

## Hawkwind: Some Facts from the Freedom Freaks NME – 30 September 1972



Hawkwind are one of the very few "Underground" bands to make the big time almost entirely on their own terms, without any real concessions to the Media who like to believe they "make or break 'em". Even the band's "Silver Machine" single seemed to escape rather than be released.

Hawkwind blend the appeal of science fantasy with some very straightforward and down-to-earth attitudes about individual freedom in a business which is always only too anxious to commercialise. They first made news at an early Isle of Wight Festival, when they played some distance away from the festival site in an open field, for free, to those who had no tickets or no money.

Apart from Nik Turner, who is pleasantly benign off stage and goes occasionally berserk on stage, burbling like a crazy man into his sax, the members are not immediately identifiable as individuals. This collective image has had its advantages, for at times there has been a tendency for various members to lose their minds and miss gigs, so drummers would transfer with glee to guitar or whatever at the last minute and few would realise the line-up changes or musical discrepancies. To say that Hawkwind's attitude is casual is an understatement, but even so, through all the haphazard and undisciplined approach there has emerged a sort of continuity built around their on-stage space trip.

This has produced a unique and original act. They are very much musicians of their time and they give their audiences what they receive. I've seen two or three Hawkwind gigs now, and each time the experience was different. At times they can be incredibly tedious. Then they break into a flurry of musical activity which leaves you mentally gaping. The whole thing has a hypnotic, almost dream-like quality.

The first time I saw the band was shortly after their album, "In Search Of Space", last October. It was at Ewell Tech. There was the amazing naked painted lady Stacia and the light show to end all light shows, or so it seemed. Swirling psychedelic designs on floor and ceiling, interspersed with flickering strobe and heavy pulsating bass rhythms which in turn were broken with screeching synthesizer and babbling sax. Most obviously it was a trip. It was also a space trip. Sci-fi writer Michael Moorcock had got in there somehow, and Bob Calvert -who wrote "Silver Machine"- had some considerable influence. On another occasion he added his poetic reading to the proceedings.

Audience reaction was one of total absorption - total involvement - they were inside listening out. The only other time I have seen such total commitment was in San Francisco when Airplane were doing "White Rabbit" and their light show was projected on gigantic screens on all sides. Somehow Hawkwind get that kind of 360 degree aura and it had to be seen, to be felt, to be believed. In an atmosphere like that it's almost impossible to believe that Donny Osmond exists, but then for Hawkwind's audience he probably does not.

Apart from the actual concept and fantasy, it is left to Turner to provide most of the action, and he can appear an awesome sight in full cry with his red mane flowing, lurching around blowing his blunt instrument. Like most of the more menacing figures on stage today he is a 'turnaround' off stage - quietly-spoken and idealistic. A dreamer of a better world. Hopefully he can make the changes before it changes him. An honest individual.

"Of course we've taken acid in the past, and our first album was really a collection of good trips and bad trips," said Nik. "There was nothing ambiguous about it. It was just about our experience.

We're [not] trying to advocate LSD or put it down. It's simply something which we think everyone should have the right to decide about. It gave us something and it might help others - but it should be taken with care and respect for your body. We don't advocate drugs by word or action. All we advocate is the right to choose.

We're constantly being put into some kind of category, but we're not the people's band, or a working man's band, or a science fiction band - we're just a band. The only politics we are into are the politics of freedom."

"I still like to play for free and I like the idea of free music. I wanted to play the Windsor Sex Olympics thing recently for nothing but only half the band got there. It's a subject of disagreement in the band at the moment. Dave wants to get some rehearsals done and I want us to do things like that festival. What's left of the Underground is worth preserving: I'd like to do more free gigs. But one problem is that we have debts of our own to pay off, yet - we were quite heavily in debt before the recent success. We really have made it the hard way. The only reason certain papers have acknowledged us at all is because we have made such an impression that they can't ignore us - our following is so big."

"I suppose our naivety makes us easy marks in some ways but I'm not really worried about people ripping us off. If they want to do that, let them. You don't gain by it in the end. We had about £8,000 worth of equipment stolen from a van which was parked outside our roadie's house in Ilford a few months ago, and we weren't insured. If someone needs the equipment more than us then they can have it; and if we're daft enough not to insure it then it's our fault. If people want to rip us off they can, they won't win in the end."

The danger with success for any band with Hawkwind's free-wheeling attitude is that they almost inevitably get sucked into the Machine and begin compromising their intentions. "We like to turn people on but we like to do it our own way," said Nik. "We want to use the Media and not end up being used by it. The only reason we did 'Top Of The Pops' was because we could do it our way and it was filmed live. If we had been asked to go into the studio with the plastic grins and mime we couldn't have done it. As long as it serves a function it's cool, but we don't want a reputation built upon hype. We must try to retain our ideals and principles and not start believing in our own publicity. We want people to come and see us and decide for themselves. Some will come and say 'that's a lot of shit' or 'I don't like that', but a lot are coming and enjoying themselves, so that's cool. I just want people to come to our gigs and have a good time. Some people might come to see Stacia because she's got big tits, but that's a bit sad because she's got a lot more going for her. If they're turned on by big tits that's fine but I don't think anyone is going to pay 15 bob just to see a pair of tits."

"Anyway it's a whole lot sadder to me that someone should come and see us just because we've been on 'Top Of The Pops' - but there again if they get into what we are doing because of that maybe it's O.K."

What does Nik think the audience get out of Hawkwind's music?

"If people are mentally free then they can get into the meditation side of it and if people are hung up they might get more hung up - but they might realise that they're hung up and try to get themselves out of it. That's what it's all about, I think."

-Keith Altham