

2012 SUMMER SPECIAL

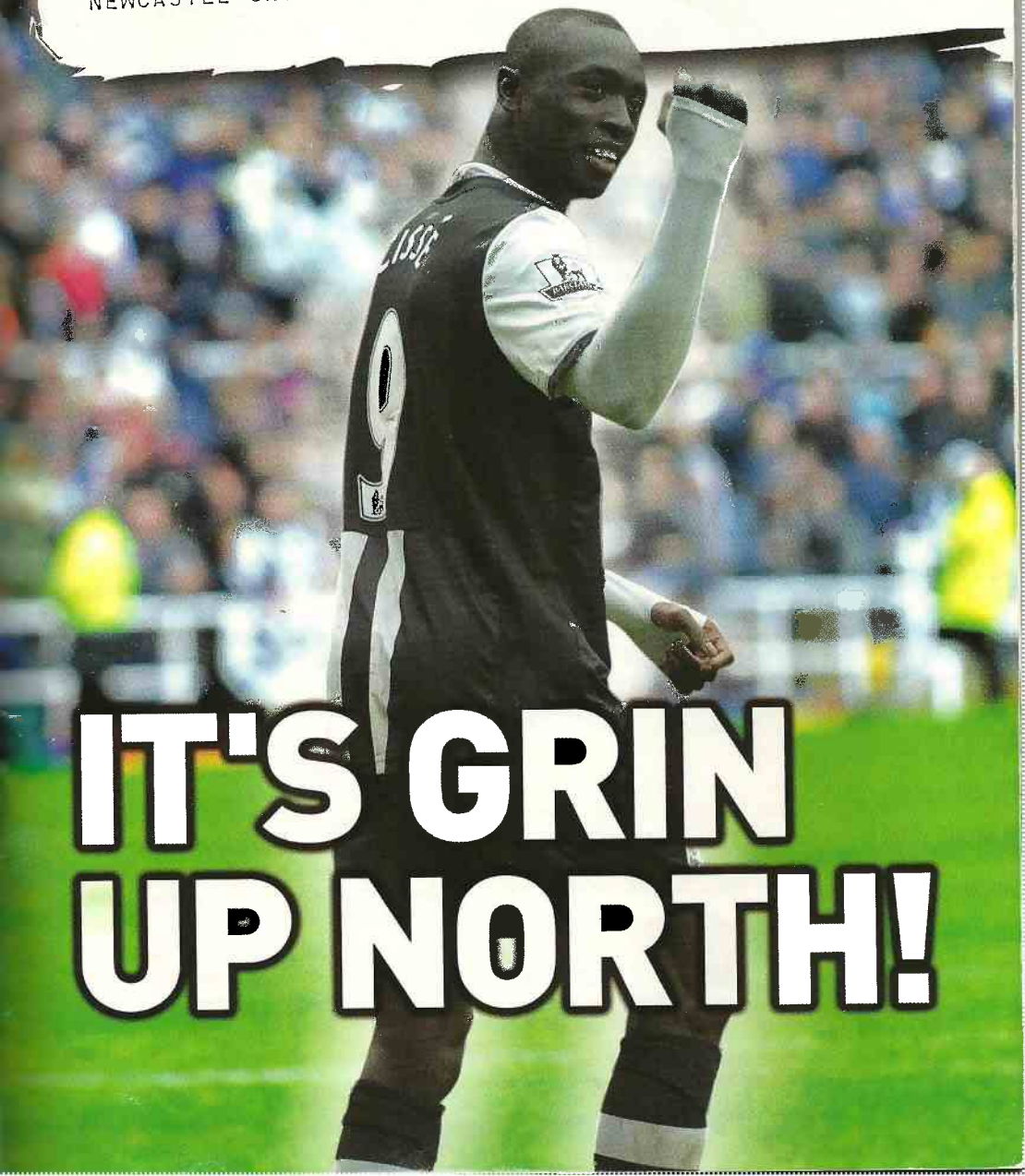
true faith



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NEWCASTLE UNITED FANZINE - THE ALTERNATIVE VIEW



IT'S GRIN UP NORTH!

drums and wires

We catch up with Simon McKay the power behind Newcastle's excellent early 80s post-punk fanzine. Read on

TF: Stupid question first, what made you start a fanzine in Newcastle in 1981?

Simon McKay, ESN: Just loving music and wanting to be involved and get closer to the music I was so obsessed with.

TF: Another stupid question but with the fanzine doing so well, why did you wrap it in, in 1984?

Simon McKay, ESN: The mag was selling well, but my enthusiasm was waning. I wasn't enjoying the bands that were coming through by this time and ESN had always been about the bands who were active and covering whoever came to town: I was finding 60s pop and soul more interesting than the emerging bands of '84 so it was time to stop.

TF: Tell us about how you knocked the fanzine together, who wrote it, designed it, sold it and what kind of response did you get from it?

Simon McKay, ESN: The first issue was done in a week while staying at a friend's flat in York - he owned Priestley T-Shirts: the big thing was he had a typewriter! I had lots of handwritten notes to type up and somehow - without

understanding anything about working in columns and having standard size photos - I cobbled it together. When I got back to Newcastle and found I needed to add bits, like an editorial, I had to do those in my scatty 15 year old handwriting. In response to the first issue, Ros, who was to become a good friend got in touch and offered to type future issues. Stephen Joyce and I started the mag but after a few months we started to receive contributions from a couple of other writers, most notably Dave Martin, originally from Liverpool. Often the contributions came from outside the area and gave us interviews with bands that hadn't been to Newcastle, which felt like a bonus to Stephen and I.

TF: What were the high-points of Eccentric Sleeve Notes?

Simon McKay, ESN: In Jan '83, we had a breakthrough with ESN 4: the Clash were on the cover and we took a chance on increasing the print run from 700 to 1,000 and it worked out. I DON'T have a loft full of that issue or any others. Another great thing about doing the mag was the number of bands that continued to find time to speak to us when they came back to Newcastle. The Au Pairs, Orange



Juice, Blancmange and even some you wouldn't expect like U2 and Depeche Mode who had long since outgrown us but still gave us their time. Now that I've taken the mag online (the back issues and some recent interviews) I'm very pleased to be making available interviews with bands that you can't read about anywhere else, that aren't featured on

Wikipedia, like some of the bands on the Birmingham scene that I met though the Au Pairs i.e. Fast Relief, The Pinkies and Tarzan 5. I'm also very pleased to have the Newcastle focus - interviews with north east bands such as Treatment Room and Neon and also more general material on the Newcastle alternative scene in the early 80s.

TF: Did you have any contacts with the other fanzines around at the time... we hear a lot about the likes of Liverpool fanzine, The End for example?

Simon McKay, ESN: I don't remember there being much else in the north east... I've heard that publishing a fanzine in London was pretty tough because there was so much competition. As I recall, in Newcastle, we had a pretty clear run from 1981-84 so I think we were lucky.

TF: Nowadays a lot of football fanzines have definite music reference points but in the early 80s there seemed to be a chasm between the tribes that went to gigs regularly and the "lads" who went to football. What do you think?

Simon McKay, ESN: Yes, there was a chasm. It seemed to be that you liked alternative music or football. I stopped going to St James in the late 70s as I got into music and the Saturday football crowds in town seemed very scary to me and a lot of my friends by the early 80s. People outside the alternative scene didn't get what it was about and seemed to resent it - there weren't crossover bands like Oasis then. You mention Liverpool... well, I think there was more of link between football and music in that city than any other. I've no idea why though.

TF: Tell us your favourite memories about Punk and Post-Punk in Newcastle?

Simon McKay, ESN: I was 13 when I started going to gigs in '79 and I realised a lot of the bands I wanted to see were playing at the University and Polytechnic. To get in there you needed to be 18 and have an NUS card... or find a way to sneak in! I think my favourite memories are related to trying to find ways into gigs that I shouldn't have been in...



slipping through the fire escape at the University to see The Members in 1980, sneaking into the venue five hours before the band went on stage for the Au Pairs, Cure and Steel Pulse for their student union gigs that year. Maybe that's more about being young and looking for a buzz than anything specific about the music but then again, I've just mentioned seeing four great bands for free!

TF: Have I just imagined going to see dreadful bands at The Garage in Bell's Court, next to Spectro Arts?

Simon McKay, ESN: Not all of the bands were to be savoured and Stephen and I knew that but it really didn't matter... it was a gig on a Sunday night and you could spend the whole weekend looking forward to it and quite often the whole week as there was so little else happening, particularly when the student unions were closed. The Garage was a great scene and I think a lot of friendships that were cemented there are still intact.

TF: Were any of the ESN lot into the 'futba'al' back in the day?

Simon McKay, ESN: By 1978 I was so caught up in music that I'd stopped going to St James Park. I still played though and we had a kick around with Hurrah! in between their soundcheck and their performance at Darlington Arts Centre. That was a big mistake on their part though... they wore themselves out and said they could barely get through the set. A lovely football story though... the Housemartins were playing in Hartlepool (c1986), which was well off the gig circuit. A few of us drove down and as we approached the venue (somewhere on the Headland) we went past a grass area and saw the Housemartins playing football with some of the local kids. The Housemartins played a blinder that night so I guess they were in better shape than Hurrah!

TF: The likes of Penetration and Pun-I-Lux came close but why do you think there was never really a break-out band from Newcastle?

Simon McKay, ESN: People say it was the geography and the bands being too far away from London and being isolated. I'm sure there's something to that and maybe linked to my memory of how much the local scene was geared towards club bands and blues bands who all played covers - that was something particular to our region, I'm sure. It was hard for local bands to get an audience if they didn't conform.

TF: What made you bring it all back to life in the excellent ESN website?



Simon McKay, ESN: I'd had a few articles published in Record Collector (Don Letts, Gang of Four and Julien Temple) and I was very happy with that arrangement. They said they wanted to publish a career piece I'd done on Dave Ruffy of the Rutles but months after months it didn't appear and I was so determined it was going to see

the light of day that I decided to launch the site so I could publish that as well as my archive interviews. I've since added a few new interviews including Viv Albertine (Slits) and Penetration.

TF: What are the people who put the original zine out, up to these days?

Simon McKay, ESN: I was working in IT in the City until a couple of years ago when I quit. I'm now studying part time, working on a couple of writing projects and doing some (low key) radio broadcasting; on Sunday nights I have a show called Post Punk Britain on www.breaklondon.co.uk I also co-present a series of occasional shows with my friend, the actress, Fenella Fielding. You can hear various episodes here: <http://simon.mckay.podomatic.com/> Stephen Joyce has been on the road with different bands for more than 20 years now. His first employer was My Bloody Valentine since then he's gone Morrissey, Roxy Music... all sorts... I can't keep up. I've not been able to track down the Dave Martin of Ros.

TF: Is ESN simply an archive now or is it progressive, looking to the future?

Simon McKay, ESN: It's all about old bands so in that sense it's always looking back but perhaps when I write new articles they offer a re-evaluation of what has happened and perhaps some new insight. I don't find as much time as I'd like to write new material, but every now and again there is a burst of activity.

TF: How can people support ESN?

Simon McKay, ESN: It'd be great if people went to the website and joined the mailing list to receive emails when something new is published. Also, I'd love it if people would have listen to the Said Liquidator CD we're selling via the website (that was a band I formed after the mag ceased) and consider buying it... there are no back issues of the mag in my loft but plenty of Said Liquidator CDs!

Many Thanks to Simon for his time and if this sort of stuff floats your boat and you haven't already get yourself to the Eccentric Sleeve Notes Website at: www.eccentric sleeve notes.com It's mint. ☺

