

Brock's Fireworks

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"YOU hardly ever hear the real Hawkwind on record you know."

Dave Brock's face wears a look of distant amusement.

"It's almost always watered down. You can see the real Hawkwind playing live and hear it playing live because what we really are is a live band. But on albums? You'll have to look elsewhere if you want to hear the REAL Hawkwind."

Dave Brock's eye twinkles mischievously but it's hard to tell if he's smiling or not. This is the Champion of the Cosmos, remember. The Lord of the Hawkwind and a real veteran of the Psychic Wars. The more mundane aspects of life hold little meaning for him any longer. Which isn't to say that he's perpetually stoned out of his head, despite Hawkwind's notorious reputation as one of the few truly psychedelic bands Britain has ever spawned. But he certainly looks like he should be. What with that straggly shoulder length hair, an ashen complexion, an old granddad undershirt and even older flared jeans. In fact at first glance he looks like one of those acid casualties for whom the sixties ended all too soon. The sort you might expect to see shuffling round the corners of Ladbroke Grove or Villiers Terrace.

But this man is no walking disaster area. A hippy, and an ageing one at that, he may be. But a boring old fart? Never. Dave Brock is pretty much 'on the case'.

But well mysterious, mind.

I mean, what's with all this slagging your own albums? They can't be that bad surely? And if they are, who's to blame but you? You played on them after all.

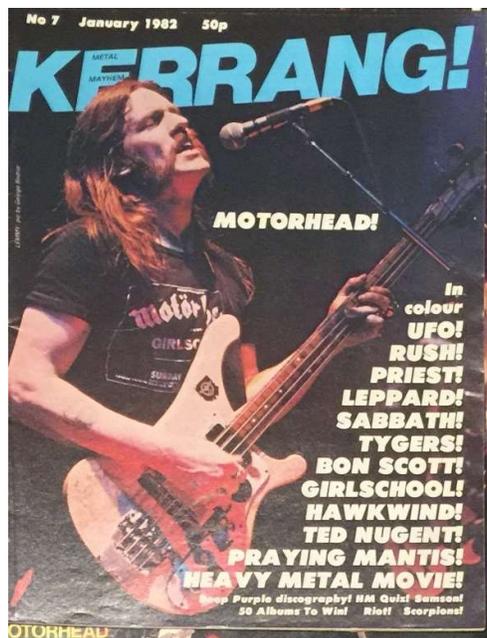
"Oh no. I'm not saying they're bad. Not at all. Of course, I'm always slightly disappointed with something or other on each album.

But any creative musician is. You hear something you played back in the studio and you think: 'Oh, I could have done that bit a lot better'. But that's standard. Ask anybody in any band. What I'm saying is that those magic moments you get when you're playing live can never be captured on albums. It never quite happens how it should in the studio, although you can get really close to it.

"Our live tapes are where you can hear the real Hawkwind. They're true reflections of the mysterious goings-on on stage. We've got some live recordings of 'Damnation Alley' from 'Quark Strangeness And Charm' and 'High Rise' from 'PXR 5' which you should really hear because they're unbelievably together. "

But if they're not available...

"They are, they are. You can get them on cassette through Weird Tapes. That's a little label we run with our fan magazine editor Brian Tawn. We put out all sorts of things on Weird Tapes. It keeps Hawkfans going. In the New Year we're going to put out a proper EP of the 'Sonic Assassins' which we recorded in 1977 when Bob Calvert had gone right... loony. It was recorded at a gem of a gig. That's the sort of place you can find the real Hawkwind."



FOR many fans, of course, Bob Calvert personified the real Hawkwind. A gentleman and a scholar. A great mime artist, a rivetting singer and a man with a literary imagination second to none.

Hawkwind's original 'poet in residence', Calvert went on to pen the outrageously raucous 'Silver Machine' which broke the band out of the underground and into the charts in 1972. He would prowl round the stage like Biggles on a bad trip, all leather jodhpurs and airman's goggles, using a megaphone to harangue the audience like some acid agitator.

His sense of sci-fi theatre and sheer personal presence not only helped Hawkwind to one of the most 'amazing' stagershows of the early seventies but also cast its shadow across the tender young minds of those who were later to rekindle the Hawkwind flame and stride over the edge of time and into the eighties with it. Punk youngsters like Johnny Rotten, the Buzzcocks' Pete Shelley, the Stranglers and the Psychedelic Furs.

"So many of those guys have come up to us and said 'Oh, we used to come and see you all the time and get really out of it. If we hadn't got into Hawkwind we'd never have started getting bands together. " Dave Brock shakes his head and laughs.

"And all the singers say they modelled themselves on Calvert.

Especially Johnny Rotten. Bob still plays with us occasionally, you know. On the last tour he did 'Sonic Attack' with us a couple of times.

Using his megaphone. But he's off doing his bookwriting now. He's just had a novel published called 'Hype' which is really good and he's been doing some one man shows as well. We saw a couple of them. They were OK."

Dave Brock speaks dispassionately about Calvert, for so long Hawkwind's lone intellectual and their uneasy bedfellow. Brock shows neither animosity nor affection. In fact he treats the subject with the same diffidence he brings to everything else. He does crack up occasionally, mind you.

Breaking into roars of laughter at some private joke our conversation touches upon in passing. But basically speaking, he comes across as a fairly serious and singlehanded fellow with enough going on in his brain now not to need worrying about the past.

Dave Brock is the cornerstone of Hawkwind you see. The point around which pivots this space rock band to end all space rock bands.

He was in there with his guitar when the 'Wind first brought electronic mayhem to London's Notting Hill in 1969, And 12 years later he's the only one who is still there, mapping out the Universe with his electric guitar and his two flower-power painted speaker cabinets. Robert Calvert has been and gone a score of times. Lemmy has played his part, Stacia danced her way to oblivion and Simon House soared his way to Europe and the David Bowie band, Even the legendary Ginger Baker has served his sentence beneath the leather wings.

But when it all comes down to dust it's Brock's shoulders that bear the heavy weight of Hawkwind responsibility.

Maybe that's why he spends so much time leaning against walls.

IN their earliest days, two years before 'Silver Machine', Hawkwind created quite some controversy and not a little notoriety when the brain splitting volume of their PA and the retina scorching intensity of their lightshow laid audiences low like German machine gunners on the Somme. Fainting and acute nausea were

apparently so commonplace at Hawkwind gigs that the band's name came up frequently in local council meetings as a public menace, while who knows if they weren't mentioned in the Lancet as a potential threat to Public Health?! Fuddy duddy officialdom had only to take one look at the face-paint and the weird wizard's mantle of power to be convinced that this group of undesirables were plainly high on some sort of drug that would make angel-dust seem like aspirin.

But some dozen albums and three thousand odd gigs later Hawkwind have cooled it just a little. Mind you, their most cerebral period of the 'Astounding Sounds, Amazing Stories' and 'Quark Strangeness And Charm' albums has given way to the more cranium crunching once again. As their latest album - and first for RCA - 'Sonic Attack' proves. Loud, raucous and rampant.

But what about the old mind-expanding processes and the psychedelics? Dave Brock is well wary of talking about them.

"The less I say the less hassles I get. But things have changed a little if not a lot. It's all down to your state of mind, really. Like I used to mix all our albums when I was tripping.

Right up until the 'Astounding i Sounds' album. Some of these mixes turned out to be really strange. Embarrassing some of them. But at the time they sounded fantastic. Naturally.

"But this new album has a lot of weird sound effects on it. Listen to it on cans and there are lots of sub-sonic sound frequencies which will make you jump out of your chair. At high volume, at earthquake velocity, it will actually vibrate things off tables, We broke a lot of coffee cups with it. I guarantee it will make your eyes water. But we don't try to make people ill. We try to create real sensations. We were hoping to use a quadraphonic PA on the last tour so that we could spin the sound round the speakers in four corners of the hall. But it didn't prove practical because the lightshow we had was too large. But we're hoping to have it for next year."

Hawkwind have long been famous for their stage sets, like the awe-inspiring Atomhenge they toured with in 1977. At the moment though, it's their lightshow which makes Dave Brock's eyes mist over with pride. It goes under the name of the Astral Projector and is the brain-child of an old Hawkwind associate of many years standing, John Perren.

It has stunned audiences round Britain all through the Summer and the Autumn as Hawkwind's road schedule has taken them to festivals in Glastonbury, Stonehenge, and Devon as well as an exhausting tour of the major halls in most of the major cities which booked up the whole of October. With another week of Christmas dates in the can Brock has few worries about the band's grassroots supporters who are still flocking to gigs in their thousands, But he wouldn't mind a little more respect from the music press.

"We're pulling great crowds, and the albums are still going into the charts, so we aren't exactly suffering because nobody is writing about us. But it's a bit frustrating to know that you're working away and being ignored totally. We've done so many things that nobody has heard of which I would have thought were newsworthy. Like we were top of the bill at the Glastonbury festival this year and the whole thing was running so late they pulled the plug on us halfway through the set. The crowd went berserk and smashed the stage. But all the journalists wrote about was Judie Tzuke and New Order. They were so boring too. I do that sort of thing at home. And they were out of tune!"

NOW that may seem like the last words of criticism you'd expect from the lips of the man who got his first big break with a thing that was so out-of-tune it was almost atonal. But the rough amphetamine rush of 'Silver Machine' peaked long ago into the steel-edged sound of present-day Hawkwind. So when it comes to initiating young bloods Hawklord Brock requires more than mere bravery. He wants real battle skills too.

