

New Wave in Folk Rock: The Alarm and Big Country

by Helen Cohen

A new wave in folk rock has emerged on the music scene, and is being created by such bands as Aztec Camera, Big Country, and the Alarm.

The Alarm is made up of four Welshmen, very enthusiastic, named Mike Peters (lead vocals/guitar), Eddie MacDonald (bass), Nigel Twist (drums), and Dave Sharp (guitars). This is the band who opened up for U2 on the second half of their tour, and who has received much praise from Bono Hewson, front man for U2.

Like the musicians who make up Big Country and U2, the members of the Alarm have a "refreshing attitude towards rock and roll." They stay away from the "decadence" so common to rock; they shy away from the old "sex 'n' drugs 'n' rock 'n' roll" cliché way of life. Quotes U2's Bono:

"There's a new mentality towards rock and roll music... Ultimately I think U2 are totally rebellious because of our stance against what people accept as rebellion. The whole

thing about rock stars driving cars into swimming pools, that's not rebellion. People would be very pleased if I did that, and our record company would be only too pleased to pay the bill, because we'd get in the news and sell more records. That's not rebellion...

"There are so many performers who talk about wanting to avoid clichés in their music, but who rarely avoid them in their lifestyle, but the Alarm aren't like that. When great music is made there are usually great people behind it, and the Alarm are great people."

The Alarm's sound has been called a combination of mid 60's Dylan and early Clash. Their instrument line-up includes two acoustic guitars, electric bass and drums. Real drums. No synthesizers, no technology. And the use of acoustic guitars is no gimmick; Mike Peters says their songs simply sound better on "the instruments they were written on."

The four members of the Alarm got together at a time when punk was at its peak in London, hence the punk in-

fluences that can be found in their music and ideology. None of them were ever in any punk bands, however, they have said they were "inspired by this new twist of musical energy." Mike Peters says, "It showed that we can use the power that comes from the energy and togetherness of youth, and make something really positive."

Not only is their sound punk inspired, their "look" is too. The band's style of dress looks like one of Stiv Bator meets Roy Rogers: spiked hair, plaid shirts, suede fringed jackets, and cowboy boots. But fashion is NOT their primary concern. In fact, when they first started out opening for some well known bands such as the English Beat and U2, the Alarm had been offered "several lucrative contracts from some major record companies," but turned them down to sign for a small I.R.S. label, because of I.R.S.'s non-concern with fashion and music trends. Peters explains:

"They (big record co.'s) didn't want the Alarm, they wanted what they thought was the Alarm. The image. It was usual-

ly just 'well, you look great lads, and using acoustic guitars is really different.' I.R.S. wasn't interested in the fashion of it at all. They talked about us musically."

Like U2, who's songs consistently take a realistic view of the world, but an unpessimistic view, one that always offers hope, so it is with the Alarm:

"We just want to encourage people to keep going. We believe there are better times to come. The things that people want will come eventually, and that's the sort of hope we're trying to provide."

Another band coming out of the New Folk Wave is Big Country, faring from Scotland, and consisting of Stuart Adamson and Bruce Watson on guitar, Tony Butler on bass, and Mark Brazicki on drums. They are also a part of the "new mentality" in rock music. Like U2 and the Alarm, Big Country looks on music as a powerful medium that can and should be used to get your message across.

Big Country's instrumentation is much like the other bands cited so many times in

this article. Just basic stuff, guitars, (tuned at times to sound like bag pipes), bass and drums. But there is a lot more to them than their traditional music line up. The real sound of the band comes from "the songs of Adamson and the spirit in which the band plays them." As with the Alarm, Big Country draws on punk and post punk influences. Adamson was originally in a punk band called Skids, and as a group they are influenced by Joy Division, the Jam, and their own Scottish folk music. It has been put that "Adamson has forged a highly original musical framework on which to hang his songs of justice, freedom, and pain."

The songs themselves are nothing more than "musical parables." When reading the lyric sheet off of their first album, *The Crossing*, visions of Pipers, Heathcliff, and Robbie Burns could come to mind. Take for example the song "Harvest Home." Just the title is "folksy." Here are a few lines from the song:

Who saw the fences falling
Who broke the ploughman's bread
Who heard the winter calling
Who wore the tailor's thread
And The Storm:
I came from the hills with a
tear in my eye

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Interview: The Secrets

Four Who Are Into Energy

by Helen Cohen

The Secrets are a local band who have been together a little over a year and have already established quite a following of fans. They play local clubs and colleges, but playing the Casba down the shore this summer helped them more than anything in gaining their reputation as one of the best new bands around. In fact, their growing popularity landed them a gig at Filly's on November 15.

On September 28, Dave Joyce and Garry Nutt came to Penn State and conducted this interview in the student lounge.

The Secrets got together after Joyce and Ball, who had been playing together for a while, met Iacona, and Nutt who was the last to join. All of them have given up outside jobs in order to give 100% to their musical careers.

Being that the typical audience the Secrets play for are people in clubs, they usually do, in the words of Dave Joyce, "slam-band cover stuff." He says, though they do have some original material, when deciding what songs to do, they pretty much have to consider the crowd they're playing to. "We have to dictate what we play to

where we're working, although we don't bend over backwards to do 'Freebird' to anyone that yells it. We try to please the crowd of where we are.

"College crowds are more in tune to original music, so when we play colleges we can throw in a few original songs. Presently we're doing about 4 or 5 in the song list." Nutt adds, "We're accommodating."

The Secrets are primarily a dance band and consider the music they play "New York style rock 'n' roll." Their covers range from new Wavish U2 and the English Beat to Motownish Smokey Robinson, but they are influenced more by the New Wave side of things. According to Joyce: "As a band we're influenced by the newer music. Not so much the Techno-Pop side of things, but more like the danceable, energy music that doesn't sound like disco; I hate to say Punk because 'Punk's' an old word, but that rawness of Punk." "We have the rawness and energy of punk, yet a lot of the classic New Wave is what we like to play like Duran Duran and Adam Ant," adds Nutt.

Joyce says the Secrets prefer playing colleges to clubs because of the receptiveness of college students:



The Secrets (from left to right): Dave Joyce, guitar/vocal; Stevie Ball, keyboards/guitar/vocals; John Iacona, drums/vocals; Garry Nutt, bass.

"In clubs the age is 21 or older, so you're talking a whole different record buying market, whole different taste in music [Than what you find in college audiences]. We really enjoy doing colleges because everything is so much more mature. The people in colleges usually have a purpose for being in the audience. They want to hear the music and they're there to party. When you're playing in clubs, half of the audience doesn't know what they're doing there. They're just there and they don't know they're supposed to dance, or get in a fight, or pick up the girl or guy

next to them, or just bar-hop. Sometimes they simply have no energy, and it's like pulling teeth to try and get it out of them, where as playing colleges you just feel so much more welcome and so much more energy coming from the audience, so there is a definite energy exchange, and the band thrives on it. You can count the bad nights we've had, but it's always a very energetic night when we play at colleges. They won't let you stop, they won't let you up at all, so you work twice as hard, but you have twice as much fun too."

I asked Joyce how they handle an apathetic crowd.

"We abuse them. Our drummer has a fairly large vocabulary, and he can just talk right over their heads."

When I asked Nutt and Joyce if fashion played a lot in the image the Secrets are trying to project, Nutt, donned in red leather boots and faded purple jeans, hair done in a brunette version of Mike Peters of the Alarm replied, "Yeah, we're into fashion." Joyce, dressed in a modest black shirt and grey slacks said, "It's not enough anymore to go see a band that dresses exactly like the audience, you know, wearing blue jeans and lumberjack shirts. There's no area of theatre there. We try to portray something a little bit different. We try to get a cohesive look with in the band, too, so it looks like a band."

The Secrets aren't afraid that New Wave will die anytime soon, especially with M-TV; and the way in which audiences are receiving and accepting New Wave, there's no way to go but forward.

And the Secrets are going forward. Nutt recently auditioned for Billy Idol's band, and was one out of hundreds of musicians that tried out to actually get called back. And there's no doubt that the crowd at Filly's was pleased. With the talent they have to back them up, surely these Secrets won't be kept for long.

Review:

Adam Ant's New Single 'Puss in Boots' Taken from Forthcoming Album 'Strip'

by KellyAnn Brazunas

Anyone who knows me well enough is probably saying to themselves, "Oh, no, She Finally Did It! A review on the lover of her life, that queer — Adam Ant! How can she not be biased?" Well first of all, yes, I am finally doing an article on my favorite performer — Adam Ant! Second, he is not queer.

And third, I'm not going to be biased — I love it! Only joking! In reality, I hate it! That's right, she said she didn't like it!

This is the most awful thing Adam has done to date! The chorus should be proof of this tacky attempt at a hit single:

"Pussycat, Pussycat, Where have you been? I've been to London, Now I'm Queen. Sitting pretty, I don't wear

suits, And the mice all call me — Puss in Boots..."

Don't these words sound like a take-off on an old Tom Jones hit?! Not only are the lyrics a mess, but so is the music itself. Phil Collins produced this album for Adam and also plays the drums for him. What a Mistake! The opening drum beats sound like the song that Collins did for that woman in

Abba, "Is there Something Going On?" It's a sad attempt at producing a "new song." Phil. Would you believe that they decided to use extended versions of this terrific song!

Needless to say, it is quite different from anything that Adam has recorded before. Hopefully, when his new album is finally released, the rest of it won't be done in such poor taste.