

How Will Success Affect the Freaks?

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As the lads soar ever upwards and the fair hand of fame and fortune smudges its gilded imprint on their wrecked skulls the question on the tongues of every starving hippy worth his salt must be 'Will success spoil the sonic assassins?'

I speak of none other than Hawkwind, the guardians of the much oppressed great communities throughout the British isles, renowned for their journeys into the depths of Teenage Wasteland and beyond (for further revelations, consult any decent medical encyclopaedia).



I know of some poor souls now to be found in a state of total inertia since they casually turned on their television to be faced with the incomparable sight of their heroes cavorting on 'Top of The Pops'. What does it all mean? have Hawkwind cancelled their subscription to the resurrection in favour of a chance encounter with Pan's People? Your devoted ace reporter decided to investigate.

First, I stopped off at a cafe in London's Ladbroke Grove, a well-known den of vice where fading pop stars, lascivious cuties, narks and labourers mingle amidst the half-eaten jam-rolls. Cornering a suspicious looking freak outside 307, Portobello Road, the oddices of Frenzy, a deviant journal, and a well-known haunt for certain members of Hawkwind, I questioned him in depth as to the whereabouts of the aforementioned.

Finally, he mumbled: 'Assembly Hall, Worthing', and fell over.

At last, here was something concrete. I wasted no time - my mission was of a crucial importance - and hitched a ride from a gentleman, persuading him to travel via a route encompassing the Sussex area, and soon found myself on Worthing pier surrounded by young and old, all seemingly unaware of the cosmic presences to be found only a few yards up the road.

Bracing myself, I entered the stage door, keeping my eyes peeled for only signs of newfound wealth or swollen egos. I first encountered the formidable visage of good lookin', good cookin' drummer Simon King, still wearing his old white jacket, lumber-jack shirt and levis.

Tactfully questioning him about his current financial position, he informed me in no uncertain terms that he was losing money. Simon, you see, as well as as drumming previously for such dubious quantities as Opal Butterfly, up until recently was the co-ordinator of a thriving antique business he ran with his father. Now the pressures of being in a hit-parade combe have forced him to canal out of his business interests.

Things look so bad that he's even thinking of having to move out of his luxury apartment. He also claimed he was 'embarrassed' by being on 'Top Of The Pops' in the first place, though he appeared pleased by the prospect of topping the bill at the Rainbow.

I next made for the dressing room where I was greeted by a strange, unearthly sight. Aside from the usual mayhem to be found 'behind the scenes' at Hawkwind gigs, there appeared to be a number of adolescent aficionados hustling all and sundry for autographs.

Young kids of the male species proudly clutching tatty pieces of paper were seen leaving and entering, while members of Hawkwind tried their best to maintain their classic poses.

The cool, calm Nik Turner was cleaning out his wind instruments with a cheerfulness and precision that would almost bring a tear to one's eye. Dave Brock was quietly grumbling and still wearing his, shall we say, casual attire, while Del Dettmar, goblin and magic man behind the synthesiser, seemed as resigned and bewildered as ever.

The fearsome Dik Mik was on the verge of going to sleep while Lemmy the Lurch, bassist and vocalist extraordinaire was conspicuous in his absence - out on a mysterious errand.

And who was that strange character with strict short-back-and-sides, small moustache, leather jacket and flying glasses? Surely, it was Robert Calvert, demon poet and writer for the band, who had decided to accompany them on a few selected gigs. Bob is fully recovered from his recent problems and has everything under control again as he anticipates the extent of his fortune to be culled from the penning of 'Silver machine'

Except for the presence of more juvenile brats jiving at Hawkwind gigs, things appear to be progressing at the usual comfortable speed. Free gigs are having to be cut down on somewhat, mainly because of the size of the crowds they would attract, while Hawkwind's career is being planned very carefully by manager Doug Smith - with an eye to embracing a larger audience while still holding onto the original freak following.

Smith stipulated that the band would only perform on 'Top Of The Pops' if they were placed in their natural environment, either live on stage or else in the studio with all their friends.

The band themselves have been working too long anyway, for their sudden success to overpower them. The band are mostly all 'mature' musicians age-wise - Simon is the youngest at 21 while Nik the oldest at 32, with Dave Brock, Dik Mik and Del all not far off 30.

Simon and Lemmy are veterans of various bands, including Sam Gopal's old set-up, while the rest are well-known as jack-of-all-trades types. Nik Turner used to be in the Navy, splitting to work as a roustabout on a fair in Amsterdam. Dave Brock lived in Amsterdam for a while, but has made busking his living even during the early days with Hawkwind (it's been just over a year since he gave it all for good).

Dik Mik was a studio-photographer and then a roadie, while Bob Calvert was a teacher and sci-fi writer.

Relationships with United Artists, their record company, are improving considerably as they become more successful. Whereas, before, the situation was not exactly amicable (the band had to pay for the packaging of 'In Search Of Space' themselves), now the businessmen are becoming quite friendly. Calvert informed me of his signing an extensive three-year contract with the organisation, in order to secure the release of the intended 'Captain Lockheed' project.

The actual set they played was impressive not only for the music but also for the level of organisation that the band have attained. No longer are there the incredible lengthy waits between sets for the band to get together.

Magic Muscle (Doug Smith is attempting a Grateful Dead/New Riders type relationship with Hawkwind and Magic Muscle, the former acting as the 'big brother' symbol) leave the stage and Hawkwind appear soon after. The sound they produce is of such a weight and density that Hawkwind must easily rate as the heaviest band in the country.

Calvert recited free-form spontaneous poetry, holding the continuity between numbers together with anything from old favourites like 'Master Of The Universe' to new material like 'Brainstorm' (the logical next single) which blasted forth from the impressive array of speakers.

The spectacle could be defined as ye olde psychedelic experience. Hawkwind are a unique band in more sense than one. It's true that nothing is as dead as the recent past, but here are a band with all the trappings and vision of 1967 acid-rock and who are making it all work simply by approaching it without pretension.

It's when you see 14 year-old school kids dancing alongside die-hard freaks that you realise this is a real underground band, offering a whole landscape of alternative lifestyles to those who come and see them. Whether it be viewing them through 'Top Of The Pops' or because they like getting stoned and meeting fellow freaks.

So have no fear all you faint hearts, the mighty Hawkwind, psychedelic warlords to the fair and strong, are still fixed on their stellar course. If one needs further proof of their intentions, let him attend London's Rainbow this Sunday for a veritable feast of fun and permanent brain damage. Captain Thunder said, 'Be there or be square'.

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