

**Melody
Maker**

June 1978 65p

BOOK OF

BOWWIE





PHOTOGRAPHS by: Colour —Andrew Kent (pages 1, 16, 17, 20/21, 24, 25, 28/29, 40); Barry Plummer (12/13). Black and white: Barrie Wentzell (2); Gijbert Hanekroot (4); Roger Perry/Barrie Wentzell (7); Mick Rock/Diane Hyatt (10); London Features International/Barry

Plummer (15); Christian Simonpietri (18, 26); RCA Records (32); Alan Johnson (35); Bob Gruen (36).

PUBLISHED by IPC Specialist and Professional Press Ltd., 1 Throwley Way, Sutton, Surrey SM1 4QQ, England.

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Printed by Garrod and Loft-house Ltd., Crawley, Sussex; typesetting by C. E. Dawkins (Typesetters) Ltd., 44/46 Southwark Street, London SE1 1UN.

Sound and vision

DAVID BOWIE means different things to different people. To pop fans of ten years' standing, he's the guy who composed the classic "Space Oddity" and who thus caught our imagination. Even in 1969, his stage act was way ahead of the rest.

To those favouring theatrics in rock, Bowie is the one soloist with flash and panache who has mastered the technique of mixing a blinding presence with music reaching the subconscious, peculiarly correct for the age.

To anyone mildly futuristic or interested in sci-fi, Bowie is the epitome of that consciousness.

To the much-vaunted new wave in rock music, Bowie is one of the few established stars to inspire relevance. Because he does not stand still.

Perhaps he reaches out to young people because whatever strands have marked his chameleon-like career, he has always had exceptional style. This book sets out to mirror the facets of a remarkable artist who has won the respect of all his contemporaries.

Starting on page 5, Allan Jones profiles the personality and career of the man and his music, recounting his meetings with Bowie and the motives that fire the man's creative energies. This article includes an album-by-album assess-

ment from "David Bowie" right through to "Heroes".

On page 33, Chris Brazier describes him as "not only the greatest popular musician of the Seventies, but also one of our most important contemporary artists." Brazier, whose thesis on Bowie won him a top award in a national writing contest organised by the Melody Maker, describes Bowie's "idealism, decadence and alienation" as the hallmarks of his stances, in a sharp assessment of Bowie's many characteristics.

On page 19, Michael Watts begins his definitive conversation with David Bowie. It was in 1972 that Bowie's most important interview of his career took place — with Michael Watts. Headlined "Oh You Pretty Thing", the interview changed Bowie's attitude towards his career, he says now. In today's article he is no less honest in his self-analysis.

The book, lavishly illustrated with colour and black-and-white pictures, is a fitting testimony to an artist who continues to be a crucial force in today's rock.

Ray Coleman,
Editor-in-Chief,
Melody Maker



Man, myth and music

by Allan Jones

AN October afternoon in London. David Bowie is sitting in his suite at the Dorchester Hotel, chain-smoking Gitanes and talking in clipped, almost nervous accents about his new album, "Heroes". His presence is immediately engaging, his conversation brisk, intelligent and infectious; his enthusiasm exciting and quickly communicated. His charm is immense and his humour reassuring. I feel at ease at once in his company, although I have not met him before this encounter.

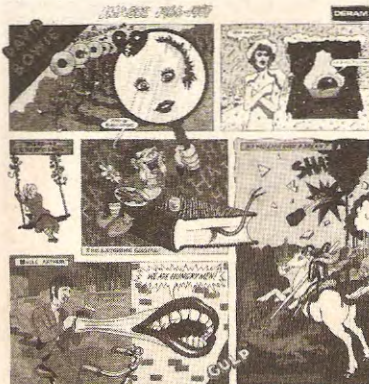
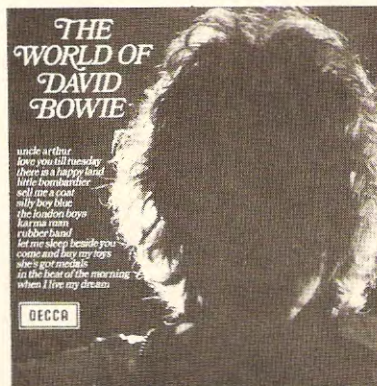
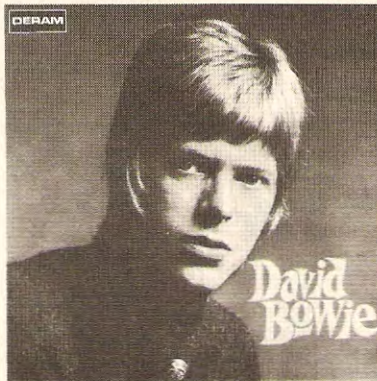
I had seen him on stage, from a distance, of course: as Ziggy, as Aladdin Sane, as the Cracked Actor and the Young American, and more recently as The Thin White Duke of "Station To Station" and the Thin White Shadow behind Iggy, for whom he played keyboards on the Forgotten Boy's resurrection tour.

I barely recognised Bowie at Iggy's opening night at Friar's club in Aylesbury, and even now it is not without some difficulty that I am able to reconcile the calm and quietly confident personality before me with the violent glamour and flamboyance of the various personae with which he had earlier confronted his public.

The ghosts of his former incarnations hung about him still, and I recall, as I talk to him about "Heroes" and "Low", conversations with musicians with whom he has worked. Especially Mick Ronson, his guitarist through the wild days of Ziggy's dominance and through the painful disintegration of that personality on "Aladdin Sane", whose death-agony was graphically recorded on the "David Live" album.

I remember Ronson telling me of Bowie's dangerous petulance, of his unpredictable humour, of his calculating manipulation of those who found themselves in his orbit of influence. And he smiles, with an air of resignation, when I mention this; there are memories, he says, that he cannot deny, but has not the time to regret. These things happened, and they may have been unfortunate. But he was not, then, in command of himself; he could not fully discipline his temperament, and its occasionally erratic twists.

The personalities that he formed then—specifically Ziggy—that began to overwhelm his own character; the distinctions between actual fact and dangerous fiction became blurred and finally indistinct. They could, he says grimly, have swallowed and even destroyed him.



The assumed identities are now behind him, he insists, he no longer feels quite so emphatically the desperate need to excite his audience with the provocative flamboyance that they urged the design of characters like Ziggy and Aladdin Sane.

He is more anxious to talk of the music he has produced since his return to Europe, of "Low" and "Heroes"—both of which had been recorded in collaboration with Brian Eno in Berlin, where he had then been living for over a year—which he is eager to promote. And there is in his conversation, a determination to prove conclusively his fidelity to these records, and to deny the anticipated charges of the suspicious and the cynical that these works are substantially more personal than a mere flirtation with the techniques and the ideas of the European avant garde and just further evidence of his quixotic and mercurial talent for assimilation courting yet another new sensation.

So, Bowie sits here defending these albums as expressions of a truly personal commitment; his reasoned arguments a reflection of the maturity lately reflected in the music he has recently created on "Low" and its successor.

And I reflect upon the burden of that charge of capricious exploitation with which he has always been charged by those dismissive critics of his talent.

And who is to say that these accusations have, in the past, been entirely without justification, I wondered? His work, from his debut album, "David Bowie" (Deram DML 1007), released in the summer of 1967, has never rested conveniently within the specific horizons of rock 'n' roll's most obvious impulses or aspirations. His generous ability to synthesise prevailing trends in music and fashion—to create, usually, of these popular infatuations, something more extraordinary and enduring—had been constantly attacked as evidence of his calculating and mercenary inclinations.

The essential truth of the matter is that Bowie, from the outset of his career, was fired by an ambition that sought to extend its talent far beyond the critical limitations of pop music and rock 'n' roll. And such ambition, especially when so clearly and defiantly defined, is certain to be assaulted by the prejudice of those who find it uncomfortably determined and independent.

"David Bowie", and the single, "Love You Till Tuesday"—how I loved that record!—were quite remarkable in that

they were entirely antithetical to the then predominant idealistic mood of musical adventure most fully represented by the anarchic exploits of the early Pink Floyd—with Syd Barrett at the battered helm—and Hendrix and their acid-blown contemporaries.

Bowie suggested with these first records that he was not greatly infatuated with the strict temperature of rock 'n' roll, or the widespread crusade for the liberation of pop music from its increasingly moribund traditions (within which he was deftly working at the time).

No, these records suggested that Bowie was neither committed to, nor concerned exclusively with, rock music and its nascent maturity. Indeed, the sense of theatre—clearly defined by the sweeping narratives of the songs on this debut album—with which he invested his writing and performances at this time hinted that his ambition was definitely wider and more diverse than that of his contemporaries.

His public statements of the period, for instance, were bewildering in their disparate commitments. As early as February 1966, in an interview which coincided with the release of "Can't Help Thinking About Me" by David Bowie and The Lower Third (who were, with The Buzz, who played as a support band to the Who as The High Numbers at the Marquee, one of his early bands), he was to be found declaring that his eventual vocation would be as an actor, not a musician or singer.

The same interview found him expressing a genuinely informed interest in Buddhism, and the intriguing information that he had recently started to compose, with Tony Hatch—the pop writer—a musical score for some kind of West End musical.

The associations he was courting could hardly have enhanced his credibility among the self-defined progressive community of musicians in London, or their audience. But Bowie was unrepentant and independent.

He was, by all accounts, a precocious adolescent. He left Bromley Technical High School in 1963, at the age of 16, to pursue a career as a commercial artist. Six months later, disenchanted, he formed what he later described as "a progressive blues group", which was followed by a succession of groups, none of which brought him any closer to the elusive gates of success.

He had been performing for a year as a solo acoustic singer when he was signed in 1967—along with Cat Stevens—to the new Decca subsidiary, Deram (it was then fashionable for most established labels to have a progressive offshoot reserved for new talent).

The album he recorded for Decca/Deram he has since disowned ("that first album I did in about 15 minutes—you could say it was rushed"). But it remains a fascinating, if deliberately, anachronistic, work. Alongside cameo-snapshots of Swinging London, which he captured with a wry and sardonic eye ("Maids Of Bond Street", for instance, and the seminal "London Boys", which was not included on his debut, but released later on the excellent Decca compilation, "The World Of David Bowie"), there are dramatic romantic ballads "When I



Live My Dreams" which, with "In The Heat Of The Morning"—also on the subsequent compilation—anticipate the style of "Lady Grinning Soul", from "Aladdin Sane" and even "Word On A Wing" and his arrangement of "Wild Is The Wind" from "Station To Station".

And then there are frightening excursions like "We Are Hungry Men", which introduces for the first time Bowie's disturbing pessimism and interest in totalitarian doctrines and his bleak hopes for the future (an important song this, I think, but widely overlooked in discussions about his work and its development).

The album was favourably received by the critics. "Sounding like a young, good-looking Anthony Newley with the writing ability of a Cat Stevens," wrote the Melody Maker on June 17, 1967, "it's surprising the talented Mr Bowie hasn't made a bigger impact on the pop scene." But the record achieved no great commercial success and Bowie, in a fit of disillusioned pique retired from music to devote much of his time and energy to the Tibet Society, with whom it's said he even founded a monastery in Scotland.

It was at this time that he also began to consider the idea of forming a mime troupe. He had met and been inspired by the noted mime artist Lindsay Kemp, who he would eventually include in his lavish 1972 appearance of London's Rainbow. Kemp, apparently, had selected Bowie's "Love You Till Tuesday" as interval music at one of his performances, attended, coincidentally, by the young songwriter.

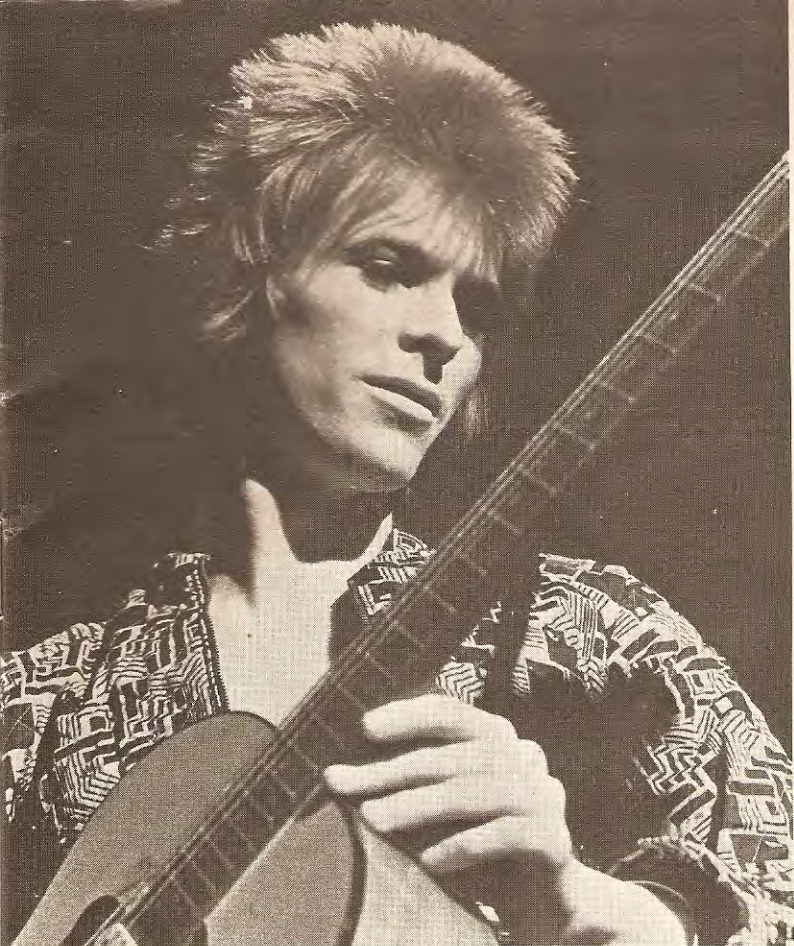
Bowie, flattered and impressed by the attention of Kemp, collaborated over a period of 18 months with Kemp's Mime Company. And on June 3, 1968, Bowie presented, at London's Royal Festival Hall, a 20-minute play in mime and song which concerned itself with the plight of a boy of religious inclination living in Tibet under the oppressive regime of the Chinese Communists (the idea for which might have been earlier expressed in a song, "Silly Boy Blue" on his first album—you might like to investigate the parallels). He supported at this concert Marc Bolan, who was to become one of his closest friends, whose Tyrannosaurus Rex was appearing alongside Roy Harper.

The event was something of a disaster, from all accounts, with Bowie having to suffer the impatience of an audience thoroughly bewildered by his performance. But Bowie persevered, and in February 1969 it was announced that he would accompany Tyrannosaurus Rex on a brief concert tour.

He was also persuaded to return to recording. He was signed to a new record company, Philips, who released a single entitled "Space Oddity".

On October 4, 1969 "Space Oddity", Bowie's first foray into science fiction novelty, entered the MM chart at number 27. It eventually reached number 5 (and was a number one hit, incidentally, when re-released by RCA in 1975).

Its success, however, far from catapulting Bowie to a position of security, provoked a second retirement from the rock biz. It was certainly unrepresentative of much of his work at the time and its unexpected success created for him an



impossible tension that he was unable to resolve.

To capitalise on the success of the single, for instance, Bowie was booked into unsuitable venues supporting incompatible acts like Edgar Broughton and Steamhammer, and he even appeared at the Save The Rave '69 charity concert at the London Palladium with Dusty Springfield, the Equals, the Mojos, the Marmalade, the Settlers and Tiny Tim!

He retired to organise and supervise the running of an Arts Lab at the Three Tuns in Beckenham. "It was very weird," he would comment later of this period. "My father died, and a week later I had a hit record. The juxtaposition was like a pantomime, a comic tragedy." His personal confusion and despair was touchingly captured on the album he made for Philips, "Man Of Words, Man Of Music", produced by Tony Visconti, with whom he has worked extensively since.

This album—although overlooked on its initial release—suggested the versatility and vibrant imagination of its author, though it is clearly immature in its more idealistic passages. There are memorable moments here, though, and it is not an album to be discarded or considered lightly.

"Letter To Hermione"—she was one of Kemp's dancers—is a love song more direct than almost any he has since written. There were other similarly introspective songs, intriguing but not brilliantly exceptional. But then there was also the extraordinary "Cygnets Committee", an epic paranoid death-trip that waved farewell to the idealism of the Sixties.

This album, however, was not properly appreciated until it was re-released in 1972 by RCA—it was afforded a more

contemporary sleeve portrait and retitled "Space Oddity". Then, on February 28, 1970, a gig at the Basildon Arts Centre was advertised in *Melody Maker*.

High Tide were headlining, we learned, supported by Hype—"David Bowie's new electric band." With Bowie in Hype were Tony Visconti, his producer, on bass; John Cambridge, who had appeared on the Philips album, on drums; and a guitarist called Mick Ronson. Visconti had met Ronson during the sessions for "Fully Qualified Survivor", the album he had produced for Michael Chapman.

Visconti knew Bowie was looking for a guitarist and introduced him to Ronson. (They got along famously from the moment they met, according to Ronson, who moved into Bowie's Beckenham home where they spent hours, days and weeks rehearsing and planning their strategy in the basement—"David", Ronson told me, "just KNEW he'd be famous one day.")

It was, presumably, this line-up, with either Cambridge or Woody Woodmansey on drums, that recorded the three singles Bowie released in 1970. All were unsuccessful: first there was "Prettiest Star" (which featured Marc Bolan on lead guitar, and which was re-recorded in 1973 for "Aladdin Sane"), then in June came an electric—and brilliant—version of "Memory Of A Free Festival (Parts 1 and 2), which had been previously included in a more whimsical form on the Philips' album; which was followed finally, by "Holy, Holy".

Bowie was chasing success, but fame, fortune and immortality were ahead of him. Frustrations accumulated and, in an attempt to bring some order to his increasingly deranged business affairs he approached a young lawyer named Tony

DeFries. The lawyer, however, soon formed grander plans for his client and himself.

He recognised Bowie's potential talent and, having secured his release from his manager, he took over Bowie's management. In May, 1971, Mercury—Bowie's third record company—released "The Man Who Sold The World", an album of extraordinary power and imagination—or so we fans were convinced—which, although it was not a great commercial success, was to prove to be a crucial turning point in Bowie's career.

American critics, especially, responded enthusiastically to the vivid apocalyptic moods and tone of philosophic inquiry they discovered in Bowie's songs ("All The Madmen", for instance, and "Saviour Machine", "After All" and "The Supermen").

The public once again, however, resisted Bowie's challenging assertions and were reluctant to embrace his voice as an expression of popular importance. He worked rarely following the release of this album. (Ronson has mentioned a few gigs, like one at London's Roundhouse where Bowie, to jeers from the audience, and he performed an acoustic set that included songs like Van Morrison's "Madam George" from "Astral Weeks").

So, DeFries took him to America to promote the album and began to construct around Bowie a mystique, an image neatly based on his professed bi-sexuality (the original sleeve of "The Man Who Sold The World" had featured Bowie reclining on a couch in full length Lauren Bacall drag, kitted out in a flowing satin dress, and the wild lyrics to "The Width Of A Circle", a bizarre homosexual fandango propelled by the incendiary guitar of the kamikaze Ronson, combined

Morgen gehört denen,
die es kommen hören.

L'AVENIR APPARTIENT
À CEUX QUI SONT CAPABLES DE
L'ENTENDRE APPROCHER.

明日(未来)の足音を聞く
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Il domani appartieni a chi
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Space Oddity
LSP 4813



The Man Who Sold The World
LSP 4816



Hunky Dory
SF 8244



Ziggy Stardust
SF 8287



Aladdin Sane
RS 1001



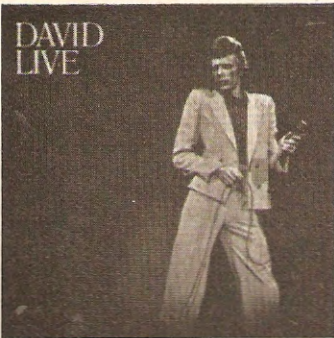
Pin-Ups
RS 1003



Diamond Dogs
APL1 0576



Young Americans
RS 1006



David Live
APL2 0771



Changes One Bowie
RS 1055



Station to Station
APL1 1327



Low
PL 12030



"Heroes"
PL 12522

RCA

Also available on cassette

**Tomorrow belongs to those
who can hear it coming.**

to emphasise and enhance this notion of his dual-sexuality).

It was this outrageous, and fleetingly controversial, image that DeFries and Bowie manipulated onto the front pages of the music press—eager for some excitement, as ever—in December, 1971, when Bowie released "Hunky Dory". The public this time would not be so indifferent to his ambition and talent.

Michael Watts, reviewing "Hunky Dory" in the *Melody Maker* on January 15, 1972, offered this opinion: "Possibly, just possibly, David Bowie could be the biggest thing to come out of Britain this year." The next week, David was on the front page of *Melody Maker*, the Hollywood vamp look of 1971 having been replaced by a more androgynous, cropped-headed, but still effeminate look.

The style was, by the summer of that year and the release of "The Rise And Fall Of Ziggy Stardust And The Spiders From Mars", a universal fashion, recreated by every kid with a yearning for the kind of carefully contrived deviancy and pseudo-decadence which Bowie had come to epitomise. And, it became, clear, Bowie had a stronger hold over the imagination of this audience than any other rock star. He appealed to them on so many levels of fashion and emotion that most rock stars were made to look redundant and impotent by comparison.

"Hunky Dory" established Bowie as one of the most sophisticated, mature, thoughtful and authoritative songwriters in contemporary rock. He seemed capable of composing virtually anything from the most straightforward, but always telling, pop songs like "Kooks" and "Changes"—with its deeply intriguing lyrics—to the mysterious and

highly provocative essays of "Life On Mars" and "Quicksand".

It also reminded those who'd forgotten that he was a superior parodist. "Queen Bitch", for instance, was a brilliant piece of New York sleaze, utterly redolent of the Velvet Underground and Lou Reed, while "Song For Bob Dylan"—quite an audacious piece, anyway—was a clever impersonation of that singer's vocal and musical style. The whole thing was topped off by the eerie, bizarre riddles of "The Bewley Brothers".

Something for mental cases of all ages, indeed.

"Ziggy Stardust" was even more brilliantly audacious. Bowie, clearly anticipating his own success to a final climax that was—in retrospect—frighteningly accurate, drew fully on his theatrical sensibilities to create a wonderfully vivid scenario in which he assumed the title role ("so inviting, so enticing to play the part"), of the ultimate rock star who comes to prominence as the Earth enters the last five years of its existence. Its triumphs, suffused in bold bravado, style and wit, brought Bowie into the vanguard of British rock.

Bowie and DeFries were characterised as the most successful and adept management/artist collaboration since Elvis and Tom Parker. And it wasn't far from the truth. They both shared similar megalomaniac tendencies.

Bowie wasn't interested in a singular stellar orbit. He wanted people up there beside him: most specifically people with who he had something particular in common. So, MainMain, the company organised by Bowie and his manager, recruited into their camp Iggy Pop, Lou Reed (who made a fairly embarrassing

appearance with Bowie at the Festival Hall in 1972), and Mott the Hoople.

Mott were trembling upon the very edge of disintegration when Bowie approached them with "All The Young Dudes", which he produced as a single for them (it was followed by a less impressive album). He also placed himself in charge of the production of Iggy's "Raw Power" and Lou Reed's "Transformer" (the recording of which Mick Ronson has described as "a bloody shambles"), which at least gave Lou a hit single with "Walk On The Wild Side". But, for all this accumulating success there was the suspicion, voiced even among his admirers, that Bowie was taking it all too far, too fast, and without enough care and consideration.

"Aladdin Sane", an album based for the most part on the impressions of America gleaned by Bowie during various U.S. tours and written during his visits there in late 1972 and early 1973 (with the obvious exception of "Prettiest Star" and his cover of the Stones "Let's Spend The Night Together"), was a crushing disappointment. I can, at least, listen to it now—and fully admire the fiercely impressionistic "Panic In Detroit", the fullblooded punch of "The Jean Genie", which like the similarly impressive "Drive In Saturday" was released as a single—but overall I still think it one of Bowie's most ill-considered albums.

In May, 1973, he became the first rock star to attempt a concert at Earl's Court in London—a hall so cavernous it would be better left to the Motor Show and the Ideal Home Exhibition. The event was a sorrowful disaster that tripped along the borderline of disaster and chaos.

The audience, clearly dissatisfied with



the concert's location and their enforced distance from their hero, staged a feeble, but unpleasant riot at the front of the stage. It was announced that Bowie would leave the stage—which he did—until they returned to their assigned seats. Bowie disappeared. They returned, cursing, to their seats. Bowie returned to the stage. They returned, brawling and angry, to the front of the stage. Those who cared skulked off to get drunk...

Bowie, himself, must have been affected by the debacle. In July, from the stage of the Hammersmith Odeon, Bowie announced he was retiring; thus confirming the pestering criticisms of those who were convinced that he'd extinguished his talent in that first glorious rush of albums.

But he continued to record, despite his emphatic declaration that he would not tour again. In October, 1973, he released "Pin Ups", which he had produced in France; it was a collection of interpretations of songs from the Sixties. A diverse ragbag of songs including some inspired arrangements of the likes of the Syd Barrett/Pink Floyd psychedelic opus "See Emily Play", the Merseys' "Sorrow", the Easybeats' great "Friday On My Mind" and—an ironic inclusion, but a devastating reading—the Kinks' "Where Have All The Good Times Gone".

I'm still not convinced of the album's true worth. It's an entertaining diversion, but I still find—unfashionably, I'm sure—Bryan Ferry's "These Foolish Things", a similarly-designed collection drawing on much the same sources, a far more satisfying and amusing venture.

"Pin Ups" was the final performance on record by the Spiders From Mars, the Mick Ronson-led aggregation that had backed Bowie on "Hunky Dory", "Ziggy Stardust" and "Aladdin Sane". The last time he worked with this group, in fact, was late in 1973 at the Marquee in London. Bowie was filming a segment for America's *Midnight Special*.

The working title for this film—which included among other monstrosities Marianne Faithfull done up as a nun for a duet with Bowie—was "The 1980 Floor Show", a deliberate amendment of George Orwell's 1984.

Bowie, it had been strongly rumoured, was then working on a musical adaptation of Orwell's classic novel of a totalitarian future (what an appropriate choice for Bowie, though!). The musical, according to the rumours, would be before long presented in the West End, afforded a spectacular presentation.

That production, of course, never saw even the shadows of the West End, never mind a stage and a lavish presentation. But in a frighteningly mutated form the music intended for that show appeared in the summer of 1974, in the controversial form of the "Diamond Dogs" album.

A cursory ear to the introduction of this album promised something a shade bizarre. "And in the death the last few corpses lay rotting on the slimy thoroughfare," Bowie recited cheerfully over assorted electronic screams, vaguely melodic undertones and a mad dog howl that climaxed with Bowie screeching, "THIS AIN'T ROCK 'N' ROLL—THIS IS GENOCIDE!"



I thought the album was terrific but wasn't in a position to say so. The rock critics — proving once more their unique perception — took it for a shabby joke and laughed all over it. But then — it WAS a bewildering synthesis of punk rock (Bowie ahead of everyone as usual), punk S.F. in the manner of, say, Harlan Ellison, and Burrough's The Wild Boys, and punk philosophies. And all this, it seemed even to those who recognised fleeting fragments of coherence, had been strung together in desperate and random panic.

If ever an album was close to being a suicide note it was "Diamond Dogs". And as if to further his terrible desperation, Bowie soon after its release embarked on a massive American tour that left even those who were veterans of such treks violently exhausted. Tony Newman, Bowie's drummer on that ferocious blitz on America, once described the touring show as "Broadway on the road".

Bowie, like a mad architect, mounted one elaborate effect upon another against a complex backdrop; and he didn't seem to care whether it collapsed upon him or not. Perhaps he was beyond all such concerns by that time. Certainly, "David Live", the harrowing album recorded at the Tower Theatre in Philadelphia on that tour, presents an intense rock-verite documentary account upon his physical and musical decline.

Releasing that album was a courageous step toward rehabilitation, perhaps: it clearly revealed that he was no longer in complete command of his talent and by confronting his public with direct evidence of his collapse, he forced himself into a period of reassessment (if you always thought of that album as a bummer, listen to it again with some sympathy for Bowie's predicament and you'll recognise its true value as a documentary insight into the pressure and confusion to which many rock heroes are plunged — and what happens when they get more than a little strung out on fame and drugs and their own egos).

"I've never played it," he said of that album last October. "The tension it must contain must be like a vampire's teeth coming down on you. And that photo on the cover! My God, it looks as if I've just stepped out of the grave. That's actually how I felt. That record should have been called 'David Bowie Is Alive And Well And Living Only In Theory!'"

Bowie went into relative isolation in New York, where in seclusion he composed the songs that would eventually appear on "Young Americans", which was released in March, 1975.

To those convinced that Bowie had exhausted his creativity early in his career and had since been floundering in confused directions trying to make sense of what talent he had left, "Young Americans", with its protracted mood of anguished self-examination, must have seemed like a last despairing lunge at some kind of retreating success. A facile exercise in self-pity and cultured melodrama, even, laced with melancholic introspection.

OVERLEAF: BOWIE AND MICK RONSON

Aladdīn Sane





And, to be sure, "Young Americans" found Bowie in a far more introspective mood of reassessment than anything he had previously recorded. But his despair and isolation, far from provoking melancholic exasperation, pushed him toward a more positive and determined outlook.

It's a far braver album than its critics at the time appreciated — with only one notable exception, as far as I can remember — and the introverted mood of the lyrics belies Bowie's determination to overcome apprehensions he was suffering. He had clearly tired of the white rock 'n' roll style which he had so thoroughly deployed on previous albums and here moved into an area he was later to describe as "white plastic soul".

It was recorded with a group of musicians he was to retain as a working nucleus for all his subsequent recordings, including those European productions that marked his return to the very vanguard of contemporary rock. Carlos Alomar (guitar), and Dennis Davis (drums) appeared on the album, and have been with him since; and bassist George Murray joined them shortly after.

The basic mood of "Young Americans" was bleak and harsh; with Bowie facing for the first time the consequences of his past manipulations of identity. Here, though, he stripped away all pretence. In the words of "Win", he was "hanging" for the first time "naked and wild", as we'd never seen him before. But the music, paradoxically, was free and rich, exotic even, with Echoplexed saxophones and brilliant vocal arrangements adding particular depth and texture to his music.

It is another paradox, perhaps, that "Young Americans" — such a painful album to produce, he later confessed — should prove to be his greatest commercial success in America. "Fame", the Bowie-Carlos Alomar-John Lennon collaboration, was released as a single and reached number one, and the album itself went gold in August, 1975.

Those who still considered this new musical development in Bowie's career as just another passing infatuation — this time with black dance music and stylised disco rhythms — must surely have been surprised when Bowie pursued the style still further, and pushed it to even more extreme limits with "Station To Station", which was released in January 1976.

"Golden Years", another successful single, and the immensely powerful "Stay", both exquisitely crafted songs, took the basic form of contemporary, slick soul/disco and developed it into a deeply personal style, perfectly suited to the author's continued mood of anguished introspection.

But Bowie, with these albums, was not merely refining existing musical styles to win over a popular audience. "Station To Station" seized the musical power base of white plastic soul first explored on "Young Americans" and used it as a kind of launching pad into the unknown.

The title track alone found Bowie creating a weird new musical universe with insane heavy metal parades clashing with strutting soul rhythms and the florid piano of Roy Bittan (from Bruce Springsteen's band), with his own, peculiarly operatic vocals smeared across the top of this potent mixture like a voice from the far side of hell.



Bowie's audience and critics were, however, barely allowed the time to fully assess the considerable implications of "Station To Station" before he was hitting them from another direction; namely his full scale acting debut (he'd appeared earlier in a walk-on role in The Virgin Soldiers) as Thomas Jerome Newton in Nicolas Roeg's ambitious movie, The Man Who Fell To Earth.

It was, as was mentioned at the time, typical of Bowie's restless imagination and intellectually ambitious personality that he should choose for his first starring role a principal part in a movie that so deliberately sought to break new cinematic ground, and even make a direct attempt to create a novel cinematic language by attempting to completely reorganise established narrative structures.

The collaboration between Bowie and Roeg (who had earlier directed Mick Jagger in Performance and whose previous film had been the widely acclaimed Don't Look Now with Donald Sutherland and Julie Christie), was especially interesting because of the clear correspondence of their ideas.

Roeg, in various interviews, for instance, had expressed an appreciation of the usefulness of ambiguity in art; an inclination that Bowie, of course, shared. Neither saw ambiguity as a means to simply disguise or conceal inherent weaknesses, but as a process that might enhance and liberate their respective endeavours, and through which they might be free to introduce to their work elements of genuine surprise and embrace contradictions of ideals and intentions to create subtle but eventually quite telling tensions that might deeply excite the sensibilities of their audience.

It must be said, though, that "Station To Station" was, conversely, the least ambiguous of Bowie's albums to date — though the lyric content was occasionally oblique, if not totally impenetrable. "Station To Station" confronted the spiritual malaise of the Seventies with unprecedented frankness and succinct emotion. Bowie hid behind no ornate disguises, no elaborately conceived facade. His concerns and anxieties were clearly expressed and moving in their genuine apprehension.

He had realised, perhaps, with "Diamond Dogs" that a retreat into total fantasy was today inadequate if he was to confront and measure through his art the complexities and terrors of reality.

In 1972, when Ziggy was the nazz, it might have been novel and exciting. But as the decade rolled toward an ominous climax, such devices as he had previously employed must have taken on for him the character of a useless costume parade of shallow impersonations. Fantasy, he seemed to realise, can only be sustained if it is to be used at all creatively and forcefully only by a perpetual confrontation with reality.

Whether you accept "Station To Station" as just a great pop album (which it certainly is, and that's no mean achievement), or an ambitious work of considerable depth with no little emotional and psychological complexity (which I would venture it also is), what can't be denied is its vivid impact and enormous power.

From the dangerously lunatic prayer, "Word On A Wing", which found him



holding a weird debate with God (no less) — “just because I believe, don’t mean I don’t think as well/don’t have to question everything in heaven and hell” — to the vicious thrust of “Stay” and the fantastic, panoramic sweep of the title track, “Station To Station” remains one of his finest works. A courageous and valiant attempt to confront the contemporary paranoia and spiritual confusion of a generation (whom he had always addressed more directly than almost any other rock star) for whom the future was a dangerous and treacherous wasteland.

Bowie returned to Britain in May, 1976, for his first concerts since he announced his premature retirement at the Hammer-smith Odeon in July, 1973. He arrived for these concerts — six nights at London’s Empire Pool in Wembley — the centre of a controversy that had been provoked by his alleged comments about fascism in Britain.

His comments were interpreted by some as a flippant advocacy of extreme right-wing policies. Others saw in his remarks a prophetic nature, a warning rather than a gesture of support for fascist doctrines (Bowie later attested that neither was the correct interpretation; he felt that he had simply been misunderstood and that too much had been made of his observations).

The audience that flocked to London during that week of memorable concerts at the Empire Pool were, however, less concerned with the ostensible political views of Bowie or whether he was some kind of closet fascist. They’d arrived only to hear his music and applaud his return. They were excited that they had been granted the opportunity of seeing him once more onstage in Britain after an absence of three years.

And these shows in London proved brilliantly and emphatically that Bowie

was able to command and influence the mood and opinion of his audience to an extent that no other figure in contemporary rock could even begin to challenge. And when, during these concerts, he performed, and dedicated to his audience, “Oh, You Pretty Things”, the bond that existed between the performer and his audience was so forcefully expressed that even the most impartial observers were forced to acknowledge and recognise the powerful impact of Bowie’s personality upon the collective imagination of this generation of fans.

They greeted “Rebel, Rebel” virtually as an anthem; they came to the concerts dressed in emulation of the various styles popularised by Bowie during his career — from Ziggy lookalikes in space age drag, to the new austere look he currently favoured — and spoke admiringly of his ability to change, alter and discard personalities. They loved him for his insistence upon change and surprise. He was the living embodiment of all their wildest fantasies; and he represented through his music, and its similar emphasis on change and novelty, their anxieties, frustrations and aspirations.

The shows themselves were brilliantly staged (some would still argue persuasively that they remain the most exciting ever seen in London — even some who share no particular sympathy or admiration for their architect). There were, inevitably, theatrical overtones to the product; but Bowie eschewed for the most part the outrageous theatricality of his past to concentrate instead on a kind of presentation that more fully represented the new depth of his music.

The dazzling use of banks of penetrating white light that bathed the stage and blinded the audience referred directly to the kind of lighting familiar to students of

Expressionist cinema; and the whole feel of the production, allied to Bowie’s own austere appearance — dressed in tight black pants and waistcoat, white shirt open at the neck, with his hair swept back and slicked down — was redolent of a Thirties’ Berlin cabaret; an image entirely appropriate for the essentially bleak mood of his new songs.

The sophistication and maturity of this presentation and Bowie’s performances set him ahead of all competition. The Rolling Stones, when they played only a week or so later in London at Earl’s Court, were made to look cheap and tawdry by comparison.

I remember Jagger arriving for Bowie’s final concert at the Empire Pool — Bowie greeted him with a nervous wave during “Suffragette City”, I recall — and ol’ Mick’s heart must have slumped to his boots when he saw that show and the fierce depth of the audience’s allegiance with Bowie.

He left before the end; I didn’t blame him. He must have been choking in desperate envy. Bowie at those concerts was flushed with the energy of youth. A week later the Stones at Earl’s Court looked like a gang of old men, completely out of touch with their audience.

David Bowie would later describe the recording of both “Young Americans” and “Station To Station” as traumatic experiences; but found encouragement from the latter’s achievements because he felt that he’d discovered a direction for his musical talents that he could successfully follow without the sense of hopeless frustration that he felt had lately been creeping into his work.

In his last year in America Bowie had almost given up completely on Anglo-American rock ‘n’ roll; it satisfied not all his restless ambition. He started listening



exclusively to the music being produced by European groups like Kraftwerk and T. Dream, and to composers like Philip Glass.

He realised that to keep alive his creative impulse he must return to Europe: "I had to experiment. To discover new forms of writing. To evolve, in fact, a new musical language . . . I was tired with my methods of writing. I wanted, generally, to re-evaluate what I was doing. I realised that I'd exhausted that particular environment and the effect of that environment upon my writing. I was afraid that if I continued to work in that environment I would begin repeating myself.

"That's why I returned to Europe."

So Bowie, two years ago, moved to Berlin, to which he was attracted by its cultural associations — particularly with Expressionism — and its vividly transient mood.

Those close to him have observed that his return to Europe coincided with a period in his life marked with frustration and depression. He was bound up in legal complications and litigations with former business advisors and his erstwhile manager and head of the MainMan organisation, Tony DeFries and seriously confused about this creative direction. These tensions were documented, if not entirely resolved, on his first "European" album, "Low", released early last year.

It was produced by Bowie and Tony Visconti in Berlin, at the Hansa-By-The Wall studio, and at the Chateau in France. The musicians involved included Carlos Alomar, George Murray and Dennis Davis from the "Young Americans" and "Station To Station" albums, but more significant to the resulting album was the presence of Brian Eno.

Bowie and Eno had been impressed by Eno's "Another Green World", his various experiments with Robert Fripp and his involvement with electronic music. During his stay in London for the Wembley concerts in the summer of 1976, he had contacted Eno, and proposed that they should collaborate on some future project.

"Low" was the first result of that collaboration, and it marked a radical departure from everything Bowie had previously presented to his public. Even the more extreme moments of "Station To Station" could not have prepared his fans or his critics for the music Bowie and Eno produced together on "Low".

Bowie completely eschewed the narrative structure of his early songs, and moved even further from the oblique gestures and suggestions that had constituted parts of the lyrics to the songs on "Station To Station".

But the most extraordinary departure from his earlier musical style was to be found on the second side of "Low". Conventional vocal techniques were abandoned utterly, and those tracks that did feature any kind of vocal performance at all found Bowie experimenting with phoneticism, to create a mood of almost alien intensity — "Warszawa", for instance — and brooding desolation.

Interestingly, some critics who had previously stood off from Bowie in their admiration found "Low" the most impressive of the records he had produced; perhaps they instinctively recognised that

Bowie was waving farewell to the charades and pantomimes of his formative years and was now approaching a more mature perspective.

The faith of these critics was rewarded with the appearance in October, 1977, of "Heroes" (which was voted, almost unanimously, Melody Maker's Album of the Year last December). The tentative explorations of "Low", and much of its desperate air, was replaced by a defiant confidence and a careful optimism that mitigated the darker overtures of many of the images in the lyrics presented here.

"Heroes", then, was in part a restatement of the artistic intentions first expressed on "Low". It was produced again in Berlin with his regular nucleus of musicians, supported by Eno, and with the addition of Robert Fripp on lead guitar. But there was no repetition, and while there were superficial references in style and content to "Low", this new album offered further proof of Bowie's striking maturity.

The predominant tone was of frightened speculation on our troubled future — there is a marked preoccupation with a disturbing vision of a futuristic society bereft of all values and heading for the cosmic dumper — but the language and form of these songs entertained no conventional narrative structures. They were less speculative essays than concentrated images, strung together with pertinence and confidence in the technique.

But the album was really overshadowed by the title track. A six minute epic of such fervent passion and determined optimism in the face of incipient danger and defeat, and invested with a deep compassion rare in Bowie's work, that it impressed me — and does still — as his finest achievement.

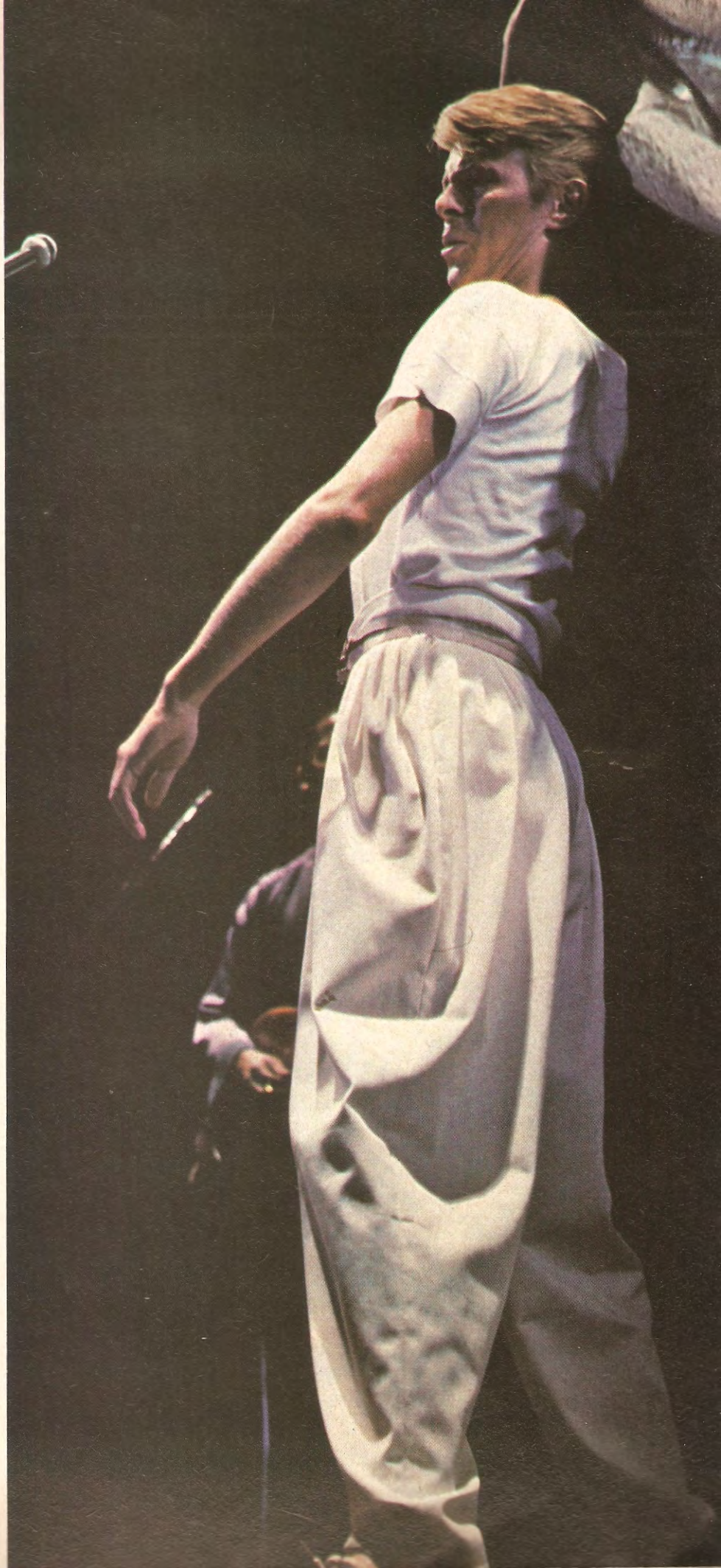
These victories, however, have been won at some cost to Bowie's commercial value. These recordings, in their honesty and conviction, have been too extreme for these more refined temperaments in Bowie's audience who do not share his taste for danger and experiment.

His current American tour, for instance, is rumoured to have been received indifferently by those who demanded more conventional expressions of his talent. As Lou Reed remarked, Bowie is alienating one part of his original audience — perhaps a large part — even faster than he is attracting new admirers. It's a dangerous and courageous game he's playing. But he has not seemed to have spent much of his time in any deep worry about the situation.

His creative energies have been as inexhaustible as ever. He has recently completed a movie in Berlin — *Just A Gigolo*, directed by David Hemmings, in which he co-stars opposite Kim Novak and Marlene Dietrich — and will shortly, it is believed, begin filming *Wally*, a bio-pic directed by Clive Donner, in which he will play the Expressionist painter Egon Schiele.

But he refuses to limit his activities to one specific area. Acting, he says, will not dominate his interests. Perhaps he will soon return to Berlin or Vienna to study art. I just hope someone pushes him soon in the direction of a recording studio.

So often it has seemed (as I've said before), Bowie is virtually alone, it sometimes appears, is attempting to create truly modern music for the modern world.





Bowie on Bowie

Interview by Michael Watts

This interview with David Bowie was conducted in Berlin at brief intervals during four days' filming of *Just A Gigolo* which Bowie was shooting alongside Kim Novak and under the direction of David Hemmings. The interviewer had to put up with the film

crew playing trumpets and old gramophone records of German marches, as well as a film extra belting out songs at the piano. "I hate these blues sessions," says Bowie. Once, a long time ago, however, he used to play sax behind Sonny Boy Williamson . . .

PEOPLE do associate you with futuristic things, don't they?

I don't know now whether it's so futuristic. I never thought of myself as a futurist. I always thought I was a very contemporary sort of figure, very Nowish. Rock is always ten years behind the rest of art; it picks up bits and pieces.

I mean, I only picked up Burroughs years after it all happened in literature, and actually applied it to my work. The application wasn't made until years after it was a dead and gone style; it'd been finished in literature a long time.

And that happens with rock. It's only just reached Dada now. So, as far as putting me as a futurist, I think the fact is I'm as contemporary as I feel I need to be, and a lot of the rest of what's going on pays a retrospective look to what's gone down before.

It's work generally in an atmosphere that's about five years behind. There's so much of it that it seems to represent today, but it isn't, in fact: it's using references and feelings and emotions from a few years back.

I've always thought there was a lot of England 1890s about you as well. Beardsley and Wilde, etc.

Oh yes! That was a very strong influence, the idea of the Aesthete, the elitist (laughs) — a point which Brian (Eno) and I share. I think there's a large snob factor in what I do.

You once said to me, "I'm an actor, not an intellectual," and yet critics see in your records ideas rather than emotions.

I've decided I'm a Generalist now!

A Generalist?

Yes. I thought that just about covered all grounds. It encompasses anything I wish to do, really. I find, for instance, I really want to paint seriously now, and not toy with it, and I am painting very seriously now, every available moment.

And I'd like to be known as a painter one day when I get up the nerve to show them. But I want at the moment to be known as a Generalist rather than as a singer or a composer or an actor. I think a Generalist is a very good occupation to have.

HOW about this contrast of ideas and emotions? Critics do tend to find more ideas in your work than other musicians'.

Again, I think the sum total of the parts is greater than the input, very much so, and especially on the latter stuff that I've done. There were a considerable amount of very diverse ideas that went into the album, but the sum total of all those ideas is something extraordinarily different to that which I expected to come from the album when I made it.

For me, listening to "Heroes" is quite as new an experience as any other listener listening to it. They're never what I expected them to be.

There was, apparently, a quite casual, happy atmosphere in the studio with Eno. But the music didn't turn out that way.

No, no. I thought it was a nice, exercising process, but it turned out to be a

substantial piece of work, which was very satisfying.

Tony Visconti, who helped produce it, told me that you made "Low" because you felt you were becoming predictable.

Yes, yes — I felt I was very predictable, and that was starting to bore me. I was entering an area of middle-of-the-road popularity which I didn't like, with that disco soul phase, and it was all getting too successful in the wrong way. I want and need creative, artistic success.

I don't want, need or strive for numbers. I want quality, not a rock 'n' roll career. My ego is such that I do wish to be recognised as offering something fairly worthwhile, and when I feel it is getting a bit ploddy it embarrasses me and I wish to move on.

Do you think there is a general theme to your records?

(Pauses, then mischievously adopts a Dr. Bronowski voice) "Is there an element of the irrational in the human spirit?" (Laughter) Yes, I think the irrational is very much part of it all, and the combination of the wrong elements in the wrong place at the right time.

That's very vague.

Yes, I don't think I would like to subject myself to complete analysis of my work, really.

With the exception of "Hunky Dory" and "Pin Ups", there's a very chilly, technological feel about much of it.

OVERLEAF: BOWIE AND BAND: SIMON HOUSE (violin) CARLOS ALOMAR (guitar) DENNIS DAVIS (drums)

LEFT: BOWIE IN JUST A GIGOLO





'Brian
Eno got
me off
narration,
which
I was
incredibly
bored
with'

A bit chilly, you think? I think it's not expressed in general, emotive terms: love or anger, or whatever. The emotional scale is somewhere above top C (grins). The emotions on it are those rarely touched by writers. I think. That's what gives it the chilly feeling.

But I don't think they are chilly emotions — I think they are just rather surprising emotions that are lurking in one's head somewhere that are very rarely expressed, possibly because one doesn't feel there's an occasion to express that kind of emotion.

I still don't know whether there is an occasion to express that emotion, but I'm expressing it on those records if anybody needs it!

Well, they obviously do because they're buying the records. Although, without knowing their sales, I would have said that the last two albums didn't do as well as the others.

Oh, no, of course not, no.

And that doesn't bother you at all?

Not at all. It's rather pleasing in a perverse kind of way.

That does smack of snobbery.

Yes, I know it does. Brian says he's most embarrassed that "Before And After Science" is doing so well in New York — of course, he's lying through his teeth, he's very pleased. But he said, "I did everything to put people off buying it. I went over there and did my utmost to dissuade people from purchasing the aforesaid article." In fact, "Before And After Science" is receiving a very good reaction in the States.

But as far as you're concerned, isn't there a chance of you losing your audience?

Oh quite.

But it doesn't bother you?

No. No. There comes a time when you go through the most ridiculous posture of saying, "I'd be really pleased if everybody stopped buying my records so I could go away and do something else". There's an ounce of lunacy at the back of one's mind when the album comes out. "Let's see if this one can really crash, really bomb. There's a little bit of oneself that actually thinks it.

BECAUSE that would mean there's now no constraint to make a record for that particular audience?

Absolutely. And then you can take the whole bull by the horns and just record something underneath a table with a cassette recorder, or whatever, and all those things one says one's gonna do one day.

But Lou Reed tried that with "Metal Machine Music," didn't he, and it didn't work for him?

I haven't talked with Lou for a long time, so it's hard to know exactly what was at the back of his mind. 'Course, he promptly started producing very commercially-orientated albums after that, so I don't quite know whether that was a ploy to lever himself off RCA.

And he went back to his basic theme,

writing about that kind of netherworld.

Yes, yes. I don't think he's too interested in writing about anything else, though. I don't know — I think Lou stays in New York too much. Having said that, of course, I now hear that he's staying in Japan, so it's not entirely true.

LET'S talk a bit about the collaboration with Eno. What do you think you've taken from him?

That's a nasty question, a nasty question.

What has he injected into my music? is probably the more accurate, and what he's injected is a totally new way of looking at it, or another reason for writing. He got me off narration, which I was so intolerably bored with.

Narrating stories, or doing little vignettes of what at the time I thought was happening in America and putting it on my albums in convoluted fashion: Philadelphia, or New York or Los Angeles, "Panic In Detroit" and "Young Americans". Singer-songwriter askew.

And Brian really opened my eyes to the idea of processing, to the abstract of communication. I don't think we agree with each other on everything. We're certainly not that simpatico where we embrace what each other says with open arms.

It's possible also that my word-manipulation in songs has slightly changed his ideas. He enjoys the way that I work with words and melodies.

How do you?

I still incorporate a lot of the Burroughs ideas, and I still purposely fracture everything. Even if it's making too much sense. I now fracture more than I would've done in the past. But it's still a matter of taking my three or four statements and inter-relating them.

Not as literally as I used — I don't use the scissor method very much — but I'll write a sentence and then think of a nice juxtaposition to that sentence, and then do it in a methodical, longhand fashion. A lot of me goes into it now, whereas at one point it was getting very random.

It was far more random on "Low". On "Heroes" it was a bit more thought about. I wanted a phrase to give a particular feeling. But never a song as a whole — I never had an overall idea of the feeling.

Each individual line I wanted to have a different atmosphere, so I would construct it in a Burroughs fashion. There are two or three themes in each song, but they are interlinked in such a way as to produce a different atmosphere per line, and sometimes a whole batch of lines.

But I didn't want to restrict myself with one process, so I would use straightforward narrative for maybe two lines and then go back to disorientation. "Heroes" was about the most narrative, about the Wall, on that album.

On "Low" a "New Career In A New Town"...

That didn't have any words, though. (Intrigued). But did it give you the im-

pression afterwards that it had? Yes, it does, doesn't it? That's exactly what I mean, that the sum of all the parts produces an astonishing feeling and that you really feel that you understood something from it.

"Be My Wife" was quite specific. Was it genuinely anguished, or were you being tongue-in-cheek?

It was genuinely anguished, I think. It could've been anybody, though. But I think as a generalisation what you find on both albums is a potpourri ranging from narrative song to, I suppose, in its own way, surrealism. In fact, some of the songs are very like those I used to write a long time ago, not so very different from something like "Quicksand" which was on "Hunky Dory."

WHAT'S "Sound And Vision" about?

That was an ultimate retreat song; actually, the first thing that I wrote with Brian in mind when we were working at the Chateau. It was just the idea of getting out of America, that depressing era I was going through. I was going through dreadful times. It was wanting to be put in a little cold room with omnipotent blue on the walls and blinds on the windows.

But I do think Brian and I are very good collaborators. I've never been happy collaborating with anyone before to the extent that I do with Brian. We do have such varied interests that it makes for some very interesting speculations in the studio. It's nice to have a friend like that and to work in that relationship. I never thought I would work like that. I always felt very singular.

How did you get on with Bob?

(Long pause).

Bob Fripp.

Oh, I thought you meant Bob Dylan! Didn't get on with him at all. I had a dreadful time with Bob Dylan. Absolutely ghastly. I talked at him for hours. I was fairly flipped out of my head if I remember and I just talked and talked.

The funniest part about it was that I'd been talking about his music and what he should do and what he shouldn't, and what his music did and what it didn't, and at the end of the conversation he turned to me and — I hope it was in jest, but I have a feeling it wasn't — he said (falling into a banal American accent), "you wait till you hear my next album".

I thought, "oh no, not from you, please! Not that, anything but that!" I don't know whether I was in the correct state to appreciate him, but it was the first and last time I ever met him.

He never made any other contact with me (laughs uproariously). That was in New York. I didn't find him odd, that was the problem — there again, when people meet me they generally don't find me as odd as they would have me be, so I guess it's one of those things where you build up a particular picture.

I lost all that fascination for him, I must admit, quite a number of years ago,

though. Once I had quite a thing about him.

Does any rock person now hold any interest for you?

I really don't think so, I really don't think so. At this particular stage I do feel incredibly divorced from rock, and it's a genuine striving to be that way. I refuse to listen to records, refuse to listen to music in general.

Not even Kraftwerk?

No . . . I don't think they have found their niche — I could turn that into a pun but I don't think I'd better! I've found a lot of their earlier work more invigorating than their later stuff, actually. I liked a lot of the stuff that seemed to be free-form.

That was when Neue were with them, of course, and you had two frictional elements working against each other — Neue who were into complete volume against Florian's very methodical planning.

I can't get the same satisfaction out of them now, though I like them as people very much. Florian in particular. Very dry. When I go to Dusseldorf they take me to cake shops, and we have huge pastries. They wear their suits. A bit like Gilbert and George, actually . . . God, whatever happened to those two? I used to really like them . . . When I came over to Europe — 'cause it was the first tour I ever did of Europe, the last time — I got myself a Mercedes to drive myself around in, 'cause I still wasn't flying at that time, and Florian saw it.

He said, "what a wonderful car", and I said "yes, it used to belong to some Iranian Prince, and he was assassinated and the car went on the market, and I got it for the tour."

And Florian said, "ja, car always lasts longer". With him it all has that edge. His whole cold emotion/warm emotion, I responded to that. Folk music of the factories.

WERE you influenced by Kraftwerk when you made "Low"?

I dunno if I was in a musical way. Some of their premises for wanting to make music I found interesting.

You say you don't listen to rock music, and yet you and Eno are producing Devo in Cologne.

Yes. Firstly, I like their music, and then meeting them had a lot to do with it. I found them very interesting people, very much in the same sort of conversational pattern as Brian and Fripp, but an American equivalent.

I felt there was an awful lot of enthusiasm in what they thought they could enter into eventually. The theory of their potential is very strong. I don't think it's fulfilled at this particular moment. You really should go and see them live.

I don't think I'm particularly interested in their basic premise of de-evolution. I just quite like their music and their lyric construction.

"Jocko Homo" reminds me a bit of "The Chant Of The Ever Circling Skeletal Family" off "Diamond Dogs".

'I didn't get on with Dylan at all. I had a dreadful time'

Yes, I like that piece of music, it was good. Actually, some of those pieces off that album would've been quite in place with some of the things I'm doing now, I think. The intro, sans poem, was a very interesting piece of music.

I would like to treat the Overture From Tannhauser in a similar fashion to the way I treated "Bewitched, Bothered And Bewildered". "Diamond Dogs" was a hard sort of album to live with at the time, but it does mature, doesn't it, and gains potency with time?

I don't like a lot of my albums. A complete album it would be hard for me to say I like. I like bits and pieces. A bit of it works exceedingly well, and a lot of it only works.

You prefer to make them and put them out very fast, don't you?

Yes, absolutely. I don't like too much premeditation.

I've heard that you use a peculiar system of notation for the musicians.

I draw the music, the shape that it should look like. I have to draw the feeling because I can't explain it. The musicians who have worked with me have now learned the language. It's very contributive music.

THE last two albums have been a curious mixture of disco funk and New Music, haven't they?

Yes, it's still there, isn't it? I mixed up the bass very high of course, and did very extraordinary and naughty things to the snare drum sound over the last two albums as well. I wanted the snare drum to disorientate.

I was so incredibly bored with the drum sound one hears, especially the American drum sound of the last four, five years: the big, heavy, upfront bass drum, the make-it-sound-like-a-wooden box that's been there ever since "I Can Hear The Rain".

I said, it doesn't cut anymore. So we fooled around with the drums, and found that when we treated the whole drum kit it started to get back to a sort of psychedelic sound, and so we picked out different drums and treated them all individually.

We found that corrupting the snare drum definitely put the whole thing out of focus with the normal perspective of how drums have sounded.

How did you come up with the idea of what I think you called at one stage "plastic soul": the music of "Young Americans" and "Station To Station"?

Mm, had a lot to do with where I was staying, and at that particular time it was New York and Philadelphia. I thought, I don't write soul music but I do enjoy this. I also wanted to keep messing around with my lyrics as well, which are very unsouly.

So I juxtaposed the two: very un-souly lyrics over very soul-influenced music. It's always taking something and just twisting it. It's a very constant way of working that I have really.

In those terms it's predictable in that I will take something, look at it, and then





say, okay, now let's just bend it out of focus and see what that does to our very comfortable positions. A little bit of unease.

You've never experimented with reggae, have you?

No, I don't like it very much. I got rather biased against it... I heard an awful lot of it when I was a kid and I heard even more of it when I was a teenager of the ska and bluebeat variety, and it rather unfortunately — I know it's terribly bigoted — but I find it very hard to come back into liking it again. It still doesn't move me. Maybe I just ain't got rhythm!

GOING back to plastic soul, how did you come up with "Fame", for example?

It was, in fact, Carlos' riff to "Footstompin'" (Carlos Alomar has been Bowie's guitarist for several albums). I wanted to do "Footstompin'", and I said, "Carlos, that is such a good riff. I'm going to take it away from that song, and let's do something with that."

And then Lennon came in and said (Scouse accent) "that's f— great, that! Worra great riff that is!" And then John stood in his spot and made sounds, and it sounded not unlike "Fame".

You know, one often just makes sounds and those sounds become words, and then you think, "gotta word. Now out of that word let's create a subject and evolve that subject." Things often start like that.

Can you contrast that process with "Warszawa", say, on "Low"?

Oh, on my part that was a quite positive idea to try and take a musical picture of the countryside of Poland. But I didn't tell Brian that. The procedure of that one was really quite simple.

I said, "look Brian, I want to compose a really slow piece of music, but I want a very emotive, almost religious feel to it. That's all I want to tell you at this point. What do you suggest as a start?"

And he said, "let's go lay down a track of finger clicks." And he laid down I think it was 430 clicks on a clean tape. Then we put them all out as dots on a piece of paper and numbered them all off, and I picked sections of dots and he picked sections, quite arbitrarily.

And then he went back into the studio and played chords, and changed the chord as he hit that number, and went through his piece like that. And I did a similar thing on my areas. We then took the clicks out, heard the piece of music as was, and then wrote over the top of that according to the length of bars we'd given ourselves. **It sounds incredibly mathematical.**

Oh yes, quite assiduously so. But each of those instrumental pieces was done differently — very, very differently — and that's what retains my interest on these albums.

How about "V-2 Schneider"?

No, that was much more of an idea of a sequence. Except we turned the riff around in the beginning, purely by accident. I started playing the sax riff on the offbeat instead of the onbeat. Halfway through I

I'm just as open to suggestion as ever. How about your advocacy of Nietzsche and homo superior?

They were used very much in defiance more than anything else. I had a period when I was very fond of flaunting suspicious points of view in front of people, merely for effect. I found that very rewarding.

It's hard to remain artistically illegitimate; it's so easy to become legitimate and Establishment. That becomes a cause: "how can I avoid that next?" I'd hate to become part of the accepted cultural set-up. You know, "that's it, nicely, in place." That's not what an artist wants to do.

Your incessant role-playing always led to criticism that you were more interested in style, in synthesizing styles, than content.

Yes, I think I am still, in a way, interested in synthesizing styles.

But not at the expense of content?

No, not at all, no. I think it's a very important mode of working. A style is the superficial arrangement of things as they are, and to juxtapose a few of these styles against each other produces some quite important artistic factors and results.

DO you read your press a lot?

Months and months later. I'm now reading the reviews of "Heroes." There's a wonderful one I've just read, another one of those "he's driven the last nail into his coffin." It goes on about "this record will never move off the counter" and "it has absolutely nothing to say — he's obviously completely lacking in any ideas any more."

Actually, I think it had the line in it, "he can't write a good song anymore!" (Falls about.) Damn right. I think it was American. But I've got to Texas now, and Texas seems to like it a lot. It's the first time it's happened to me in Texas.

But, you see, the only way to remain a vibrant part of what is happening is to keep working anew all the time. For me it always will be change. I can't envisage any period of creative stability and resting on any laurels.

I think for what I do and what I'm known for it would be disastrous. So that's my predictability. Again, it's the elitist in me, but I find it very hard to consider that I am primarily still in pop or rock . . . though I'm not quite sure of what the definition of being in it is.

I mean, I would be the first to say that I am absolutely and completely out of touch with what young teenagers are thinking. I have absolutely no idea.

Not about punk?

Artistically, I can understand, yes. But I don't know whether a 14- or 15-year old on the streets thinks the way I was thinking at that age. I don't know. I think it would be too much to expect that he would be thinking that differently.

By the same token, 30-year olds think very much the way they've always thought, because I look at myself and say, yes, I was told when I was 30 that I would be a lot mellower than I was at 25. And I am,





and it's a fact.

Yes, punks are supposed to be oppressed by the past and figures like you and, more so, the Stones and the Beatles.

Yes, yes. I think that's the point: now music for me is not an expression of generation anymore. I think that has changed. That's a very important point. I was, when I was younger, writing for a particular generation, and I considered it my generation.

Now I have widened my interest in music to not making a statement of a particular generation, but it's a statement of the emotive forces that one feels in particular environments. It's no longer an age thing with me, it's a place thing, and place applies to any age.

So it's music for all ages one wants to fall into, but it's not confined anymore to the generation that used to be interested or, indeed, hopefully is still interested in what I've got to say.

Although, actually, we are going through an incredibly important era. I think the Seventies will have the same chaotic appeal to future generations as the Twenties do to us, to a certain extent. **I hope it doesn't foreshadow another holocaust, as that decade did.**

Well, yes. But I don't think I'll limn that one anymore. It became a bit of a torch in my earlier period.

Of course, we have now entered the Aquarian Age, which is supposed to have terrible consequences.

Enormous. It has always been cited in the past as being the age of unbelievable chaos. And, of course, Haley's Comet comes round in '88. It all falls in place with the more factual, scientific ideas that are going around.

But I've dropped enormous clangers on that before, so I'm not gonna even start on it. A little knowledge can be quite dangerous—or can be put to great effect if it's used only artistically. If it's used artistically a little knowledge can be very symbolic of how people are thinking.

AND how about your professed knowledge of politics?

I have absolutely no interest whatsoever. Never have had, probably never will.

You were needling us all again?

Very definitely, yes.

You have no interest in the political situation in Germany, for instance?

The kind of interest one has if one lives in a foreign country. But may I live and die an artist! Through the ages, though, a lot of artists have used those very spiky little things just to get people at it.

We're not going to see a flesh and blood re-run of Peter Watkins' Privilege, then?

(Laughter.) No, no.

Because the movie was terrible, anyway.

But have you seen it recently? Much, much better than when it was made. It is really worth seeing, and I loathed it when I first saw it. I saw it again a couple of months ago—on Kenyan Airways, I think it was—and it is quite amazing.

Do look at it, and then remember that horrendous gig I did in London years ago—I think it was the retirement gig at Olympia. An enormous arena. And it was all so fanatical and quite horrendous-looking.

It was a cliché at the time, but now it makes a lot more sense, though not for what we thought it was about at the time.

You and Jean Shrimpton as the President and First Lady.

I think not, I think not. I think we've passed along that way once.

YOU left, amid a lot of publicity, MainMan Management and Tony DeFries. How do you feel now about DeFries?

(Long pause) Yes, that's an interesting question. My anger was spent a good couple of years ago, and all the feelings of being used, done-out-of and whatever, I think they're more or less melted into the mist.

I suppose now it was all rather important in a way. I certainly would not have achieved the degree of notoriety, I think, without all that nonsense going on. If I was an egoist I guess I could say that I would've done because my performance was good enough, but one doesn't know.

Without some of those initial ridiculous fusses, some of the best things never come to light. It did come to light through the efforts of him and the crazies who were running around at that time, and so I guess I'm thankful for that period in one way.

But I'll never condone completely what went on. I don't know whether I was absolutely manipulated but I believe all my business was manipulated. I believe that a lot of what were initially very good ideas were cheapened for the sake of getting something out economically rather than going the whole hog and doing things properly.

Stage shows were never what they were supposed to be because suddenly the money was not there to pay for what I wanted initially. Things would always be done on a shoestring and I could never understand why, because apparently we were very, very popular and . . . "where's the money?"

All that was involved. We have settled now. I don't think any of it was amicable, but it's mellowed out now. We have an understanding with each other. We have to deal with each other from time to time—but not on a personal level.

You would never go back to him?

Oh, Lord no! That's absolutely out, it couldn't be further from my mind. I have literally no idea of what he does, where he is and what kinds of things he does anymore. It was an astonishing, chaotic period. Very tumultuous.

What are your feelings now about the sex angle? (In January 1972, at the outset of his career with MainMan, Bowie confessed to the MM that he was bisexual, the first rock star to make such a declara-

tion. The remark had huge reverberations.)

It seems easier for people to assimilate that now than it ever was before. I've got two views about it. Initially, I thought it was a good polemicist's basis; it was something to throw in people's faces. But on the other hand it had a disastrous effect on my credibility as a composer and writer for a long, long time.

Why did you tell me?

Do you know, I've never really understood why. It certainly wasn't a premeditated thing. I was starting to build Ziggy, he was starting to come together, and I was naturally falling into the role; and it was using one's own resources, and you sort of pick up on bits of your own life when you're putting a role together. Bang! it was suddenly there on the table. It was as simple as that.

I read that article again for the first time the other day. It's very coy and embarrassing.

Yes, but imagine in a few years' time, that will become an archetype interview of that period. You mustn't feel embarrassed. No, no! I know exactly what you mean, but you wait and see. Mark my words, mark my words. It's the old McLuhan thing about cliché, archetype.

I'm sure only a few years after he'd made them Chaplin was very, very embarrassed by his first movies—but all these years later! There was nothing like that before then, and a whole school of something or other has come from them.

And I was sort of half-serious then when I said that I'd developed a school of pretension within rock and roll. I can see why I said that. I don't necessarily agree with it now. I only said it as, again, a throwaway. But there is some strength in it, I think. Quite definitely.

I remember an interview about 18 months ago in the Village Voice with Cherry Vanilla (once Bowie's American publicist at MainMan). It was a piece about marketing gays . . .

Oh God. Marketing gays.

And she said, "we peddled David's ass like Nathan's sells hotdogs."

Good Lord. Chronic, isn't it? I hope she meant it tongue-in-cheek. I know what she meant, yeah. She worked very hard at pushing that side of me, because it gave her very easy access into headlines. And all the time that that was going on, of course, I was in another country, so it was hard for me to keep any sort of control.

My compromise at the time was to live with it when I got to America and found out how I'd been set up to be over there, and I thought, "my God, I can't fight this enormous snowball. I'll have to work with it and gradually push it back down to something more manageable."

But I'd just started with Ziggy, and I couldn't suddenly drop it then. He was Ziggy, he'd been created, and that was my piece at the time, my theatre piece. I thought, "well, I'll have to use what

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Ziggy's got and be what God's given him" (short laugh).

And so I had to work with him for a little while in those first few months in America.

You put yourself on the line, too, by involving yourself in other artists' careers. I've always wondered why, considering that you've had such personal success, you should want to build, or re-build, others' successes: Lou Reed, Iggy Pop and now Devo.

I guess it's because there is still a lot of fan in me. I do get impressed with new things. I can't help but be. I like to feel that if I can't do that myself then I'd like to be part of it and try and . . . Especially people who are not being noticed.

I would love to be responsible for helping somebody. I think that's great for my ego.

They've not been acts of unadulterated kindness?

Oh, no, no. Good Lord, no.

But you did receive some rather horrible criticism, particularly in relationship to Lou, that you were coming up on his back.

I did read a lot of that, of course, and I never denied it because it seemed such a shallow observation of what I was doing. There are very, very few parallels between me and Lou Reed.

I think I've only ever written one song like his, and that was "Queen Bitch", and it was only recognised as a Lou Reed song—and I know this for a fact—because I wrote next to it "For Lou".

"Andy Warhol" was next to it.

Oh yes, yes. Those two together. But I don't think my career was based on those two songs, and there is very little else that I have done that is anything near approaching what Lou Reed does or has done. I find it very hard to find a comparison between me and Lou.

I've never written about street people or such, or the gossip of the day, walked like him, dressed like him, looked like him or even performed like him. I think that's really shallow. We got on very well. I found him very witty, in a very New York way. And the same again, I might add, applies to young Iggy as well, 'cause I've also read that a couple times.

But, you know—and I did it partly for the amusement factor—I've always noticed that if I put out certain names as my influences to see if people would pick up on them and then say I was definitely influenced by them, then every time I've done it it has always come back. Always, always, always!

I could say that my greatest influence, in fact, was Tiny Tim, and they'll say, "ah, of course! Quite obviously David Bowie has lifted an enormous amount from Tiny Tim." Always it works in that fashion.

I don't blame anybody because I do it purposely—I certainly used to do those red herrings just to see how it affected people—but it amused me that they would take something like that and

convolute it and make it into a statement of their own.

Let's move from the past to the present. How do you feel about this film as compared with The Man Who Fell To Earth?

A totally different kettle of poisons. This has so far been a far more enjoyable experience. For one reason or another I'm a lot closer to David than I was with Nick (Roeg). Nick is less approachable. David is a far more generous personality. **Roeg's an intellectual.**

Yes, he has those leanings. David not so much; though, of course, he is of a sophisticated nature. Creatively, quite as extraordinary as Roeg in his way.

Do you feel that movie was a success?

I think that's debated by everybody that's seen it. I think there's a lot of pro, a lot of the reverse. I still have only seen it the once—the one time that I saw it in the cinema—and I still feel that I learned more by the actual process of making it than seeing the film in a finished state.

I didn't enjoy it as a movie to watch. It's very tight. Like a spring that's going to uncoil, it's full of terrific tensions. Of course, that's part of the so-called magic of the film.

Yes, I want to ask you whether you saw parallels between yourself and Thomas Newton, the strange character that you played, which is why you took the role.

Oh, that's a dangerous trap to fall into! Sort of, it was quite easy for me. When I did it was hook, line and sinker, I would've thought (Laughter). I mean, Nick exerts such a tremendous influence over one psychologically that one does carry the weight of the image around for a bit afterwards.

HE was a cold, inexpressive character. This is what your image was at that point.

I think I was very frightened of expressing any kind of emotion then, which of course, followed with the most dramatic and traumatic experiences on the "Station To Station" tour when I became over-emotive. I went through great waves of despondency and ecstasy . . . and I'd kept a lot of things pretty well repressed for a few years.

So that was a very cathartic point in your life?

Oh, Christ, yeah. I feel much more on an even keel now.

But you're a volatile man, to say the least. It could happen again?

Yes, I get scared stiff of the idea of touring again because of all kinds of experiences that one has. Once bitten, maybe twice shy. I hope that I don't get back into that situation again.

Do you mean drugs, and other things as well?

All the things. The testing of one's personality to the fullest: can you cope on a tour? When you're shouldering the responsibility of the whole thing, it's quite easy to break up. Either way, you close up or you let loose. My tendency goes either way. God knows how it's gonna affect me.

'There
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Reed'



From idealism to alienation

by Chris Brazier

I'VE been hanging on David Bowie's every word for quite a few years now. I wrote a couple of years back that he was "more important to me than any other artist in any field, living or dead".

If I'm not quite so extravagantly devoted to him as I was, it's partly only as an inevitable result of his distance — in the latter part of his

career, particularly since moving to Berlin and Switzerland and maintaining an unusually low profile, his image has taken on something of the quality of an elder statesman, a kind of remote but highly respected Magister Ludi.

I still hold him in unparalleled awe and I don't think I'm unusual in that: since he first captured the imagination of a

mass audience as Ziggy Stardust, he's dazzled a helluva lot of eyes from his particular stretch of the cultural firmament.

Respect for him, moreover, seems in rock terms virtually universal — he was probably the only established star to be respected by the punks in their most vitriolic phase, admiring, as they did, his creative fluidity

and avoidance of stasis.

It was only when I was confronted at university with the need to study a literary artist in depth that I started looking more closely at the words I'd been hanging on and realised that Bowie's lyrics were as worthy of intense attention and respect as most contemporary novelists or poets.

Idealism and Romanticism

BOWIE's attitude to life and to the world as expressed in his songs can be divided into three clearly-defined phases — idealism, decadence, and alienation — the first of which encompasses all of his early work up to and including "Hunky Dory".

The chart success of his "Space Oddity" single in 1969 gave Bowie his first contact with hysterical teenage fans, and it disturbed him. Refusing to abandon his serious songs for a more commercial stance, he turned his back on rock and devoted all of his time and energy to the running of an arts laboratory in Beckenham. His fervent and idealistic belief in this arts lab, which he set up "to try and promote the ideals and creative processes of the underground", is in itself an introduction to his philosophy then.

By 1969, however, crass commercialisation had reduced the hippie ideal to the level of simplistic pacifism and escapist naivety to facilitate mass consumption. Those who remained true to the original vision of the Underground had, more-

over, become embittered and radical, and were agitating for a violent revolution.

Bowie had little time for the simplified version of the hippie dream, but, equally, the humanitarianism which had been in evidence in his earliest work, and which finds expression in the "Space Oddity" album in the genuinely pathetic picture of an old lady caught shoplifting in "God Knows I'm Good", would not allow him to side with the radicals.

In "Cygnet Committee", while affirming an almost desperate belief in the ideals of the Underground, Bowie communicates his horror of violent revolution. The capitalist "Thinker" is used and abandoned by the radicals, and Bowie makes it clear that this kind of belief in the expendability of any human being, however "bad", leads very easily to the horrific inhumanity of a war in which people are ploughed down, because the revolutionary "love machine" has excluded all but "the shrieks from the old rich" from its awareness.

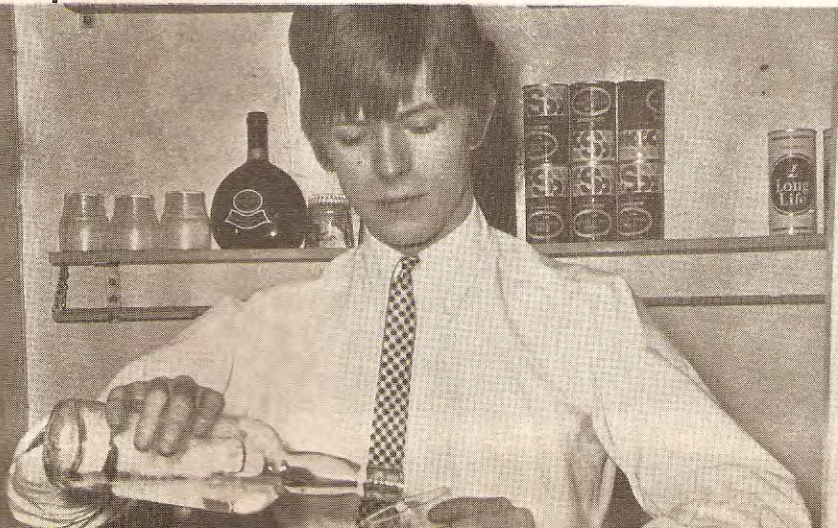
The narrowing of perspective to exclude

all but an ultimate aim involves not only disregarding the nature of the means, but also the perversion of the actual end — the goal becomes not "the State of Love" but the destruction of the enemy. The end product is a world in which real lovers are insignificant beside a sloganised belief in love.

The song demonstrates, above all, the patent and horrific absurdity of the statement "We can force you to be free" — whereas Socialist ideology accepts as a basic premise that individual freedom should be limited, hippie ideology sees that freedom as being of paramount importance and thus ought to reject the idea of coercion out of hand.

Instead, these revolutionaries form a "committee" which attempts the impossible task of forcing the "cygnet" (contemporary man) to become a swan (a fulfilled human, with his full imaginative potential realised).

Nevertheless, Bowie's desire to believe in the goal of complete individual liberation is quite as fervent as his horror



of the violent revolution some saw as the means of attaining it — the “living” for which he yearns at the end is not merely life free from dictatorship but also the “true life” of spontaneity and imagination, as he reveals when he howls desperately “I want to believe/In the madness that calls ‘Now!’”

Bowie's next album, “The Man Who Sold The World”, abandons the overtly personal stance of “Space Oddity” in order to explore this “madness” more fully.

“The Width Of The Circle”, constitutes the protagonist's retrospective view of the road he has taken to fulfilment. The past self upon which he looks back lazily fatalistic, diverting all responsibility on to his god, and thus refusing to assert himself as an individual.

This willingness to “sleep” means that he is very quickly approaching middle age and the stagnation it usually brings, and when, in a moment of vision, the protagonist stands outside himself, he recognises that he has become “a monster”. He turns to the blackbird, whose natural, innocent ecstasy is unrestricted by the society that would deem it “insane”, and it directs him to Kahil Gibran, and, since the “truth” he learns from his philosopher is that “God's a young man too,” Bowie probably has in mind the most celebrated of Gibran's dicta, that from The Prophet which begins “Your children are not your children/ They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself . . .”

The protagonist is thus liberated from the indoctrination of his elders, and, realising that the young must find their own truth, takes his leave of his other monstrous self in order to embrace his youth and explore himself via sex and drugs.

Inevitably his “reputation” suffers in the eyes of the world as a result but this is insignificant compared to the “magic spell” cast by the act of throwing off the shackles of reason, which creates an entirely new set of “morals”. Clearly the “God” who takes the protagonist's “logic for a ride” is not the Christian deity — it is rather the “young” God referred to earlier, who is revealed as Satan in the ensuing lines.

Whereas sex and sensuality are alien to the Christian God, they are the Devil's own province, and Satan becomes the ultimate fulfilment of Bowie's wildest masochistic and homosexual fantasies.

Hence the protagonist rejects the persistent advice of the chorus (which represents conventional morality and normality) to “turn around, go back!” and instead moans “do it again, do it again!” By the end his union with the “snake” is the complete sexual experience has resulted in his becoming a devil himself — “a spitting sentry, horned and tailed”.

Yet in the context of the song this conclusion is far from being horrific — it is rather the ultimate fulfilment of human individuality, an achievement of godhead impossible within the Christian universe, and the protagonist makes it clear that he is “waiting” for the rest of us to take the same path as he has.

The celebration of Satan's energy, of human potential, and of the benefits of sensual excess evident in “The Width Of The Circle”, together with the rejection there of reason and conventional religion, place Bowie's outlook closer to that of William Blake than that of the Underground, though the links with the latter are still manifest.

The rest of the album is devoted largely to the further exploration of these themes. The title-track, for instance, sees Jesus not as having saved the world, but as having sold it to the Christian God; and, in “She Shook Me Cold”, only savage sex can give access to the “peak” of experience.

If the album has a primary theme, however, it is the rebellion against the supremacy of logic or reason which is inherent in the title “The Width Of The Circle” and is reflected in the wild, psychotic drive of most of the music, which locates the work atmospherically on the borders of sanity. This is explored most fully in “All The Madmen”, in which insanity, or freedom from reason, is seen as a higher state.

Bowie's fourth album, “Hunky Dory”, shows him emerging from his exploration of the tortured recesses of the mind to see whether there is any possibility of the potential he believes to exist in man being fulfilled — his mood, as a result, varies from optimism to extreme doubt. He once said that the album was written “when I thought we still had a chance” and thus the future becomes a source of hope, symbolised both as a golden sun which brings the dawn of human fulfilment, and as the sky towards which man will aspire.

In both “Changes” and “Oh You Pretty Things”, moreover, it is rock which

will make possible the evolution into Homo Superior through imaginative liberation.

Bowie's confidence in this future is, however, far from complete. In “Life On Mars?”, he concentrates upon the depressing state of the world at present, while transferring his hope, with determined optimism, to outer space.

To the girl with the mousey hair life is “a godawful small affair”, both trivial and terrible, and the second verse shows Bowie's view of the world to be little more encouraging. For both the girl and Bowie the only hope lies in the possibility that their role as spectators is shared by some extra-terrestrial race for whom human life has the entertainment value of a freak-show because they have transcended violence and evolved to a higher state at least as distant from us as we are from the “cavemen” — such an eventuality would make humankind's evolution into Homo Superior highly probable and thus infuse life with meaning.

The doubt about the future in evidence in “Life On Mars?” becomes far more extreme in “Quicksand”. His belief that in every mortal resides the “potential of a superman” is unshaken, but his own inability to realise that potential draws him towards “the ragged hole” of despair.

Bowie believes that he is close enough to “the Golden Dawn”, far enough down the road to fulfilment to be “living proof of Churchill's lies” (the old world's ideas of patriotism and hierarchism), and for his own choice to be microcosmic of that which must be made by humanity (“I'm destiny”).

If he fails, therefore, to throw off the “tether” of “the logic of Homo Sapien,” to “kiss the viper's fang” as he envisaged himself doing in “The Width Of The Circle”, then humankind will inevitably also fail and Bowie will have to herald “the death of Man”.

Frightened by “the total goal” of the fully liberated imagination and unable to see his target Bowie sinks in the quicksand of his thought and is strongly drawn to the idea that all self-belief is deceitful, and that “knowledge comes with death's release”, though the attraction of this refrain, it appears, could not ultimately overcome the positiveness of the affirmation “I'm living on”.

“Quicksand” sees Bowie, therefore, at a crossroads, tempted to abandon his early idealism.



Decadence

THE OPENING track of "Ziggy Stardust", "Five Years", which imagines the effect of the news that the end of the world is imminent, might initially seem to indicate that Bowie had decided to "herald loud the death of Man". Yet "Starman" is just as optimistic about the prospect of eventual fulfilment as his earlier songs had been.

In effect, "Ziggy Stardust" represents an attempt to run away from his intellectual dilemma rather than to confront it. Lyrically his most superficial album, it constituted little more than a series of poses calculated to capture the imagination of the rock audience.

In "Star" he sees commercial success as a panacea, bringing not only personal fulfilment but a chance to change the world. The latter of these reasons seems to show something of his earlier faith in rock as a revolutionary force, yet by devoting all his energy to becoming a rock star he was not kissing the viper's fang of imaginative revolution but diving instead into the commercial whirlpool.

The idea that stardom represented for Bowie an escape from his intellectual confusion is supported by a recent admission in *Playboy* that: "Being famous helps put off the problems of discovering myself. I mean that. That's why I've always been so keen on being accepted . . ."

Whatever his reasons, Bowie's pose was brilliantly tuned and timed, and "Ziggy Stardust's" blend of simple catchy hard rock, escapist sci-fi, and sex with a chauvinistic flavour, was grasped eagerly by a rock audience in the mood of disillusion and weary cynicism that was the backlash to the idealism of the hippies.

With his glittery outer shell Bowie became the focus for a decadent "movement" in rock, and he has said that at some point he was himself subsumed into the fictional personality and attitudes of Ziggy Stardust.

Yet he certainly began by merely reflecting the mood of the young — he seems to have grasped that the cynical atmosphere made for a general distrust of any truths beyond egoism and hedonism, and to have modelled himself accordingly.

This unquestioning reflection of the world around him is evident in the song he wrote for Mott the Hoople, "All The Young Dudes", which, since "Ziggy





Stardust" was recorded before the end of 1971, represents the only real clue to Bowie's thinking in 1972.

A tribute to the new breed of teenagers, its protagonist sees the Revolution as a thing of the past, like the Beatles and the Stones, related to his elder brother but not to himself, which never happened because there were "too many snags". More important to him is a present full of sensual excess: "Now I've drunk a lot of wine and I'm feeling fine/Got to race some cat to bed."

Bowie was just as content to merely observe on "Aladdin Sane", which not only reflects the increasing preoccupation with decadence in the media and amongst his fans, but also represents his impressions of the wildly hedonistic world of the rock elite into which he had been propelled by stardom.

The result is that the album is a celebration of decadence, both in its cold musical atmosphere and in its lyrical attitudes. The characteristics of this decadent world are outlined in "Watch That Man" and "The Jean Genie".

Bowie's reactions to this decadent lifestyle range from confusion to attraction. He had revealed in "Ziggy Stardust"'s most personal song, "Soul Love", that, although he felt himself to be incapable of loving any more, he had derived from his observation of others a strong belief in love as a powerful inspirational force which could "spark the fusion" between people, creating "new words", new realms of communication.

"Aladdin Sane", however, shows him wandering through a world of people incapable of love, who, like the "Cracked Actor", are obsessed with sleazy, emotionless sex, not only because nothing else arouses in them any sensation, but also because it is the only thing which convinces them of the reality of other people's existence.

"Panic In Detroit" is the only song on the album in which Bowie distances himself sufficiently from his own situation to reveal that his abandonment to decadence has emerged out of disillusion and pessimism about the prospects for revolution.

Detroit, the car-manufacturing centre of America, is the frenzied, machine-orientated rat-race of the modern world in microcosm, and the driving musical arrangement, is designed to keep us fully aware of the panic outside the room which is at the centre of the piece.

The main character is a member of



"the National People's Gang" and is thus ready to lay down his life for the revolutionary cause like Che Guevara, whom he resembles, and posters of whom adorned the bedroom walls of thousands of young idealists during the Sixties.

Even as we watch, however, the Revolution is in its death-throes—the protagonist is "the only survivor" of his movement, and the police's "repercussions" leave only a few people of a similar persuasion alive. Moreover, even these survivors have become "strangers" and the protagonist wants to "stay home"—the failure of the Revolution means that the walls between people remain.

In the middle of the song the focus switches on to the narrator, who lives a lifetime in the space of five lines. He clothes himself, thus marking the end of the open, undisguised innocence of babyhood, and makes his way obediently to school.

His submission gives way to rebellion, however, when he finds his teacher "crouching in his overalls"—when he realises, in other words, that the teacher is a mere tool of the Establishment who accepts humankind's animality and refuses to walk tall in recognition of human potential. He rebels by smashing his "favourite slot machine", the symbol of his submission to a competitive materialistic system, and seems thereby to transcend the ordinary world.

This rebellion is nothing but an ephemeral interlude, however—as the main musical theme re-asserts itself, the narrator makes his fortune and becomes part of the system. The song implies that this cyclic movement from innocent submission through rebellion to experienced submission is inevitable and thus that revolutions are doomed to failure.

The only way for the Che figure to escape the inevitability of this cycle is to commit suicide, and to "collect dust" in nameless obscurity.

After "Aladdin Sane", Bowie began to think again, instead of drifting with the decadent current. Following a train journey across Russia, which affected him deeply, he said something which suggested a return of some of his former idealism: "we're all very normal . . . And it's about time we told people so. Otherwise what those kids are aiming for—I mean the revolution—is going to melt away. It's now we have to revolt. But sensibly—and with thought".

It is perhaps no coincidence that, only

two months later, Bowie "retired" from live performance and stopped using extravagant make-up, thereby effectively renouncing his position as the leader of "glitter-rock" and relinquishing much of his influence over the early teens, the most impressionable and easily-led section of his audience.

His next venture, "Pinups", provides, moreover, the first recorded hints that he wanted to dissociate himself from the malaise of decadence. Re-interpreting the songs he loved as a teenager, his theme is "Where have all the good times gone?" and he yearns for the world of simple optimistic idealism out of which these songs emerged which revolves entirely around romance, something which seems to attract Bowie as he stands amidst the lust-orientated decadent scene.

"Diamond Dogs" tully develops the hints on "Pinups" by presenting Bowie's lurid vision of the kind of horrific world that might be created by a continued obsession with decadence.

The majority of the population has become subhuman and savage, and roams the streets hoping to prey upon a rich elite who spend their time at wild, decadent parties from which even the grossest physical deformities cannot restrain or debar them—the implication is that deformity appeals to the elite's perverse sense of chic, which gives them a disturbing resemblance to the characters who populate "Aladdin Sane".

To the elite, the Dogs are a threatening, malignant force, but there is a definite sense that their destructiveness is justified. Hence, in "Future Legend", their assault on the affluence of "Love Me Avenue" turns useless symbols of decadent pleasure, mink and silver fox furs, to a practical use as "leg-warmers", and the Dogs perhaps hark back to the dark instinctualism of the fantasy figures in Bowie's romantic period.

It is, however, the effect of this completely decadent world upon human relationships which concerns Bowie most of all, the protagonist in "Sweet Thing" is desperate to communicate genuinely with another being, to overcome his isolation.

He strains to do so by having sex in a doorway, which suggests not only that the 'lovers' are out of place here, left in the void between the internal safety of the elite and instinctive freedom of the Dogs outside, but also that they are on the threshold of attaining some higher state through love.

All the couple manage to do, however, is "wrangle some screams from the door," and the protagonist sees the sexual act not as a communion, but as "putting pain in a stranger", as something which makes of his partner a mere receptacle, and which serves only to make him the more painfully aware of his own isolation.

Made "scared" and "lonely" by the solipsism thrust upon him by this experience, he runs to the politicians at "the centre of things" for an answer. This parallels the quest in "The Width Of The Circle", but instead of finding fulfilment the protagonist here is offered by "the Candidate" only a world that is not only sordid but entirely false—the street is a "set", words are "lies", and people wear masks.

The hero articulates a deep emotional need to make contact with a real person rather than a mask—"I want you, I need you/Anyone out there? Any time?"—but his only response is a crude sexual proposition from "a très butch little number".

The Candidate explains that even though sex gives neither insight nor pleasure (people shake "in fright" rather than enjoy it) and even does harm, sexual prowess is the only standard by which a person can be judged, and he and his world are totally committed, with typically decadent irresponsibility, to sensual excess.

The piece ends with the protagonist's unequivocal acceptance of the "cheap" hope offered him—he does not merely resign himself to the impossibility of change, but instead convinces himself that he had never wanted anything else but the "street with a deal" he had previously found so abhorrent. Bowie emphasises the awful nature of the conclusion by transforming the beautiful ascending melody into a raucous, metallic din.

Bowie refuses, moreover, to leave his reasons for portraying this horrific future to the inference of the listener. At the start of the album he cries "This ain't Rock 'n' Roll—this is Genocide," and "1984" attempts to justify this belief that it is rock and the decadent movement he had promoted which are propelling society towards "the savage jaw of 1984".

It is clear that if Bowie was to stop using stardom as "a door" through which to escape from the "heat" of the real world, as he recognises he had been doing in "Rock 'n' Roll With Me", he had to relinquish his role as the focus for the decadence he now found abhorrent and dangerous.



Self-Definition, Alienation and Solipsism

If "David Live" constituted Bowie's point of rupture with his past, it also contained clear indications of his new direction in the inclusion of "Knock On Wood" as the only non-original, and the recording of the album in Philadelphia, the home of soul music at the time.

His break with the past could not, however be accomplished without trauma — in order to leave behind decadence and rock, he had also to leave behind the life he had led since 1972 and the fictional personality of Ziggy Stardust which had taken hold of him.

He has said in *Playboy*: "I realised I had become a total product of my concept character Ziggy Stardust. So I set out on a very successful crusade to re-establish my own identity. I stripped myself down and took myself apart, layer by layer."

In this respect, the title "David Live" is very important. On his previous two albums he had referred to himself simply as "Bowie", the name he had adopted for the purposes of his career. Here it is the career name which is omitted, as if to suggest that the real self beneath the public image is alive again — one could even see in this title an exhortation to himself to begin to live.

His crusade to re-define his personality was eventually successful but, while it lasted, it seemed to drain Bowie of much of his vitality, probably because of the extent of his disorientation at the time; in addition to his identity crisis, he was having to come to terms with both a foreign country (America) and a strange musical form. Indeed, the live album inescapably suggests that he is at his lowest ebb, and not only do some of his re-interpretations fail but he also sounds at times positively desperate.

It is possible that he saw his embracing of soul music as a symbolic gesture, either as a reflection of his own soul-searching, or because soul is traditionally associated with warmth and feeling, and, as such, is virtually antipathetic in atmosphere to the cold, emotionless music of Bowie's middle period.

The latter explanation is conceivable, since "Young Americans" makes it clear that his personal re-definition entailed an openness to emotion which had largely been suppressed for over two years. A recent emotional awakening is acknow-

ledged in "Win" by the words "I've never touched you since I started to feel," and is as much in evidence in the album's warm musical atmosphere as in its lyrics.

Undoubtedly the most important piece on the album is the title-track, in which Bowie re-assesses his attitude to the world and to the revolution that might have changed it. He begins by examining the social malaise in the microcosm of one ill-starred but thoroughly ordinary relationship, and displays more warm sympathy with humanity in one verse than is in evidence anywhere on "Aladdin Sane".

Bowie conveys his attitude to contemporary life by means of a highly subtle technique — the "Young American" of the refrain always represents an ideal, but one which varies drastically according to which character is doing the dreaming. To the wife it means a deluded idea of the perfect husband; to the husband it means young and free bachelorhood; to the revolutionary it is someone who will wear "leather" and fight for change with "a razor".

The "Young American" Bowie wants, and would like to be himself, is simply one capable of spontaneous emotional expression. He retains an ideal, therefore, but one which is drastically reduced in its magnitude and implications from that which he held in his early period.

Bowie's incapacity to surrender to emotion leaves him, on "Station To Station" fundamentally alienated from society. This feeling of alienation was probably accentuated by Bowie's experience as an actor, in *The Man Who Fell To Earth*, for which, he maintained, he "became" Thomas Jerome Newton, an alien who cannot fit into society on earth.

Indeed, the sense that Bowie has transcended the world only to find desperate isolation is inescapable on "Station To Station". This is particularly so in the title-track, which strikes the listener primarily with its vastness: music and lyrics combine to create the impression that massive distances are being negotiated in seconds, and, although Bowie describes himself as "the European cannon", we are aware that he lives in America, and that the ocean he is overlooking could thus be either the Atlantic or the Pacific.

Bowie's main hope in the title-track

appears to reside in love — whereas once he "could never be down" because there were always new "mountains" to conquer, and human aspirations seemed to "soar" with the "sunbirds", now all he can ask is "who will connect me with love?"

The idea of love is so attractive from the midst of his loneliness that he ends the song fantasising about what it would be like to be "stricken". Bowie *has* to conceive of love as something which attacks the individual from outside, as a magical causeway to fulfilment, because otherwise he, the cold, emotionless, "thin white duke" who shatters romance by his very presence, has no hope of experiencing it.

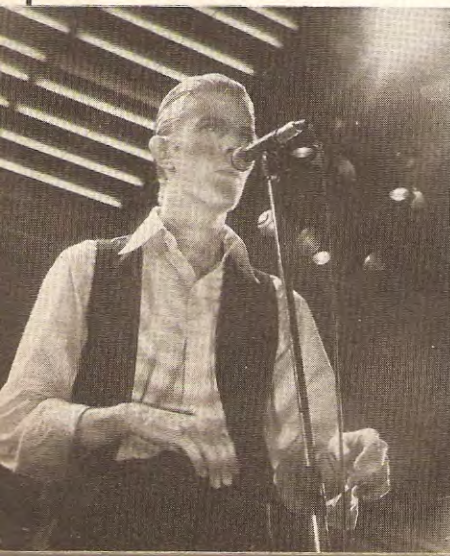
Thus, as the album ends, he appears to be desperately straining to believe in the extravagant romanticism of "Wild Is The Wind", which sees love as powerful inspirational force, a "wind" which blows through the heart.

If love is not magical, Bowie seems doomed indefinitely to the tortured loneliness he feels in "Stay", which sees genuine communication as an impossibility, however much it may be craved — "Cause you can never really tell/When somebody wants something you want too".

The solipsism evident here is by no means a sudden development in Bowie's work, having its origin in his decadent period, in which words are often seen as useless, and distrust of words inevitably means that the media become fundamentally untrustworthy, which is one of the horrors on "Diamond Dogs" and which produces the dictator in "Somebody Up There Likes Me".

His view of the media owes a considerable debt to Burroughs, who is undoubtedly the greatest single influence upon Bowie's recent thought. Both men see the media as manipulative of consciousness, and both even illustrate this conditioning by mentioning the way the Mayans once ruled South America (Burroughs in *Berserk Machine*, and Bowie in an interview with *Creem*).

According to both artists, true communication through language is impossible because language is merely composed of code words which elicit set responses within us and thus limit and distort our apprehension of any reality



beyond ourselves.

Furthermore, the individual consciousness is restricted as well as controlled by its dependence upon words, and both artists may have been influenced here by 1984 — if we accept Orwell's point that the elimination of vocabulary results in the reduction of consciousness, we must also accept that, while we remain tied to language, realisation of our full potential is impossible.

Burroughs' ultimate goal thus becomes escape from language, and he tries to palliate the irony of having to communicate this message through the use of language by cutting up prose and putting it together again at random, in order to challenge the reader's set responses.

Bowie has experimented with cut-ups too, though he has only used the method for "a couple of actual songs," and he has, on occasion, rebelled with great success against the restrictions of conventional vocabulary.

As a musician, however, Bowie has been able to experiment more than Burroughs in the field of extra-linguistic communication, as with the attempt to represent the mantra-drone of human instinct in "Right". His most extreme experimentation is on the second side of "Low", which contains no lyrics — Bowie here merely phonates instead of articulating words.

The music here is bleak, sombre, and depressing, and as lonely, mournful voices wail above the futuristic synthesizer desert, it succeeds in conjuring up the sonic picture of numbing isolation which both

the title and the first side of the album indicate that he was aiming to create.

The songs on the first side do have lyrics, but they are more simple and direct than in any of his previous work, with little or no attempt at subtlety. This may have been because he saw clever expression as pointless, or he may simply have been too low to think properly; either way, these songs show Bowie in the depths of solipsistic depression.

They depict him living alone in a room painted blue, the colour of depression, with "Pale blinds drawn on day/Nothing to read, nothing to say, "and nothing to do but drift into his solitude and wait for "the gift of sound and vision".

Thus even the ability to communicate has to inspire him from outside now, as he hoped love would on "Station To Station", and all the songs show his attempts to communicate with others as abortive. From amidst this nightmare the most simplistic romance, in "Be My Wife", the album's last words, seems as essential and attractive as it is impossible.

Hence Bowie, who began his career striding optimistically towards the "total goal" of imaginative liberation, towards the realisation of the full potential of humanity, winds up trapped in his room, desperate because he is less able to find the fulfilment of a love relationship than the most ordinary of people.

"Heroes", his latest album, at least sees an emergence from these solipsistic depths; an emergence which has been accompanied by a renewed willingness to be interviewed and a new tour.

This, along with his provision of a lyric-sheet for the first time since "Aladdin Sane", suggests a resurgence of confidence in the power of language, though the second side is still largely devoted to impressionistic, wordless sound-pictures.

Besides, his outlook still seems bleak — the songs here mainly consist of fragmented images of darkness and suggest a world out of control, caught somewhere between blackout, nightmare and reality as "you get up and sleep".

The exceptions to the darkness and confusion are "Sons Of The Silent Age", an acute, concise portrait of the middle-aged men who so sleep their way through life that even death is unnoticeable; and the title-track, the pool of light around which the blackness revolves. "Heroes", like the kissing in the rain image in "Blackout", represents a revitalisation of the simple, conventional romantic ideas that seem to attract Bowie so powerfully and consistently in his later work.

Bowie's ability as a lyricist is generally acknowledged, but few people are aware of the depth of his thought, of his early romantic aspirations and humanity, or of his constant concern to re-evaluate his relationship with the world — some critics seem even to doubt his sincerity as an artist.

I can only say that I emerged from an intense study of his work infinitely more convinced than I'd been when I began that Bowie is not only the greatest popular musician of the Seventies, but also one of our most important contemporary artists.

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