

BRUM BEAT

THE MIDLANDS ENTERTAINMENT MONTHLY

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Tom Pacheco

SONGWRITER

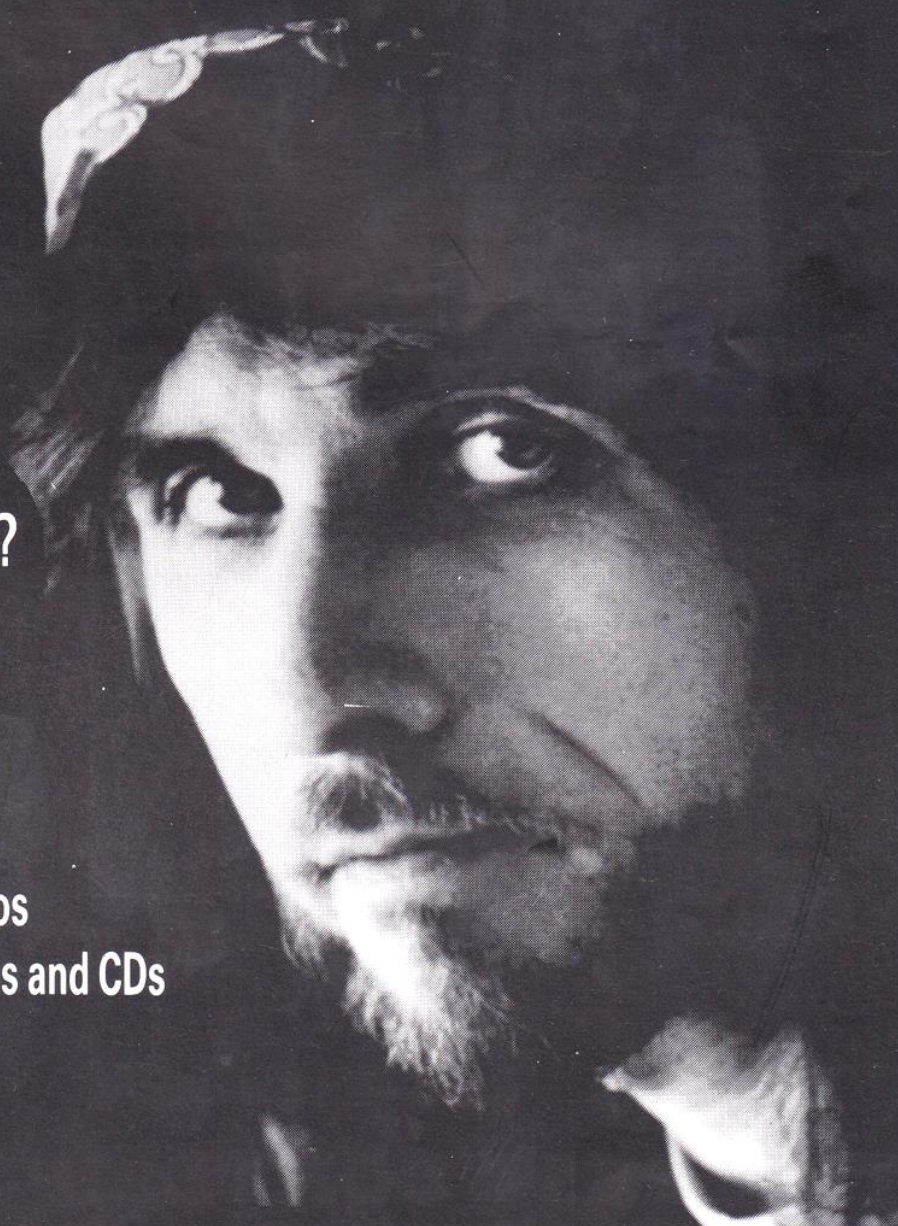
ELO Part 2:
Return To Glory?

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Paul Simon Tickets
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NEWS * REVIEWS * OPINION



A marginally thinner number of goings on this month, as indoor venues wind down for the summer, and numerous open air festival organisers incite the Gods for fair weather.

Undoubtedly encouraged and stung into action by the 'pearl 'n' twin set' tag in my April column, all you discerning, intelligent folk music buffs out there soon had the SOLD OUT sign registered at Symphony Hall for Clannad's Monday, 13 May concert. It's now a case of (drowning your sorrows in) alcohol, or picking up a last minute cancellation.

Over at the NEC, there are still a few tickets left on May 14th and 17th for Paul Simon's 'Born At The Right Time' world tour dates. Having read the ROLLING STONE review of Simon's January 14th appearance at Oakland Coliseum Arena, this Arty isn't gonna be separated from 19.00, let alone 20.50. Scots wha hae, keep it in their pocket!

Following on from his April date in Wolverhampton, Al Stewart is at the Alexandra Theatre on Wednesday, 8 May. By then, EMI will have released the albums 'Chronicles...The Best Of Al Stewart' and, at mid-price, 'Year Of The Cat' in all three formats. Foolhardy move, huh? An album featuring new material is scheduled by EMI for release later this year. Iain Matthews continues as the support act.



CHRISTY MOORE

There has been something of an Irish flavour to my recommended gig of the month lately. The honours this time fall to Christy Moore, who has two local gigs scheduled. The first is at Birmingham Town Hall on Tuesday, 14 May followed by Warwick University the following Monday. Christy's fifth solo album 'Smoke & Strong Whiskey' was released on 22 April on the new label, Newberry Recording. 'Smoke...' opens with 'Welcome To The Cabaret', Auld Moore's Irish chart-topping hit from last year. This humorous and lyrically off the wall

number, is followed by 'Fairytale Of New York', the Shane McGowan/Pogues Yuletide smash from a few seasons back. On the latter, Christy successfully avoids the obvious trap of recreating the duet. 'Scapegoats', a eulogy recorded prior to the recent release of the Birmingham Six, follows. Personally, I question the validity of this song. Of course we all know that there's a problem. What we need most are constructive and effective solutions. Through his twenty five year career, Moore has established himself as an articulate supporter of native Irish issues. Further exposure of those issues follow on the album title track, and in the historical overview of his homeland, 'Green Island'.

One other scourge of nineties society, heroin, is encountered in 'Whacker Humphries'. The outcome, when John Whacker Humphries attempts to galvanise his neighbours into action against the dealers while officialdom bumbles around, is tellingly captured in the line "One man gets a pension, and another man gets time". 'If I Gen An Encore', the closing cut, is Moore's personal reflections on a quarter century spent performing music for audiences, large or small. And it has never ever been less than a labour of love. Two years on since the effortless mastery of 'Voyage', I found 'Smoke & Strong Whiskey' something of a disappointment, due mainly to the narrow focus of certain lyrics.

With the annual Glastonbury Festival on hold, there was an attempt to float the substitute 'Peace Of Mind' national tour. A Wolverhampton date during May was pencilled in, but despite what you may have read in the national music press, the whole tour has now been delayed till later this year. Watch this space.

No doubt with the ulterior intent of promoting their particular brand of nectar, Heineken have a nationwide 'music tour in a tent', pitched at various locations across the land through the coming summer. The closest the Big Top comes to Birmingham is Wollaton Park, Nottingham, from Friday 24 to Monday 27 May. Whitsun Holiday Weekend. The current bill, with further artists and bands to be confirmed, is Friday 24th - Squeeze, The Big Town Playboys; Saturday 25th - Martin Stephenson & The Daintees, The Levellers, The Buttermountain Boys; Sunday 26th - Alias Ron Kavana, R Cajun & The Zydeco Brothers, Jimmy Katumba, Friends Of Harry, Caroline Trettime;

ARTHUR WOOD

Monday 27th - Steve Marriott. One or two rootsy things there. Oh yes, and I forgot the punchline. This event will reach the part which other beverages don't. In this instance, your pocket. It's completely FREE. Other local festivals during May include Upton-upon-Severn Folk Festival over the weekend of Friday 3rd/Monday 6th May (Contact Pat Cox on 0684/63849 for details), while up in Edale Valley, Derbyshire the three-day Edale Bluegrass Festival gets underway on Friday 31st (contact Tom Travis on 0457/61789).

If you've got the energy to go further afield, then the premier early summer festival bill must surely be Fleadh '91 on Sunday 2nd June. The venue, Finsbury Park, London N7. Headlining are Christy Moore, Van Morrison, The Pogues and Nanci Griffith. In their slipstream, you'll find The Paul Brady Band, The Saw Doctors, Mary Coughlan, Mary Black, The Dubliners, The Chieftans, The Fureys and Davey Arthur,

Davy Spillane and Minny Others.

Apart from his support spot on Fairport Convention's most recent national tour, Jay Turner has otherwise been conspicuously missing from Midlands stages of late. Seems that he headed West across The Great Pond immediately following the Fairports' tour. He spent a number of weeks impressing them in and around Toronto, Canada, both onstage and via numerous local radio stations. A return bout is already scheduled. During May, however, Jay will be in the studio cutting his third solo album, with a June release date in mind. If you don't already possess copies of Jay's 'Passion Roulette' and 'Movements In Architecture', believe me, your ears deserve the pleasure. Contact me via the BRUM BEAT office for the relevant address, costs, etc. Locally, the pubs and clubs during May offer the following: Thurs 2nd Bob Brozman (Breedon); Fri 3rd Singers

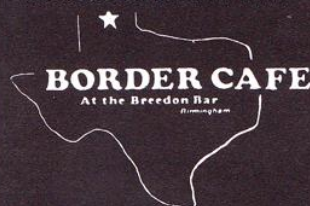
Night (Woodman, Kingswinford), Tim Lyons & Fintan Vallely (The Market Tavern, Moseley Street, B5 - admission by ticket); Drowsy Maggie (Bell & Pump, Edgbaston); Sat 4th The Deighton Family (The Red Lion, Kings Heath); Sun 5th, 12th, 19th and 26th Curtis Little (Breedon); Thurs 9th Mack & The Boys (Breedon); Fri 10th Jim Couza (Woodman); Singers Night (The Market Tavern); Dick Gaughan (Bell & Pump); Joey Davis & Kelvin Henderson (Breedon); Sat 11th The Hank Wangford Trio (Red Lion); Steve Gibbons (Breedon); Fri 24th Woodman is closed this week and next; Singers Night (The Market Tavern), Death Of Folk (Bell & Pump), Hamsters (Breedon); Sat 25th Vin Garbutt (Red Lion - club closes for summer); Tue 28th Mack & The Boys (Breedon); Thurs 30th Issac Guillery (Breedon); Fri 31st Pat Ryan (The Market Tavern), Malfunxion (Bell & Pump).

And finally, on Saturday June 1st at the Breedon Bar, there's the much rumoured return of Duo d'Lubbock Mafia, featuring Butch Hancock and Jimmie Dale Gilmore. There's even a possibility that Mr Jesse Taylor, fresh from his April/May British tour, will also be in attendance.

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HIGHWAY '91 - REVITALISI

I can't remember when exactly - possibly it was around the beginning of the eighties - anyway, I bought a couple of import albums titled 'Swallowed Up In The Great American Heartland' and 'The Outsider'. Recorded for RCA during the mid seventies and strangely, considering their folk / country leanings, produced by enigmatic legend 'Shadow' Morton, a man best known for creating The Shangri-Las' 'Leader Of The Pack', the albums featured a Dylan influenced songwriter who hailed from Massachusetts by the name of Tom Pacheco.

His songs were indicative of an autobiographic writer who, whilst emotionally explicit and direct, avoided shrouding his lyrics in self-perpetuating obscurity.

At the time I tried to find out where he had gone. The trail went cold in Austin, Texas around 1982. Last year came an album, 'Eagle In The Rain'; almost fifteen years further down the road the recorded work of Tom Pacheco was once more commercially available.

Initially I was rather underwhelmed by 'Eagle...' but his two Sunday night performances at last year's Cambridge Folk Festival put the lie to that premature assessment. On stage Pacheco was a ****ing revelation. On the eve of the release of his eagerly anticipated 'Sunflowers And Scarecrows' album I spoke to Tom at his current home in Dublin.

'Sunflowers And Scarecrows' embraces a wider range of styles than your previous records. For instance reggae, Tex-Mex and definitely rock. Will this confuse people?

I still write songs the same way and I cut them on this album with the acoustic guitar and my voice straight up front all the time. It's possible that some people might have wanted me to make another album like the previous one, but then my songs are all stories anyway. Some of them are just presented in a little different form this time around. In fact some of the songs on 'Sunflowers...' were recorded in a much simpler fashion. For instance 'I Was Meant To Pass Through Your Life' is really just my acoustic

guitar, mandolin and a little synthesiser. Very simple. I was trying to expand upon things because I've been writing a lot of songs like 'Rock'n'Roll Roulette' and 'Sweet Lucille'.

At one stage there were plans to record the album in San Francisco.

Right. I think that it would have ended up being a real rock'n'roll album and not what I wanted. The players out there are more attuned to rock bands and it would have been too far away from an acoustic base. So I cut the record in London with some rock players and some acoustic players. Bob Loveday from Bob Geldof's band is on fiddle. It's an interesting combination of sounds, I guess.

REAL MUSICIANS, ALL PLAYING TOGETHER

How did you meet producer Kenny Denton and did he choose the musicians?

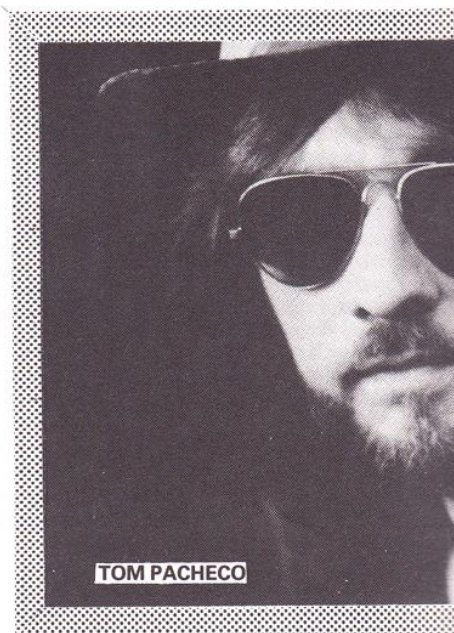
I didn't realise it at the time but I'd met him in Woodstock in 1979. He was doing some work for Albert Grossman (Dylan's manager at the time. Ed.) and I was laying down tracks that never came out. Kenny's produced Doug Sahm and Augie Meyers, The Texana Dames and he worked on Bill Haley's last album. Anyway we met again last November in Sonet Studio and decided to give it a whirl.

Kenny chose the rhythm section and I chose the acoustic players though Flaco Jimenez' appearance on the record is down to Kenny! He was in Texas working when Flaco came into the studio, Kenny had a DAT of my album and played him a song. Flaco liked it and added accordion right then and there.

It was good working with Kenny, it was the first session he'd done in about two years with real musicians all playing together in the studio at the same time. There are so many being made with computers now but we, bass, drums, piano and guitar sat in a circle and played. It was fun but it's something that isn't being done too much any more, unfortunately.

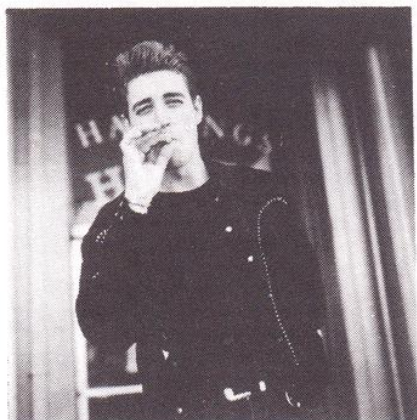
Let's talk about the songs. The opening track, 'Hippy On The Highway' sounds like wry nostalgia but is there a serious side to it too?

Well I did pick up a character one time, very similar to the one in my song, that I liked a lot. The lyrics are also about the whole sixties thing. From talking to him in the car I realised that so much has been lost. I just wanted to start the album with him - like he was back on the scene again. It's a long time since his era and it was a way of commenting about all the things he represented. It's strange because we seem to be going back into a sixties kind of feeling again in the nineties. I had so many friends like that. In fact, I was probably like that myself. I still am I guess. There's definitely a strong sense of sympathy for him and that era in the song.



TOM PACHECO

EMOTION PICTURES



JOHN WESLEY HARDING

Mike Davies has a private screening with John Wesley Harding.

From a reference to Tim Hardin's 'If I Were a Carpenter', some Stax R & B and with appearances by Victoria Williams, Barry Goldberg, Ronee Blakely and Elizabeth Barraclough, "the greatest female voice ever to appear on a rock record" (and whose dormant career he's probably been partly responsible for revitalising after 22 years), John Wesley Harding happily observes his new album 'The Name Above The Title' is a major testament to his influences.

"It pilfers from everywhere. There's tributes throughout to everyone I've ever liked in one way or another. I'm very proud too that John Prine put my last album, 'Here Comes The Groom', in his Top 5 of last year's albums next to Dylan. It's all downhill now. That's all the approval I ever wanted in my life."

Harding's quite open about his influences. ABBA, the Carpenters (he's trying to get Richard to do strings on the next album), Tommy James (whose 'Crystal Blue Persuasion' he covers here) and though you might not recognise them, he says his

two real influences are The Kinks and T Rex. "The songs might not sound like that at the end, but that's what I listen to."

One of the people he surprisingly doesn't cite, despite constant comparisons, is Costello.

"I'm 25 and 'Oliver's Army' was probably one of the first singles I bought when I was 11, so there's bound to be something in there. And after all, I do have his band playing with me. But I don't really listen to him anymore and I certainly don't feel hugely influenced by him. We've both got a pessimistic world view, but I'm more influenced by a great optimism and my songs are more straightforward."

Talking about which, Harding's been spreading his writing wings filmwards of late, providing material for Chesney Hawkes in 'Buddy's Song'.

"I wrote seven songs as I thought a 16 year old might write them. I'm going to do one of them, 'A Man Not A Boy', myself, once I've changed the lyrics. Chesney's doing well with his career and good for him and good for me too. I'm a songwriter and that's my job. Randy Newman started out writing formulaic songs to make money. That's what I'm going to do."

ED

Tom Pacheco, THE songwriter for the nineties, talks to Arthur Wood

The crux of this album seems to be the track 'Van Gogh'. Apart from telling the real tale of the painter, is it also autobiographical in a sense?

It's really for all artists. All painters. All musicians. It was actually written on a day that I was really down on myself. I was very depressed. I rarely write a song when I'm like that. I'd been reading about Van Gogh's life and the song just spilled right out. It's certainly about him and also about the struggles for recognition that all artists have. I wrote it in 1989, certainly well before the hundredth anniversary of his death which was last year.

Three tracks on the album focus on subjects which dictate that they are, lyrically, brutally honest. 'Strange Gods' deals with religious cults, ritual child abuse, drugs and

other social ills. Are you pessimistic or do you think there's an antidote?

I think each person should find their own way and not be suckered into someone else's bizarre lifestyle. It's happening more and more in the states, although it's beginning to happen here as well. It's so easy for people to become weak, get caught and give way to something. I wrote the song to make people aware of that fact, because so many of them are looking outside themselves these days - to other things, as opposed to strengths which may lie inside of them.

A MUCH MORE IMPORTANT SONG

And then 'Merchant Of Death'. In light of recent events did you stop to consider that the inclusion of the song might be misconstrued?

No, not at all. It was a choice between that one and 'Yellow Ribbons'. I knew that when this war was over there would be yellow ribbons everywhere. You know what I mean. The people that would be gaining most from this war would be the arms merchants. I figured 'Merchant Of Death' would be a much more important song and so I put it on the album. I actually wrote the song last year and the word Baghdad was in there long before we knew there would be a war. The line "Bank accounts in Baghdad" sounded good with those two 'b's thrown together like that. It was strange how that worked out. It's very weird how those things happen.

The final one in the trio is 'Rock'n'Roll Roulette'.

That song was written about a week before last year's Cambridge Folk Festival. It was the last song I wrote before I came over to England. I wasn't going to do it but I had seen an old friend of mine backstage who persuaded me to. That was another strange connection because two weeks later Stevie Ray Vaughan died. And

more recently some of the people in Reba McEntire's band. Some of them were good friends of mine. It's plain crazy how those things happen.

What about 'I Was Meant To Pass Through Your Life'? It's probably the most intense song on the album.

That song is completely autobiographical. Every single line. It's about a woman that I was with for ten years and that I separated from in 1983. Several years passed before I was able to sit down and write that song. We lived together for a long time in Greenwich Village, New York and in Texas as well as a short spell in Woodstock. We broke up after we left Texas. She was the woman who took the photographs for the liner of my second RCA album, 'The Outsider'. Her name is Melissa Raymond and the song is all about her. That's a real personal song for me.

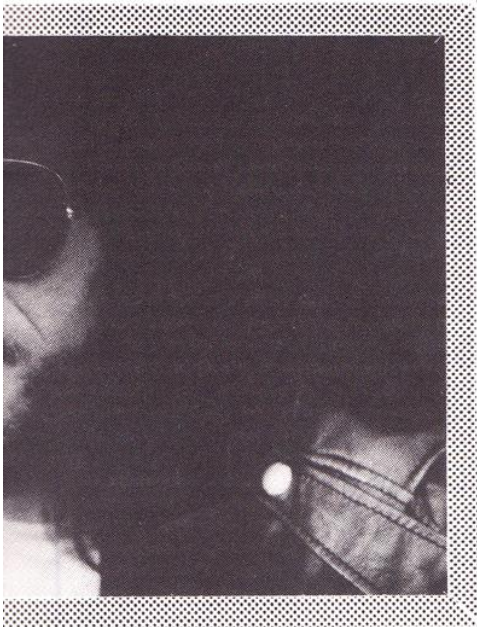
ON TOUR

With the British tour over Pacheco heads off to Germany and Holland for May before returning to his Irish base for a round of festivals. Summer will find him in Europe once again on the major festival circuit, a circuit that will hopefully include England. And then it's off to the states for fifteen to twenty dates in Texas, dates that may have just a little something to do with his manager's recently found fondness for the lone star state's chicken fried steak!

And then a rest? Seems not...

"I'm hard at work already, planning the next album, believe it or not. After the tour of the states we're planning a big tour of Britain commencing in November and running into December. I start the next album right after that in January. My working title now, which will drive my manager, Clive, crazy, is 'Peaceful Winds', but that's all I'll say about it right now"

'Sunflowers And Scarecrows' is now available on the Round Tower label



He also contributed to the soundtrack of Mickey Rourke's soft-porn turkey 'Wild Orchid'.

"But my self-respect is intact because I used a pseudonym. My name's nowhere on the cover. I pretended to be Tom Waits for three minutes and got an immense amount of money. Then I saw the film and walked out of the preview. The director was very worried that I didn't like it. I hated it! It was the biggest piece of shit I've ever seen in my life. I had my name removed from anything to do with it. I'm the Rhythm Method on the soundtrack!"

Movies inform much of what Harding does. He loves them. They infiltrate his thoughts. His first two albums were named after ones ('It Happened One Night' and 'Here Comes The Groom', both by Frank Capra) and he says this one is supposed to be constructed like one, from the opening theme (the string section from 'Movie Of Your Life' - an attack on biopics that bear little resemblance to the reality) to the closing credits of the James number.

There's also references and images galore throughout the lyrics. I ask whether movies symbolise the album's recurring theme of truth and lies and the

fact that people live lies so often they become their truth. Now he's off and running.

"That's part of it, although there's more important things in there too. If there is a theme it's probably guilt, personal guilt about the things you do to yourself and to others that you could avoid. 'Backing Out' comes from that.

"It's about apathy and cynicism and how ruinous they can be, about TV messiahs, about how personal relationships are ruined because popular culture won't tell us the truth. It's what 'The People's Drug' is about. It's not a conspiracy thing, but we're fed dung all the time. Not just in the inane quality of the work but in every respect, from the presentation to the meat and potatoes of the song or film. Life imitates art more than art imitates life.

"Few people are willing to take an original stance on anything, from the presentation of the Gulf War to the Manchester Scene, it's the same thing. What really depresses me about pop today is how things have to be hyped until they're dead. You have to be famous far quicker now to be successful and that's diametrically opposed to good art because art needs time to grow. People like Tracy Chapman,

Tanita Takiram, Sinead O'Connor are blowing out because they've been created too soon."

"The artist has to take a responsibility too, but the people in the business don't WANT to take one. It's all down to the business of making or not making money. My songs are nudging conscience things. And if they budge someone else that's fine but the revolution begins in my bed. It's enough to nudge your own conscience. There's so many plates of glass to smash before you get to Kathleen Turner."

But of course you still have to work in the industry to do it. "But accepting the machine doesn't mean you condone it. That's what 'Backing Out' is about. I think the most terrifying song on the album is 'The People's Drug' because it's something that's so easy to take. I've got responsibilities to myself and to people around me to write good songs, but I get the Chesney single and I get mine and on his there's this beautiful photo of him and on mine I'm looking sick with green colours on me. He's in Smash Hits and good for him. Mine's about personal guilt and drinking and maybe I'm in Q where they say he says interesting things but with too many words."

Good ones though.