

which catapults into sounding like a keyboard out of control, straight into Smith's deadpan: "*The Palace of Excess leads to the Palace of Access.*" The original lyric "*nine to five*" becomes "*ten to five*", a smart and funny comment on the commercialism of the current rave scene. But far from being dismissive, Smith's actually — if curtly — generous.

"Some of it's pretty cool. Not the watered down stuff, mind, which has a limp beat and an old Ronettes song worked over it. . . . But some of the House and Techno stuff I like dancing to. I like the way they abuse machines mainly. I've always been into that idea. But I can't imagine sitting down and listening to that stuff. . . . I wasn't particularly sending dance up. I was just playing around with it. I just hate it when technology is employed in a bland way. That leaves me cold."

I ask about "The League Of Bald Headed Men" the LP's spacey House excursion, with Smith's taciturn rap buried somewhere below the music.

"All these blokes in their thirties who suddenly got wrapped up with rave, converted by it and tried to get into the scene. They've started making a business out of it. That side of it is really seamy. That irritates me. And that's what's pathetic about London forever trying to catch up with the rave scene. You know that's been left behind now in Manchester."

Various dance tracks on *Infotainment* attest to Smith's enjoyment of the genre. At the same time, there's hesitancy, a hint of self-consciousness, chords seeming to stall while Smith's rap intercedes, as much second thoughts as headlong rush: the titles give the game away — "Paranoia Man In Cheap-Shit Room", "A Past Gone Mad". With any other group, you'd think they were only demonstrating how easily they can turn their hand to rave — but such journeyman-tactics would be most un-Fall-like. Anyway, it sounds as if they're as close to hedonism as they could possible be.

So, 14 years now. . . . Don't you ever feel like jacking it in and doing something different?

"No, not really. I will keep going but I'd like to do more theatrical and spoken word collaboration as opposed to dance ones."

He's been here before, of course. There was the short play *Hey! Luciani!* at the Hammersmith Lyric (with a plot that prefigured *Godfather III* by some years). This was followed by his collaboration with Michael Clark *I am Kurious Oranj*, a bizarrely imaginative meditation on William and Mary of Orange's arrival in England (a subject Hollywood as been curiously reluctant to pursue). Do words interest you more than music? "Yes they do. But the

idea has always been to combine words with good music. That's always been my main aim."

He won't say who The Fall might be working with in the future though it's clear he's got definite people in mind. "Once I've got these interviews out of the way I'll be free to get on with it, won't I?"

He's just as reticent about his current likes and dislikes. "I like things like I Ludicrous and Tackhead. I listen to some jazz like Coleman, otherwise loads of rockabilly and weird stuff."

The first single to be released from the LP is "Why Are People Grudgeful?" with a playful Ska feel. It doesn't seem like a natural choice, especially when there's the contagiously lyrical "I'm Going To Spain." A song — with an 'I' that pretty much resembles the Fall's frontman — that perhaps tells of Smith's disillusionment with the UK.

"No, I like living here. That song's meant to be a skit on *Eldorado*. This idea of people upping an leaving a sinking ship and going somewhere sunny. It's a bit of a con."

You're 34, aren't you?

"Yeh." Suddenly edgy. "How did you know?"

It's the age of the 'I' in the song!

Smith laughs, as if the moment he's got a song out of his system he forgets it totally. "Oh yeah, you're right, it is." (Laughs again.) "How old are you then?" He stops, suddenly coy. "No, I shouldn't ask that, it's rude."

Ultimately, for all his gripes, nothing will put him off — certainly none of the usual things. He's not even sick of touring — The Fall will be on the road later in the spring.

"I'm looking forward to it. It's good fun," says the man who's made miserabilism more eminently sustainable than anyone else. Once I preferred The Smiths for this to The Fall, but Morrissey went and spoiled that. Of course it's disorientating to hear the man praise things for being "good fun", and I think once I would have worried greatly about this, listening to my *Bend Sinister* tape alone in my bedroom, dreaming of Saturday night's alternative disco.

But now I'm an adult, my dreams are different. I don't want my teenage idols to be their own cartoon-images any more. In the crevices in my head, I wave to that bus from the Portobello Road as it pulls off with my copy of *Bend Sinister* and everything else from that, and start to dance again to *The Infotainment Scan*. Creative misanthropy means much more than not having fun. Growing up means finding new ways into old pleasures. □



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