jacket, dressed to kill

Never cop a parking ticket  
Never seem to show its age  
Speed police too slow to nick it

Grey Cortina got it made . . .

Wish I had a grey Cortina  
Whiplash aerial, racing trim  
Cortina owner, no-one meaner  
Wish that I could be like him

● Words and music by Tom Robinson, reproduced by permission.

He is in love with the whole kitsch trip of such a model, and after dinner at the Liverpool Berni Inn, he said a Mark II Cortina to whisk us away would have made the fantasy complete for him.

"Do you know, my contact in the motor trade tells me that a J registration silver fox 1600E will fetch its weight in gold in the open market. A client of his bought one off somebody for £1,500 last week. It's like I say — the silver-grey ones go faster."

Nodding dogs on the rear shelf and fur trim would be essential for him, of course — ah, the luxury, the lunacy.

Robinson smiles at the thought, but it's the smile of an escapist. He's going to score heavily over the ephemeral appeal of hundreds of other bands next year, because his music is rock hard, and his commitment is very real.

But like his mentor Ray Davies, he's the classic character portrayed in Smokey Robinson's "Tears Of A Clown."

"As close as I am to any guys on this earth," the heavily emotional Robinson said finally, "I'm close to the guys in my band. Yet . . . I'm not really close to any human being on this earth."

"I'm very lonely. This band's my life, and I don't find time for anybody or anything else. It's cost me all my friendships, this determination thing . . . and my worst fear is that if the band's successful, having a nervous breakdown or something."

"Because you can get so isolated and removed from reality. I've watched people, and you have to be so on the ball all the time, just trying to keep yourself away from that abyss."

Was it worth it? He didn't flinch from replying, with that quicksilver, steely outer wall of confidence:

"Course. Y'see, I suddenly shot out of bed from my sleep, last October 12. . . ."

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# TRB

# TOM ROBINSON BAND

# PRESS CUTTINGS



"London Evening Standard"

## Tom Robinson — rock voice of '78?

NEWS ON CAMERA



FROM THE LOCAL to the Lyceum—Rising rock star Tom Robinson in action last night.

MUSIC with a hard-core political bias could soon become a regular feature of the Top Ten if a singer called Tom Robinson continues his sudden and mercurial rise to the top.

Last night nearly 3000 jostling fans filled the Lyceum ballroom for a concert by the singer, whom many observers feel could become the voice of rock music in 1978.

Six months ago 27-year-old Robinson and his group were performing to just a few hundred people in public houses around North London.

Then his first single, an innocuous song called Motorway, became one of the top five chart singles.

Now, from this position of some success, it looks as if Robinson is prepared to launch the rest of his material that combines accessible, catchy rock with lyrics that deal, as he puts it, with oppressed minorities.

In return, many of the singer's most enthusiastic admirers feels he has the potential to become the kind of spokesman that has been missing since the days when Bob Dylan and John Lennon were at their peak.

As the son of wealthy parents Robinson adds a middle-class articulation to the kind of dissatisfaction expressed by punk rock.

And now that the punk movement could be running out of steam he seems an ideal candidate to take over.

EMI Records have already signed up Robinson in a contract reputed to be worth £100,000 and the singer realises the kind of contradictions he may shortly face.

"Nobody is more aware about the probable fate of this group than myself," he says.

"If we get some commercial success people will inevitably say it's a sell-out."

### Commercial

"We mean to carry on and if we do lose the feeling we have with the audience now they can come and throw bricks at my Rolls-Royce."

In the callous, commercial world of rock music last night's show was an extraordinary event in many ways.

Robinson's followers who could not get into the theatre were given leaflets to ensure prior booking facilities on the next tour.

Meanwhile, for those inside, free programmes were given out mixing up traditional information for fans about the group with comment on matters like the George Ince campaign.

Robinson's background includes several years at a grammar school plus a spell at the Finchley Manor School for Maladjusted Children.

"I was sent there when I was 16 years old after suicide attempts and a nervous breakdown," he explains matter-of-factly.

"It was just an unspectacular nervous breakdown brought on by 'A' levels."

His current political preoccupations were brought on because, he frankly admits, he is homosexual.

"I was never a political animal until things started happening close to home."

"Quite ordinary people I knew who went out for a drink got beaten up or picked up by the police."

"I then realised that freedom is indivisible and that it covers several other areas as well."

Report: JAMES JOHNSON  
Pictures: GRAHAM WOOD



"If we lose the feeling we have with the audience now, they can come and throw bricks at my Rolls-Royce"

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# TRB

## TOM ROBINSON BAND

### PRESS CUTTINGS



"Melody Maker's first-ever wraparound front cover January 7, 1978"





# TRB

# TOM ROBINSON BAND

# PRESS CUTTINGS



Page 10—MELODY MAKER, January 7, 1978

# Tom Robinson

THE Brecknock Pub, London, mid-week in early summer '77: there are great rock and roll bands whose enthusiasm for their music and whose aim for creating a natural unity between themselves and their audience comes together and works.

Their lyrics can encompass anything from mooching about the streets looking for love, being fed-up with sitting in Holiday Inns, being violently anti-society, or simply being confused about the potential meaning of life.

Then there are "alternative" political bands whose lyrics follow a very direct line. Musically they tend not to make it because they only have goodwill and commitment on their side, and they stumble through their set.

The two major ingredients have never been so successfully and commercially fused — not even with the Clash—before. The Tom Robinson Band are unique in that they encompass both the excitement of good rock and roll with overt political commitment.

## Relationship

Robinson, despite the initial awkwardness that comes with middle-class involvement in "minority" causes, seems, even in these early days, to have a special relationship with his audience that is natural rather than manipulative. This is the night EMI finally decide to sign up the Tom Robinson Band.

Robinson, out of Cafe Society, the Robinson Cruising shows, and the odd bass-playing gigs with Irish showbands, had been broke for three years, and a good record contract with a major label had been his burning goal.

Danny Kustow (lead guitar), Mark Ambler (keyboards) and Brian Taylor (drums) were younger, less harried by the rock business world, and happy for the work.

In the event, though, even Robinson did not suspect how fast success was going to hit this band. The recording session for "Motorway" certainly gave no indication of things to come.

Three producers later it still wasn't right. "I couldn't see what we were doing anymore," says Robinson, "I kept saying to the company 'tell me what to do and I'll do it, I wrote the song, I've sung it, I've done it every way you've asked.'"

## Personal chaos

A month after its release it had propelled the TRB from the small clubs to the Lyceum. By December they were coming to the end of four months on the road, as many changes of plan, and a whole mass of personal chaos.

Nobody who had seen the TRB go through this from May onwards was surprised at their success. But then, it's often easier from outsiders to gauge potential. The TRB couldn't fail. It might have been a slower process but it wouldn't have been any less sure.

The difference is that from the start Tom was obviously A Man With A Mission, but the rest of the band never looked quite as sure. Now they not only play with a conviction success can bring, but have gradually become as personally involved as Tom in what's being said.

After all, when people wanted to give them a hard time it wasn't Tom who faced confrontation—but the others. His position on gays, blacks, women and the working class was clear, but nobody was sure where Danny, Mark and Brian stood. It was they who were verbally and physically threatened after gigs by the NF or local pub "heavies".

## Crazy lives

By the middle of December, when I saw them, they were tired and bewildered, very aware of how crazy their lives had become and how things had changed. They thought all this—the endless cover stories in the press, three days having to be especially set aside to deal with the demand from foreign journalists, bigger management, new deals—was frightening, coming, as it all had, off one single.

And their concern about the future, where exactly to move from this point and keep their professional, political and personal integrity, was overwhelming. The TRB have to hold on to their principles.

Perhaps like Dylan—the only musician to whom they bear comparison—they'll manage it in their own way. As Brian Taylor says grimly: "We're trying to feel our way and take advice from management, record companies and lawyers, and it's very different."

"You don't know who you can trust anymore, you don't even know if you can trust yourself. This is—the time for self-discovery."

## equipment

- DANNY KUSTOW: 1959 Gibson Les Paul custom guitar; Gibson SG guitar; Ernie Ball super slinky strings; 50-watt Marshall lead amp; 100-watt Marshall 4 x 12 cabinet.
- MARK AMBLER: L100 Hammond organ; J145 Leslie speaker; Wurlitzer piano; Fender twin reverb amp.
- TOM ROBINSON: Fender Precision bass; Rota sound flat-wound strings; Ampeg V4 amp; Ampeg SVT 8 x 10 bass cabinet.
- BRIAN TAYLOR: Tama drums: 22" bass drum; 13 x 8, 14 x 9, 15 x 10, 16 x 15, 16 x 16 tom-toms; Ludwig 400 snare; Pearl bass drum pedal; Premier 'C' sticks; Evans hydrolic skins; Ziljian 15" hi-hat cymbal; two Paiste 16" crash cymbals; 18" Paiste crash/ride cymbal; 20" Paiste ride cymbal.

## records

- SINGLE: "2-4-6-8 Motorway"/"I Shall Be Released" (EMI 2715).



## Tom Robinson

TOM ROBINSON is concerned, committed and honest. He is even honest enough to say he's deliberately being honest so that nobody can have their expectations ruined, or turn on him later telling him he's "sold out."

"That's why I've always made it clear I want fame and I want recognition. I'm not doing this for the good of the country, I'm doing it because I want to be a pop star, I'm insecure enough to want to go on stage and know people are pleased I'm there, and have that communion with an audience. I don't want people thinking I'm an ego-tripper and a hypocrite later on."

Tom Robinson has a motorbike which has been parked one mile from his home in North London for the past four months. He has not had time to go and get it back!

"In September I was on the George Ince march and I knew how many mikes we had, how much we were being paid for a gig, how the roadies were managing, what the sound mixer's matrimonial problems were. I — wham! — all this craziness. I totally lost control and freaked out . . ."

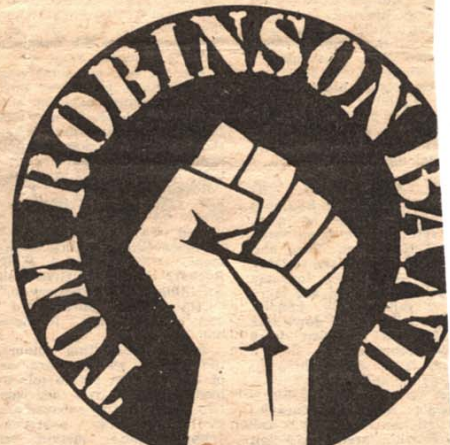
Tom Robinson came out of a home for maladjusted kids realising he was gay. He stood up and said it when other musicians who were gay held onto the closet rails for dear life.

He worries that this side of his persona is overstressed. After all, he says, the other members of the band are heterosexual and, while the gay issue is important, it's no more so than the other issues at stake.

He has marched in protest for abortion rights, for Ince, for the Grunwick strikers, against the National Front. He played for Rock Against Racism when it was in its formative days.

He combines all this with an impressive understanding of the way the music business works, learnt through often bitter personal experience.

He has a special kind of public relations that is endearing as it is often disconcerting. He belongs to no political party but his line is clear. His overt



ambition, the necessity for fame and success, may inevitably lead him to a position of compromise. He seems prepared to deal with that.

Robinson is the most articulate and formidable musician, and while he says he doesn't have all the answers he certainly asks all the right questions.

"Let's suppose that every rock fan who comes to see us has the traditional scam about the police not being too bad. Six months later, when the TRB isn't the thing they're most interested in, they see a black youth stopped and searched by the police on the street. Maybe they won't think 'wonder what he was up to' or 'dirty bastard pig' but they might wonder, with a more open mind, exactly what was going on. That would be a result of inter-action between their conditioning and a bit of bashing-over-the-head propaganda from us."

"I now have a responsibility and I want to shape up to that. I'm not telling an audience what to think and do, that's why I have reservations about 'Left Is Right And Right Is Wrong' — it's too absolute."

"I don't want to lay down 'this is so,' but merely to say 'have you ever looked at it like this?' To expand the way people look at things and encourage them to make their own conclusions."

"Let's face it — in the end we are just a rock group, it is only rock and roll. Let's not blow up the importance of what's going on."

"But if, while I'm having my personal glory trip, one less kid has been Paki-bashed or a 100 less people have joined the NF, that's a truly magnificent thing."

"And if we've achieved anything up to today, whatever it is will remain. That's my reason for holding out as long as we can, as uncompromised as we can, until we can't. If that happens we take our decision and take our flak."

"I didn't expect this. I didn't expect the speed, the degree, and it poses a problem. We're not just a '2-4-6-8 Motorway' group on Top Of The Pops and I'm not an SWP spokesman. We're somewhere in the middle. We broke into a market that wasn't initially part of our direction. All I'm damned sure about at the moment is that the next records aren't interpreted as an attempt to go back there and repeat it."





MELODY MAKER, January 7, 1978—Page 11

# Band

MM Band Breakdown by Penny

Valentine. Pictures by Barry Plummer



## Danny Kustow

**ONSTAGE** Tom Robinson may be gay, proud or angry — Danny Kustow seems just plain surly and macho. If there is one man who gives the TRB the spit and fire necessary to transform them from being a good political band into a hot rock and roll band that man is Kustow.

He is the archetypal guitar hero, prowling and glowering out in a kind of distorted pain from under his jet black hair. He gives the band exactly the extra dimension they needed.

Earlier this year, when they first started playing live, it was apparent that Tom relied on Danny up there next to him. He could have come over just a little bit earnest but for the dark figure of Kustow stamping around, and the two of them, arms round each other's necks, pub-singing "My Brother Martin."

The emphasis changed. It was a clever, if subconscious, move by Robinson to make two stage-front focal points. If the kids dismissed Robinson out of hand, they would have Danny to turn to. And often they did.

"At youth clubs, and some were rough places, they identified with Danny as being the kind of yobo of the band," says Tom.

"He was the macho kid and they'd hang off him as the guitar hero. They could identify with him. They related to Danny animally. The girls wanted to have him. The boys wanted to be him."

The band's "crisis point" each night was "Glad To Be Gay." That was

when trouble could break out, when they might be "bottled". But with Kustow suddenly coming up to join Robinson on the chorus they never had any bother. "The moment Danny moved to the mike and sang along, and it was apparent he was angry too, they thought: 'Well, if that bloke says it — it must be okay.' You could almost feel the sigh of relief come off them, then they'd join in and you'd be over the hill."

Off stage Kustow alternates between a mumbling moodiness and a sudden switchblade smile. If that sounds too pat an illustration it's the best I can come up with to quickly describe his very complex personality.

He can be difficult. He can be shyly charming. He can be childish and temperamental. He can try and shock. Robinson looks on him with a kind of older-brother concern. He makes allowances, but there are times when he stops. "That's Danny's problem — not yours, not mine," he shrugs.

Their closeness derives from the fact that they were both in the same home for maladjusted children. Two middle-class kids with very different problems who wound up under the same roof.

Robinson gave Kustow his first guitar lessons. Sometimes Danny would spend hours listening to

another boy's large collection of blues albums. When he finally came out (he cynically refers to it as "cured") he took on a variety of jobs — on building sites, in warehouses, as a waiter — until Cafe Society broke up and he came back together with Robinson full-time.

The stories about him joining the Israeli paratroopers upset him. He denies it. Bored and fed up in London, kicking his heels between mundane jobs, he was looking for action. He went to Israel with a mate and they lived on a border kibbutz so — naturally — they were taught to protect themselves. That, according to Kustow, is as far as it went.

He seems disappointed, but he wants to set the record straight. He was looking for real action but he didn't find it. So he came back. He still seems to look for action and admits that one side of him is attracted to violence.

Kustow has been compared to Keith Richards and he grins about that. Oh yes, he admits, he ripped off Richards' style but then who hasn't? "Keef chords" they were always called, those tightly bunched notes.

He doesn't know if he's a success and he doesn't care. Sure he likes the attention on stage best of all, but success?

## Brian 'Dolphin' Taylor

**BRIAN** comes a close second to Tom as the most extrovert and articulate member of the band. He thinks the reason he nearly didn't get into the TRB was because Tom initially thought he was too "cocky."

He answered the same advertisement as Ambler, although more by accident: "I'd seen it in Melody Maker and read it because it was so big and said all these great things Tom was going to do, and ended up with the words 'No Bread' — so I ignored it."

Two days later a bass player he knew rang up and said he was going to audition for the band and would Brian take him there in his car?

Taylor met Robinson, the bass player didn't get the job, but Brian was taken on as a temporary drummer: "In those days everything was on a temporary basis because Tom would book a gig and then get a band together to play it. There was a

gig due in three days, so I played."

Like Ambler, Brian ended up with Robinson because he was broke and this was work: "I was at my wits' end. I'd done a few sessions, was on the dole, bored stiff. Tom played me a few songs. I thought 'Long Hot Summer' was a bit weak but I was very interested in 'Glad To Be Gay.'"

"When we played and the others came out — like 'Up Against The Wall' which I freaked at — I began to think this was going to be good."

Up until the TRB Taylor had existed mainly in the cabaret field. At five he was playing with his mother and sister around old people's homes. At 13 he joined an amateur rock band. Then it was back to cabaret.

He enjoyed it: "To start with it was a means of getting pocket money. Then, when I went professional, I left home and did cabaret bands. It was great. You can make a real fool of yourself because those bands are always consid-

ered so dumb and useless and the audience doesn't give a monkey's, you can get away with anything."

The last band he joined tried to move to rock. It was not successful. Taylor found himself in the forefront of their line-up on New Faces: "I came out rather well," he says modestly, "but the band itself was — less than fortunate."

That was in '76. He auditioned for 999, Subway Sect, Edgar Broughton, but "was rejected by the then-famous ones and didn't fancy the ones who are famous now."

The "Dolphin" nickname has stuck since he was a kid. He saw a whole series of fantasies about working with dolphins at Brighton when he joined the TRB. Not true?

"Not true," he sighs. "Though I like going to see them there, they're great. No, it started on the road — one night Tom pulled me forward to sing and I did 'Rudolph The Red-Finned Dolphin,' 'I'm Dreaming Of A White

Dolphin' . . . it just went on."

Although he came from a comfortable home in West Drayton and went to the local grammar school, Taylor thinks his first political stirrings happened early when his brother married into a poor family. The father eventually killed himself because of dole worries.

"But the initial ideas were there. I've never at any time, for instance, felt that the blacks were in the wrong. But then I certainly wouldn't have stood up and said it."

Taylor's first overt political experience came when he and Robinson went to join the National Abortion Campaign march this May.

"We were doing the ICA and it took me two hours to get there because of this march. I was in a really bad mood when I finally turned up. 'What's this bloody march going on?' I yelled and Tom said 'I thought we should leave right then and join it.'"



## Mark Ambler

He's self-contained and keeps a distance: "When you hear 's — the Tom Robinson Band, fantastic' and people raving all over the place, it becomes unrealistic. You shouldn't believe everything that people tell you, should you?"

Early gigs showed Ambler retaining his sense of distance between himself and what was going on on stage. "It took a lot of time to get conditioned to that non-interested look! But after a few weeks I thought I'd better look as though I was part of it all."

### Shift

"I didn't really know the role of a bass player — I thought you just stood there and played. When I moved to keyboards, it p — me off that I had to look up and shift about and be seen to be enjoying myself."

"It was totally alien to me, but Tom kept persuading me to do things." When he joined TRB, Ambler was "down and out, and looking for any gig." A child prodigy, he had taken classical piano lessons from the age of eight. He soon tired. "They'd say 'that's very good, Mark,

but we must know our chords' when I tried to improvise." Jazz lessons from Stan Tracey, followed, arranged by his mother who had been a long-time Tracey fan.

"He's such a nice guy and he taught himself from a completely different angle, and those lessons really helped me." At the same time Ambler was studying guitar at the Royal College Of Music and finding the same old problems about musical freedom versus rigid format. He hated the lessons but not the teachers: "They were so badly paid we had the first punk history teacher — his clothes were held together with safety pins." He quit RCM after a year.

Although joining the TRB under such take-it-or-leave-it circumstances led some people to believe he wouldn't stick with the group, Ambler seems to have settled. Sometimes he worries that what the band stands for gets in the way of the music, but there's always the challenge to play better because of the pressure they're under.

That's more to his liking. "It is," he says, smiling for the first time, "all getting better, even though we're shattered. Tom's playing better bass — he was terrible to start with, and Danny's singing has improved — he's in pitch now."





# TRB

## TOM ROBINSON BAND

### PRESS CUTTINGS



February 11, 1978 | U.S. \$1.10c/Canada 60c | 18p

*new* **MUSICAL EXPRESS**

# **BAND ON THE RUN: TOM ROBINSON BREAKS OUT**

Pages 25-30



**Generation X Eddie and the Hot Rods**





# TRB

# TOM ROBINSON BAND

# PRESS CUTTINGS



February 11th, 1978

NEW MUSICAL EXPRESS

Page 25

SING IF YOU'RE GLAD TO BE GAY. SING IF YOU'RE HAPPY



*Pictures of naked young women are fun  
In Tibits and Playboy, page three of The  
Sun;  
There's no nudes in Gay News, our one  
magazine.  
But they still find ways to call it  
obscene . . .*

**L**ONG BEFORE Mary Whitehouse ever discovered the hideous charge of 'blasphemous libel' on which she spiked *Gay News* last year, the vigilante forces of our nation had worked out another method of hurting Europe's foremost homosexual newspaper. If anything, it was even more slimy than Whitehouse's tactic.

See, *Gay News* has always been most careful to stay well within the highly flexible limits of the laws governing obscenity. Like the song says, no nudes, no porn, no sensationalism. No way could GN be found to contravene the Obscene Publications law.

But — and this was the big BUT that the authorities latched onto sometime around 1974 — just because a paper isn't obscene doesn't mean you can't take it to court. It may come out of the case innocent, but the British courts have a clever way of fining the innocent: LEGAL COSTS.

Twice in 1974 GN fell victim to the British legal system. Police swooped on newsagents in Bath and some other south coast town, took the paper to court — and the judge, although deeming the magazine innocent, refused to award legal costs, thus depriving it of the several thousand pounds required to mount its defence against the police's rejected charges.

It was at a benefit to raise funds for one of these *Gay News* legal battles that I first saw Tom Robinson.

The venue was the Royal Mail pub in Upper Street, Islington, the date late 1974. A typically jolly gay get-together it was. GN editor Denis Lemon — already a hero and potential martyr to



PHOTO BY BARRY PLUMMER

the people there — blushing handed out the prizes in the raffle, and then, to fill the gap before the headlining drag queen made her entrance, a pallid youth got up on the stage and diffidently strummed out a totally unmemorable little ditty he'd just penned.

That young man, of course, was Tom Robinson. If you'd told me then that three years later he would be leading one of the fiercest rock 'n' roll bands in the country, you would have been laughed out the door.

So how *did* he get from sentimental acoustic love songs to Whitehall-up-against-the-wall?

The glib answer would be: money. It would be very easy to accuse Tom Robinson of jumping onto a political slogan bandwagon just as the whole 'movement' gathered impetus late in '76 — and people have already done so. One of those people, who has known Tom for five years now, is Ray Davies.

*A well-known groover, rock 'n' roll user,  
Wanted to be a star.  
But he failed the blues, and he backed a loser  
Playing folk in a coffee bar.  
Reggae music didn't seem to satisfy his needs,  
He couldn't handle modern jazz because they  
played in difficult keys.  
But now he's found a music he can call his  
own.  
Some call it junk, but he don't care — he's  
found a home . . .*

*He's the prince of the punks and he's finally  
made it.  
Thinks he looks cool but his act is dated,  
He acts working class but it's all baloney,  
He's really middle class and he's just a  
phony.  
He acts tough but it's just a front —  
The prince of the punks!*

*He tried to be gay but it just didn't pay,  
So he bought a motorbike instead.  
He failed at funk so he became a punk,  
Because he thought he'd make a little more  
bread.*

*He's been through all the changes from rock  
opera to Mantovani,  
Now he wears a swastika badge and leather  
boots up past his knees,  
He's much too old at 28, but he thinks he's 17.  
He thinks he's a star but I think he looks more  
like a queen.*

*He's the prince of the punks and he's finally  
made it.*

**'I've only been acclaimed as  
a campaigner for gay rights  
since I ceased to be one'**

Continues over page

# TOM ROBINSON

By PHIL McNEILL





# TRB

# TOM ROBINSON BAND

# PRESS CUTTINGS



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NEW MUSICAL EXPRESS

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THAT WAY... SING IF YOU'RE GLAD TO BE GAY. SING IF YOU'RE



### From previous page

Thinks he looks cool but his act is dated. He talks like a Cockney but it's all baloney. He's really middle class and he's just a phoney. He acts tough but it's just a front — Prince of the punks!

Thus spake Uncle Ray on the B-side of his recent seasonal opus, "Father Christmas". Sure, it could be applied to most current bandwagon jumpers — indeed, Ray denies that it was written with Tom in mind — except that Robinson is generally believed

to be 28 (he's actually 27), he does have a motorbike, he is gay, he did use to sing in a coffee bar (Cafe Society had a residency at Bunjies when they first signed to Konk), he is middle class, he does adopt a Cockney accent for a couple of songs . . . and he does want to be a star.

Oh yes — and here's the rub — he's finally made it too.

Even among TRB admirers, the question nags: what the hell was Tom Robinson doing in that wimpy band all those years? How come he's only just started playing hard, committed rock in the past year?

So . . . what I'd like to do is explain why Tom was in a basically heterosexual band in the first place, to counter some of the more disdainful write-offs of Cafe Society that have gone down in recent Tom Robinson interviews, and to trace Robinson's path from indifference to dedicated activism and (as he would claim) back to non-activity.

**A** VERY rough chronology: Tom Robinson met Ray Doyle and Hereward Kaye in Middlesbrough around 1969/70. Tom 'came out' around 1971/2. Cafe Society was formed in 1973 after a reunion with Doyle and Kaye in London. His first 'political act' was to work at Gay Switchboard, which he did from early '74 to late '75.

In other words, although he was openly homosexual by the time he formed Cafe Society, he was not 'politicised'. By the time he was, his career with Cafe Society was well underway. Being a gay activist began virtually as a hobby, and at first had little or no relevance to his 'day job'.

Maybe this calls into question Robinson's increasingly frantic 'commitment' — coinciding as it has done with his increased success — but I think not. In fact, if we pry into Tom Robinson's past we see a remarkably clear-cut path of self-realisation and action.

Early in 1975, he did his first ever interview. It was in *Gay News*.

*Q: What do you see as your responsibility within the gay movement?*

*A:* Just to be openly that I think. If every gay in Britain was to come out overnight, an awful lot of the prejudice and ignorance that abounds among hets would disappear. This is a thing that so many people don't realise about coming out. They imagine that if they come out people will think they're a 'nasty queer', whereas in fact when one comes out with one's friends they change their idea of what a 'nasty queer' is.

A lot of people rationalise their fears about coming out. They say they'd lose their job or it would hurt their friends too much. One has to be very scrupulously honest with oneself to make sure one's not making excuses.

I was lucky in that I have a very tolerant father, who is heartily in favour of all forms of sexuality except asexuality.

*Q: There are always times — when one meets someone on a train, say — when it would be so much easier not to come out to them. Do you have that sort of experience?*

*A:* Yes, there are always occasions when one

does find oneself passing ("passing for straight" being the opposite of "coming out of the closet"). I wonder if there is such a thing as a totally come-out person? I expect there is . . .

**T**OM ROBINSON has since become such "a totally come-out person" that he now says that he is "an Uncle Tom. I'm a straight man's homosexual . . . a lone homosexual in straight circles."

In passing — we happened to be talking about a song from TRB's new EP, "Right On Sister", and in what ways men could or could not support women's rights — Tom told me recently that he would "deeply resent a heterosexual writing about what it's like to be a male homosexual."

I'm already aware of the trap, having encountered a bit of flak for supposedly patronising women whilst criticising The Stranglers' sexism on "Rattus Norvegicus".

All the same, I reckon it's possible for anyone to think about major personal 'confessions' from their own lives, then to consider the stigma attached to homosexuality — after all, it's only ten years since it was illegal! — and begin to appreciate the pressures on gays not to come out.

Hopefully this may go some way to explain why when Tom first joined Cafe Society he was apparently prepared to sublimate his sexuality in a group format, rather than storm the barricades from the first minute he registered with an oppressed minority. ("Registering" is actually the telling appellation Tom gives to his decision to become a member of CHE — the Campaign for Homosexual Equality.)

And then, of course, there was Cafe Society's music — which was actually very good. I interviewed Tom for *Let It Rock* in June 1975, and asked him then if he might not be happier in "an all-gay band".

"I suppose I might consider it," he replied, "but they'd have to be incredible, because I really believe in Cafe Society."

**A**T THAT TIME Cafe Society were, I guess, at about the peak of their blighted career. Their sole album had just been released: everything before them led up to it, subsequent events just led down.

From the start, Cafe Society were an imaginative, 'professional' trio. The demo tape they cut for Ray Davies — the one that persuaded him to sign them early in '74 — contained a couple of the songs that would finish up on their debut album 18 months later. Even at that early stage, the crafted harmonies that gave the band its principal musical *raison d'être* were inch-perfect.

The album is still good. On the inner sleeve, each member wrote a note about another: Tom on Raphael, Ray on Hereward, Hereward on Tom.

"I sing the song of my friend Tom / Getting ready for his evening cruise / He looks askance in his baggy pants / And sparkling tennis shoes / He grabs his scarf and his other half / And they're gone before there's time to glance / 'Cos it's Friday night and tonight's the night / They go to Kings Cross to dance."

"On a silent shelf there's a photo of himself / And harmonicas from A to G / A reel-to-reel, an A. S. Neill / And a letter to the *NME* . . ."

They were a sentimental band. Ray: "Hereward is a top hat and a rose, a mask and a melody, a song and a smile. He's corny — we should all be so lucky."

Top hat and a rose indeed — there was a real corny side to Cafe, a penchant for music hall which came out in their one single, "The Whitty Two-Step", and which is still uncomfortably

prevalent in TRB's "Martin". But Ray, as Tom put it, "sang with a frightening intensity". A great singer, with a lovely warm rasp to his voice. Combined with Hereward's lyrical passion and Tom's deft arrangements, it made for an album which deserved to sell considerably more than the derisory 600 copies it finally shifted.

Robinson was more impatient than the others — though none of them speak too highly of Ray Davies and Konk's record (or lack of — they eventually bust up because the second album never looked like seeing the light of day).

Had more Cafe Society product actually crept onto the market, the band might still be together, and The Tom Robinson Band might not exist.

**O**N THE OTHER hand, Tom's entry into the world of sexual politics definitely caused a certain amount of aggro in Cafe Society. At the same time as he gradually became frustrated within the confines of a band he now terms "great, but hopelessly '60s", so Kaye and Doyle became irritated by Tom's attempts to inject gay content into the stage act. He now compares their feelings then to how he would feel if one of his band was a health food freak who insisted on singing songs about the evils of white bread . . .

The first real infiltration of gay matter into Cafe's material was, in fact, quite absurd.

Soon after he first started working with Gay Switchboard, Robinson became involved with Gay Representation Action Group, who wanted to get a radio programme together for gay people. Tom wrote a jolly little jingle for the show — which, as far as I'm aware, never reached the airwaves — and somehow it got into Cafe's set.

Audiences for the likes of The Kinks, Barclay James Harvest and Leo Sayer — all of whom the trio supported on tour — would blink with amazement when the three guys strumming guitars would suddenly gather at the mike and croon: "If you're down in London town and happen to be gay / There's a great information service open every day / It will tell you who and where and when and how and why and more / On eight three double seven three two four."

End of jingle. The Gay Switchboard number, incidentally, is still the same.

Perhaps understandably, the bigger the audiences they played it to, the more embarrassed the other two began to feel.

As it happens, the jingle *did* get played on the radio. "Kenny Everett played it once," grins Tom, "and for an hour afterwards Gay Switchboard was swamped with calls with the answer to the Capitol Radio Competition."

But let us digress to Gay Switchboard. Up till his stint with them, Tom's only gay 'involvement' had been to attend a few discos. Then a friend casually invited him to come over and see what went on, and Tom decided to join in.

"I was just an ordinary volunteer," he recalls. "It's in Kings Cross — this office with three phones and two or three volunteers on a shift." Tom used to work an afternoon a week.

"The phones were just manned 24 hours a day. You'd get these calls in the middle of the night saying (*adopts deep Scottish voice*): 'I'm in Abercrombie, and I think I'm a lesbian' (*laughs*) — or somebody in Hampstead police station who'd just been arrested."

"You were like the ambulance service to the front lines. You really saw what was going on at the front, in the daily lives of ordinary homosexuals right across the country."

"There were calls from people who'd never spoken to another gay person in their lives . . . a lot of silent calls. The phone would ring, and

they wouldn't say anything, but they wouldn't hang up either.

"You'd just talk to them, constantly, reassuringly, until you got them to talk. I always used to do that because that was what you were told to do — just on faith — until the first time I actually persuaded somebody to talk after five minutes. After that it was just a natural thing, because you knew there really was somebody at the other end. Or you'd ask them to tap the phone so you'd know there was somebody there, listening. Terrified people all across the country calling you."

**E**VEN SO, Tom Robinson still wasn't angry. I remind him of that first time I saw him, the *GN* benefit gig at the Royal Mail, and he laughs at how innocent he used to be. "Jesus, yes — I remember it well. But it all felt like a bit of a game, it all felt rather jolly. I didn't really feel . . . (*punches fist into palm*) 'This means you — and this means your teeth' . . ."

Ah, no. The younger Robinson was a man who really *did* feel "Glad To Be Gay". The song by that title on the new TRB EP is actually "GTBG Part II", or "(Sing If) You're Glad To Be Gay" — and it was written in direct response to "GTBG Part I".

*It's the same old story all over the world / When a boy meets a boy and a girl meets a girl / We all come together 'cause we're happy to say*

*It's a natural fact and it's good to be gay. / We've been analysed, ridiculed and driven away / By our elders and betters just for growing up gay*

*They trampled on our feelings till we hid them for shame / Well now Glad To Be Gay is the name of the game.*

*Don't feel guilty if you're passing for straight / If you wanna be yourself, well it's never too late / People won't mind if you're honest and gay — / You might even find that they prefer it that way.*

*'Cause it's the same old story all over the world / When a boy meets a boy and a girl meets a girl / We all come together 'cause we're happy to say*

*It's a natural fact that it's good to be gay . . .*

A typically infectious number, it was written specifically for the CHE Conference in Sheffield in 1975.

"A jolly little sing-along calypso," Robinson spits contemptuously. "A natural fact — it's good to be gay! And I really believed it!"

Over the course of the next 12 months, Robinson discovered that people really *did* mind if you were "honest and gay", and that rather than "prefer you that way", they'd prefer you either locked up or hospitalised.

"A year later I'd been thoroughly disillusioned not only by the apathy of the gay movement itself, but by the things that were being thrown at us as the gradual clampdown and the backlash came.

"A year later I wrote '(Sing If) You're Glad To Be Gay' as a reaction against my own naivety in writing 'Glad To Be Gay Part I'."

"I'm sure I've gone down in print saying this lots of time before, and I'll probably end up quoting myself, but we had fascist ideologies — there's no other word for it — in the *Sunday Express* and the *Telegraph*, about 'The Buggers' Charter of 1967', and the *People* writing stories about vicars and scoutmasters with monotonous





# TRB

# TOM ROBINSON BAND

# PRESS CUTTINGS



February 11th, 1978

NEW MUSICAL EXPRESS

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## HAPPY THAT WAY... SING IF YOU'RE GLAD TO BE GAY. SING IF



regularity during the early part of '76. . . . We had the Peter Wells case. Peter Wells was sent to prison for two years for having sex with a consenting 18-year-old — at 18 you're meant to be an adult, man. You're allowed to vote, kill, buy a house, get a mortgage — you can do anything except go to bed with another guy."

Beginning to sound unnaturally like a politician even in the confines of his dowdy little Highgate bedsitter, Tom runs on through the list.

"One of my best friends, David Seligman from Gay Switchboard, got beaten up by queer-bashers. His face is still scarred even now."

"Incognito, which is a gay publishing chain, got busted, and its shops were closed down. For obscenity. Okay, Incognito published a bunch of sexist shit, but they were busted because it was gay."

By the time of Gay Pride Week, at the beginning of August 1976, Robinson was transformed. During that week, he staged his solo *Robinson Cruising* show for four nights at the Little Theatre, St Martins Lane, receiving an approving, sensitive *NME* review from Penny Reel (who, interestingly, recently remarked to me that he found the TRB's sloganeering style trite and outdated).

For that performance, Robinson would sing "Glad To Be Gay", then reel off a list of gay clubs and pubs whilst a stooge in the audience hollered out the fate that had recently befallen each one of them: "closed — closed — busted — closed — busted — busted — closed . . ."

Tom's ire was not lessened by what he saw as his brothers' and sisters' apathy in the face of the backlash, retreating placidly to whatever new boundary the law chose to ring around them.

He would then perform "Sing If You're Glad To Be Gay".

*The British police are the best in the world I don't believe one of these stories I've heard About them raiding our pubs for no reason at all*

*Lining the customers up by the wall Picking out people and knocking them down Resisting arrest as they're kicked on the ground*

*Searching their houses and calling them 'queer' I don't believe that sort of thing Happens here . . .*

*Sing if you're glad to be gay Sing if you're happy that way Sing if you're glad to be gay Sing if you're happy that way*

*Pictures of naked young women are fun In Titbits and Playboy, page three of The Sun There's no nudes in Gay News, our one magazine*

*But they still find ways to call it obscene Read how disgusting we are in the press In the Telegraph, People and Sunday Express Molesters of children, corruptors of youth It's there in the papers, it Must be the truth . . .*

*Don't try to kid us that if you're discreet You're perfectly safe as you walk down the street*

*You don't have to mince or make bitchy remarks To get beaten unconscious and left in the dark I had a friend who was gentle and short He was lonely one evening and went for a walk*

*Queer bashers caught him and kicked in his teeth He was only hospitalised For a week . . .*

*So sit back and watch as they close down our clubs Arrest us for meeting and raid all our pubs Make sure your boyfriend's at least 21*

*So only your friends and your brothers get done*

*Lie to your workmates, lie to your folks*

*Put down the queens, tell anti-queer jokes*

*'Gay lib's ridiculous' — join their laughter*

*'The buggers are legal now —*

*What more are they after?' . . .*

*So sing if you're glad to be gay . . .*

Written initially as a venomous send-up of male homosexual complacency, with a verse (since deleted) referring specifically to Peter Wells, "Sing If You're Glad To Be Gay" is both misinterpreted and completely bizarre when it's yelled out lustily by a predominantly het TRB audience.

"Yes, very bizarre," Tom agrees. "It was on the strength of the thing as a song rather than who it was for or about, that it ended up in the set. Now it would be a sell-out *not* to play it."

"I don't know how I feel about hearing 2,000 heterosexuals singing it at the Lyceum. I have very serious reservations about it."

"I don't know how I feel about going to play in Middlesbrough, and I see all these butch young men who are either working down the docks or the steel works or unemployed, who I used to be in terror of having my head kicked in by when I used to live there, standing there waving their scarves, going: 'SING IF YOU'RE . . .'"

"I don't know how I feel about that. All the time I lived in Middlesbrough I was terrified out of my life, in case anyone found out I was gay . . ."

**A** PART FROM the anti-homosexual backlash over that year, '75-76, the other major influence on converting Tom Robinson from passive pride to militant action was a New York theatre group called Hot Peaches.

A radical, outrageous drag show, their leader Jimmy Centola became a firm friend of Robinson's — indeed, he guested on the *Robinson Cruising* shows — and it was his brash drag queen approach that pushed Tom out of his previous laidback 'cool' stance and into fist-brandishing anger.

"Apathy ruled that summer," Robinson recalls. "Still does, come to that." Then Hot Peaches came over to do a week's stint at the ICA. They needed a guitarist, and Tom was enlisted . . .

"It was just sweltering in the theatre — people had their shirts off — and every night there was another riot down the Colerne. While we were playing, the news was filtering back. That's when I wrote 'Long Hot Summer' — a gay street-fighting song."

Its inspiration was taken from a Jimmy Centola rap/poem, in which he would describe the events which took place at Stonewall, New York, one night in 1969 — the gay world's most famous riot.

"Went down to the Stonewall wearing the trousers and white shirt that my mother had bought for me, and there was men dancing with men and women dancing with women, and then right at the back there was my sisters, the queens, in all their glory . . ."

"And the whistle done blow and in they come, pushing and shoving just like a bunch of pigs — and nobody was saying nothing, 'cause in those days if you was gay you did not say you was gay . . . till they come to the queens. Well, this pig, he came up to Miss Marsha, pushed her over and ripped her dress . . . this pig went to hit her, so I said: 'Hey, why don't you leave her alone, she ain't hardly bothering you none' . . ."

"So first they came in and busted up our fun, then they busted up our faces, and then they plain old done busted us . . . But you know, I don't mind that, 'cause it was the beginning of 'gay liberation'."

*"But you know something? Now everybody done forget who done what and who for, and sometimes I go into gay bars and I see all my sisters and brothers in all their liberated glory — and you see, over the bar, a sign saying: 'No drunks, no dogs, and no drags' . . ."*

*"Now can you imagine comparing me to a dawg? I don't care y'know, 'cause they can eighty-six me out of every gay bar in New York and I'll pay it no mind, 'cause I've got mah friends — friends who love their gay sisters and brothers, including the queens . . ."*

Robinson spits this out now, word for word — he has an amazing memory — to illustrate Centola's straight-ahead, shocking, audience-confrontation approach. I never saw Hot Peaches, but according to Tom they would stun even the most upfront gay into a new self-pride.

Again written principally for gay consumption, "Long Hot Summer" actually found its way into Cafe Society's set towards the end of Tom's sojourn with the trio. Indeed, its easy flow matched that group as irresistibly as its tension now matches TRB.

*'Hey Joe, get up and go — wouldn't like to tell you twice' Hey Mac get off my back — didn't ask your advice*

*All this heat out on the street telling us to move along It's gonna be a long hot summer from now on . . .*

*Hey man, I don't understand — I ain't hardly bothering you 'Say fag, you're just a drag — we ain't nearly finished with you'*

*There's too much heat out on the beat, telling us we don't belong It's gonna be a long hot summer from now on . . .*

*Hey Sam, give us a hand — we can't make it alone But we can all make a stand next time the whistle gets blown*

*Get your feet out on the street when you hear the heat is on It's gonna be a long hot summer from now on.*

That song was first unveiled during the *Robinson Cruising* Gay Pride Week shows — when Tom's band included, incidentally, Cafe's Ray Doyle and a guy who would later play guitar in an early incarnation of the Tom Robinson Band, Roy Butterfield (a.k.a. Anton Mauve). It must have struck an ironic note, with its call to resist police harassment, because the Gay Pride Rally which climaxed the week was apparently governed with an iron fist by the friendly bobbies.

**A** SWIFT DRIVE through the crosstown traffic to a Queensway Chinese restaurant, and Tom describes the events of that day.

"We're actually discussing the compromises *Gay News* makes in terms of toning down its content to get a place on W. H. Smith's racks, Tom defending it staunchly against those gays who put it down — "they're as stupid as Mary Whitehouse is shrewd" — but he has to admit that even he couldn't take the respectable face that the Gay Pride Rally attempted to put on homosexuality.

"The reason I sang 'Sing If You're Glad To Be Gay' at the rally in Hyde Park was because I found out who the speakers were — like the 'Gay Vicar of Thaxted' (a safe, religious homosexual frontman), Ian Harvey (former Tory MP) . . . there was nobody radical there at all."

So Robinson performed "SIYGTB", followed by a song written by Bradford GLF (more of whom later). "Halfway through singing it a message came through from the police: 'If he doesn't shut up we'll arrest him'. I had to stop in

mid-song. Mind you, 'Sing If You're Glad To Be Gay' isn't the most pro-police song."

I can imagine them being irritated . . .

"Yes. We were surrounded and practically outnumbered. They used the same tactics on us as they later used on the blacks at Notting Hill, only the blacks wouldn't put up with it. We did."

"We arrived at Hyde Park, and I think there were eleven buses of reinforcements waiting. And they made a little avenue for us to walk down into the park, and then just fanned out into a circle around us. A real heavy show of strength — like, 'You may think you're liberated, but just don't come in!'"

The Notting Hill Carnival '76, less than a month later . . . the rise of the National Front . . .

"Coming to a realisation that gay people were copping it, was only a short way away from looking around and seeing that it's happening every night in Brixton. You only have to open your eyes, once you realise it's happening to you, to see it's happening to other people."

"So yeah, that's how I became politicised." Three months later, infuriated with the lack of danger in Cafe Society, he quit the band and started fixing up gigs for a group that didn't yet exist . . .

**O**N ITS DAY, that group can be devastating. The Tom Robinson Band is one of the very best rock'n'roll bands to emerge in the great rock renaissance.

Without them, Tom would still be plugging away inside the closed world of sexual politics, instead of blasting out his 'message' in punk clubs and concert halls, in newspapers and on the radio.

Without Danny Kustow, Brian Taylor and Mark Amber you would probably never have heard of Tom Robinson.

What's more, they're all good interviewees, judging by what I've seen of them in print (particularly the excellent interview in *Rock Against Racism's Temporary Hoarding* No. 4).

However, the TRB feature awaits another writer. The idea of this one was sheer exploitation of the fact that Tom and I have been good mates for so long.

**H**E IS UNIQUE in that he is the *only* rock singer of the new breed of 'street' kids who actually had a solid 'political' involvement before he began singing about it. In fact, as the story shows, initially he sang for his bread and spent his spare time campaigning — totally the reverse of the singer who forms a band (or for that matter, the writer who joins a paper) and then finds an issue to beat his/her breast about.

As Tom says, in a most telling turn of phrase, "You know, I've only been acclaimed as a campaigner for gay rights since I ceased to be one."

Although he hasn't allowed his CHE membership to lapse, he is no longer involved in the nitty gritty of sexual politics. He doesn't even do benefit gigs (preferring to donate gig money — like the recent Hope gig for Gay Switchboard) because the band find the audiences either too unresponsive or too preoccupied with the niceties of whether Tom demonstrates the correct stance.

The classic example of that particular problem came with the celebrated incident in Bradford when the lesbians of the local Gay Liberation Front 'zapped' TRB — stormed the stage — during "Right On Sister", accusing Tom of being patronising. Most people would come out of that incident cursing the women who interrupted the show. Tom's reaction?

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# TRB

# TOM ROBINSON BAND

# PRESS CUTTINGS



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NEW MUSICAL EXPRESS

February 11th, 1978

From page 27

"It's cool. I stopped playing it at once. It was written as a statement of solidarity with those women, and if they don't want it, I'm just gonna play the next number."

On the eve of the new "Rising Free" LP, on which "Right On Sister" is the last track, the song was inspired by Jill Posener, a playwright whom Robinson worked with in Gay Sweatshop, because "that was the first time I'd worked with real dynamite lesbians. It's not about women's lot — that's for women to write about. I wrote it from a man's standpoint, and most women take it in the spirit it was intended. "I can understand it if *Spare Rib* don't like it when they review it — I dunno . . . But I'd just like to point out to women who find it patronising that I *did* have a letter from a 14-year-old girl who said: 'Dear Tom, Thank you for "Right On Sister". I thought me and my penfriend in Norway were the only two who felt like that.'

"Now that girl doesn't care what's right or politically correct, but that one little song, stupid and banal as it is, touched a chord in her. I hope that means something to feminists."

"There's such a danger with the Left generally — and people involved in sexual politics in particular — that the things they attack are on their own side. For instance, the Bradford GLF lesbians zap us but not The Stranglers."

"It's their party trick. The rest of the band were totally freaked out by it," he chuckles.

It's evident that Tom actually quite relishes the ins and outs of the gay politics he reckons to have left behind. Nevertheless, it's obvious he must now reach thousands of hung-up gay kids who've never even heard of CHE, GLF or Kinsey, and would never dare to read *Gay News*.

His grounding in sexual politics is a breath of fresh air in rock music. For a supposedly libertarian genre, there are an astounding number of people in this business who don't even realise how much their exploitation of their own and others' conditioned responses to sex reinforce an oppressive status quo.

Tom Robinson has sexual oppression sussed. Amazingly, he's the first major rock singer to simply be homosexual rather than pose about and use the 'abnormality' of gayness as titillation. As Steve Clarke observed, his onstage persona is "low-key macho". He has a horror/fear of appearing camp, because for him it's not a flirtation, it's a hard fact. No bisexual chic, and no gratuitous outrage (not onstage at least — though he did manage to outdo any attempts at outrage I've ever seen when we went for a meal together at Christmas, in a posh West End restaurant, and Tom merrily sported an extraordinarily 'obscene' Seditious fist-fuck T-shirt for all and sundry to blink at).

ROBINSON'S awareness of political games also makes him extremely wary. So resolutely upfront is he about his desire to be successful, I doubt whether even my most cynical colleague could berate TRB for selling out.

"I wanna be a star," Tom insists. But, I offer, you are also very dedicated to personal communication. The newsletters, free badges . . .

"Only because that makes you more successful as a rock star," Tom deadpans. "Obviously, if an audience feels personally involved they'll enjoy it more. You give away a free badge that cost three pence to make, they'll wear it as a present from the band. That's sound marketing. I don't understand why other people don't do it."

"Kids pay £1.50 to see you, £4.00 for an LP, 80p for a single, £2.00 for a T-shirt . . . If you can't give them a little three pence tuppenny ha'penny badge, what's it all about? If you make people feel you care about them, that makes them care about you."

"That's why we write back to all letters. If you don't, word gets about. So you send them badges even if they forget the stamped addressed envelope, and Charlie out in South Glamorgan tells all his friends: 'Jesus, I got a personal reply, and I didn't even send a stamped addressed envelope!' That's ten people's worth of good vibes."

"It all makes good financial sense."

So all these people who write to you are just being used?

"I didn't say that. But it *does* make perfect commercial sense."

Even so, the sight of the TRB office in full spate during a letter-answering session is completely unnerving. I dropped round one evening recently — no sit-up job or anything — and there was the whole band and a couple of friends sitting on the floor surrounded by mountains of mail, scribbling and typing personal notes to stuff in all these envelopes along with badges, stickers and newsletters.

Baffled, I retreated to manager Steve O'Rourke's empty office (yes, that is Pink Floyd manager Steve O'Rourke . . . Tom reckons he's such a nice guy, he was almost hurt when I expressed suspicion: good business sense again, as O'Rourke has already exerted his weight by getting EMI to put out what amounts to half an album at single price with "Rising Free") and only the exhausted Danny Kustow was tempted off the factory floor to share my indolence.

"The thing is," Tom stresses, "all those things are *not* against my personal interests."

Again, he's completely honest about making compromises for commercial success — for instance in choosing "Motorway" as the first single. At the same time he praises to the skies bands who he reckons *haven't* compromised, like The Sex Pistols (he recounts an incident at the Music Machine where Johnny Rotten accosted him and hissed: "Don't ever give in" and was promptly sick on the carpet) and the feminist band Jam Today, whose stance is so 'pure' that their drummer even resents men being in the audience. Jam Today, he says, don't make any bread, but they act as "a signpost for the rest of us".

On the other hand, I suggest, Jam Today don't reach as many people as you. Would you say it was necessary for bands like them to inspire groups like yours, who are more likely to effect change?

"NOOOO!" he howls. "I'm not gonna say that! Bollocks. I'm not gonna go round blowing that trumpet. I was pissed off when Ray

Coleman (in *Melody Maker*) invented the quote 'Clash and Pistols equivocate, we don't'. I never said that. I said that their *stance* is equivocal, but I didn't say immediately afterwards: 'We don't'."

In fact, he proceeds to detail how he's actually "ripped bits off" from those two bands, and later goes into a whole long list of people he's blatantly taken ideas and inspiration from: Hot Peaches, Frank Zappa (Zappa used to do a kind of Mothers News column in some papers, which inspired the TRB bulletins), Hereward Kaye, The Kinks, Dylan, Bobo Phoenix (whose onstage ferocity with Dead Fingers Talk made Tom discard Cafe Society's "discreet performance"), Robert Godfrey (whose persistence in keeping The Enid afloat through numerous trials and tribulations was another inspiration), Andy Fraser ("the gunner bass player") . . .

"I'm a magpie," he says. "I'm not an original thinker. I've gotta admit the *only* new thing about TRB is the synthesis."

AND, I WOULD venture, the honesty and the extremism. Extremism? Yeah, I know what you're thinking — TRB are safe. And it's true. In a world where the rock audience's senses have become blunted by ever more ludicrous extremes of outrage, in a world of pop groups bidding desperately to outdo one another for grotesque appellations (Moors Murderers, "Pretty Paedophiles", etc.), in a world where rock journalists pretend to be literally bored to the point of suicide (if only . . .) and search for ever more nonsensical insults just because last week's idol didn't toe some party line that he or she hadn't the least idea existed . . . In this world, yes, TRB are 'safe'. They're polite, they're friendly, they don't provoke riots.

I would even doubt, despite their outspokenness about, say, homosexuality or the

National Front, whether they are in any more physical danger than you or I — except, that is, when Tom frequents gay pubs like the Royal Vauxhall Tavern, which was recently raided by over a dozen heavies in NF badges who stormed in and smashed glasses, furniture and the barman's ribs, and hospitalised one customer before fleeing in a white van.

Listen, I'll tell you what's extreme about Tom Robinson: he is making a stand on behalf of *people*. There is no mistaking what he's saying, no way — apart from the odd ode to a motor car or some tiresome imaginary brother — that any TRB song, uh, equivocates.

And he's not just preaching to the converted (not that it would necessarily invalidate anything if he were) because not only is he going to reach an audience who come to rock first and *listen* later, but also his major statement — that human rights are inseparable, that you *can't* divide it up into homosexuals, immigrants, women, etc, etc, that you *have* to decide which side you're on — that statement is a cliché only for those who can't be bothered to think about it.

It is extreme. It requires that hoary old beast: constant re-evaluation of oneself.

Our prejudices are so conditioned into us that even now — after watching and supporting the gay movement from the outside for several years — even now I listen to "Sing If You're Glad To Be Gay" or Tom's Jimmy Centola rap, and I discover that there is still room to lower my personal barrier of irrational fear of homosexuals by another notch. The work of twenty years is not necessarily undone in less than a decade.

Tom Robinson, I would suggest, is extreme because he is *rational*. Normally we think of people as extremists — Patti Smith or Johnny Rotten, for instance — for exactly the opposite reason: because they lay bare their irrationality. This sparks against our own insecurity, and our need to come to terms with their extremism is cathartic — and, incidentally, a powerful factor in their success, both artistic and commercial.

But Tom Robinson is just plain old rational. Straight. Mr Nice Guy. In fact, I'm slightly surprised he's so popular in these times of mental machismo . . .

Characteristically, Tom tries hard to defuse any attempts to lumber him with a saintly image, and I don't blame him. But everyone is someone else's guru, and in some respects Tom Robinson is mine right now.

It's easy to become complacent about truisms like the evil of the National Front, and Robinson's constant reiteration of his beliefs acts upon me in the same way it would appear that, say, Jam Today inspire him.

FINALLY, LET ME make a guess about the album.

See, they've already dispensed with most of the off-centre stuff: "Motorway", "I Shall Be Released" (the George Ince song), "Don't Take No For An Answer" (the Ray Davies song), "Martin", "Glad To Be Gay", "Right On Sister".

Which leaves . . . "Up Against The Wall", "Power In The Darkness", "Long Hot Summer", "Winter Of '79", "I'm All Right Jack", "Better Decide Which Side You're On", "We Ain't Gonna Take It" . . . the street-fighting songs, the wide-screen anti-Front songs, the backlash songs.

Take a listen to "Don't Take No For An Answer" on the new EP, LOUD. Now think: Chris Thomas is producing the album, that band is playing it, those are the songs they're playing . . .

I tell you, it will a real fist in the face of oppression — *our* oppression as well as 'theirs'. A clenched fist, naturally.

"Prince Of The Punks" reprinted by permission of Ray Davies / Davray Music 1977. "Glad To Be Gay", "Sing If You're Glad To Be Gay" and "Long Hot Summer" reprinted by permission of Tom Robinson.



PHOTO: CHALKIE DAVIES







"Hot Press article (Dublin) reproduced by Record Mirror (London)"

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Record Mirror, May 27, 1978

**N.S.** What did you think of the Anti-Nazi League march?

**T.R.** There was a good atmosphere on the section I was on. But for the kids, the best part of the march was undoubtedly the part as we got down to the beginning of the Hackney area and there was those five thugs of about 16 on the right hand side, who stood through the whole procession and shouted abuse at the march — which was very brave — five against 60,000 right — but for the first time, I think for those people on the march, they sussed that the National Front actually had faces, that they were ordinary people just like them who had these absolutely perverted views. And that was worth all the march and all the concert put together — to actually come face to face with people your own age with those beliefs because that demonstrates that it's real in a way that the demonstration can never hope to do. **N.S.** A feeling I had after the march was that people need to develop a new language for political sloganeering which embraces the human element and the fact that there is a human element in the opposition.

**T.R.** Exactly. Well, the case in point is the Sham 69 skins, who came along to a Rock Against Racism gig — the very famous one a few weeks ago — and were pretty well won over by the reggae. I think it was Misty that was on that day, but they came along to that gig and they're skinheads, and we know for a fact that several of them are British Movement, which is miles worse than the National Front. And the thing is they love music better than they love the British Movement. And they were there through that whole gig, and by the end, when we were there, I mean, like, these real hard little skinheads down the front — they moved right up to the front — and I thought "Oh, we're going to have trouble here". They were boppin away, they loved it — and when all the black bands came on, when Ninety Degrees came on, as well as the punks. They were there, black, white together tonight — and as you say, the human element of the opposition was apparent — in fact they are human and human beings have an infinite capability for the good as well as for the bad, they can rise to it. And that's very good. Far from shouting anti-gay abuse when I was on, during the speech when I was putting down the punks and the blacks and the niggers and the commies and the queers and the womens' libbers and that, they said "What about the skins, what about the skins? Aren't you going to put us down?" So they definitely wanted to be in.

**N.S.** To what extent are you worried about the identification of the T.R.B. with the overall political thing? Do you think it could operate to the detriment of your musical drive?

**T.R.** If we ever f---ked up our priorities, it would. If it ever became politics first, music second, we'd have blown it. We have things worked out in those terms, and that's why we're very glad that "Motorway" was the first hit, because it was a rock 'n' roll song and amply demonstrated that we could make a perfectly good living playing straight rock 'n' roll, thank you very much. And nobody need think that we're using politics to make a fast buck or that.

**N.S.** I think that at the moment you provide the answer to the sceptics who say rock and politics can't be put together.

**T.R.** I think that people who say that are very blind anyway. The only stock example I've got is "Stand By Your Man", which is more or less politically devastating for the women's movement, that's ever reached the airwaves and it went to No. 1 or something. If you go down with a pub band, round the pubs of London, as I have, and you see that song being sung, you see all the old dears of about 80, who sacrificed their entire lives to some pig of a man, drinking up their halves of Guinness going "Stand By Your Man", because it justifies and vindicates everything they did. I mean, that's a very powerful political song but because it's for the status quo instead of for change, it isn't perceived as political.

**N.S.** What are your immediate plans?

**T.R.** I'm insisting personally that they leave us alone from the middle

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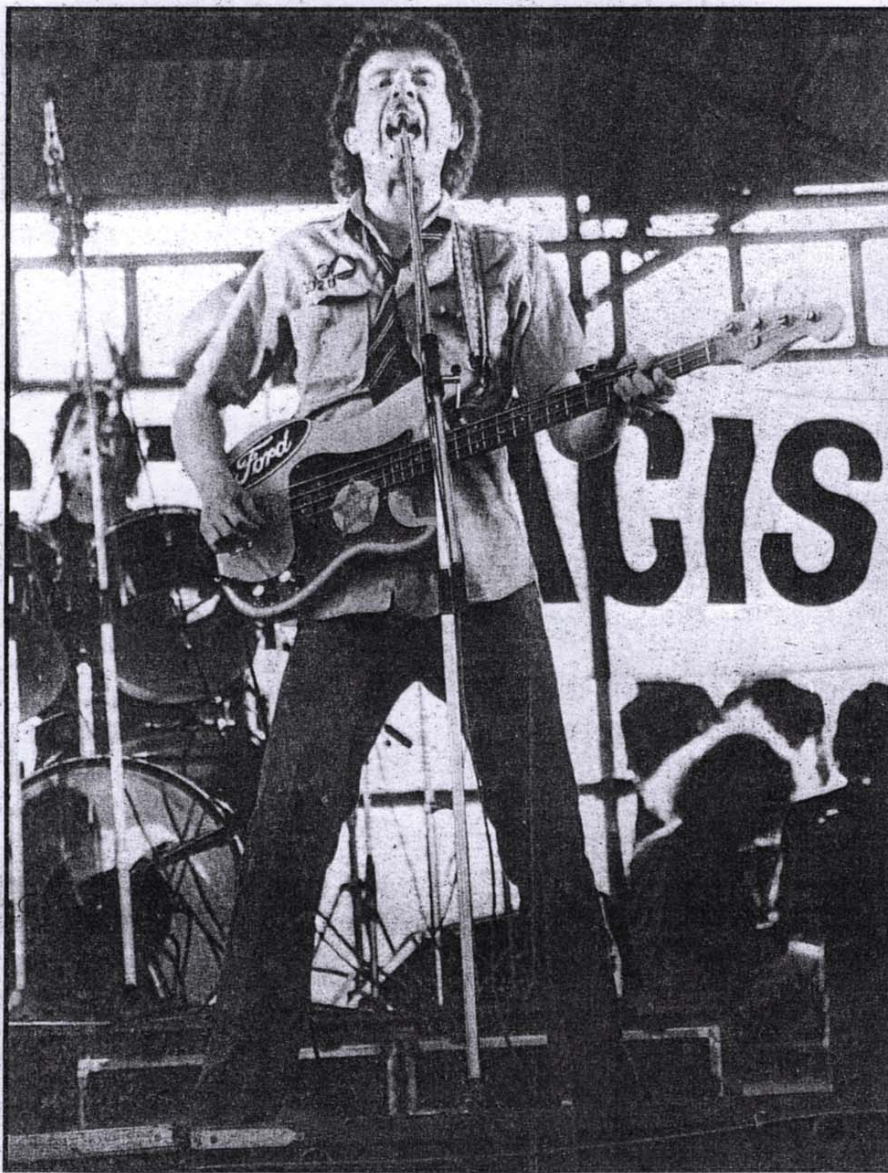
GENERALLY SPEAKING I'm pretty averse to the question and answer interview. However, looking back over the typescript of my conversation with Tom Robinson in London recently, there seemed to be a flow there which totally justified printing it in this particular form — indeed to have done otherwise might well have destroyed the drift of the ideas that were there on the occasion.

Tom Robinson is an extremely aware and articulate individual, so that there's no need whatsoever to process what he says to make it either interesting or intelligible in the cold medium of print.

Tom Robinson is a man who'll look you in the eye and say what he feels. He brings the same kind of dynamic commitment to his music. He also happens to write mighty fine rock'n' roll songs and to execute them, in the company of his band, with a similar strength and panache.

It's worth hearing what he has to say.

## Up against the wall with TOM ROBINSON



Interview by NIAL STOKES

of June to the beginning of September to write and record the second album. The reason I'm so worried about the next album now is that, at the moment, we're playing songs that are a year, year and a half old, written when I was newly politicised, very angry — but for reasons of artistic integrity, I'd like to also be performing something I'd written now. I'm halfway through lyrics of about 4 or 5 songs already. But it's just time. I don't want to be pressurised unduly, because you can't write songs to order. You have to write and let it come. Also there's the whole thing of working in a new keyboard player and things like that — takes sorting out.

**N.S.** Is there going to be any new

emphasis in the material for the second album?

**T.R.** It's like Mr Elliot said: "Last year's words belong to last year's language, next year's words might have another voice." It's just the thing we voiced in a way in which one would express it today, as opposed to the way one expressed it then, I dunno.

**N.S.** Do you change the lyrics of existing songs as you go along?

**T.R.** Yes. For instance, just the latest newspapers that happen to have been slugging gays are included — like the Daily Express. After the lesbian mother bashing by the Evening News, that went into the song. And that song I think can only survive if it carries on changing.

Because if it stays at categorically listing the things that happened three years ago, it becomes sterile, meaningless. It's a song that obviously one wouldn't want to drop, so if you've got an old song, it's got to stay on and the nature of the song being a catalogue of woes, it has to stay up to date.

**N.S.** In the show you incorporated a fairly strong theatrical thing with the speech.

**T.R.** I was really so nervous I really f---ed that whole speech up a lot — I think it could have been a lot funnier.

**N.S.** Do you think the claims about the figures were accurate?

**T.R.** Everyone obviously inflates them, but if the BBC News say

60,000, it has to be 60,000, cos they don't give you the benefit of the doubt. Even if the public came along just for the music and weren't interested in the politics at all, maybe 5 per cent of those got politicised — it's still worth it, with those kind of numbers.

**N.S.** Again, it comes down to the question of just how effective music can be in stimulating people into thinking critically. You have to ask the same question about any art form. Do you think music is more capable of politicising people than, say, film or theatre?

**T.R.** Yes, more than film or theatre and less than football, it's just any kind of mass culture, any kind of populist culture as opposed to an elitist culture is bound to have a greater power in that way. Film and theatre are basically elitist, part from sort of a 'Jaws' or 'Third Encounters of the 56th Kind' — those kind of things, well, maybe. Even so, when I was on the dole, I could never afford to go to films. TV yes, radio yes, football matches yes, though not for me personally. Films and theatre no.

**N.S.** How do you see the balance of different political interests or concerns in what you're doing?

**T.R.** Well, to say that there's one human race, sounds pretty mild but actually it's political dynamite. That's the basic premise, I know it's the cliché of the decade, but clichés don't stop being true from becoming clichéd. And that's the common ground on which the band works. Well, obviously a lot of things start following from that, once you start thinking it through. It's the general idea of Rock Against Racism, anyway. You start with common ground where any fool can see that black people may be different to white people, but then it's no inherent betterness or worseness about it. And then you start moving it on from black people to Irish people, you know. What's all this Irish jokes business about? When you start thinking about that. And you get down to queer jokes, right and you start thinking about that one, too, and gradually this whole "well, is it really true when they say that the workers are out to just cripple industry. You know, is that all they're at...?"

**N.S.** On the question of your relationship with the record company, how do you rationalize being involved with a company like EMI and at the same time putting across socialist politics?

**T.R.** If it wasn't for EMI, I wouldn't be talking to you now. I wouldn't be going to talk to a lady from Sterne magazine this afternoon to say the same things, basically about the rally. We wouldn't have reached — it's quite possible we wouldn't have had the hit with "2468 Motorway" without EMI's promotion department, in which case we probably wouldn't have reached all those people at the rally yesterday. And if you make music, you make music because you want it to be heard. And if you want it to be heard, you want it to be on record, and if you want to make records, you have to have a good record company. And we went with the best we could get our hands on. You know, CBS and EMI probably the two best in the world in terms of just making sure the records get heard and "exploited".

The kind of contradictions I find much more unnerving are the EMI weapons division, where they make anti-personnel mines, as well as radar for guided missiles. And all you can do in the end is be very open about it and say to your audience, to your public "Look, I've just found out about this. I didn't know but I think you'd better know as well." In last bulletin, I published the EMI pamphlet that somebody stole from the arms sale, the Military Arms Fair on the EMI ringer, which is missile throwing device that can be fitted to any medium or heavy tracked vehicle, fires 1,296 rounds per minute, reloads in five and can immobilize personnel without fatality. The pamphlet's got all these sort of little stars with the pluses — a bit like Persil washes whiter and whiter, does this, that — it was just like that.

But so far, I've reached a compromise. I've already signed to EMI, they'll find that out. All I can do is stir up what shit I can around that, using the position equally and not be so sort of two-faced that I sit down about the EMI Weapons Division, whereas I shout on about women's rights being taken away.

**N.S.** How do you get on generally with your peers in the rock sphere — the actual musicians?





# TRB

# TOM ROBINSON BAND

# PRESS CUTTINGS



*Tom Robinson*

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T.R. I really like Bob Geldof and Mick Jones and the Clash, I really like a lot. They hate each other, I think. Phil Lynott, The Motors - I'm trying to think of all the people we've met. Generally, when we meet people, it's charming, you know, they're really nice people. You know, the mood that you find among the other bands of your own generation is generally kind of wonderment at what's going on. But we've all got this far and we're all sittin' there going 'what' clinching the novelty of all this and the slight headiness of it.

N.S. There's a macho thing in rock generally which is - it's something which is ultimately hard enough to pin down, when you get into the whole sexism set of distinctions it can become very hazy. I just wondered how you feel about that in rock.

T.R. Yeah, well, rock 'n' roll is almost by definition sexist, isn't it? Well, it's built on machismo, its fundamental thing, it's basic rock 'n' roll as opposed to, like, popular music generally is male generated. The female singer in rock 'n' roll is the exception and generally she's the singer and not the drummer, right. There's strictly defined rules: whereby a woman is allowed to sing rock 'n' roll and she's definitely a bit of titillation for male palates anyway - Blondie, that general thing. That's usually it.

It stems from the roots of rock 'n' roll which is in the blues ethnic - the 12-bar blues and the old songs like Muddy Waters 'I'm A Man' and 'I Got My Mojo Working' and 'I ain't no milkman's son' or 'I'll give you plenty cream until the milkman come' and the double talk and the jive talk and the double entendre.

The Doors encapsulated it by taking 'Back Door Man' as blues standard and doing it themselves. And then you just saw it from Morrison straight away (sings) . . . 'Well, the men don't know what the little girls understand', It's all there. The medium itself is sexist just by all the

precedents. Don't you agree?  
N.S. I think a lot of bands that steer clear of blues basis can do things which are non-macho.

T.R. Are you talking about Yes?  
N.S. Well I'm not talking about Yes at all, 'cos I don't listen to Yes and I don't like Yes.

T.R. Yeah, but they're, like, sexless.

N.S. But isn't it possible to incorporate sex into music without being macho? A band like XTC at the moment, just reflecting on their music, I can't think of anything macho in it. Maybe I'm wrong.

T.R. No, it's true. But isn't what XTC are doing an extension of the Yes genre. It's the intellectual thinking man's rock as opposed to raunchy rock 'n' roll. Raunchy itself implies sex.

N.S. But the question is whether you can incorporate sex without being sexist. That's the ultimate issue.

T.R. Joni Mitchell - her songs are very sexual.

N.S. Yeah and I don't think they're sexist.

T.R. No, but then it isn't rock 'n' roll.

N.S. I doubt that a thing like 'Rag Mamma Rag' which has a certain exuberance and sex, whether that actually crosses the border into

sexism.

T.R. Touche! That's great, that's a really good example, 'cos that is a really sexy song but it isn't sexist. Possibly because of the fact of the breadth of The Band's vision anyway, the love of humanity which sort of oozes out of that whole album anyway. They just like couldn't put somebody down. There's no real sort of hatred on that album. Even when Virgin Cain's brother gets killed, he's still like very fatalistic and he's not blaming the other side. But that album, let's face it is an exception.

There's one other guy I thought of and that's Johnny Rotten, who's a lead singer who - I suppose he isn't really sexual either - but I mean he doesn't do much posturing. I really think a lead singer is in a position that you would expect to be very sexist and it's actually not there at all. The guy's a complete individual.

N.S. What do you think of their abortion song?

T.R. I think it sucks. And the part that sucks is too mild a word. I don't want to be associated with that sort of rot.

N.S. I felt the same.

T.R. I would say a thing that's probably worth saying from Dublin to Swansea that anyone who in an

over-populated under-resourced world tells you that homosexuality or abortion are anti-social has to be off their rocker.

N.S. The question with that song is what motivated it.

T.R. John's an ex-Catholic.

N.S. This brings up the whole question of God and religion.

T.R. Well, I've got nothing against believing in God. One day I might end up that way myself there seems to be quite a good case to be made, that there might be a God. To lay my cards on the table, I must tell you that I was Church of England from about eight through to about 15 - I was part of the Church of England. My father is an avowed atheist. I mean he actually bothers to put in his diary where it says "in case of emergency" under religion, he puts humanist. He's that obsessive about it because when you take him back and you find that he was trained to be a priest before he lost his faith right - I mean that's him certified.

So I lay my cards on the table and say that although I was not brought up to be religious, I joined the church choir locally where I was living at the time at the age of eight and got interested in the religion through that and got confirmed and everything and gradually lost

interest again about the age of 15.

But as I say, you know, for that reason, I can find the idea of a God quite plausible. But, I mean, whereas Jesus of Nazareth was undoubtedly a very good bloke and had some pretty sensible ideas, the atrocities that have been committed in the past 2,000 years in his name aren't worth thinking about. I mean a lot of evil things have been done in the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And that bloke Paul of Tharsus has quite a lot to answer for as well.

N.S. What do you feel about Gays who are apologetic about their sexuality?

T.R. My theory for it, for what it's worth, is that somebody who isn't quite - don't quite belong - hold to the trappings of belonging much more than somebody who does. That's as evidenced by, for instance noblesse oblige. And the difference between the U and the non-U will say "I beg your pardon" and the U will say "what", because the upper-class doesn't need to prove anything. They know they're upper, so they can afford to be rude and say "what". The aspiring bourgeoisie say "I beg your pardon".

In other words if you don't have it, you aspire to it. So if you are beyond the pale by being gay, either beyond the pale of religion or beyond the pale of politics, perhaps you cling to those things. You see Indian guys wandering around the city wearing suits and bowler hats. They'll never be let into Claridges, for Christ sake.

N.S. I think that's important in the gay thing in Ireland that . . .

T.R. We lick the asses of the establishment and the status quo and try and beg some little crumbs from under their table and play their game and when they see fit to pay us any attention by even mentioning us or deigning to, we fall over ourselves in gratitude. I think gay people really want to wise up. As far as the vast majority of the population are concerned in Ireland and in Gt. Britain, we're scum. And suss that. We'll never be respectable if we live a million years. So stop clinging to all that.



DANNY KUSTOW AND TOM







June 24, 1978 SOUNDS Page 53



TOM ROBINSON BAND: a highly entertaining show

## Robinson romps home in no-hype Hollywood

Tom Robinson Band  
Los Angeles

CONSIDERING THE relative lack of any amount of hype, the Starwood was respectably full, if 'respectable' is a word you could use to describe the least salubrious of the three major rock clubs in L.A. The Tom Robinson Band's two nights in Hollywood are the first dates of a short, mostly promotional US tour.

No doubt the most asked question in the ivory towers of the US press and Capital Records this week has been: how will the LA punks/New Wave fans/rock and roll audience react to a band/singer whose lyrics and stance are aggressively political (that is, British politics, a whole different ball game) and gay? One or two of the punters tonight may have been puzzling over that question, but from the warm and unhecking response, I would imagine not.

For one thing, if you never opened a newspaper or relevant music magazine, you would think of Robinson more as a civil rights campaigner than a homosexual — or, if you're of a more cynical disposition, as an exploiter of today's 'in' social issues.

Because Tom looks macho, and when he's not looking macho, he's looking like Mr Nice Guy. He looks intense, he looks charming, he looks sincere, he even looks jovial. But he never looks gay. Pouting, squirming, strutting are out.

As for the audience, I didn't take a survey, but none of them were coming on with what Mr Joe Public would consider homosexual mannerisms, though as Robinson says, what in hell does a 'homosexual audience' look like? They were pogoing as always, raising their fists in clenched salutes and acting very well entertained.

The impression I got was that one or two people around me looked embarrassed in the 'Sing If You're Glad To Be Gay' chorus, not quite sure what to do; and that many were visibly confused by the

references to peculiarly English political situations (though Robinson tried to bring it closer to home by substituting the occasional mention of the latest political moves in California, the gubernatorial elections and tax initiatives) but most were happy to sing and hum and bob along to whatever was going on.

The sight of a couple of hundred American kids standing up against the stage like a fancy-dressed football crowd and chanting 'Glad To Be Gay' at the top of their lungs is quite something, and I'm sure TRB couldn't fail to have been moved. The songs were pretty simple, concise and generally short, all in the classic rock and roll format except for the Kinksesque cabaretish music-hall numbers like 'Martin', and each and every one of them as rousing and singalong as any I've heard.

Other than 'Gay' and 'Martin' ("This song has got two parts — our part and your part") which were the most obvious audience participation songs, the biggest crowd-involvers were 'Grey Cortina' ("The grey cortina", said Robinson to a crowd reared on T-birds, "is 100% immune to meter maids, parking tickets, blow-outs, breakdowns, and does wonderful things for your machismo") 'Long Hot Summer', a rallying cry with a strong tune that was, I suppose, slightly closer to home, being about New York riots — getting out on the streets doesn't mean walking 50 yards from the club door to pick up your dad's car where you left it — and '2-4-6-8 Motorway' (introduced as 'a song with a difficult chorus'; and especially the encore, 'I Shall Be Released' given new strength through Robinson having seen and enjoyed Bob Dylan's final LA show the night before).

Through a highly entertaining show, with catchy tunes, fine rock and charismatic personality, Robinson won over L.A. The audience got involved in the event like I haven't seen except for the Pistols (who were heavily hyped) and the big-name rock bands. This looks like being a successful tour for TRB. SYLVIE SIMMONS

Rezillos/Mekons  
Marquee

WHEN THE two extremes clashed and had me jumping.

Unremitting humour and aggression embraced the warm Marquee atmospherics as The Mekons and The Rezillos effused frenzied music to lose weight by.

Tonight's gig was the most gratifying experience I've gone through this month. Cynics read on.

First to appear, the Mekons, are not a group in the accepted sense of the word. Rather a gang. At least that's the feeling of each Mekon I spoke to. Based in Leeds, the 'gang' play occasionally and collectively under the name of The Mekons — a loose arrangement explained by their apprehension of being 'role cast'.

On this occasion there are six Mekons (sometimes there are

more) and all insist strongly on remaining anonymous.

So, Mekon info. runs as follows: two Mekons concentrate on singing and joking, another two Mekons play guitar and frown, and finally there's a Mekon on bass and drums. All pitch in with a share of the vocals — often all at the same time.

These are The Mekons. And they are damn good.

'Garden Fence Of Sound' is hardly an apt description of the 15 aural delights that were submitted in rapid succession. Crude, maybe, but most of the songs were far from thin and hollow snippets. Rather, reasonably solid rhythms thatched with choking vocals ('Heart And Soul') and nasal chants ('Dan Dare — Oh Yeah'). More to the point, Mekon music is dance music. The fact that, with the exception of the drummer, none can really 'play' is a pretty vacant criticism, underlined further by

their enormous wit and eccentricity.

"We've got to slow down the hectic pace," remarks a Mekon after a fierce 'Dance And Drink' (a particular number with the immortal lines 'I can't think of any more words that rhyme/S-I try to keep in time'). Well 'Lonely And Wet' which followed was scarcely less terse, evoking jilted sensibility without plunging into precious sentimentality.

Their set was enthusiastically received and rightly so. After one bout of pogoing a Mekon said it was so quiet you could 'hear a pin drop . . . well a big one'.

They encored with 'Heart And Soul' (again) — the single you should all have on Fast Product before disappearing into the clustered crowd. Auspicious and thoroughly enjoyable.

And so on to the Rezillos. Like the Mekons, the radiant Rezillos are a quirky combination of keen playing and ridiculous comedy —

have the immediate appeal of the two previous gems 'Can't Stand My Baby' and ' . . . Good Sculptures'. NICK TESTER

Robert Gordon  
Link Wray  
Music Machine

THE MUSIC MACHINE is packed. Plenty of brushed back hair, a few quiffs and leather jackets, but not the preponderance of those tall, gangly types who habitually jounce clockwise around the dance floor at Rock and Roll gigs. No, it's your usual quota of chicks being eaten out by the eyeballs of scattered clutches of blokes.

After reading so much about Robert Gordon's inability to live up to his image, I was well pleased and surprised by what I witnessed. From the first song the applause was thunderous, building to holocaust proportions as the band shot through 'The Way I Walk'.

At one point Gordon left the stage and Link Wray set off on his own soliloquy 'Rumble', bounding tangled, twisted mesas of sound (Sure thing — Ed) off Stoner's superb bass. In one riveting moment he crouched at the edge of the stage in desperation, coaxing blood out of his guitar (Sure thing — Ed).

At Gordon's reentry, we felt the full power of his great, hoarse belly voice, exercising enormous power over his material. 'Don't' was unashamedly dedicated to Elvis, "but Elvis is dead, right?" so this wasn't just the next best thing, it's for real, right? He strapped on a guitar to howl through 'Wild Woman' and plenty more that I can't remember, getting everybody booging through 'My gal is red hot, your gal is . . .' The walls hummed with applause.

The encore saw Johnny Thunders come on in tow for a rousing version of 'Blue Suede Shoes', Thunders slithering all over the stage, then 'Summertime Blues' where the sound, constantly threatening to blow at Link's traditional volume, finally

did so on everything except a drum solo. (Sounds a gas — Ed). This band have now broken up, but you can still get the records. PAUL CHAUTAUQUA

Monochrome Set  
Pegasus

EVER HAD that feeling that you're watching something which you have seen/heard before but can't place? It's along the lines of . . . 'sounds familiar, but . . .' Well, that's Monochrome Set for you.

They didn't get going until the fourth or fifth number, largely because they had to cope with a small, subdued audience put off by a support act a friend described as similar to a fairground inside a cement mixer.

Three guitarists in Monochrome Set, all dolled up in plastic ties and black shirts, all looking very undecided whether they were busking for their supper or treating us like a row of beer mugs, backed by a t-shirted drummer, played a tight, well ordered set through-out.

Frontman Bid (vocals and semi-acoustic guitar) gives a superb Anthony Perkins psycho performance, the others following him carefully as though afraid he might suddenly spin around and use his axe on them.

Onstage twists and turns of sound emerged in tangled skeins from Simon Croft's wide bass rhythm and the opposition of Lester Square's zippy lead. Outstanding were 'Ici Les Enfants', straight out of the Velvets by Beefheart, Bid singing like Kevin Ayres — 'Songs From The Bottom Of A Well' springs to mind — and building up malevolently into the next number, where Lester Square used a vibrator on his guitar track.

They finished with 'Goodbye Joe' a chance for a bass, followed by a lead, run, and gravelly lyrics over a John Cale rhythm. Overall, they make a good, well constructed musical impression that tends to push you out rather than draw you in: the thinking man's band. PAUL CHAUTAUQUA

## STEVE SHANNON

### 1954-1978

"When I get lonely I go to the places we used to go"

PEACHES, DZAL, KIT, MUNCHER & GARY.





# TRB

# TOM ROBINSON BAND

## PRESS CUTTINGS



"Rolling Stone  
magazine"

### *The Tom Robinson Band*

## Rock with a clenched fist

By Mikal Gilmore

LOS ANGELES

**T**OM ROBINSON places a cassette recorder on the table between us and pushes the red record button. "Do you mind?" he asks with a disarmingly modest smile. "You see, I've been misquoted so much..." This is a remarkable statement, I can't help thinking, for a man who, though he's been part of the British music scene since 1975, has only been doing interviews for the last year.

Robinson is the lead singer and bassist of the four-piece Tom Robinson Band, whose first album, *Power in the Darkness*, has recently been released, and whose single, "2-4-6-8 Motorway," was a Top Ten English hit and received considerable airplay here. And he has fair reason to be wary. In England, his songs, particularly "Glad to Be Gay," a declaimer about gay apathy and "queer-bashing"—Robinson's gay, but the other members of his band are not—have earned him a reputation as a political spokesman/sloganeer. The British press touts him as one of the few real savants of the New Wave; one writer even quoted Robinson as saying, "The Pistols and the Clash equivocate. We don't."

"I've never used the verb *equivocate* in my life," says Tom, sitting in a Hollywood Holiday Inn. "I wish I had the gall to say we're New Wave, punk or whatever, but we're a rock & roll group, and we came along long after the Clash and the Pistols. Anyway, I think the term 'political rock' stinks, and I *loathe* protest music and folk singers." Robinson's vehemence is surprising, since he started his profes-

sional career in a group called Cafe Society, a cabaret version of Crosby, Stills and Nash. "That's part of my resentment," he says. "It stems from that bland assumption that if you play an acoustic guitar you're interested in folk music."

Robinson, now twenty-seven,



*"I loathe protest music."*

says he was first drawn to rock & roll by his classically trained father, who insisted that rock music was repugnant—and unwelcome in his household. "I suppose you could say that he was my biggest influence," smiles Tom. "If he hated it so much, I figured there must be something good about it." Eventually, the rift between the two spread so far that Tom spent six years in Finchden Manor, a home for "maladjusted boys," where he first met Danny Kustow, his current band's guitarist. When he left the manor five

years ago, he headed for London. In his first year there, Robinson formed Cafe Society with two old friends. Kink Ray Davies signed the group to his Konk label and produced its one album—a watery-sounding effort that by most accounts, failed to capture the personality of the band's pub act.

By the time Robinson left Cafe Society in 1976 and founded his current band, he had started writing songs about the volatile social climate around him. "If you're a rock fan living in London," he says, "and your idols are writing odes to the latest Britt Ekland, what the fuck's that got to do with you? That's why the New Wave took off in such an enormous way there—because it belonged to the people who made it. It was do-it-yourself

PHOTOGRAPH BY EBET ROBERT





# TRB

## TOM ROBINSON BAND

### PRESS CUTTINGS



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15p weekly

USA: one dollar

## Gabriel/Robinson gig

PETER GABRIEL, who is already hosting four sold-out shows at London's Hammersmith Odeon next week, will be joined by Tom Robinson for a fifth show on Christmas Eve.

Neither singer will appear with his regular band, and they are inviting guest musicians to play on the show. All the profits from the concert will be split evenly between the Association for One-Parent Families and the Northern Ireland Gay Rights Association.

Tickets for the benefit concert are available now at £2.00 from the Harvey Goldsmith box offices in Chappells, 50 New Bond Street, London W1, and at the Great Gear Market in London's Kings Road. Tickets are limited to two per person, and are available by personal application only.

Anyone who presents a dole card at the door on the night will have half the ticket price refunded.

● Dolphin Taylor, drummer with the Tom Robinson Band, has quit the group after making a final appearance on Sunday at the Amnesty International Human Rights demo in London's Hyde Park.

He says he was dissatisfied with the group's new musical direction, and has left to concentrate on songwriting and session work. A temporary replacement drummer joined the band in the studio this week to start work on the new TRB album, and the group is currently looking for a permanent replacement for Taylor.

The band will start 1979 with a tour of Japan and Norway, and plan to have the album, being produced by Todd Rundgren, ready for release in March.





"Summer 1979"

## THE LAST DAYS OF TRB

**S**O. FAREWELL then, TRB. For the time being anyway.

Last week it was that the shock-horror news was unleashed upon a shocked, horrified world: Tom Robinson's men had called it a collective day. Henceforth would they stride out to meet their separate destinies, separately.

And for why? The cause being cited isn't so much "musical differences" as a general consensus that TRB had lost that *je ne sais quoi*, was somehow minus that certain spark.

"I haven't been excited for a long time," confessed Danny Kustow, guitarist and TRB co-founder. "And that's what I want, to be excited on stage by what I'm playing."

"I don't think it was ever the same after Mark left," (Mark Ambler, the original keyboards player) "It didn't seem to be the TRB. The founder members, the original group started breaking up. And Dolphin went" (Dolphin Taylor, TRB's former drummer) "and once he went it definitely wasn't TRB any more."

### Danny Kustow confides in Thrills on his departure from The Tom Robinson Band

But the split?

"It was a group decision. We thought we'd take it as far as it would go and that's it. We want to go our own ways. I'd like to play with a lot of people, so it's the best thing really."

"It was amazing playing with Tom. But the time had come to move on."

And Danny, although notoriously just a little more talkative than your average brick wall, went on to describe for *Thrills* his current preoccupation: a loose association known enigmatically as The Jimmy Norton Explosion (not, alas, as "The Jimmy Norton Experience" as previously reported).

Now in rehearsal, and chancing the odd gig, the group comprises Kustow with

Rich Kids Glen Matlock and Steve New, plus the erstwhile Slit drummer Budgie.

"We're just going to see how it goes, really. There isn't anyone called Jimmy Norton. I think it's a really great name, don't you think so?"

Um, pass. But what're Tom, and the other guys going to do? "Tom's writing some stuff. He's got a whole backlog of songs which he's never had a chance to play" — a facet indicated in his recent series of solo shows and by his release of a single, sans TRB, in 'I'll Never Fall In Love ... (Again)'.

"Charlie Morgan the drummer and Ian Parker are both going to do some session work. Ian's writing, he's going to get his own band together."

Robinson himself had come to regard TRB as "no longer a challenging or risky venture ... after 2½ years it's become a bit tame and predictable."

Some new manifestation of TRB seems likely in the long term; in the meantime Tom gets on with completion of a new album.

PAUL DU NOYER

THRILLS

## TRB SPLIT: NEW BAND NEXT YEAR

THE TOM ROBINSON BAND has split up after two-and-a-half years' existence. The reason, says band leader Robinson, is that they are "no longer a challenging and risky venture."

He adds: "Now, after two-and-a-half years, it's become a bit tame and predictable. It's time to move on and try something fresh."

Robinson is at present preparing new material for a third album, and is planning on a new TRB line-up for the new year. The band made their final appearances at the Tourhout and Werchter festivals in Belgium last week.

Guitarist Danny Kustow, the other founder of TRB, is currently doing a few gigs with Glen Matlock and Steve New, of the Rich Kids and Budgie, ex-Slits, under the name the Jimmy Norton Experience. Organist Ian Parker and drummer Charles Morgan plan to return to session work.



Kustow and Robinson in typical happy-together pose. Pic: Chris L. Urea.

