

Wshoe

j u k e b o x

Every month we play a musician a series of records which they're asked to identify and comment on — with no prior knowledge of what they're about to hear.



paul weller

Tested by Philip Watson

He's been called "The Cappuccino Kid" and "The Modfather", he's been leader of a Style Council and head of a Movement, but these days Mister Post-Punk White Soul Brother Number One prefers just plain Paul Weller. Prone to the occasional well-meaning error of judgement, Weller is a pop survivor. Now 35, he was born into a working class family in Woking and was in his first band by the age of 14. With Bruce Foxton and Rick Buckler he formed The Jam, and for six years from 1976 the group were one of punk's most celebrated and idolised units. Splitting the band in 1982, Weller surprised many in the 80s with the ersatz jazz and R&B of The Style Council, formed with keyboardist (and ex-Merton Parka) Mick Talbot, and his overt support for an array of political causes, particularly the pro-Labour Red Wedge movement. In 1989, Polydor refused to release his "Garage House-influenced" fifth Style Council album and terminated his contract. He then had two children with his wife, former Wham-ette and Style Council backing vocalist Dee C Lee, before releasing a debut solo album on Go! Discs last year. A new album, *Wild Wood*, his strongest (and certainly most wantonly hippy-retro) album for many years, has just been released, and he tours the UK in November. He claims his favourite pastime is sitting in a room listening to music.

CURTIS MAYFIELD

"Future Shock" from *Back To The World* (Curton)

Curtis Mayfield. *Back To The World*. "Future Shock". That's a great album — one of his best. I was playing it the other day funnily enough. It's a really underrated album as well — I don't know why because every track is great and the lyrics and arrangements are brilliant. The melodies go hand in hand with the lyrics — the deeper the lyrics go, the deeper the melodies go — and you've just got to follow it. And that sleeve design! Don't you think the roots of Soul II Soul, that sound, that beat, that swing sort of drum sound, is in this? I do like some of his earlier stuff with The Impressions, like *Check Out Your Mind*, but I prefer this solo stuff more. And his voice is funny isn't it — sort of a fragile falsetto — so small, but so sweet. He's definitely an influence, mainly lyrically I think because he's just so positive about things. I'm really bored with these HipHop and gangsta lyrics — all that bitches and niggers and guns and the rest of that crap. It wasn't any better for Curtis's generation, in fact it was probably worse, but 20 years ago Curtis, Gil Scott-Heron, Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye, they were saying let's clean up the ghetto. I'd sooner hear that. I don't see the point in wallowing in the shit we're in; let's talk about how we're going to get out of it.

People used to say The Style Council — the Kind Of Loving album especially — was heavily influenced by Curtis Mayfield. Do you think that's true?

What, *Kind Of Loving*? The one everyone hated. It didn't have that sophistication and it didn't have very good melodies, so I think the comparison fails by a long shot. But he did mix a track on that album — and he was brilliant to work with. The vibe you get from him is that he is really at one with himself and the world. And I did this other thing with him, interviewing him for a video of his gigs at Ronnie Scott's. That was brilliant.

But it's true most of your influences are American R&B.

Yeah, probably 60 to 70 per cent. Basically my tastes are black music in most forms and English 60s pop

which comes from that R&B source. I can't think of too many exceptions — maybe Syd Barrett or early Pink Floyd, but even Floyd started as an R&B band playing Chuck Berry.



TRAFFIC

"Freedom Rider" from *John Barleycorn Must Die* (Island)

[Before the vocals] Traffic. *John Barleycorn Must Die*. "Freedom Rider". I like Steve Winwood. I think he's great; great voice. He's just got that R&B sound, and he also developed something more, something else in Traffic. When he first started with Spencer Davis it was just pure Ray Charles and it was just so weird to hear a 15-, 16-year-old white kid from Birmingham singing like that. It didn't even seem to be mannered; it just seemed quite natural, it just flowed out of him. I suppose I like him because he was kind of a role model for me in that he was English and into R&B — it showed me a way of taking inspiration from other people's music, but also of trying to add something of your own as well. And the playing is great on these Traffic albums — not necessarily technically, but they just had a great feel, which is more important.

Do you think anyone sounds as good today? Mick Hucknall?

Mick Hucknall? What a load of old bollocks. He doesn't compare in any way. These people [ie Traffic] were making real music, and they could outplay any of us lot today. I've been playing a long time, but I'm only just getting there. These people were doing this shit when they were how old — 20, 21? *Some people have accused you of lauding the past too much. Doesn't your new album sound just a little too much like Traffic or The Small Faces circa 67?*

If it does I take that as a compli-



ment. I don't get hung up on that retro thing because I don't think I'm doing what Lenny Kravitz is doing — and no disrespect to him. If people say it sounds like an old record then that suits me fine because they're my favourite records — they sound the best to me. That is my time; that's what I come from. I've been listening to this sort of music off and on for a long, long time now and it's an important part of my character and my music. These records still sound fresh — I defy anyone to say otherwise. They will always invigorate and inspire me.

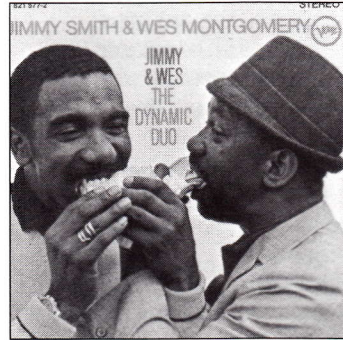
All the same, don't you think music must keep innovating, moving forward?

But I think it is. I'm still adding to the music — it's not just straight plagiarism. I think I'm still interpreting the past, still adding something to it, something fresh, something new. Why are so many people hung up on originality? What is original music? Is it Techno? Is it blips? Because if that's truly original music I don't want to know about it, I don't want no part of it. I mean, on my album we just tried to cut the tracks live in the studio as much as possible, tried to keep the mixes rough, tried to make the drum kit sound like a fucking drum kit, and the guitar like a guitar. I don't know what's wrong with that. That's how I like sounds to be.

JAMIROQUAI
"Hooked Up" from Emergency On Planet Earth (Sony Soho Square)

You might have got me here. *[After hearing the vocals]* Oh, Jamiroquai. They cut a lot of this stuff live as well apparently. I know he's getting a lot of criticism right now, but I say leave him alone and let him fucking develop in his own time. Because Jamiroquai are bringing real music to people, to younger people, and if it makes them backtrack and get into Gil Scott-Heron and Stevie Wonder then that's got to be a good thing. And he's pretty up-front about his influences. I've never seen him try to deny his influences — he's giving credit to the source — so what's the fucking problem? We've had five or six years of people saying pretty much nothing, and it's good to see people

with attitude, people getting back into saying something. *Can't you have too much attitude? Can't attitude sometimes backfire and get in the way of the music?* Well it can definitely backfire on you, but does that mean you shouldn't still say it. Lennon said it, Marley said it, Stevie Wonder said it; why shouldn't Jamiroquai say it? He likes that sort of music — what's wrong with that? My generation, and his, have had more than 30 years of black music and culture in this country. It's part of us now — you and I probably wouldn't be sitting here now if it wasn't for black music. Just because he's white doesn't mean he has to follow Iron Maiden or be in a heavy metal band. Not every white kid has to be into heavy metal or white chunky rock bands.



JIMMY SMITH/WES MONTGOMERY
"James And Wes" from The Dynamic Duo (Verve)

Kenny Burrell? It's not Jimmy Smith. It's not Grant Green. Wes? But it's not Jimmy Smith is it? *Well actually it is.* I should have known this because I've got this album — although admittedly I haven't played it for a long time. I didn't recognise it was Wes Montgomery until he did those octave runs. I got heavily into Jimmy Smith around 1980/81. His music was the first thing that got me into jazz, but then I heard a lot of other organ players who I liked a lot more — more funky, gritty players like Jimmy McGriff and Freddie Roach. I started buying lots of the Blue Note reissues: Herbie Hancock's first LPs — *Taking Off* and *Empyrean Isles* — a lot of Stanley Turrentine and Lee Morgan. But with Wes, and I know this might horrify some jazz pundits,

I find some of his stuff too MOR — maybe you just have to know the right albums and obviously I don't. Who's the drummer on here? Yeah, Grady Tate — he's great. *Didn't the idea for the Style Council come from the Hammond sound?* Yeah, but not from Jimmy Smith. It was more from Ian McLagen of the Small Faces. He was probably the first influence on Mick Talbot, even though it was in a round about way because McLagen got it from Booker T. *What do you think about the change from The Jam to The Style Council now?* It's just what I wanted to do at the time. There was no great master plan or anything; I just had aspirations — or pretensions as some had it — to make other kinds of music.

You've gone back to playing the guitar more on this new CD. Yeah, I lost confidence in my playing in the Council. I wasn't interested in that Rickenbacker sound any more, and I didn't know what else to do, where to go from there. It took me time to get over my hang-ups — I'm nowhere near as good as any of these guys — but I know what I can do now, and I'm getting somewhere with it, which is an incentive.

SEX PISTOLS
"Holidays In The Sun" from Kiss This (Virgin)

[After a few seconds] OK, that's enough. Pretty dated don't you think? I find it hard to listen to a lot of this punk stuff now to be honest, including my own stuff — I just can't fucking handle it. It seems like a million years ago. But it was necessary at the time for me. I thought the 70s was a very, very dull time — all that Yes and ELP and progressive rock stuff. I didn't like the way they looked, I didn't like their attitude, I didn't like the music. So it was great to see the Pistols — they had attitude and they were aggressive and the music was loud and furious, and there were the clothes and the hair. For me the punk scene only lasted for a very short time — by the time all the bands had been signed up it was over, it had become diluted. I hated what it all developed into — I mean the records were fucking awful after a

while. But I got off on the energy and the fact that people were up there saying something and getting people excited. *Why do you think you — unlike many from that era — have survived? Johnny Rotten for example, is washed up in LA...* Yeah doing Schlitz adverts. I tend to think, and this isn't me blowing my own trumpet — I just think this is a fact, that I can actually sing and play, and I can actually write songs. Not everyone's going to like them, but I don't think anyone can deny that I can do it. I think John, bless his heart, would have trouble doing that, and I'm sure he doesn't even want to. I'm still making music and still doing what I've wanted to do since I was a kid. The Pistols were for that moment and what they generated was good at the time, but it doesn't stand the test of time. Every time I hear it now it just makes me laugh.

ELVIS COSTELLO
"Tramp The Dirt Down" from Spike (Warner Bros)

I don't know this. *[Hears vocals]* Is it Elvis? But I don't know this album. I don't know much of Elvis's stuff — but I liked the words. *The career of Elvis Costello seems an interesting point of comparison. You both came to prominence in the punk era, you've both been very political at stages in your careers, you're both singer-songwriters, and you're both still around. Yet his credibility has always remained untarnished.* It has seemed that way, yeah. *The same can't be said about you though can it?* No. Not at all. *What do think about that credibility gap?* I don't know how to answer it. From my perspective I've got to make mistakes to be able to see what I can do and what I'm good at and what I'm not good at. I don't want to put Elvis down or anything, because I respect the fact that he's lasted, but he's made pretty much the same record — apart from that country album — since he started. Whereas I, good or bad, have tried to do different things. Sometimes I've miserably failed; sometimes I've succeeded. *What about the Style Council*

name? Was that a mistake? Didn't it rather imply image before content?

Well the press seemed to assume so, didn't they? But that's their problem. If you can't look beyond a word or the name of a group then are you fit to judge the music? If you're not prepared to dig a little deeper, if you just look at it all at face value . . .

But doesn't the word "style" inevitably lead to certain preconceptions?

Yeah, but what I'm trying to say to you is that if you looked a bit deeper there were plenty of other things to counteract that, that it evidently wasn't just about style or clothes. You only have to read the lyrics or read some of the sleeve notes — especially on the early Council records.

Going back to that political period. Do you have any regrets about it now?

Yeah, I wish I hadn't got involved in the Wedge. We were manipulated by the Labour Party. I think I should have remained non-partisan to it all. We as a group should have carried on doing what we felt was right and doing the benefits we agreed with. We shouldn't have belonged, or looked like we were part of, the Labour Party. We got swallowed up — inevitably because they were a bigger machine than us. It has put me off politics now.

You said recently that during parts of the 80s you were quite a long way up your own arse.

Yeah. Ego's a very, very dangerous thing when it's running rampant. And now, sitting outside of it all and seeing what it is, I can see it in different artists around me.

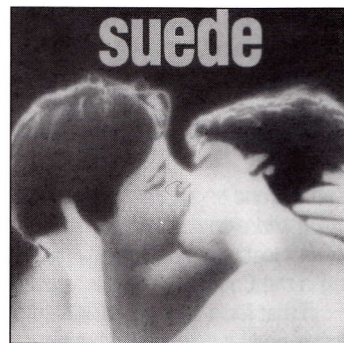
Anybody spring to mind?

Well Bono's got to be careful I think. He's making outrageous claims. Bono's putting both his bollocks on the line, whereas I only had one of mine on it. But Elvis has never had any of his on the line — he never wanted to join in the Wedge — and he was probably right as well. He had it sussed. But it was a growing period for me and I still hold a lot of those ideas, I still believe in socialism. Maybe it needs a different name these days or something, a revision, a new idea. People don't seem interested any-

more. And the international establishment have pretty much done away with it, pretty much stamped it out.

Where do you stand on the Labour Party today?

I don't. They all look the same to me really. I want to see the Tories out at the next election, but I have done for the last four or five times and it hasn't fucking happened. I just think we need a change, if nothing else, some fresh air coming in and getting people positive again.



SUEDE

"So Young" from Suede (Nude)

Who the fuck's this? The Banshees? Suede? I don't know enough of their stuff. I liked "Animal Nitrate" — I thought that was a really good single — and I really liked their version of "Brass In Pocket", but I'm not crazy about Brett's voice. I'm not a massive Bowie fan, never have been. I can't get with too much of this kind of teenage angst thing — I tend to think it's all a bit staged, a bit mannered.

Yeah, you see I thought there might be some creative link here: people up their own arses?

No, he wants to be a star, that's all. He's going for it. I can't really knock that — we've all been there at some point or another. He's obviously a big Bowie fan, but I don't mind that. As I've said, I don't mind the retro thing. I mean, it's like saying, did the first Jam album sound too much like The Who? Of course it did, because we just plundered it, but mainly out of enthusiasm, because I just love that sound. But this just isn't particularly my sort of music that's all.

Well I was trying to play you something you wouldn't like.

You've succeeded.

What would it have taken to really annoy you musically? George Michael? Nirvana?

Well, Nirvana would have done the trick. They sound like the Police. Or a Sting track would have done it as well. But it's nothing personal, I just ain't into those sounds. Although I like the guitarist on this — Bernard . . . [Butler]. Whatever happens to the band he'll do all right. Like Johnny Marr in The Smiths — there's always one music man in a band.

STEVIE WONDER

"Square" from The Jazz Soul Of Little Stevie (Motown)

Who the fuck's this? Lou Adler? It's got to be him or Stevie Wonder. Which album's this from. I've never heard this.

It's from his very first album — recorded when he was just 11. As well as harmonica, he plays piano, organ, drums and bongos.

He's a genius isn't he? He really is. Not in a press-hype way: more like the way people talk about Mozart, about being a child prodigy — he's the same thing, a pure one-off. But it's difficult to talk about Stevie Wonder. You've got to watch what you say about Stevie Wonder. I'm always loath to criticise him because Stevie Wonder will always make a great track every now and again. He's made some duff albums, like *Square Circle*, but then you've got "Overjoyed" on that album — which ranks up with his best ever. I'll tell you what I think he needs to do — if I dare say this. He needs to get behind the kit again, get rid of all those fucking drum machines and all that swing beat crap and start playing again. Because that's what everyone wants to hear I think — including all the HipHop kids who love all his earlier stuff. Because no-one plays kit like him. It's sort of wrong technically, but it's so right as well. And he needs to cut that kind of real rough album again. If you ain't got a good drummer, you ain't got a good band, simple as that. I'd just like to see some of these guys get back into some more raw recording, away from all this digitised bullshit we've had for fucking ten years or more.

Why did your drummer, Steve White, leave you at the end of the 80s?

He got fed up, because we started working with drum machines and synthesizers. He couldn't handle it. *But you were also quite difficult to work with during that period weren't you?*

Yeah. I lost the plot. I don't know what to say — sometimes you lose it, sometimes you don't. I don't believe any artist is so consistent that they never put a foot wrong. We all make duff albums now and again. No-one's brilliant all the time.

AL GREEN

"Tired Of Being Alone" from Al (Beechwood)

Turn it up. [*He moves his chair back for maximum stereo effect.*] I want to listen to this one all the way through. His voice is just phenomenal, fantastic — and the drummer, Al Jackson, is really great on that track as well — but I went to see him recently at the Festival Hall, and I feel really bad about saying this, but I just couldn't handle all the cabaret shit. As soon as he started doing the "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus" thing, I had to go to the bar and get with some other kind of spirits. But he's so brilliant as well of course, and he's too great to put down, it's just that I don't like cabaret, I don't like show biz. I ain't with that. I like things raw; I like to see people just do their thing. I would like to see Al Green with a small band so you just get his voice and none of the rest. I love his voice — it's a similar thing to Marvin Gaye — it's almost as if their voices are a separate entity from their bodies. Do you ever get that vibe? And at least he's still making albums — I wish Marvin Gaye and Marley and Lennon were still around making records. I miss these people more and more. *You seem quite moved listening to that track?*

It was lovely, yeah. It's because I haven't heard it for a while, I suppose. □