

The Spaced-Out People's Band
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Hawkwind take off SEE PAGE NINE

HAWKWIND: the spaced-out people's band

WHEN Hawkwind were last interviewed in these pages, some 14 months ago, they expressed pleasure and surprise that, during the following month, they were scheduled to play no less than six gigs. "We're picking up," lead player Nick Turner told our correspondent, in optimistic tones.

His feelings were fully justified. For some months now, Hawkwind have been very busy indeed, playing to packed clubs everywhere and receiving ovation after ovation. Their new album, "In Search Of Space," zipped into the chart days after it was released, reflecting the strength of their grass-roots support.

But you haven't read much about them in newspapers like this one. Why? I don't know... some bands achieve fame through publicity, while others work hard at building up the kind of support mentioned above - and the latter is, without a doubt, the most rewarding method in the long run. And if real popularity is any criterion, then you should be reading a lot more about them from now on.

First, though, the mysterious question: how come they've done so well, without flack or hype? "We've just been working very hard," said Dave Brock, the guitarist and singer. "You know - when you feel like packing up, that's the time you have to keep going. We're a people's band, you see, and now we're packing places everywhere."

"The funny thing is, it doesn't seem to matter how well or badly we play. We can play really rotten sometimes, and we still get a bloody ovation. It's very bad for the ego... when we play really well, the reception is no different. Perhaps the electronic sounds cover up some of the mistakes.

Perhaps, also it could be to do with the majority of their audience: "Dope freaks, acid heads, and turned-on people who're into having a good time," as Dave put it. Maybe their public image has been dimmed somewhat by the personnel changes which have dogged (or possibly enlivened) their career. They seem to go through a new bass player every four bars and although Dave Anderson (ex-Amon Duul, now Amon Din) was the bassist on their album, the position is now held by Lemmy, who, one suspects takes his name from either the Jet Morgan's sidekick in Journey Into Space, or Lemmy Caution in Godard's futuristic movie, Alphaville.

The rest of the band are now drummer Terry Ollin, DikMik on ring modulator and Dell Dettmar on VCS3 synthesiser, and the latest addition, Bob Calvert. Bob sings, speaks, plays flute, and wrote the words for the "Space Log" booklet included in the album.



Bob is also one of the guiding lights behind their next project, which is - wait for it - A Space Rock Opera. He's busy writing the words at the moment, and conceptualising what they want to be a total environment performance.

"The basic idea of the opera - for want of a better word - is that a team of starfarers are in a coma, a state of suspended animation, and the opera is a presentation of the dreams that they're having in Deep Space. It's a mythological approach to interpreting what's happening today."

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HAWKWIND

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He's not fond of the term science fiction," and prefers the alternative phrase of their friend Michael Moorcock (creator of the unforgettable Jerry Cornelius): "speculative fiction."

"It's not predicting what's going to happen," Bob says. "It's the mythology of the space age, in the way that rocket ships and interplanetary travel are a parallel with the heroic voyages of man in earlier times."

The opera will be a combination of spoken poetry, singing, electric music, mime and dancing, and they're looking for new forms of staging. For instance, they'll be projecting light and film onto the audience, and also projecting into chemical smoke, which acts like a moving screen.

"Even when the band started, it had a very spacey sound," Bob says. "Now the image has become more concrete, although a lot is still implied rather than explicit. Perhaps there's a bit of hypnosis in it, too, with the electronic sound and the flashing lights"

"Yes," Dave broke in. "It's something to do with drones, as well. You know that each note has its own colour, and it's just a matter of finding the right combinations. The opera is intended to reach the audience on a very deep level, and we'll be using techniques that haven't been used in this way before. We'll be giving out information sheets to the audience beforehand, so that they'll be able to get into it easier. It's not fair to expect them to be able to do it without any help at all - that's where Arthur Brown goes wrong."

It always seems a little odd to find a group like Hawkwind, who call themselves a "people's band" and who frequently play free open-air gigs in Portobello Road, consorting with one of the most Establishment record companies of all. Paradoxical, certainly, and asked them when the rock bands of the Alternative Society were going to make a positive step, along the lines of the Musicians' Cooperative and the Jazz Composers Orchestra

Association.

"Don't worry, it's coming," said Dave. "But you can't do that kind of thing until you're in a position of power, until people know your name. Before that, there's no point. But it's happening, it's beginning to fall."

One was loath to point out that the members of the JCOA and the Musician's Co-op made their moves out of desperation, because they had no chance of interesting a company like United Artists in what they had to say. It only emphasises the amazing gulf which exists between the respective situations of underdog jazz musicians. Maybe the emergence of a band like Hawkwind will do something to assist the fortunes of both sides.

RICHARD WILLIAMS

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