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# ***invisible jukebox***

Every month we play a musician a series of records which they're asked to identify and comment on — with no prior knowledge of what they're about to hear. This month it's the turn of. . .



**Mark E Smith**

Tested by Edwin Pouncey. Photos: Hamish Brown

50 The Wire



Mark E(dward) Smith is the mastermind behind The Fall, the group which he formed in his home town of Manchester in the late 70s after quitting his job as a shipping clerk. Since then he has nurtured and steered the various musicians and performers he has come into contact with over the years through nearly 35 albums and 27 different line-ups. The latest Fall album (released on new label Eagle Rock) is called *The Unutterable*, a title which may refer to Smith's fascination with the work of American Gothic horror writer HP Lovecraft. But trying to pinpoint exactly what goes on in Smith's head is a dubious task that inevitably throws up more questions than answers. The music on *The Unutterable* — featuring keyboard player Julia Nagle, guitarist Neville Wilding, bass player Adam Hala and drummer Tom Head, together with a guest appearance from Kazuko Hohki of The Frank Chickens — is a giddy mix of futuristic Techno crush, razored rockabilly and punk rock machine head meltdown, all superglued together with Smith's domineering nasal snarl.

Prior to *The Unutterable*, the group released *The Marshall Suite* on Artful Records, together with a solo spoken word album from Smith titled *The Post Nearly Man*. This last project prompted him to give a public reading of his poetry and lyrics in London, eliciting a response that, according to him, was favourable and fulfilling.

Although he prefers to live in the familiar territory of Manchester, he avoids acknowledging that his ideas as a writer and a musician belong to any particular place other than 'Planet Mark'. "I don't know, because I'm neither British or American," he replies when probed for his thoughts on what makes UK rock musicians different from their US counterparts. "I'm not anything." The Jukebox took place one stormy December evening in Prestwich, Manchester.

## THE SPIDERS

**"Johnny B Goode" from Let's Go Spiders (Big Beat) 1966**

**It's obvious what the song is, but can you tell the nationality of the group?**

[After listening intently for several minutes] Japanese. You can tell by the pitch.

**You're right! How does the pitch reveal where they originate?**

It's not French, because the French play rock 'n' roll in a different style. They play it really over the top. The Japanese get it pretty much on the ball. That's a bit of a good one actually.

**It's by a 60s group called The Spiders. Do you like the way the Japanese embrace rock 'n' roll and make it their own thing?**

I like some of those attacking groups, a lot of the ones who did that Speed Metal which was like a minute and a half long. I can't remember their names but they're really good. I'm a big Damo [Suzuki, former Can vocalist] fan as well.

**Do you listen to his new stuff?**

When he sends it to me.

## CURRENT NINETY THREE

**"Faust" from Faust (Durtro) 2000**

[Minutes pass] No idea.

**It's music from Current Ninety Three that was inspired by a previously unpublished supernatural story by decadent writer Eric, Count Stenbock.**

It sounds sort of like cheap film music. I don't think you can put those kind of stories on to film. It's all in the imagination.

**Your Post Nearly Man spoken word CD opens with "The Horror In Clay", which is based on the first section of HP Lovecraft's cosmic horror story The Call Of Cthulhu. Can you tell me about that?**

I changed it a bit so it was set in Penzance, which is where I wrote it. It was when the Teletubbies came out actually, so the fellow who is reading it out was like a bloke who goes mountain climbing and this sun comes up with a big evil Teletubbies baby grin on its face. It was like Glastonbury gone wrong really. I tried to zip it up a bit. Few people understood it because there's no beginning and no end to it.

[Dramatically] "The Horror In Clay"! It is good, isn't it? I'm glad somebody else likes it. You're the only one! And a couple of Portuguese people [laughs].

**Do you keep returning to Lovecraft?**

Yeah, very much. I still read him. I went round to Providence [Rhode Island] where he lived when I was in America and you can see it all. I thought, 'Bloody hell, there's enough material there to last you a lifetime.'

**Do you like this?**

It's OK, yeah. I had a tape like that called *Purgatory* by this group called Evil and it was the most frightening thing you've ever heard in your life. I think they were American or something. I taped over it because it was doing my head in. It was like that in a way, it was terrifying.

## PRINCE JAZZBO

**"Every Nigga Is A Winner" from Mr Funny (Pressure Sounds) 1972**

[Turns volume up] It's like slow Big Youth. Same lyrics.

**It's Prince Jazzbo.**

Aw, it wasn't, was it? We were only talking about him today [calls partner in to listen]. We were talking about this LP called *Prince Jazzbo Vs I Roy* [Step Forward Youth]. [Sings] "I Roy you a boy, you imitate the great I Roy" [much laughter]. Great lyric. Is that new?

**It's a new compilation, yes.**

He has no shame, Prince Jazzbo, he just rips off everybody. On the other side of this LP it's got I Roy going [sings], "Prince Jazzbo don't bother me, you don't have an idea in your head, you taped everybody, soon you will be dead" [laughs]. It's fucking great.

**That DJ battle sparked off a rash of versions.**

Yeah, I know. I've got them all [looks at cover]. Can I grab that one? Roots reggae was huge when The Fall first started.

**Were you always a fan?**

Well, I liked dub music, Augustus Pablo. It was the only thing around worth listening to for a while, wasn't it?



## MERZBOW

**"Decomposition 002.1.1" from Untitled Ten (Extreme) 1997**

There's a school of music like that in Manchester, where they play records with needles made out of wood.

**It's Japanese noise. It's by Masami Akita, better known as Merzbow.**

It doesn't go far enough for me. It's a bit like a Can outtake without the drums, or Lou Reed's *Metal Machine Music*.

**It's very like Metal Machine Music. Do you like that album?**

*Metal Machine Music* just cleans your head out. I like that, it's my favourite. It's the best thing Lou Reed ever did. It was when he went bonkers, wasn't it? I had gone right off him by then. I was a big fan at one time, but after *Transformer* I lost interest in what he was doing. Then he brought *Metal Machine Music* out and I thought it was just brilliant.

**Did you buy it when it first came out in 1975?**

Yeah. I was buying it when everybody else was taking it back [laughs]. People were wanting their money back.

**Did you hear Ecstasy, his last record?**

I'd like to hear it. The reviews he got for that last record were terrible and so I quite fancy listening to it.

**You must hear "Like A Possum", this long electric guitar rant which is the best track on it.**

Yeah, I read about that and it sounded good to me then. I think I'm definitely gonna buy it.

## CHRIS MORRIS

**"4FTCAR" from Blue Jam (Warp) 2000**

[Glances at CD player] Who's this?

**It's from Blue Jam, by comedian Chris Morris with music by Propellerheads. It was first broadcast on BBC radio.**

I don't agree with that at all. I think it's fucking crap.

Comedians and actors all want to make records, as if they haven't got enough fucking musicians who want to make fucking records. You made a record didn't you?

**Yes.**

**Well you shouldn't have done, should you?**

**Why?**

Because I said. No, I'm only kidding you. The whole thing about making music now is that it's very easy. So you've got the prime minister of this country who wants to be in a rock band. You've got a chancellor of the exchequer who wants to be a pop star. Bill Clinton wants to be a rock musician, they don't know what they're fucking talking about. I mean, Jack of all trades and master of none. I'm a singer/songwriter and that's fucking it, otherwise your quality goes down.

## FAUST

**"It's A Rainy Day, Sunshine Girl" from So Far: The Wümmen Years 1970-73 (Recommended) 1972**

Many more to go now, Edwin? Are they all like this? Is it Can?

**Close: it's Faust.**

Oh right, right. Really? Is it new stuff?

PHOTO: BUNKO OWATARI





**No, old stuff. It's from *So Far*, their second album.**

I prefer *Faust Tapes* or the first one to this.

**Are there any other Krautrock groups you appreciate apart from Can and Faust?**

I really liked both versions of Amon Düül a lot when I first heard them. Especially Amon Düül I, I thought they were very inventive.



## EMINEM

**"Kill You" from *The Marshall Mathers LP* (Interscope) 2000**

**Any thoughts?**

Is that Eminem? It sounds very tinny to me. I've heard rap stuff where the

production has been much better and thicker, where it's really sub. Where you can switch off from the lyrics, like. This is like pop rap, white soul. Those rap artists, even though they ramble on about killing people most of the time, some of the levels they've got are really brilliant. Even Snoop Doggy Dogg, his lyrics are boring, but the music is really good. It's like a Stevie Wonder production or something, it's rich. This is Tonka toy rap compared to that.

**He's popular and controversial. . .**

It's probably because he's white. It's like Ali G or something [laughs]. There's some good black stuff like this, though.

**Tell me some.**

You never know their names, do you, but the radio stations in Manchester play some really good stuff. In a way this is like NWA, isn't it? When a lot of that early stuff came out it was also tinny and weak sounding, but now it's developed a lot where it's like really slow and rich. It's lovely to listen to. Now it's got a different kick to it.

**Didn't you go and see Eminem perform live recently?**

I was supposed to. A couple of the members of [The Fall] have got computers so they tell everybody on the Internet what they're going to see, and because it's The Fall a lot of it goes out under my fucking name. That's the trouble with the Internet: it's a Tower of Babel. Doesn't he remind you of The Monkees, though?

**Who, Eminem?**

At the time you'd have The Rolling Stones, Howlin' Wolf and John Lee Hooker, and then The Monkees were the nice bit weren't they?

**You think Eminem is nice? He's currently in prison for pistol whipping some guy.**

[Snorts derisively] Pistol whipping some guy! 'Cause you know that sort of publicity is worth a quarter of a million dollars, that's what they said to me in America. You stay in jail in America and it's worth that amount in PR. Do you get my drift?

**Didn't you spend some time in a New York jail once during a recent US tour?**

It was while Puff Daddy was in there, he was supposed to have shot some people or something. The trouble was that his real name was Smith [sic — his name is Combs] and I was in the same jail. I was only meant to

be in for a night, but they kept stopping my bail because they got my forms mixed up, that was just my fucking luck. He was sending in impostors dressed as him. It was quite funny actually, because they [the NYPD] don't notice, to them they all look the same. I got out of it though. I wouldn't like to be him, he was looking at seven years.

## CHARLES BUKOWSKI

**"A Trainride In Hell" from *At Terror Street And Agony Way* (King Mob) 1969**

Is it Hunter S Thompson?

**Close.**

Bret Easton Ellis? Tom Wolfe? Who is it?

**Supposedly, one of the tracks on your new record ["Dr Buck's Letter"] is about him.**

Bukowski.

**Do you like his writing?**

I like it very much. He sounds sprightly here, doesn't he?

**It was recorded in the 60s by [Barry] Miles. I picked this track because it has a real rhythm to it.**

He sounds really good here. The ones I've got he sounds pissed out of his head all of the time. If you go for a walk on the other side of LA, this is what it's like. The LA streets used to interest me. I used to split off from the [ex-] missus [Brix Smith] when I stayed there and go see people like Kid Congo [Powers] on the other side of town. Me and him used to tear the place apart. There's the arty side of LA, there's the film section of LA, and then there's this section that makes Salford look sophisticated. They'd be living in these flats where the big old Hollywood stars used to live, only now they were wrecked. There are all these people there that don't want to conform. Claude [Bessy — aka punk rock journalist Kickboy Face] was like that. Good people.

**What do you like about Bukowski?**

I can't read him, but I can hear him. I've only got tapes that my mates gave me. Kid gave me some tapes of when he was reading at a university. He'd be on stage with a fridge full of beer, which is really revolutionary. You play gigs in California, even in the hippy places, you can't have beer on stage. Yet he had a fridge full! You'd hear him deliberately open the can in front of his audience, drink the beer down and go 'Blarrp!' They had to put up with it because it was all part of his act.

**Do you think Bukowski's audience are drawn to him because of what he wrote or what he sounds like?**

It's the delivery, isn't it? I liked Burroughs a lot more when I saw him live in Manchester. I always liked Burroughs, but when I saw him live I thought he was knockout. He delivers it like a Southern sheriff. You could listen to him all night, just the way he was saying it. You read *The Naked Lunch* and it's good stuff. You hear him reading it out loud, with all the pauses, and it sounds like a press conference or some presidential address. It was surreal, yet it made his writing make a lot more sense. The old school of writers were like that too. Bram Stoker and Charles Dickens used to read out their novels to an audience, didn't they? To see how they worked before they published them. It would have been great to hear them read it out.

## IGGY POP

**"Shakin' All Over" from *Avenue B* (Virgin) 1999**

[Taps empty lager can with pen to the beat] "Shakin' All Over". It's a fucking sacrilege, whoever it is. Who is it?

**Iggy Pop.**

Really? When did he do this?

**It's from his *Avenue B* album which came out last year.**

He can't get [the sound of] Mick Green [from Johnny Kidd And The Pirates] on the guitar. Mick Green did it [much better] on the original. Sacrilege.

**Were you an Iggy fan?**

Yeah, I still am. I'm surprised that it's him. It's a very British song, that. I once did a cover of "I Wanna Be Your Dog" and I got a note from Iggy saying that he thought it was a great version.

**What do you think is the great divide which separates British rock 'n' roll from American rock 'n' roll?**

It's like people who see [and hear] Cliff Richard as a British Elvis Presley. There's a big difference, but a lot of people don't seem to see it. To me there's a big fucking difference between Elvis and Cliff Richard.

**You recently played in London with 60s American surf rock legend Dick Dale. How did that go down?**

It was all right [laughs]. All you heard all night was Dick Dale. He was on before us and we couldn't get away from him. Everywhere you went back stage at the QEH it was Dick Dale this, Dick Dale that. We went to the hotel and all his people were there. You turned on the radio and it was talking about Dick Dale. Everywhere you went he was there. According to Dick Dale he invented Link Wray, The Beach Boys, psychedelic Frank Zappa music, Elvis Costello. . . Dick Dale invented every sort of music, according to him.

**Did you meet Dick Dale?**

[Laughs] I didn't want to meet him. We were all trying to avoid him. He was Dick Dale!

## APHASIC & DJ SCUD

**"New World" from *Mash The Place Up* (Ambush) 1998**

**What do you think of this?**

It sounds like The Fall backwards actually.

**Was this kind of music the influence behind "Cyber Insekt" and "Dr Buck's Letter" on the new album?**

You've just got to encourage the musicians until they get it right, until it's in sync.

**Where did the germ of the idea originate, though?**

I'm not going to tell you because it's a secret. I don't need to listen to stuff a lot of the time, I just need to work.

**Do you purposefully block out influences, then?**

You've got to. The group turn up with tunes and then you change them. You say, 'That's not right, you've got to do it this way. It's a good tune, but you've got to do it in this swing.'

**Yet despite your influence blocking each Fall record manages to sound in tune with the times. How is that?**

You hit it sometimes. But you get no thanks for it.

**So Mark, out of all these records, which did you like best?**

The Prince Jazzbo one was the best, I just got fed up with it [laughs]. □