

# The Ork talks

**B**ESERKLEY, Chiswick and Stiff should by now be concerns close to your heart and turntable. Don't be surprised if another maverick indie soon joins the ranks of the current front leaguers. The name is ORK, they're based in New York and their madcap activities are organised by William Terry Ork and Charles Cameron Ball.

Terry Ork started the ball rolling through his early involvement with Television. He had gone to New York around '68 to work with Andy Warhol in film. The era of the Velvet's was nearing its demise, while new life and hope centred around the infamous Mercer Arts building where the New York Dolls began to pull mammoth audiences. "There was a lot of hope, and then the Mercer Arts Centre suddenly burned down and that really stopped things for a bit."

## Demo

Through New York Bohemia he met Tom Verlaine, Richard Hell and Billy Ficca, who, as the Neon Boys, cut a three-track demo tape. Ork was so impressed that he wanted to contribute to the band in some capacity. It took about a year for the Neon Boys to mutate into Television, adding fourth member Richard Lloyd, and Ork took up the management.

They looked round for a suitable venue and came up with the now enshrined outpost of Bowery sleaze, CBGB's. It seemed the "most atmospheric." There had been signs of a really new development in music and he just sensed some new aesthetic that was new and strange.

The new aesthetic, spear-headed by Patti Smith, took time to fire, but when it finally ignited, produced

bands like Talking Heads, the Shirts, the Ramones, the Heartbreakers and of course, Television. Hell left the band in February '75 (to link up temporarily with the Heartbreakers before forming his own Voidoids) and the label released their first single, Television's "Little Johnny Jewel."

The following Spring the inevitable happened. Television signed with Elektra. Ork: "It was really a trauma to me. It was a thing I understood that had to happen and I knew I had to have alternatives for it. I think that Tom just wanted the greatest expediency. I knew we had to take on mechanisms beyond the personal level — business management, whatever — but Tom wanted things just to be as simple and secure as possible."

## Activity

Next release was Richard Hell's anthem "Blank Generation" EP, which Stiff scooped up for British release. Ork: "That was when the company moved from being a band label into Ork Records. I don't think Verlaine at that time sensed the overall activity. He was pretty much insulated to his own thing, whereas Hell always had a more grandiose attitude. Hell still thinks the movement's going to take over the entire world."

Charles Ball was also now fully involved, and the gents began to broaden their horizons. In particular there was a single by pop funsters the Marbles. Ork: "We decided to diversify and put the best of the New York bands on display, regardless of their aesthetic."

Successive seven-inchers (in chronological order) have been by Alex Chilton (perennial New York cult figure who first sang in the Box Tops and then in woefully underrated Big Star), Chris Stamey (Chilton's bassist), Prix, and

most recently, journalist Mick Farren.

Shoestring budgets, together with the musical politics in New York, have thrown up countless obstacles. The scene became somewhat impenetrable for small-time outsiders when Hilly Kristal, manager of CBGB's, and Seymour Stein, head of the burgeoning Sire stable (e.g. the Ramones, Dead Boys and Talking Heads) went into partnership for reasons that are not too difficult to understand.

Ork: "Hilly's very proud and arrogant. If people question what he does, he can just close up. It's happened to a lot of bands at various times. Like Tuff Darts were shut out for a long time, the Ramones were shut out. It's really becoming an awesome spot that he's in. You can't blame him, seeing it's his club and everything. But if it's for the good of the scene, there have to be connective venues. It's just too sticky in every direction."

"The production contracts are coming out like crazy now. As soon as some little band comes into town — like Devo, for instance — they are flashed production contracts from all sides. Just gruesome contracts."

"We spend a lot of our time probably defeating ourselves when we could really mop up by signing all these bands. They come to us because we do have the trust and the history that someone like Seymour Stein hasn't quite got, perhaps, or the club-owners don't quite have the rapport that we do. We spend most of our time preaching against the evils of these fast deals."

Ball: "The aim is to be fair. To make records which, as far as standard industry thinking goes, are either a bad joke or don't make sense." One such pipeline project is a single with (yet another) journalist, Lester Bangs, who, one drunken night at CBGB's, asked if he could cut a 45 for Ork. Jay

Dee Daughtery (drummer with Patti Smith) master-minded the sessions, borrowing musicians from other local bands. Ork and Ball want to develop this kind of intergroup cross-fertilisation.

Ork: "That's where we communists step in. We consider ourselves to be a bit of a guerilla label. Many individuals joined together from various bands in some ways make more personal music through that fusion than they do individually in their own bands."

## Security

They came to Britain last month to fix up a production deal with an as yet unspecified company (though Phonogram are apparently hot contenders). They need the financial security such a deal would ensure to be able to move from one-off singles to albums. Scheduled albums include one by Chilton and a compilation of cover versions of Stones' numbers.

Ork: "It'll be a sort of half-tribute, half-critical statement." Ball: There'll be a lot of playfulness involved. Like, Alex is doing 'Can You Please Crawl Out Your Window' — the Dylan cut — but we'll credit it to Jagger/Richard. There'll be a couple of novelty cuts like a Lorne Greene version of 'Memo From Turner'."

The doughy duo also plan releases by new bands Teenage Jesus and the Jerks, the Erasers and the Feelies, but wisely don't look much beyond a one-single commitment.

Ball: "The situation with the likes of the Feelies and Teenage Jesus is really important to document now. They may not go on, they may break up. You see, people in New York really do want to be rock 'n' roll stars in almost the classic sense."

"Like, Alex and the



RICHARD HELL: 'Still thinks the movement's going to take over the entire world'

Feelies want to sell millions of records, which means that it isn't fair for us, given our goals, to sign them for three or five year contracts.

"We'll push them as far as we can on the label but I'm not that interested in playing Yankee — or Shea Stadium. I'm interested in having the music made and whatever community ultimately seems appropriate for the music, that's the one it will stand in."

Another possible venture

— no more than an idea so far — is to enlist a committed rock 'n' roll chronicler (possibly Bob Quine from the Voidoids?) to assemble a kind of history of the new wave, or, as Ork explains, "to document the precursors of the new wave in music and attitude." The Americans, Ork reckons, are a lot less informed on such matters than us British. Of course, he's right.

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