

# Fall Out

## an interview with Mark E. Smith of The Fall



Ever since 1977 THE FALL have been playing their unique music. Not "punk" enough for the punks and too radical for the New Wavers, The Fall have maintained their courage and straightforwardness to go on. Truly Needy spoke to The Fall's lead singer and lyricist, Mark E. Smith. Participating in the interview were Bob Chute, John Gibson, Mike Heath, Barbara Rice and Bill Wort.

MS:I never wanted to get started in music at all.

TN:Do you consider yourselves to be that uncompromising?

MS:How can I think about that?

TN:Well, I noticed that you guys don't put in the obligatory dance beat. You can dance to some of your songs, certainly, but, it seems like a lot of British bands have gone that way. The "New Disco".

MS:Yeah, it's horrible, isn't it.

TN:I found the band to be very dancable because there seems to be a lot of emphasis on rhythms. There's a lot of real interesting stuff going on in the music. I was just wondering, is rhythm a big priority in your song-writing?

MS:That's from having two different drummers. You don't really want to have a "baa-baa-baa-baa" sort of thing...but is it just because they're both different styles. And the fact that we got rid of the organ, that we got rid of the melody.

TN:Also, you do, kind of intermittent keyboards. More like noise, really.

MS:I'm still aiming for that. Making music out of nothing, really. That's always what I thought rock music should be really, and it never is, as far as I'm concerned. The word "drum machine" is ridiculous. I think drum machines are good for certain groups.

TN:Are you listening to any new groups...any new bands?

MS:This is funny, because this year, when Mark (Riley) went, we obviously had to reassess a bit, his being mark...Mark was with us since he was 15 or 16. So anyway, at the beginning of this year I started going to all these concerts, because there are a lot of bands that are coming up with people who are old friends of mine, like the Prunes and the Birthday Party...sort of acquaintances. So, for the past three months I've been to more concerts in England than I've been to in the past three years. It's so fucking boring. The more I see, the less I'm thinking I'll go and do "Here's something you might like. You'll go and buy the record again". Like, I went to see John Cale in Manchester, and he was so comfortable

TN:I can never imagine someone like him being "comfortable".

MS:"Comfortable"?

TN:Yeah. His stuff is anything but comfortable.

MS:But when you go and see him... He's got a solo act now. He's on his own now.

TN:Yeah. You all got his solo, but he was playing with a band here.

MS:Yeah, right. But I've got my suspicions. Why is he doing a solo tour of England? Does it mean more money for him? I mean, he's a really good act, y'know, he does all the parts the band used to do on the piano. But about halfway through he starts to do "Waiting For The Man", and you go "Fuck."

TN:Why dredge that stuff up. Have you been listening to any of the American music that's coming out? Are you very familiar with it?

MS:Yeah, I'm very pro-American music.

TN:Like?

MS:I like Fear and people like that. Fear are great. Flipper, they're good too. Panther Burns. Do you have their record where they have a Tennessee drum corp on it? Fucking great.

TN:Do you like any of the hardcore sort of things coming out of America?

MS:That's what I mean. It's the only punk I listen to. I'm not patronizing you, but I always thought the west coast American punk was the best anywhere. See, in England people don't listen to it, because we've been drenched with it for two years, but it's shit in England. It's shit.

TN:People are still under the delusion that England invented the whole punk thing.

MS:Anyone from intellectuals about rock to the dumbest idiot on the street: American punk is just not cool. So...

TN:Do you think it's just a chauvinistic type of thing? I just read this slag of the Minutemen in NME, and I couldn't believe it! I noticed during the set, that the melodic aspect was coming from the interplay between the drums. The drummer that was switching off to bass was doing some interesting stuff in terms of moving the beat around the drum kit and getting the different timbres and different pitches from the drums. And if you listen to the drumming, the figure kept the music driving, and yet was providing some melodic motion.

MS:Yeah this what I'm saying. You analysed it very well. It's great that you see that. That's why we took the melody out, because I knew there was a better melody underneath.

TRULY NEEDED:You don't draw any sort of crowd that's into wearing uniforms.

MARK SMITH:It's different everywhere we go, all over the world. There's always certain types of people that come...in a lot of cities there's the same type of people. Like, I've met girls like you. Not loads of them...Do you get any drift?

TN:How can you classify me, Mark? I'm getting real, real bad vibes.

MS:No, no. Just a minute.No, you sort of think, "Who does that remind me of?". There's also the sort of Fall fan that's sort of short height, with glasses, and he always dresses a bit scruffy...And I've met the "same" bloke in London, and in Manchester, and in Switzerland...do you get any drift? You sort of go, "Oh, is that...no, it's not."

TN:Meanwhile, back on the subject, how did you get started in music?

MS:I don't believe you. What?

TN:I was just asking, how did you get started in music?



TN: You seem to have, sort of, by the departure of the keyboard player, backed into a phenomenon that's happening in American jazz drumming. I don't know if you're familiar with harselodic music, that certain musicians around Ornette Coleman, particularly a drummer named Ronald Shannon Jackson is doing. Do you ever listen to that sort of music?

MS: It's funny, because, yeah, I like that. I like Ornette Coleman. That's about it really. I'm not a great jazz fan. It's funny, because the drummer definitely don't listen to jazz. It's just that I rather like the drum part. With people like Ornette Coleman, they just used to do it. I mean, I have to tell my drummers what to do. But I'm not thinking at all. "This is going to sound like Ornette Coleman". I'm just trying to find a beat that goes with the song. If you're going to think of bass parts and drum parts you might as well make them fucking interesting. I think that's what Beefheart did a lot. I'm not very fond of it. You can see he's wrote a lot of the guitar parts, you can see which parts he wrote.

TN: The thing you share is that a lot of people who listen to top 40 radio are listening for the vocals, rather than seeking it out in the drums or guitars.

MS: Yeah. Yeah. Well, if you want to get analytical about music, I don't believe it for certain myself, you see. I've just found out that everything I've always liked in music has been absolute. For instance Cale, if you go and see Cale doing something like "Waiting For The Man" ... I mean, "Waiting For The Man" is like a thing you should just throw out. You know, he's obviously sat down and wrote down all the words... it's a cover version... it's a fucking cover version. And he gets so fucking snobby about the Velvets. He left the Velvets because he was a fucking snob. I'm not doing a character assassination, you get my drift? Like I would say it in Manchester, and all these people from Factory Records would say "John Cale was the Velvet Underground. It wasn't Lou Reed, it was John Cale."

TN: Are you aware of any of the American bands who are maybe influenced by the Fall, like the Embarrassment, or the Dream Syndicate, or maybe even the Minutemen?

MS: No. I don't know any of those bands. Not at all.

TN: Because the Dream Syndicate told us "If you ever meet Mark Smith say hello for us."

MS: The Dream Syndicate I've heard of. That's about it.

TN: Are you planning on recording any new material?

MS: Yeah, we've did four sides before we set off. Rough Trade came up to us and said, "How would you all fancy doing a one-off single. We'll pay for it, and shit", which is good because we're desperate. We walked out of Kamera. We finished with Kamera about two weeks ago. We were saying "Oh, fuck! Here we go again"... And the Rough Trade phoned up, which is surprising, the way we call them and everything, we just slag them off. And say said "Why don't you all go in and try to do a really great single, and we'll pay for it", which is fucking great, and that's what we did.

TN: When will it be out?

MS: I don't know. It's April now... We're going to wait until we get back so we can O.K. it... we're doing the cover and everything. We've mixed it, and shit.

TN: I know people who spend hours trying to analyze Fall album covers and I just say "Why?"

MS: It's just a piece of crap.

TN: Do you give it a lot of thought, and then maybe three hours later, write that down?

MS: Stop trying to find out. You Americans are always trying to find out processes. No, no... I'm sorry. Everybody tries to do that. For insyance, Room To Live came out all wrong. Room To Live wasn't the cover I fucking wanted. It was just a complete fuck up. It was one of the reasons we left Kamera. No, we went away, see? And I just drew a plan up, and let the bloke do it, and they hired some bloke who does Throbbing Gristle covers, and he sort of put it like a fucking moron could do it. Just no flare about it. The guy who printed Hex up for me is just like a normal printer. He prints like pamphlets, and he works for

Kamera. And he did a fucking great job ... he'd improved on what I'd done, in other words. When eas, the guy on Room To Live said "Oh, it's great to work with you", and I said, "Well, I'm going away for six weeks, you've got to get it right". We come back and it's got photo... white space... typing... All the rough edges smoothed out. Not what it could have been.

TN: There's a way you can get around dissatisfaction with your record covers. Chris Cutler was once telling me a story about how he and Fred Frith once met Sun Ra on a corner in Philadelphia, to pick up some Saturn Records for Cutler's store, back in England, and Ra was sitting in the back of this Cadillac while two people from the Arkestra took the records out of boxes with just plain white covers on them... And then they would hand them in to Ra, who would then draw on them with Magic Marker.

MS: Is that what he used to do? You mean each, individual one? I'd like to do things like that. I'd like to get a box of a thousand, and just slip the odd one in. Or ones that were parodies, with misspellings and such.

TN: And then they'd become collector's items... have huge resale value...

MS: INCREASE CULT STATUS!

TN: I notice the band seems to have a lot of fun on stage. Do you really enjoy it?

MS: Fun? No, not at all.

TN: How do you like it in the United States?

MS: It's great.

TN: You were talking, the last time you toured America, how because of, like, how the English music scene is so small, you can't get such of an idea of how much you're getting across to people. And then you came to America, and people were saying "This is pretty hot stuff you all are playing". Do you still get that feeling?





THE FALL, 930 Club, April 9th,  
1983.

True to form, the Fall did not make it easy for those assembled on this night. It's not exactly a crowd winning ploy to do sets consisting of 7/8ths new material. It also takes a really avid aficionado to be capable of recognising what few tunes have been ensnared in the sticky web of posterity. But the Fall won the trust, if not the hearts, of more than a few present for their two sets.

Needless to say, those craving retinal orgasm were treated as wallflowers, better off working said wall on DJ nights (speaking of which, do 930 DJ's feel it necessary to deafen patrons in order to maintain an appropriate clubby atmosphere? Bit of a drag only being able to converse in the most glib of tongues in the front room. And i'm not the only one who feels this way- what say you, 930 DJ's?). The Fall's heavy rhythmic base and amelodic toppings are only slightly more attractive than their (lack of) stage demeanour. Thus, you hear the Fall more than see them, which is nice, the sound taking priority over the image, especially with sounds as compelling as theirs. Of course, i can understand those 930 habitues more accustomed to easy visual digestion having thrown down their eyelids at this carelessly attired thoroughly uncool crew. More fools they, and way they be forever banished to a videoleech purgatory where the only operative channel is MTV.

So there they were and there we were, having paid to be a willing



witness to this Manchester England brand of semi-intelligible spew. Barbed, twisted perversions of rockabilly blues and other, more obscure musics, over which rides the town-cryer yammer of Mark E. Smith. The Fall's appropriation of said American culture outgrowth, by the way, is not as much a heist scenario as one might think. In my mind's eye i can see Mark E. and

John Lee Hooker, sharing the same bar rail and trying to outbullshit each other.

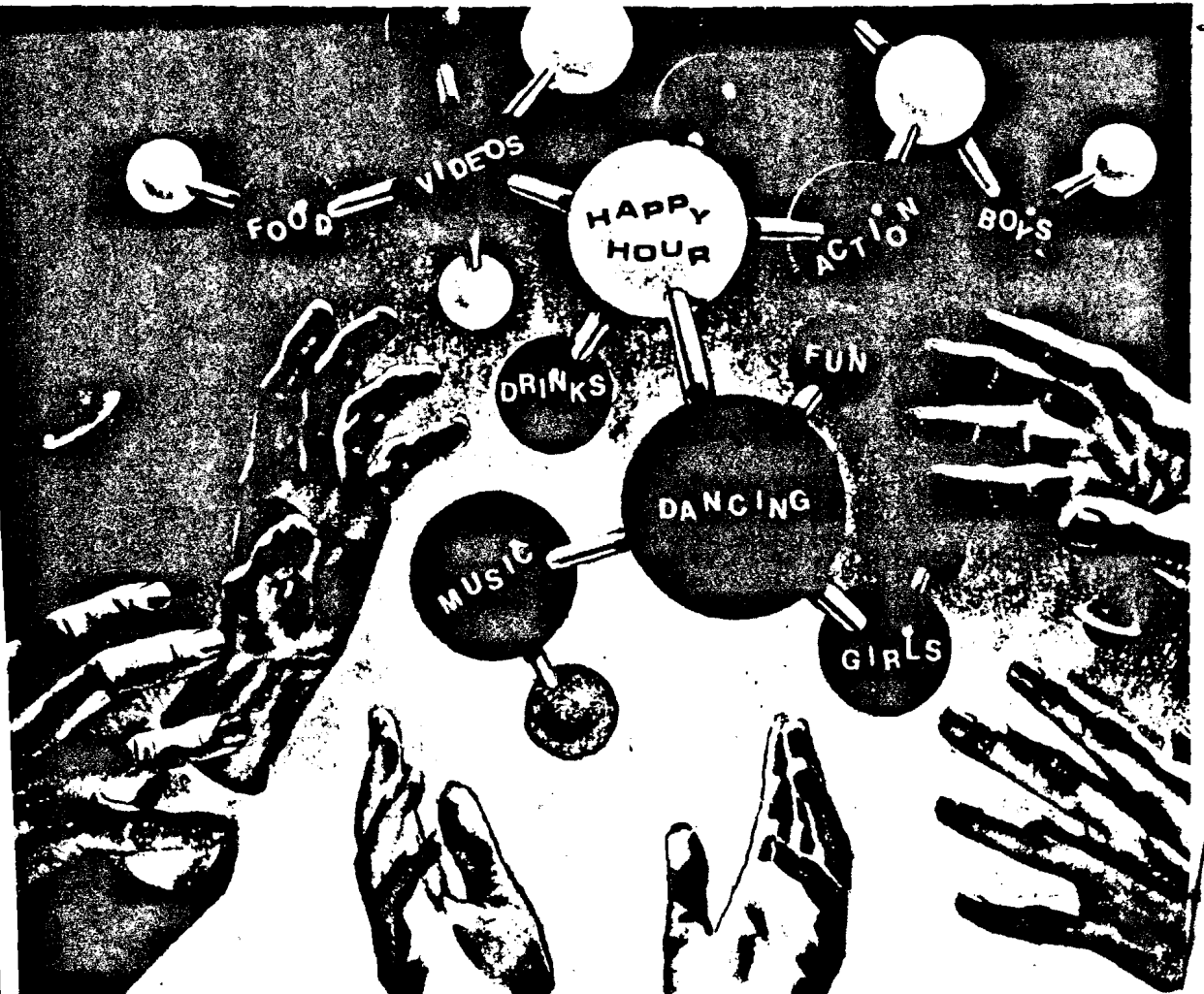
The Fall's formula of organised sound, loosely termed 'rock', probably means buggerrall to those who'd rather hang their tastes on something they can dress up or have their hair cut or grown to.

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Too unpleasant by half, like car accidents. Or evictions. Or domestic squabbles. But they're there, all part of the 'real world', maybe just outside or next door, and aren't gonna go away no matter how much you wish or pray.

Not unlike The Fall, and more power to them for that. That they are still an ongoing concern (and irritant to some) after all the transient almost desperate lungings apres '77 at a catchall cultural style, two-tone powerpop nouveaumod neuroromantic tic tribalism newpunk what fuckin next? - is a tribute to their creative strength and fortitude. The Fall stand apart, and their sarcastic glowering variations on the Funky Western Civilisation are sideways steps few of the current fifteen minute wonders could ever hope to replicate. Totale's terrors, six years plus and counting.

Mike Heath



## SOCIAL SUICIDE

Photo: Bill Wort

Birthday Party/Social Suicide 930 Mar 10

Social Suicide were really good, they seem to be a fine band that nobody likes. The justralks in attendance stood way back like they were expecting some large explosion of dreadful thrash activity, but only about 6 people actually danced. They did most/all of the songs off the new comp. album, also some slow tunes, new ones, grinding, heavyset stuff I thought slogged a little, undynamic. Bryan's turned into a sorta impressive 77-styl front guy, expressionist body-language and inarticulate writhing. I think I like them best when they sound least hardc.

Intervening was a brief reading by Jarrod Uam, of the Sabotage "poets". Not impressed. His delivery was good -- I'll bet the bitch could sing -- but his material was sadly lacking, chains of fat images strung together with a very careful eye toward their shock value. "I, Mr. Jarrod is telling us, 'am a depraved and desperate creature, crushed and twisted by the dreadful forces of urban existence.'" Bull-shit,

as someone made a point of telling him. Not once did I get the vaguest hint he'd ever felt, experienced, any of the verbiage he spewed. Insincerity is the unforgivable sin... A gaggle of elegant weirdos, match, hung rapt on his least sigh of weltanschauung, as rapt as he himself hung on Nick Cave, who is the real thing he plays so intently at.

Boy Jarrod disgraced himself at Virgin Prunos as well; I hope this ain't a trend & we hafta suffer for his art whenever a good avantband plays there...

Birthday Party, tho', more 'n made up, one of the most intense bands I've seen. Anybody that can generate that kind of power I ain't gonna quibble details of meaning and intent, there's too few bands able. Nick Cave shrieked, frothed, muttered bubbly curses, went violently mad. And the music? Factory machinery lost control, massive engines crushed together at enormous friction, filthy grating noises. Sometimes a real riff would coalesce, for a few seconds it'd be possible to twitch convulsively at high velocity, galvanic muscle-tussle... IF YOU COULD TAKE YOUR EYES OFF THAT LOST SOUL GIBBERING AT THE GATES OF HELL, standing rigid on the edge of a p.a. speaker, hanging from the ceiling... All very theatrical, of course, but never less than convincing. If Cave is not the punk Faustus, he's at least a brilliant performer, and once in a great while that's enough. Fucking brilliant, you should have been there.

SUB-MENSAS  
SOME3ODY'S HOUSE APRIL 15

Saw'm at a party. Hmm. They're swell, not out of the garage yet. It's always made me feel good to see a band that can't quite do what they're doing, see rock & roll maintained as a purely interpersonal medium, a couple people communicating with a couple others... that doesn't happen often, especially these days.

Dig; they're not wholly incompetent. I've emphasized their sloppiness & amateurism cuz it's important, attests to their purity and good motives. They're tight enough to be danceable when it suits them, though they're kinda undynamic, midtempo & I hadda force myself a little.

Furthermore, they did something, hey. Ai! Ai!(Ah-quoooo!) that I ain't heard elsewhere, a looonng number that was total bonogs goatees & dark glasses time, cool as shit; lead boy Damon read a poem his'n, called "Whisper", with the band improvising behind him, basically just punctuating, providing texture. Hey, coffeehouse, Venice, 1957. I liked the hell out of it, wish I had a tape...

Some of Damon's lyrics are really good.

Chusito 3.

CHOKO, MORTAL MICRONOTZ, MINOR THREAT VFW Hall, Kansas City April 15, 1983

Things were just getting rolling around here again. When Off-The-Wall Hall in Lawrence closed in December and changed management, quickly booking up three months in advance at a time with almost nothing but shit, it looked like things locally might die for good.

Instead, it all just moved down the road 40 miles. Daved Howard at Rock Therapy and some other KC folks picked up the slack, and began booking a VFW hall on a regular basis. And despite a somewhat narrow-minded booking policy, there had already been shows with Husker Du, MDK, White House, the Circle Jerks, William S. Burroughs, and

locals like the Embarrassment, Mortal Micronotz, Louis Lingg, Drunk Alcoholi, Broadcast, Choke, and the Tunnel Dogs.

It was all ages, with only the minimum amount of security, and a friendly atmosphere. There was even talk of making the operation non-profit, seeking federal funding, doing a benefit for the VFW, and other things. Not only were the veterans downstairs and the punks upstairs co-existing, but they were getting along. Despite the usual problems, the VFW folks had nothing but kind words for what might seem like an affront to everything they stand for. This one promised to be the best yet.

Kansas City's Choke were up first, but I was quickly downstairs. They were ten times better than the last time I'd seen them, they were nonetheless pitiful, with vocalist Johnny Sick's best moments comprising choruses like "Fuck you, Fuck you, Fuck you" in all seriousness. Lawrence high schoolers the Mortal Micronotz were god-like in comparison. Closer to garage punk than hardcore, the Micronotz have a good time, and provide a pretty decent chunk of noise as well, although their new material unfortunately pales next to their album. But their young.

With all I'd read, all I'd heard, Minor Threat could only be a disappointment. They'd already been on tour for a month or two, this was only Kansas City, drummer Jeff Nelson was sick in the back of the van, and their Marshalls wouldn't work because of the feedback caused by a TV tower across the street. But, oh boy, was I wrong.

Busting into "Filler", they were better than I ever thought they could be. Ian's a natural--- not apose in sight, pacing back and forth, simultaneously intense and down to earth, smart and funny, spouting lines you knew were true. And, oh, those guitars, and that catapulting rhythm. Triumphant and driving, like a smack in the chest, bolting and irresistible. Rocketing into "Straight Edge", "No Reason", "I Don't Wanna Hear It", "Sob Story", and "Small Man, Big Mouth", they were as powerful as any I'd seen, but it was over as quick as that.

Six songs and the lights were on, the stage power off, and the VFW on stage telling the story. Someone had broken into a display case and taken irreplaceable VFW momentos, including (how rebellious) a Nazi flag captured in the war by one of the VFW members. Thirty minutes of pleading by the VFW, Ian, and members of the crowd, while some jerk was probably smiling devilishly at home, debating what position to hang his prize catch on the bedroom wall.

Minor Threat did play again, but it was never quite the same. The life had gone from the thing, and after four more songs, the lights came on again, and that was it. The VFW would have no more, and who could blame them? It was Ian's 21st birthday but there were no celebrations. A delicate situation wasn't even that any more. It's over now. A black eye on a beauty. Just another story... but a fatal blow. Flake Gumprecht (Blake sent us a follow-up note,