

# CABARET VOLTAIRE

by Boz

On the way to Nottinghill Gate via the tube, I didn't quite know what to expect from this interview. I mean, this is Cabaret Voltaire, not Black Flag- I couldn't very likely ask them what type of skateboard they preferred. I was briefly acquainted with their new album, which had just been released. What impressed me the most was how accessible the band had become without compromising their original, artistic spirit. I would recommend "2 x 45" to anyone... well, almost anyone. After waiting awhile at their hotel (they were out) James and I spied them around the corner; "Hey, you're Cabaret Voltaire, aren't you?" They then went upstairs to clean up while we waited outside on the patio by the street. Shortly afterwards Stephen Mallinder (MAL) came outside and the interview started. Richard Kirk joined in towards the end.

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SR: Chris left the band, didn't he? Why did he leave?

MAL: It's difficult to say from our position. I think he was just getting a little fed up- not fed up with the things we were doing, but from the personal point of view he wanted to develop this side, but he was basically an engineer as such and I just think he wanted to go for something like that. I mean he's probably better equipped to answer it than I am. I mean he's got personal reasons as well, but it wasn't like he hated what we were doing...

SR: Do you have a permanent replacement for him yet?

MAL: No, we're now sort of the nucleus of Richard and myself. We've been playing dates so far this year with our drummer, Alan. He's played on one of the double 12"s. We worked with another drummer as well.

SR: Has this caused any immediate change in the band?

MAL: No, I think it's been a bit of a challenge to change things, not monumentally, but to get things to move off of a different tangent- and we find it beneficial, really, working with drums. It gives us a more direct approach.

SR: In your recordings, are you working toward an overall goal or do you treat each LP or record as an individual project?

MAL: I think we treat each thing we do as an individual thing- we don't have any overall plan or set goal that we want to achieve overall in music generally with each record. I think basically we have loose ideas of where we want to go, where we want to work- we don't restrict ourselves, we try to give everything we're doing at least a life of its own and just let things develop. I think the only conceptualizing comes

afterwards--in a lot of ways it's very natural, we don't conceptualize before, all those things come afterwards.

SR: The new record is quite different, more funky perhaps, is this a general direction you're moving into or is this just how it worked out?

MAL: I don't think funky's quite the right word really, I mean it's more rhythmic. We've always been rhythm-oriented, we've always been sort of consciously aware of using it in everything we do- it's slightly more refined, more direct- which is sort of the way things have gone the last 6 or 8 months. It's not a conscious shift as I said, it's more of a development using drummers with us....

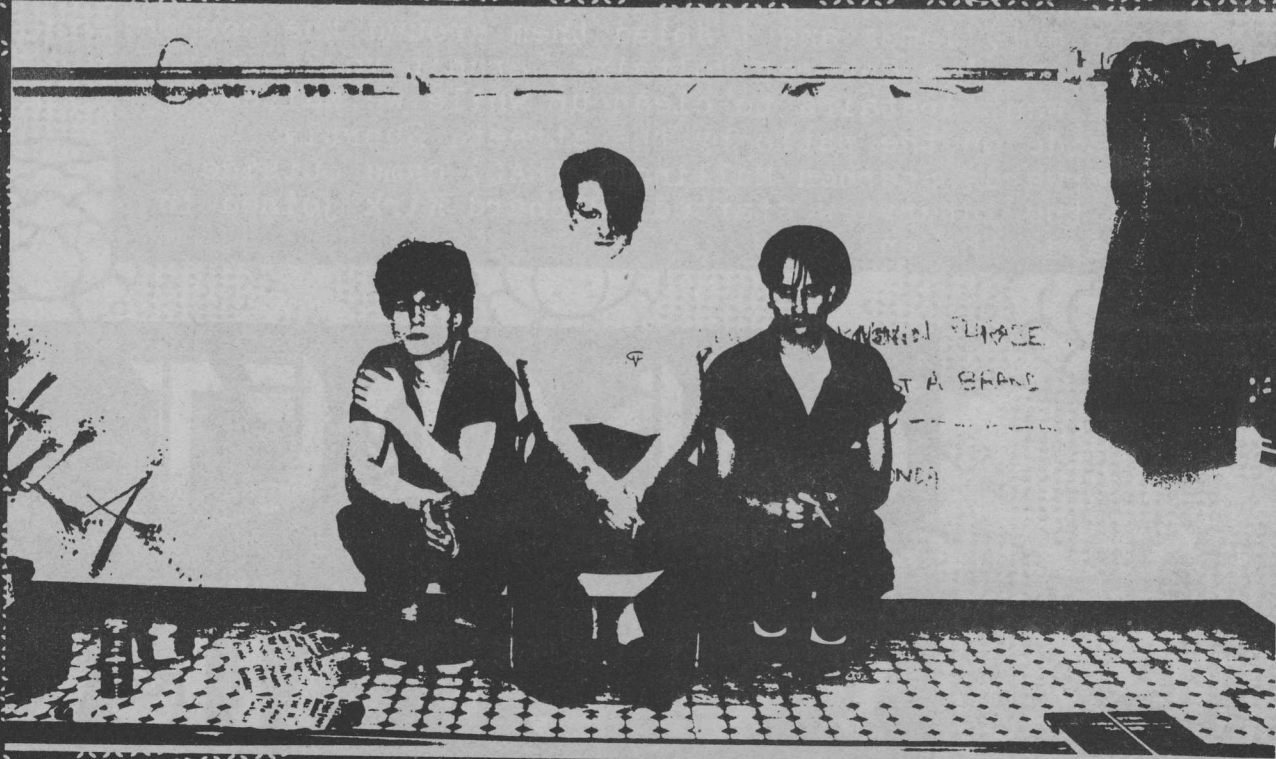
SR: Out of all your records, which comes closest to capturing....

MAL: Out of what we've done that's really difficult... I don't think there's anything really, because I'm never really satisfied with what we've done... I'm always partially satisfied with some of the individual things. I mean certainly some of the things we've done in the past have that certain crossover thing-- I think my favorite thing we've done is probably something not many people have heard, which is on the Crepuscule compilation LP.

SR: What about musical influences, both with the band and personally for yourself?

MAL: Not really- it's difficult, cause I've been through so many different types of music that I soak a lot of it in, but I also sort of ignore it-- not ignore it, really-- I mean there's obvious influences. I feel sort of an affinity to groups like Can, and the Velvets, and people like that, and some German groups...but that's really not what we're all about, I mean I grew up on Motown and ska.

SR: Quite often the term 'art damage' is used in



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reference to you and others- what do you think of that label?

MAL: I don't like categorizing ourselves, really, I don't want to be an art band... I don't like categorization and don't like being tied to some sort of inaccessible thing. I like to think of our music as accessible- it's just people's socialized attitudes to popular music that screws it up, really. I don't think everyone can really get into us really, I mean there's limits, we're not the sort of band everyone can like.

SR: Do you feel conscious of your audience?

MAL: Yeah. I don't like the idea of hampering to audiences, or doing music for audiences in that sense, I mean I do music basically for myself, but I'm totally aware of audiences as well, and there is always some sort of compromise; if you want to get anything over, you've got to compromise in some way or else people have got absolutely nothing to latch onto...

SR: Do you enjoy playing live?

MAL: Yeah, yeah. I mean we don't like playing live a lot because if you do it alot, it takes the fun out of it.... We're not snobby because we don't play alot, we really enjoy it.

SR: Didn't you recently play Japan?

MAL: Yeah, we were in Japan... the end of Japan...

SR: What was the reaction?

MAL: Great- it was really good. I mean we tend to find in a lot of ways that audiences outside of England respond a lot more naturally to us because in England there's sort of very much the press build-up that dictates a lot of the tribalism, but when you go outside of England, it tends to be not a naive sort of reaction, but more of it not being bogged down with whether they should like it, whether it fits into their general musical taste-- they react more naturally.

SR: Did you find that the people were aware of the band and what you've done?

MAL: Yeah, our records have been coming out there, we've had I think 4 records out there, and they've sold relative to the other releases elsewhere, and they knew what we were like in that sense.

SR: Any U.S. tour plans at all?

MAL: Well, we want to go to New York this year, 'cause we've played the West Coast and we've never played New York... So we're determined to play there.

SR: Are you under contract with Rough Trade?

MAL: No, we're sort of under contract per record with RT- we have a contract for every record we make. I think we do anyway... we're sort of able to do what we want-- we want our independence and they give us that degree of control ourselves.

SR: What about videos, and isn't there a film as well?

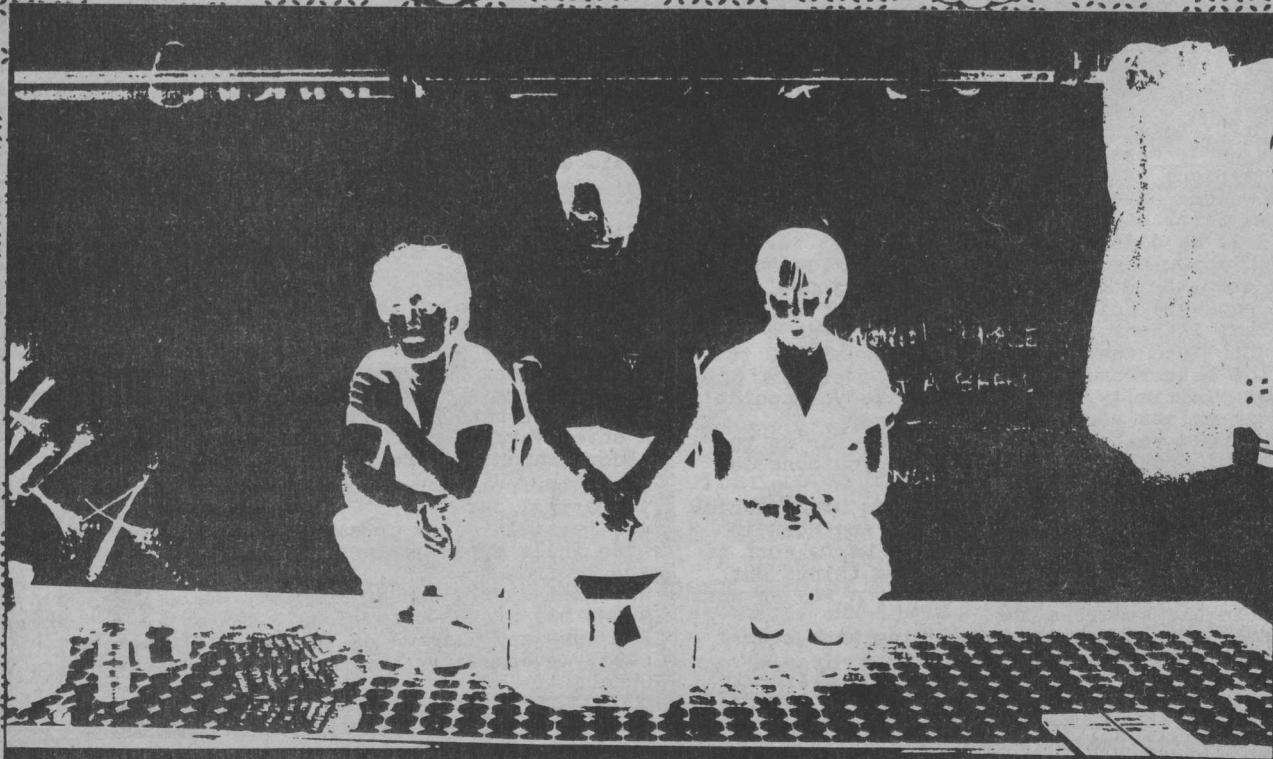
MAL: Yeah. Well, the video side of it- we set up our own video label called Double Vision, which is basically just going to be a video label run by us and someone else... The first thing out is a 1 1/2 hour Cabaret Voltaire video which we're trying to sell for about fifty pounds, which is finished, and should be out in about a month, and then we'll be working with other things-- bringing out a film which is "Johnny Yes No" which was the one you were talking about... I'll probably be doing a video compilation, also.

SR: Is your video company going to be more music-oriented?

MAL: No, we don't want to just get into that side of it... not be arty in that sense, but cover a wide range of things. Video is a media in itself and it should be used not just for promo videos.

SR: Wasn't there a collaboration with B.E.F.?

MAL: No, there was supposed to have been, but it never came off, largely because they moved down here... they've been real busy. We hope we'll still do it. I mean we were with them last night, but don't know if anything will ever come of it.





actually. (Richard enters.)

SR: What about your relationship with Throbbing Gristle?

RICHARD: I mean, TG does not exist anymore, of course. We've contributed to Psychic Television- we did a piece of video for that project....

SR: How long have you been together?

MAL: We first started doing things about

'72-'73... We didn't play 'til about '75....

SR: Would you say that the punk explosion in '76 helped open the doors for people like your-

selves who were doing different types of things?

MAL: Yes, I think it opened people's eyes a little bit into what to expect from music... it was a lot better and easier for us to play.

RICHARD: Initially, but after awhile you couldn't get a gig unless you were a punk band.

SR: You seem to be quite prolific as far as the quantity of product you release. Do you consider yourselves prolific?

MAL: Yeah. I mean, we've got our own studio which means we can sort of really develop and work in the studio quite alot which enables us to sort of do alot of recording. We don't bring things out just for the sake of it, it's just the way we work- we work in the studio a lot.

SR: Are there any plans for working with other groups or bands-- maybe producing?

MAL: Well, we do work with other groups from

time to time... it's a bit different 'cause there's only two of us.

SR: Would you say there is a specific CV sound?

MAL: Not a conscious one. We don't want to do that- we don't want to style ourselves...

SR: Is there anyone today that you're fond of?

RICHARD: I like New Order alot and I like 23 Skidoo. It's difficult to say, I mean if I sat down and thought about it I could probably think of a lot more....

At this point their manager showed up and it was time to make it to the show. They offered us a ride in their van, which they had rented. Mal brought along his ghetto machine and we listened to some reggae on the way to the Venue. In conversation, Richard mentioned that they might be doing a cover version of "Chain Gang" as their next record which will be something to look forward to.

Their performance on that night was intense and inspiring, both visually and musically. Blurred and partial images appeared on the screen overhead while a toxic blend of sound and rhythm surged from up front. It was a captivating and entertaining (I wonder how they would like that?) show- one of the best shows I saw while in London. I'm sure any charges of inaccessibility were easily overcome by their performance that night. Cheers!