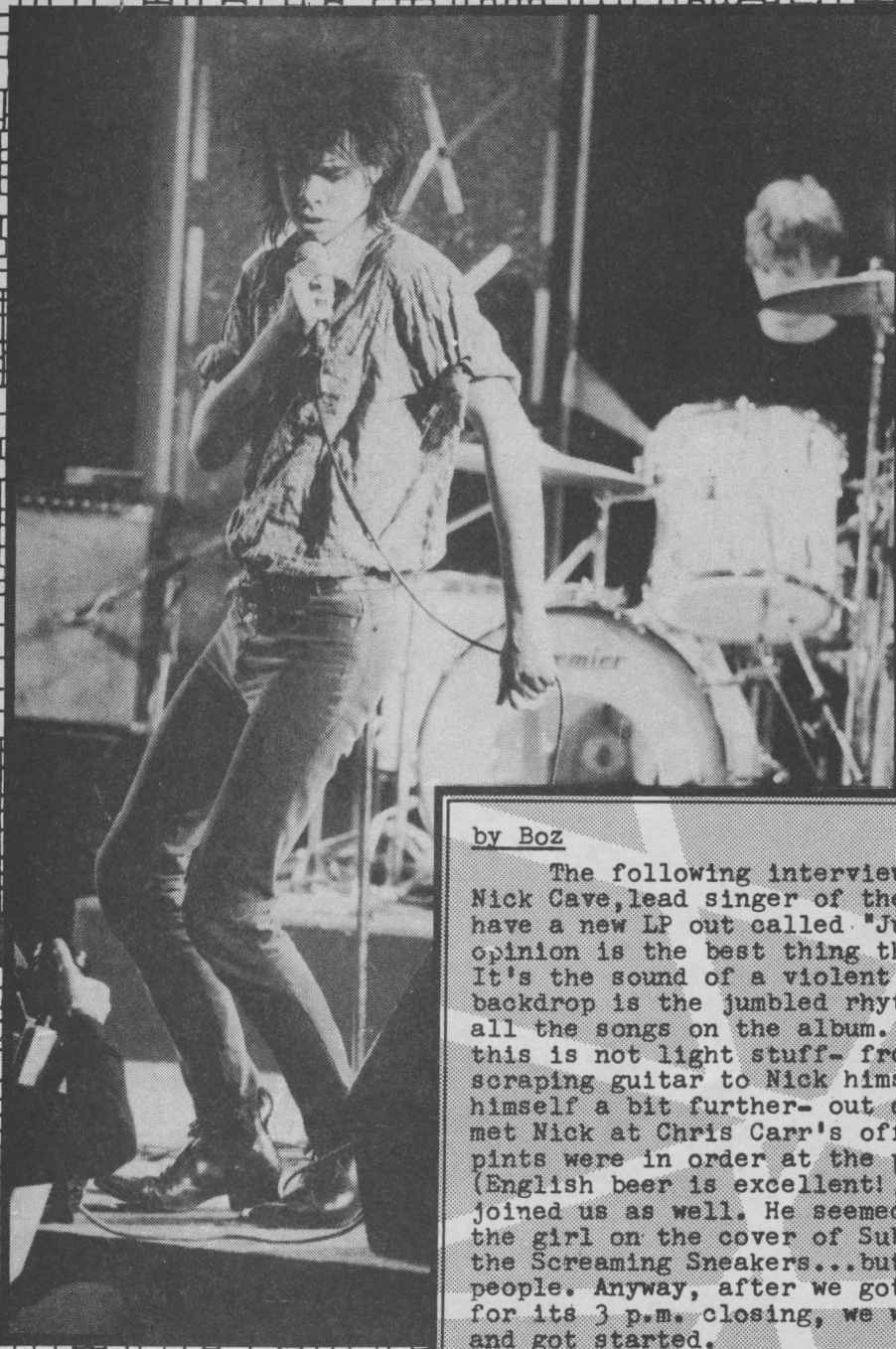


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## BIRTHDAY

PARTY



by Boz

The following interview was conducted with Nick Cave, lead singer of the Birthday Party. They have a new LP out called "Junkyard", which in my opinion is the best thing they've done to date. It's the sound of a violent drunken brawl- the backdrop is the jumbled rhythms that run through all the songs on the album. Everything is extreme, this is not light stuff- from the sound of the scraping guitar to Nick himself, always pushing himself a bit further- out of control indeed. I met Nick at Chris Carr's office, but first a few pints were in order at the pub across the street (English beer is excellent!). Phil, their drummer, joined us as well. He seemed most interested in the girl on the cover of Sublapse #5, Lisa Nash of the Screaming Sneakers...but so did a lot of other people. Anyway, after we got chased out of the pub for its 3 p.m. closing, we went back to the office and got started.

SR: How did you get signed to 4AD?

NICK: It was just a matter of Ivo (of 4AD) coming by accident—I think to one of our gigs— and liking us. Through that period we had been through a lot of record companies who just sort of listened to our record and asked questions like, "Is this a demo tape or what?"

SR: What about the records you had released in Australia?

NICK: Our first record was on a compilation record of Australian punk rock back in '77 and then we had a single and an album and a 12" EP. Then we had another album all of which are happily in the confines of Australia and hopefully won't surface over here. 'Cause they aren't too good, they're just products of rather warped juvenalia.. We released here two singles... and there's the "Prayers on Fire" album and then the live album with Lydia Lunch and there's a new album coming out, too.

SR: How did you get involved with Lydia?

NICK: Apparently, so she tells us, she heard our "Prayers on Fire" record and was greatly enthralled by it and was delirious about us coming over to America. Consequently she went to a number of our gigs, which, because of the nature of New York at the time or the nature of us at the time, I'm not quite sure— they were being cancelled or abbreviated after a couple of songs, and eventually she saw us and then decided we had a certain bad seed in common. We enjoyed each other's company...we also talked about me and her making a record together in America sometime in September, and and we've just kind of got various projects we're going to do— a video, hopefully having a book published of fifty plays...

SR: What are the plays like?

NICK: Well, they're certainly worth throwing out the window. I mean they're just one page pieces of pornography and garbage of some description. They're very good plays. I quite enjoyed doing them. They're just like--- They're not like

abstract prose at all, they're quite concise--- and they have a plot and they just happen to go for only one page. They're divided into 5 categories, 10 plays each...

SR: Who in the band comes up with the ideas for your songs?

NICK: Well, I'm sure depending on who you ask they will probably tell you a completely different story but I'll say that I do....

SR: What about inspiration for your material, musical and non-musical?

NICK: Where does the inspiration come from? Like what have I been reading? (Nick points to a book he was carrying around, "The Marquis de Sade") I found what really inspires me to write a particular way is basically due to what I have already written and the kind of sense of uncomfortableness that you get after writing something and recording it and finding...well I do anyway— take the sort of feel you've got to do at least one more record to nullify the one you did before— to excuse it or whatever, or you consider it not good enough or along the wrong track— not really what you were after. Consequently, I'm inspired to do a record to kind of react against that particular record and do something else. The sort of record I would really like to do is just a really extremely pure stylist record, that's just an incredibly kind of sad record rather than the sort of angry, aggressive, twisted type of record that we've been getting out lately... Just something rather than make people want to punch themselves, just make a kind of a silent thing— that would be very difficult for us to do....

SR: How serious is your music?

NICK: I consider it to be very serious stuff. I mean it's obviously very funny but...it always seems to me the best way to get around various sorts of things is to be first funny about it, which is a bit outmoded now, as far as I'm concerned I would just like to do a record that is a truly depressing record like "Berlin", Lou







Reed's "Berlin".

SR: What about Joy Division?

NICK: I'm talking about something that's honest and truly... not just a kind of trumped up sort of joke. I mean, whatever they were supposed to be like— as far as I'm concerned the record's just never really cracked it. They just for me weren't convincing, it was sort of blatant and over the top, and in some ways "Berlin" is like that, but you can't really kind of take it seriously. I take their sentiment very seriously but not the way they put it across. I never really liked Joy Division that much.

SR: What are your overall goals as far as a band?

NICK: It just goes in stages, we've never had a particular goal, it's changed so often.... Over the last 2 years I think our group has tried to perfect a type of reasoning that involved a kind of a thrusting or destructing kind of element at the audience— just something that corrupts or excites without any interest in where their energy goes after they've been kind of activated by it. But now I'd like to portray... a different sort of thought. As I say— a lot more kind of feeling sort of thing.

SR: Are you under a contract with 4AD?

NICK: We are with each record.

SR: Would you ever consider a deal with a major label?

NICK: Yeah. Sure, of course we would.

SR: You wouldn't be against it?

NICK: Why would we be against it?

SR: Well, some bands wind up having to compromise their music and approach.

NICK: Well, I think that may be the case in certain areas, but I think that's probably a bit of a fallacy. I don't see how anyone can come into a recording studio and say "That's not right"; I mean it would just be an impossible thing to do with us. I mean, if we were to sign with a bigger label, which we're not against on principle, we would obviously put certain things into the contract to do whatever we like....

SR: Can you see yourselves as a commercially viable band within the mainstream?

NICK: Well, I think our group could become sort of successful due to some sort of trickery on our behalf— putting across what we're doing in an exciting fashion on stage, we're kind of vibrant and energetic, and nasty and soulful and whatever, but I can never see our music being totally on the street or what we're trying to put across being understood by the masses. I think the sort of things we're trying to put across would only apply to a certain particular type of human being. That's not a person who is hipper than someone else, but just a certain person who thinks the way we do... As I said I guess we could put out a reasonably catchy single I suppose.

SR: Is there a 'typical' Birthday Party fan that goes to your gigs?

NICK: Yeah, I think at the moment there is a



certain type of people coming along, but I think they're barking up the wrong tree. We're trying to put it across to them that they're barking up the wrong tree, but they don't seem to understand. They seem to think that when we're aggressive towards them it's just kind of part of the fun and part of the show and it's just not! And these days when I feel aggressive towards the audience it's because I truly hate them and for no other reason.

SR: You're not conscious of your audience then?

NICK: Now it's becoming a kind of fashionable type of thing so that now I'm fairly conscious of people not really understanding at all, but rather being there. Rather because the media told them to be there or their friends told them to be there. So that the kind of hate I used to have on stage was a kind of hate for certain particular things, but now I just simply hate the people that we're playing to. It's distracting to play to people you're not interested in entertaining anyway.

SR: What about some of the L.A. horror bands like Christian Death? Do you see any similarities to the Birthday Party musically?

NICK: Anyone who thinks that our particular influences that we're trying to put across is Satanism or complete evil is completely misguided. Something like Christian Death— that sort of stuff doesn't interest me in the slightest, it's so far away from what we're all about, that it's like comparing us to ABC or something like that. I think that sort of thing is very shallow. We're accused of being cheap about the way we present our show because I attack the audience, sometimes quite physically, that it's a cheap ploy to kind of get attention. It offends me a great deal. I never want to go on stage, it's only a few minutes before we go on that I feel any desire whatsoever. It's only kind of seconds before (and it doesn't always happen anyway) but for some reason or other I feel I can crack it. For people to say our process on stage is cheap and so forth insults me because the only way we can put on a good show is when every inch of our soul and heart goes into the performance. If it's a good show it sticks out like a sore thumb. That's why it offends me because sometimes some shows we put out— I've really lost a lot of energy and sweat over and put a lot into it. A lot more than I put into anything else I practically do and then you read a review about it the next week and it says, 'Well, Nick Cave threw himself in the audience again, ho ho hum

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he's been doing it every gig, blah blah blah...'— that's quite upsetting.

SR: Do you generally dislike touring?

NICK: It's one big hangover. Tours are such monsters in that they kill any inspiration that you had for the music. Each time each song is sung to a certain extent it's kind of...It's like kissing the same woman for a week.

SR: So what about the single you're making for your girlfriend?

NICK: (Laughs.) The girl I've been kissing for years. Well, it's just a song we've written very recently—there's a lot of things I've wanted to do that are outside the Birthday Party framework—extra-curricular activities. In order to get her to record something, or other people also, there's other people with a lot of talent who have not the means or even the inclination.

If you ask them to go out to record a record they have absolutely no idea of how to go about it and it would probably be impossible for them to do it because of the bureaucracy that you have to go through before you can even record a record. You have to be in the position where you can say, 'Hey, listen' to your record company, 'I've got someone I would like to record a record with'. Now we're in a position where that's possible. Now I'm able to make a solo record if I wanted to— which I do. With the solo record that I want to make now is in the way that I've been talking; to make an incredibly lonely sort of record. I mean every way that I've described this record has been such a cliché that it sounds terrible but I'm not exactly sure how I want to do it. I think at the same time the Birthday Party could do that as well or better as a group. So I would hope ...I know Rowland is very interested in making a record of that sort as well. Me and Rowland tend to, even though we work away from each other, tend to kind of think in practically the same way all the time in terms of what we want to do. I'm very excited about the next record, which is quite odd because in Australia we were just sort of inches from breaking up. Just knowing that we couldn't make another record again after we made 'Junkyard'— that's what we thought about at the time because we thought we had pushed it as far as we could go and we couldn't see any other sort of record we could make. Now we're very enthusiastic.....

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