

The Strange Saga of Hawkwind Kerrang! – 21 October 1982

THE TERM 'phenomenon' has become, in my view, one of the most overly-used clichés in journalism. Anyone, it seems, who's managed to put out two albums is automatically dubbed as such. In which case, Hawkwind, given their 19 album career, should be hailed by rock scribes as 'mega-phenomenon'.

But to indulge in such blasé terminology is to misrepresent the band, before you start. For, if nothing else, this lot, in the words of Michael Foot, are 'inveterate peace-mongers' not given to excess. A career spanning nearly 15 years has left this most fluid of outfits in a peculiar, not to mention unique, position.

Over the past decade or so, Hawkwind's original underground music contemporaries have either disappeared or (in some cases) ridden to International stardom, thus losing their roots. Yet this band haven't changed one jot- both a remarkable tribute to their staunch idealism, and also, perhaps, an equal damnation of their failure to galvanise wide-ranging rock audience support in the same way as, say, Pink Floyd.

Always capable of hitting the Top 30 albums chart and selling out Odeon-sized venues in the UK, Hawkwind possess one of the strangest cult followings in the entire history of Brit heavy rock. Sheer fanaticism is the hall- mark of the band's faithful.

To them, the Hawkwind experience is an unremitting religion. Yet this has proven to be a double-edged sword. For over the years haven't Hawkwind been guilty of trotting on the spot adhering to tried-and-trusted formulae which constantly appeal to the hard-core Hawkfans, but effectively closing out the rest of the rock World?

"I don't mind having such a definite following at all," explains Hawkwind leader/vocalist/guitarist/keyboardsman (pew!) Dave Brock. "It means that we can maintain close relations with our fans, something we couldn't do if we were huge. Obviously, there's a lot of money to be made from being successful. But I think Hawkwind would lose that mystical quality if we took such a path.

"Another point is that if you become REALLY big, then you're only gonna be at the top for a couple of years, right? I don't wanna slag off Motorhead, but that's exactly what's happened to them - they're on the way down now. No, there's a lot to be said for just ticking over nicely.

"And our following may be tight-knit but it is so diverse as well. One of our US fans, for instance, is an aerospace university lecturer. He's kept in close touch with me for years now, and has even sent over some colour slides of the voyager spacecraft for the band to use.

Brock is, without doubt, Hawkwind these days. The only remaining member from the early hippy days in Ladbrooke Grove (during the late sixties), he has over the years (more by default than design) taken command of the band and it's direction.

"Hawkwind is like my wife - it's a 24 hours a day job, and I work VERY HARD on it." The problem, of course, is that one person at the helm can cause artistic tunnel-vision. And, Brock has never been truly creative. rather, it's when he's worked with such talented characters as Bob Calvert and Mike Moorcock that he's really been at his best - bringing out the best in them, by acting as human catalyst.



For this reason, I believe Hawkwind's output over the past few albums has been good but mundane. For Brock hasn't had the temperamental genius of a Calvert or Moorcock to spark off. And that's why I'm especially heartened to see both men back in the Hawknest.

"When we played a one-off gig at London's Rainbow last Christmas, both guys came and jammed on-stage, Mine you, off it they were really fighting most of the time, just like the old days," laughs Brock

"We had hoped they'd be on our new LP, 'Choose Your Masques', as well. But time was very tight, and Mike couldn't make it, whilst Bob had booked himself into a sanitorium!"

So, said album features (aside from Brock) Huw Lloyd-Langton (guitars), Harvey Bainbridge (bass/Keyboards), Martin Griffin (drums) - and 'assorted noises' from Nik Turner, temporarily returned from Inner City Unit (he will also be appearing on the upcoming tour).

The album has a concept side (based around the search for Utopia), and would have been a complete two-sided story, but, says Brock, "we never got around to doing the other side!" Thus, in the tradition of Rush's 'Farewell To Kings'/'Hemispheres' saga, we'll have to wait for the conclusion of this epic until the next album.

A single, at the time of writing slated to be 'Solitary Mind Games', is to be lifted from the LP, and hopefully will go some way towards expunging the rather embarrassing re-recorded release of 'Silver Machine' recently. To be brutal, I found Hawkwind's whole reason for covering their own 'greatest hit' inexplicable. It was so totally out of character with the band's traditional image of caring for their fans and avoiding ripping 'em off. To put it out on a pic disc merely compounded the blatant commercial exploitation angle - something Brock has always fought against.

"It was only done as a tenth anniversary thing, and wasn't supposed to come out just as a picture disc. That was RCA's decision, and I didn't like it one bit. The only reason we cut it was as a special souvenir, and it did have 15 minutes of material on the flip, which IS value for money."

Even allowing for any altruistic motives in the recording of such an anniversary edition, I still don't understand why 'Silver Machine' was put out as an official single by the band (leaving aside financial reasoning)< Wouldn't it have been better to include this seven-incher as a freebie with the new LP? No, I'm not trying to labour this point to journalistically whip Brock & Co. I'm just attempting to maintain some semblance of objectivity. You see, as a long-standing admirer of this band, I'm in great danger of talking about 'em from the fan view-point. And most Hawkwind fans refuse to admit that the band are anything but PERFECT.

To my mind, the concept of the perfect rock band is a non-starter. And when Hawkwind DO make mistakes, then even their most fanatical of supporters should be prepared to admit it. Let's have no sweeping under the carpet. And 'Silver Machine' was a disastrous error for their credibility.

Whilst we're on the subject of hawkfans, there's another serious point to make. In recent years, their treatment of support bands on HW UK tours has been at best hostile and at worst... well, they've made England's soccer hooligans seem angelic by comparison!

"OUR fans ARE fanatical. But to some extent I can understand their frustrations with our support acts. The trouble is promoters and booking agents these days sling any old rubbish on, usually they're musically irrelevant to our audiences. It's only in exceptional cases, as with Mamas Boys last year, that we get really good bands. In fact, even now, two weeks before our '82 tour starts, I don't know who'll be on with us. Maybe the answer would be for us not to use any support, but get together a full 2 1/2 hour show, I don't know.

"But this never happened years ago. In those days, we had more control over the composition of our bill. Magicians, dancers, and weird groups like the Albertos all played with us and went down a storm. So, please don't blame our fans entirely."

But, if Hawkwind opening acts have long felt the wrath of the faithful, then those outside of the 'Hawk ghetto' are equally antagonistic to the band - a point dramatically shown up by the reaction of fans and critics alike to their set at this year's Donnington Festival. "I disliked Donnington intensely," asserts Brock "It was a terrible day. Kids were really fleeced, being asked to pay £11 for the gig, plus £4 for car parking facilities, £2 for a programme, and £6 for a tee shirt. Festivals like Donnington exist only to make money - the fans' best interests are ignored."

This polarisation of attitudes has, over the years, made Hawkwind one of the most fascinating of all rock bands. Any group that can inspire such love/ hate amongst rock aficionados must be worth at least checking out.

"I often wonder if it's all worthwhile. But then something inevitably crops up to keep it going. And, as long as I can be many-faceted, achieving different things with different people, as I am at present, then it's worth the effort of carrying one."

Malcolm Dome