

SARAH 4

McCARTHY
THE SEA URCHINS
1000 VIOLINS
THE GROOVE FARM
THE ORCHIDS
14 ICED BEARS
TALULAH GOSH

ANOTHER SUNNY DAY

flexidisc

50p



LAST SUMMER

I don't remember much of last summer...

It was all giant kaleidoscope swirls and still is in many ways and - somehow it can't be Christmas in 4 days time yet everywhere I look there are

Upper Belgrave Road
Clifton
Bristol

December 21st

fairylights

"I'm HAPPY. I tried to tell him how it felt, he said he could see in me how he was at 16, and that it wasn't "like that". Then I realised, I don't want any PART of his world, I want to... RUN down to the Art Gallery, DANCE in the fountain, JUMP off the library wall to greet my friends and do EVERYTHING unhappy people DON'T - because I'm me and I'm YOUNG!!! It's three o'clock in the morning, and I'm walking home from a crappy casual party, I'm freezing, damp and BROKE, but I still love everything and... and all your messy waterfalls

"... a clasped mike-stand and the dreamiest gaze, gleesome guitars that dissolved into tears and a tambourine splintering, splitting apart, I dreamt and I woke and I stumbled quite helpless and hopelessly TUMBLING in love and just wrecking my life up for YOU bastard I love you

... they called themselves The Meanest Fuckers In Town but I knew them only as THE SEA URCHINS and somehow the name kinda stuck, 5 boys and 1 not, they trapped and captured that first careless rapture, they stole my sappy young heart and kept it for keeps and made me all unhappy misery things which I liked

... and from my wretched pool of unchoked tears I see JAMIE lost and trance-like, the music a vast hypnotic SWIRL, there's fog and there's dew and there's me and there's you, it's so beautiful, it's so wonderful...

... it was a beautiful summer, it swims before my eyes, black upon white and a sea-spray of sparkle-ing chrome...

And now a giant painting,

a view from the top of a steep piled hill - a road, narrow, falls between higgledy stucco terrace rows to a city spread wide in a watery morningtime gold... it wraps around and I step through with the sudden jarring stab-stab of recognition - hey, I live not far from here...

of words
and smiles
and eyes
and things
kaleidoscope
fragments
collide,
word-babble
babble,

I LOVE THIS...

... that tree,
this frost-capped wall,
my old house in Leytonstone we passed,
the train that brought me here tonight

Fragments

SPINNINGROUNDLOVEITALLANDYOUR EYES

Algers Road
Loughton
Essex
Christmas Eve

EYES
EYES
EYES

"But nobody could say that,"
I reflect, predictably,
through mouthfuls
of yum...

yum yum yum yum yum yum
yum yum yum yum yum yum
yum yum yum yum yum yum
yum yum yum yum yum yum

A soft beating at the door. Knock knock knock.
A small, shaggy, leathery creature stands in the porch.
Half-empty vodka bottle pokes from a pocket, large canvas
sack clenched in a fist...

"Good evening," it says, "I am..." - flaps wildly -
"something. But you can call me Bobby."

A flick of the hair back from its eyes. Beneath its
cloak I glimpse a p-p-p-POLKA-DOT SHIRT...

"BOBBY!!! Then you do exist!"

He grins stupidly. "Reindeer," he says, with a vague
skyward gesture, "outside. Please... dosomethingwithit..."

I find the reindeer eating next door's laburnum.

Eyes glint cruelly in the moonlight. Coat glistens wickedly.
Laburnum are poisonous. "This reindeer," says I sternly to
myself, "must be flushed out immediately with lots of fresh
water." I grab its jingly bells and drag it towards the house.

Removing Bobby from the sink, I invert the reindeer under
the tap. It struggles pathetically.

"If symptoms persist, you should consult a vet," squeaks a
small squeaky voice behind us. Unexpectedly.

"Good God, Bobby, what's that???"

A chubby little man, not ten inches high, sits cross-legged
on top of the fridge. Leather jerkin, leather breeches,
leather boots, curly red hair and great big floppy ears.

"Him? Oh that's Alan. One of my gnomes. We usually call
him 'DUMBO'."

"Because of the ears?" I whisper, nervously.

"No..."

LABURNUM POISONING; SYMPTOMS: tiredness; aching limbs;
vomiting; furry growth around antler-base; refusing to
pull cracker, read motto or wear paper-hat and general
all-round bloody-mindedness.

"Bobby," glugs the reindeer, antlers clacking on last
night's wash-up, "our friend seems exceedingly glum. Did
you bring the hallucinogenic choccy santas? They'll sponge
that puddle of woe from his face before you can say
'Medium Cool is just the most exciting record-label EVER.'"

(The Midland Railway's old main line from Bristol to Bath
was re-opened a few years back - but gravelled and tarmaced
to serve as a cyclepath...)

Embankments, grassed-up high past houseback and rooftop;
overbridge, underbridge, milepost and grade, scrub-covered
cutting, thistle, blackberry, half-hidden fragments of
dusty red brick - a long-lost, secret, backdoor world...

And now, a cold dripping black space, the Staple Hill
tunnel, and our path is a thin metalled band, white-lined,
that threads to a faraway thumbnail of light and everywhere
allaround darkness and dampness, moving, murmuring, hullo,
hullo... green and stalewater smells. Brrrrr...

It's 18 miles from our house to Bath, at 2pm we left and
walked down through Redland and into St.Pauls through an
afternoon drained to a dull ache of grey, a vacant stare,
shrinking away...

Hullo?

"Cosmic," said the reindeer, and glowed strangely.

LATER THAT SAME EVENING...

"Bobby," I say, indicating the sack by the door,
"don't you think you ought to get going? There's an
awful lot of children to visit, and it's getting awfully
late. And that awful bloody reindeer's OK now" - I see it
wave a friendly hoof of acknowledgement from the corner of
the room, do its silly grin, and return to its copy of
'What Sleigh?' - "so you've really NO excuse. If you
disappoint them now, they'll stop believing in you."

Bobby snorted and got to his feet. "Fuck them," he said,
"it's Christmas."

"Tell us a story first," chuckled the gnome, "then we'll
go, honest!"

"Yeah, tell us a story."

I sighed. "Once upon a time..."

"I like this tree-picture," said Bobby, gazing out of the
window, and falling over.

**NEW
NEW**

(this is the McCarthy article...)

The Redskins sang about politics and died. McCarthy ARE politics... and it's the purest political reflex - that one lonely bloodred ANGRY - that fires what they do, not dull dogma words but that red raw essence, that INSTINCT, fed pure into the McCarthy machine to be given form... and emerge as this shimmery beauty, these vast trembling landscapes of crystal guitar, each coruscant, scouring, tumble of light...

Don't reflect ugly with ugly; Sleeping Beauty woke to a soft princely kiss, not the beat beat beat of club fists on the door...

That's the point. It's BEAUTY that finds the HUMAN response, not dead words; BEAUTY that triggers emotions that given the channels will flood into ACTION...

ANGRY and shivery, clear-headed now, in my mind all I see is a WIDE OPEN ROAD not that whirlpool pit of hopelessness...

Here's a statement: the 2 most important bands in the world this minute are MCCARTHY and TALULAH GOSH because deep down THEY'RE THE SAME; because at the heart of McCarthy's political beauty and Talulah Gosh's FUN there's the same YES YES YES to - Christ, I don't know, LIFE, I guess... and that's what's important, it's that Pure Positivity that fuels the adrenalin rush, undirected maybe for now, but still there restoring my faith in... well, HOPE, basically...

that soon we can move some worlds...

Scales fall from my eyes...

Hard as fucking nails...

THIS IS YOUR COUNTRY TOO...

So rise up and spit down your Bobby Gillespie's worthless new noise 'cos it no more comes pure from the HEART

'cos there's no more DESIRE

no more PASSION or HATE or real LOVE just a sick rock-infested mess, Tory dreamers, eighties godheads, KILL KILL KILL...

Spell it out. "Sonic Flower Groove" is charmless and smug. but "I Am A Wallet" reFUELS me, refills that pure LOVEANDHATEAGAIN. And so does "Testcard Girl". "Political", "Apolitical", who cares, both refuel and refill with that pure abstract HOPE that sets me on fire and fills with DESIRE to CREATE or DESTROY... what? These apathies, these attitudes, these governments...

Get it, Stephen??? No...

Fame corrupts?

Oh wow sometimes I wish our few grubby morsels would... no more endless hours of windsoured motorway, thumb outstuck, sweetest of smiles through the grittiest teeth in the whole fucking world, two thousand flexidisks piled at my feet and ahead just vague bleak successions of floodlit roads signs recite like some old skipping game

NEWBURY SWINDON CHIPPENHAM BATH...

but then sometimes... like Swindon in a Thames Valley bus moonlighting, whole bus for us and no bus-stops at all, just a glorious WIDE-OPEN-ROAD, that burnt magic again... busses, trucks, green and white (peppermint...) articles for Staines and Redhill and one lovely Gateways CB'd delivery monster I recall

but then comes the hardshoulder creep and coldshouldered in fog and same skindrenching rain and it's gone; scramble away through mud and thistle-wracked ditches

to ragged barbed-wire and then - nothing;

walk on, walk on, six empty miles

of cold dark miserable Reading by streetlight and crippling bastard wind

and traffic roars everywhere

and 6 o'clock shops closing round us

to yet one more ghostly,

shimmering

lamplit motorway,

an empty horizon,

I reach for my

thumb...

And so long.

Till one more copper-coloured morning I awake and...

But I wouldn't have it any other way.
... it keeps it somehow PURE,

gives it meaning;
bury myself in life,
touch it all with my hands,
make it real and UNDERSTAND...
POPmusic.

POP! SARAH...

It's just a record-label,
I guess, but - rather a nice one,
maybe. ANYWAY, it's OURS.
You can invent
your own.

WARMLEY

... where the Chippenham road emerges from Kingswood to cross the southernmost humps of the Cotswolds and where, ONCE UPON A TIME, the Midland Railway Company built a station. That station is now a tea-room.

A tea-room. A flaking, rotting, white-planked shed, ex-... ticket office? Maybe... with Victorian railwayman's cosy back parlour, stained teak and brass and drowsy with pipesmell? And the heavy tick-tock of the company mantelpiece clock... maybe just a waiting-room; wood-burning cornerstove, framed sea-side prints on the wall and a bell that rings by the door, door that says First Class Only... maybe... but now - well, just a flaking, rotting, white-planked shed, bedraggled by rain and lost to this wildness of weeds and breakers' scrap; beside it, perched on the platform edge, a single formica-topped table. Puddled with rain, it is formally set round by six plastic chairs, and a dinner-gong sounds from an old car-wheel...

Two teas, we sit under anorak hoods and raindrops splash into chipped china mugs - rain falling steadily, I guess it's late afternoon - kids going home from school, steady wet tarmac hiss of rush-hour wheels; drab and disconsolate, sad afternoon, solemnly ticks to a soft slow dusk and here, on this forlorn stump of stone on Bristol's most easternmost fringe, a small, gentle, epiphany, almost - melancholic tear-stained vision, I'm in love, these are love-letters...

I'M IN LOVE WITH A GIRL WHO DOESN'T KNOW I EXIST

is another song by ANOTHER SUNNY DAY,

1'34" of total crystal beauty,
huge waterfalls of guitar crash round a
desolate plaintive wail, saddest moments in the world,
6 string teardrops drip drip drip....

... "You're The Centre Of My Little World", McCarthy,
"Things Could Be Nice", Primal Scream (early),
"It's OK If You Don't Love Me"... Biff Bang Pow!

1000 Violins,

don't be misled and mislaid,

"ANORAK CITY" was a convulsion of
pure malice and disgust
caught by a hidden mike,
the rest will be formed
from pure love...

YOU CAN BE MY ANORAK, BABY

"ANORAK CITY"

plays at 45 r.p.m. because that's
POPmusic speed, ALBUMS play at 33...
is just 5 $\frac{3}{4}$ " across and the thinnest
plastic ever because it's only
POPmusic, flimsy, throwaway stuff...
crackles and fizzes and POPs because
it contains such things as
ENERGY, COLOUR, EXCITEMENT
is called "ANORAK CITY" because some
people are incredibly stupid.

... incredibly STUPID and call what we do

REACTIONARY - even though it uses original tunes, original words and original FEELINGS rather than sampling some old seventies soul...

NARROW-MINDED - even though we don't restrict ourselves at all; though if we'd been 100% hip-hop or hardcore or jazz, of course, we would have been SPECIALIST and that would have been all right.

CUTIE - 'cos it all screams COLOUR, EXCITEMENT, ENERGY, LIFE - HOPE, INSPIRATION and YOUTH and a hundred other things they quite clearly lack...

and of course, teenage girls in polka-dot skirts offend ancient macho sensibilities - unlike hip-hop or grebo or thrash which is all safely, mulishly MALE (honourable exceptions cloud the argument, don't write and tell me...) - join the NME! We've got a pretty young Live Ed. to model our T-shirts and enough bigotries and prejudices to fill a whole year of newsprint, repeat after me: cutiesanoraksshamblingcutiesanoraksshamblingcutiesano...

... till people grow paranoid, doubt their own feelings...

... and fanzines rush to a new dishonesty, page upon monotone page of self-denial - "TALULAH GOSH? oh please, that was all a joke and we've grown up now..."

... dig up that old red herring soul...

OH! - but I'd never pretended the Poppyheads played SOUL, just that "Postcard for Flossy" was sheer honest EXUBERANCE, ENERGY, JOY, a simple raw effusion of Total Pop Consciousness pressed into shiny black vinyl (one might say; I think I did) and that's why it meant so much, why it excited me so...

That's why we released the record.

Any 20 year old who pretends to sing "SOUL" is a total jerk.

Sorry if this is self-indulgent and humourless, maybe I shouldn't try and defend or explain, but when every post still brings a barrage of insults it's hard to just switch off - to listen while bands like The Clouds, Bachelor Pad and Emily (now signed to Creation...) get scorned as "cutie" just 'cos folk haven't the guts or imagination to think for themselves.

Actually, deep down, I couldn't give a fuck; if you can't understand, it's your fucking loss, not mine. Now onwards...

CREMATION TOWN: BURN IT DOWN

Guitars snarl, fuzz, howl, a raw, nervous ENERGY...

back turned to the crowd, crouched down low,
pounding out SMASHING the beat...

juddering growl of lyrics dies to a molten tune,
uncurls like that hot afternoon,
on the highest hill while

the sky towers down...

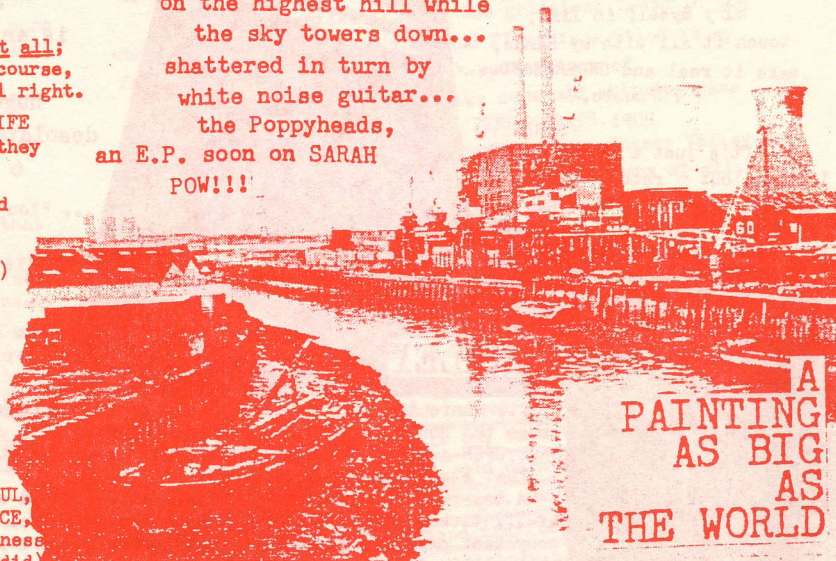
shattered in turn by

white noise guitar...

the Poppyheads,

an E.P. soon on SARAH

POW!!!



A
PAINTING
AS BIG
AS
THE WORLD

The line swoops down through Bitton village to flat brown fields where cows now congregate in the early evening; a quiet time, time and space and all things, a beautiful, sweet-smelling, rainsmeared evening, some such watercolour world; a failing sun hung low and the sky is fallen ash, fills up my SOUL oh that wretched word...

Down on the riverbank, dry beneath the bridge, we sit and eat sandwiches. Tea-time. Outside our cave a bird calls suddenly sharp and splitting the dusk with a shrill five note repeat; and the riverbank rustles response from tree to field; and the soft air shifts to hush and enfold and the thick sleepy silence resumes. Water drifts, and suddenly it's such a BIG world for just two people... I didn't notice when the rain stopped falling, did you? No...

The Avon unwinds slowly between beige stalks. Daylight slackens, and a moon comes. It is 7 o'clock, 7pm, and we are on our way to see The Groove Farm in Bath, this is a fanzine, a fanzine about POPmusic, and this is a gig review...

I don't know how to label my politics. I read POPstars talking politics - the 100% trendy anti-government line (or get blackballed and ruin your sales...) - and it just seems the utmost hypocrisy that in the one small area where they're forced to ACTIVELY make a choice - the selling of their own songs - they embrace THATCHERISM in all its wildest flights of fancy.

And I read papers like the NME - so priggishly moral, so intolerantly "right-on", yet no original thought or IMAGINATION ever informs what they say; just great clumsy gobfuls of ill-formed prose, glib pig-headed grunts and absurd intellectualising (this fanzine was written under the heady influence of Barbara Pym, Penelope Lively, Philip Larkin and Beryl Bainbridge, by the way, for those who keep asking...); all equally as pointless and all making me ANGRY. Politics is too important to be appropriated by them; political writing should INSPIRE to ACTION. Where are the McCarthys of prose? The TALULAH GOSH's... Today I read that 40% of "young people" would vote Tory...

ACTION... we went to a Young Socialists benefit, and sat glum through the first side of the Redskins LP, and then they turned it over for the other side and DEAR GOD ALMIGHTY I wanted to HURT them and I'm a gentle soul but they made me so ANGRY -

HOW CAN YOU HAVE A REVOLUTION WITHOUT IMAGINATION?

... AND YET THE EVENING BEFORE I'd listened to 14 Iced Bears last Peel session, heard "Spangle" melt into the empty aching void of "Hayfever", thought "Life is oh just big soppy tears and that's why I love it so and why all this is IMPORTANT and I want everyone to feel like me and LOVE IT ALL" and felt quite unaccountably HAPPY and HOPEFUL...

... but imagine proposing cute apolitical Talulah Gosh as politically vital simply because that adrenalin rush at level 1 is the most crucial of all, the trigger for subsequent change EVERYWHERE...

Maybe I'll just write "ANARCHY" but that seems childish now and anyway I don't like Chumbawumba that much and Ho hum... Just looking for a STATEMENT. black doesn't suit me....

Away from

the middle-class journalists preening and the students playing politics in the safe confines of their Union Buildings and the pathetic little anarcho drib-drabs cluttering up the pavements with their silly slogans as if it all ACTUALLY MEANT SOMETHING...

Economics are the method,
the power, the law,
We have seen the
soul's MK
change nearly nine years
John Biffen's last June
her as a Stalinist

John Biffen's last June
her as a Stalinist
John Biffen's last June
her as a Stalinist
John Biffen's last June
her as a Stalinist

the object
is to
change
the soul.



HAPPY IS WATCHING THE WORLD SPIN...

Three things. From Illinois...

The Stupid Cupids, The Springfields and Paul Chastain; the first is "Big Blue Buzz", a flexed ball of spaced out speed fuzz and jangle; the last, a rain-filled guitar and sad solo voice; and the middle...

... is "Sunflower" and "Clown", two of the loveliest, most fragile and trembling popsongs left in the world; a tender, graceful, primal sigh, gentle guitar webs mesh through a teardrop shower of half-murmured harmonies, fall and rise through a drifting, timeless, space... "Nobody over here really understands what we're doing, and it sometimes makes me cry. We're always accused of being 'pop wimps', which used to bug us but now we retaliate by living in our own special pop world..."

Out there in Illinois.

Do I really have to explain?

Oh I get told off for placing ATTITUDE above "content", and sometimes, yes, it does begin to blur and one loses one's way. But NO, it is important, the world makes it so, I wish it didn't.

Bobby looks up from a small heap of limbs.

"Are you getting at me?" he says, "'cos I..."

"Ho!" shouts the reindeer, "let us not bicker, please! It is, after all, the eve of our saviour's birth. A time for sharing with everyone, love, joy and happiness. Let us play 'Scribble' instead!"

"Similar to Scrabble," explains the gnome, fetching the box, "only you're allowed to spell the words wrong. I invented it myself. Here, see?" He arranges four tiles on the board: G A R B. "ONYX!" he states firmly, "and a triple letter score on the 'X' so..."

"Very badly spelt," murmurs the reindeer appreciatively, gently clapping his hoofs, "all four letters wrong. Wonderful..."

"But the PRESENTS," I interrupt, "shouldn't..."

"... for the poor and needy," Bobby has begun to mumble, "the kids without families, the..."

PAULIE CHASTAIN
THE SPRINGFIELDS
THE STUPID CUPIDS

"Ah, then you're a bigger bastard Bobby than I thought!" hoots the reindeer, and it begins to canter round the room. Settees, chairs and our glass-topped coffee-table cover beneath its gracious bounds, and turn. The gnome, unperturbed, lays more tiles. TURNIP.

"QUAGGA!" he declares, and adds his score. The cantering stops abruptly in a deathly clatter of hoofbeats.

"Rat-face yourself!" screams the reindeer, and leaps for the gnome, overturning the board and table and scattering unused tiles...

"Oh I don't understand this game," I moan. As antlers and ears lock firmly and the hoofs begin to grind.

"Would you like us to go then?" says Bobby, suddenly lucid and upright.

"Oh if..."

"THEN!!!" they all shout, and collapse on the rug in a heap of giggles.

I had another Santa.

Christmas is for children.

BRISTOL

AND YOUR SMILE ALL OVER MY EYES...

Entering the city now, the path beside the river,
rain falls softly again and Bath is a mountain of
light ahead. Down by the water it's dark.

Through the city to Pulteney Weir, to cellars
beneath the bridge, to the Groove Farm shouting and
screaming in a subterranean whirlpool of noise,
four hands to hold down Darren's drums...

And somewhere, buried in this spurge of
inconsequence, is what I was trying to say...

Something obvious about POPmusic not being lumps
of black plastic and twerps with guitars and drums
in smoky rooms doing POPsongs but...

kaleidoscope fragments, rain in October, endless,
people-less, Somerset fields and an old railway line

then seeing a band (eyes shut) and then

hand-in-hand at 2am to window-shop in glittering,
echoing, glass-walled arcades knowing

nothing else matters
because THIS is everything now...

"This morning before the city woke we climbed up high on
Brandon Hill and watched the final lingering skeins of mist
drift loose from the harbour and the first sun glinting
suddenly bold on the water; and I thought of you last night
when I looked at you in all your dishevelled loveliness
and your eyes were all at once clear; and in your eyes
I pictured a million glittering cities and knew that,

everything was changed; that from now on it must be
move out and away. Because tomorrow I shall wake up and
you'll still be there and the uttermost loveliest version
of you is the one I hold now and that is the completion
of a phase... and if tomorrow brings rainstorms and
winter returns and those cities lie lost in the grey
sadness of your morning, I know I once glimpsed them
in you and I will say I love you and that will be all.

This morning Christchurch spire rose lonely into mist
and took my breath away. And the lorries powered down
the M32 as ever they did and there was something about
this too; about record-companies not being studios and
contracts and gimmicks and lies but these mist-filled
motorway mornings and four hour double-deck bus-rides
through south London streets in the rain...

And yes, I remember (but you knew this anyway...):
about politics not being doctrines and shoutings,
inept sloganeering, sham distaste and guilt-ridden
middle-class posing but TALULAH GOSH in a half-empty
half-darkened basement, making the adrenalin SURGE once
more, making me believe in I dunno HOPE nad all sorts
of futures again

so I turn and gaze into you, sad apocalyptic eyes,
find you smiling...