

# STAND UP AND SPIT

## THE STORY OF THE MEMBERS

*This article is based on one that was originally written for NFH #16 in the spring of 1989. That version was based totally on information taken from articles that appeared in other magazines in the early 80s. In the fall of 2000, Members guitarist JC Carroll saw that article on the NFH website and sent me an e-mail to say that he'd enjoyed it. I asked him if he'd be willing to do an interview to help update the story, and not only did he agree to do it, but he enlisted Nicky Tesco to provide his answers as well. Since I'd geared the questions towards JC, some of them were a little odd for Nick to answer, but he did his best with them. What appears below is a re-written version of the original NFH article with all the new material added.*

The Members were a prime example of the diversity that made the UK punk scene of the late 70s so great. They didn't just play one style...their songs at times were rowdy, at times introspective, sometimes punk sounding, sometimes reggae, sometimes with really low-brow lyrics, and sometimes with incredibly clever and insightful words. For a while they actually had people believing they were going to make a mainstream breakthrough until it became apparent that the general record buying public was not on to songs about urinating at the disco. But we are getting ahead of ourselves; let's start at the beginning.

The beginning starts something like any of 5,000 other bands. Heard Pistols, saw God, formed band, gigged at London's Roxy in 1977. But maybe not that simple. In the liner notes to the CD *At The 1980 Chelsea Nightclub – The Choice Is Yours* that compiles their first two lps together, it says that Nicky Tesco had been bragging to someone about his band when in fact he didn't even have one, so he had to form the Members almost on a dare. This sounds like a bit of a stretch, perhaps, but according to Nick: "This is a completely true story. I was going out with a girl at the time who had been invited to a party at a rehearsal studio in Tooley Street, south east London (right by London Bridge). A whole crew of us had taken up residence in the office and I was fucking around on a typewriter when this guy, Mike Kingsley, came in and asked what I was doing. In my snottiest voice I told him I was writing a song and he asked if I had a band. I lied through my teeth and said "Of course I fucking do!" He asked me to come and audition the following week, so I formed a band and hammered out three or four numbers – one being "GLC", the B side to "Killing Time" – and got the requisite dodgy management and kick started the Members."

JC Carroll wasn't part of the original lineup, but became a Member soon after they started. Nick had formed the Members in the London satellite of Camberley, and according to JC "I was from Camberley but had

moved to London and was immersed in the punk scene. I was recruited for two reasons: (a) I looked good and the rest of the guys didn't look that punky, and (b) Nick heard me play some songs on an old acoustic at a party and liked it. It has to be said that my guitar playing was pretty primitive at the time."

Carroll had spent a little time playing with Graham Parker (with whom he cut some demos early on). "I listened to everything from the Velvets, NY Dolls, and Ramones to reggae which was very big in Ladbroke Grove near where we lived", he recalls. "We of course loved all our contemporaries like the Lurkers, Chelsea, the Clash, and of course, the Pistols."

Nick's recollection is as follows: "I had seen JC at various parties around Camberley and always thought he was cool and amusing. As the band developed I knew I needed an ally for the reggae side of things plus I knew he had some great songs." The reggae connection was important for Tesco...he cites three bands as his biggest influences at the time: Big Youth, U-Roy, and oddly enough, the Stranglers.

The first Members recording, right after Carroll's joining up, appeared on the first Beggar's Banquet compilation *Streets*. It's a fabulous punk track, the anti-National Front "Fear On The Streets", and it features Tesco's roaring vocal to a ripping tune. *Streets* is a terrific compilation...one of the very best from that era with superb performances by bands that became standards like the Members and Lurkers and also one-off groups that managed a stellar effort for their one track and disappeared forever, like Arthur Comics doing "Isgodaman?".

"I don't know if JC has already given you the background on this", says Nick. "Steve Lillywhite, who was our drummer's brother (and later on one of the hot shot producers of the 80s - ed), had been asked to put together a compilation album (along with Ed Hollis, the manager for Eddie and the Hot Rods) for the nascent

---

Beggars Banquet label. It was one of our live favourites at the time and a comment on my experiences of living in suburbia constantly under threat from blockheads who had a problem with the way we dressed.”

Adds Carroll: “ ‘Fear On The Streets’ is the original Members line up more or less plus me. The project was a compilation called *Streets* and was all recorded in two days. The other interesting track on this album was a track called ‘Talk Talk’ by a group that I think was called The Reaction. They were fronted by Mark Hollis who was Eddie Hollis’s brother. He went on to form the 80s band Talk Talk where they re-recorded the song with great success.”

If you have the early 80s book *Volume*, which is a discography of punk and new wave up to 1982 or so, you will see an entry for a single of ‘Fear On The Streets’ on a label called ‘XS’. But JC assures me that no such single ever was released and the song only appears on *Streets*. The track is also notable because it’s the only recorded evidence of the band with original guitarist Gary Baker playing, although Baker’s strong songwriting contribution, ‘Sally’, shows up on the first lp.

The Members career seemed likely to stall right out of the chute, because they insisted on confusing their audience by playing things with a batch of different styles; bleached-reggae stuff, songs with metal-like guitar solos, and songs that at times featured the most un-anarchistic lyrics. This was topped off by Tesco’s very Cockney accent, which made for a sound that didn’t really fit any of the existing slots. Because of this it was not until August of 1978 that they got another piece of vinyl out, despite packed gigs.

“I guess we had wider musical tastes, and were not so strictured by dogma”, says Tesco in explaining the Members’ approach. Carroll has this to say: “A lot of people think of punk as a bunch of mohawks playing three chords but that really wasn’t the case. A lot of the bands at the time were quite sophisticated... XTC Magazine, etc.”

When the Members did hit, it was with one of their best. Mostly written by Carroll, ‘Solitary Confinement’ was a one-off single for Stiff, meaning Stiff signed them for the one record and then they were left to their own devices. Compared to the typical punk arrangement this song is nearly orchestral, twisting and turning down one path after another musically, but always with a raw, live edge and piles of energy. Lyrically the song deals with a youth who moves from the suburbs into London for more excitement, but finds himself in even more of a rut, miserable and lonely and unable to meet anybody. It’s cool stuff and sung straight from the heart. With the typical Members flip approach to music, though, right in the middle where the song breaks down into the chant

‘All alone, by yourself, all alone, by yourself’, Tesco butts in with ‘Buy yourself this record!’, and the song steams off again.



“The song was about my experiences coming to live in a studio flat (bedsit) in London at the age of 18”, says JC. “The boss of Stiff at the time was a guy called Dave Robinson, a tough Irishman who according to legend had started as a roadie for Jimi Hendrix and then rose to heights of Barman at a famous music pub called the Hope and Anchor. Eventually he got into music management and managed my old mate Graham Parker. It was Graham who I believe persuaded Dave to give us a break - £150 to record a single. It was produced by a guy called Larry Wallis who was from the Pink Fairies and also a Stiff artist.”

“The original version is scratchy but has charm. We were overjoyed to have a single out on Stiff. They were the place to be. We re-recorded it on Virgin because Stiff owned the original version. The best version in my eyes is to be found on the B side of the ‘Single Offshore Banking Business’. The album version is a bit too long. There is an interesting version of it recorded at Santa Monica Civic for a movie called *URGH! - A MUSIC WAR*.”

Nick’s recollection of inking the deal with Stiff is amusing: “I was suspicious as hell and pretty much got thrown out of the meeting for expressing my thoughts, which was pretty fair being as I was acting like a complete asshole.”

“He (Robinson) put us in the studio with Larry Wallis, who, to this day, feels his credit should have read ‘Unpiped by Larry Wallis’ as opposed to ‘Produced by...’”

“We thought the original was fucking great, it was just that by the time we recorded it for the album we had developed it live and Rudi, from X-Ray Spex, was guesting on sax so it felt like a good idea at the time. Whether it was is debatable but there was all this bullshit about cred flying around and not wanting to rip off ‘the kids’ which in retrospect was a dumb move.”

As an aside, the Newtown Neurotics subsequently modified this song into their excellent "Living With Unemployment". I asked both JC and Nick what they thought of that version.

JC: “Me and Nick went to see them and dug it.”

Nick: “The Neurotics version is a pile of wank.”

Ah, golden memories of decades past. When you can find them.

Both sides of the Stiff single were subsequently re-recorded with much more punch later in the band's life; the sound on the A-side and the reggae "Rat Up A Drainpipe" is pretty subdued by comparison to the uproar of "Fear On The Streets" or the later material on Virgin, who signed the band in the fall of 1978 as the band's live popularity continued to grow.



It didn't take long for Carroll to become one of the two keys to the band, along with Tesco. “I wrote songs and brought them to the band”, says JC. ““Sound of the Suburbs” was a classic example. That particular song I have to say took me a long time to persuade them to play. Eventually Nick cleaned up some of the lyrics and they played it, maybe after four or five months. The first time we played it was at the old Marquee in Wardour Street. The crowd went bananas and we kind of knew that it would be a hit. I wrote it in two hours.

We sold 250,000 singles in the UK. It was top ten mainstream hit.”

“We liked to bring in different songwriters but me, Nick and Chris formed the basic song writing unit.”

“It was an open situation”, says Nick. “It had to be, I guess, but apart from Chris, who could knock off the occasional classic, JC and I seemed to know where we should be going. When we stopped knowing that the cracks appeared. All the money we earned during that period got fed back into the unit and the ironic thing is that out of everyone JC and I came out of it worst. Things only improved after the band broke up and we re-negotiated our royalty payments with Virgin and started getting paid separately.”

The band at this point was a five-piece with Tesco on vocals, J.C. on guitar, Chris Payne on bass, Nigel Bennett on lead guitar, and Adrian Lillywhite on drums. It's worth pausing a moment to let JC and Nick describe the other guys.

Says JC: “Nick had the energy to get the whole project going and he had a hell of a stage presence.

Chris was a great musician with a great voice and unusual bass style.

Nigel was a good rock guitarist and his heavy style complemented my clean twangy style.

Adrian was a very solid and energetic drummer.”

And Nick's view: “JC – Cool, we fell out by the end. Now we're close again. He was always a visionary.

Chris – The quiet one. Good bass player but not someone I stayed in touch with.

Nigel – Mr. Rock'n'Roll and very funny.

Adrian – The non-spliffer in the band, which was cool. Was the earliest member, after me, and very loyal but things change.”

By this time Tesco had developed into the sort of boisterous, one-o'-the-lads frontman that the British kids adored in their search for anti-hero stars, and things were looking up for the band. Virgin pulled out all the promotional stops for their first single release, the fabulous "Sound Of The Suburbs", of which original copies came with a die-cut sleeve made to look like a TV set, and a clear vinyl single through which one viewed the blurry picture. Full page ads for the record appeared in several British rock magazines.

"Sound Of The Suburbs" packs a ton of energy, and like "Solitary Confinement" has a complicated arrangement

---

that seems to go everywhere during the course of the song. Tesco's yobbish vocals are in fine form, and there are some cool guitar leads scattered all over. In spite of a strange, instrumental flip called "Handling The Big Jets", this record actually made the top ten mainstream charts in the UK, a fact that amazes me today.

Their next line of business was to make an album, and the band was fortunate enough to be in a position to hit on Adrian's brother, Steve, as a producer. Steve Lillywhite's claim to fame at this time was producing a couple of Siouxi records and playing bass in the Snivelling Shits. U2, Simple Minds and all that was far in his future, but he was able to help the Members out with free studio time and managed what became his production trademark sound for them; crystal clear with every note perfectly audible. The result is a record that got a lot of acclaim when it came out, but seems to be universally forgotten now. Released in April 1979, *At Chelsea Nightclub* is an incredibly diverse lp considering the narrow sound that was in acceptance at the time. There are instrumentals, songs with solos, reggae songs, punk songs, and even a live track tossed in. Yet it all hangs together remarkably well, the common denominator being Tesco's rowdy vocals, which could never work in anything but a band with punk roots.

"Steve was Old School", says JC. "He came from Surrey like all of us and played in bands at the time me and my brother Paddy were playing in local bands. He was a house engineer for Polygram and sneaked us in to do demos. He really liked us and we liked him. He thought a lot about the contrasting guitar sounds, sparked stuff up with 12 strings and added handclaps to "Sound of the Suburbs". (The same handclaps that are on the Hot Rods "Do Anything You Wanna Do", which he also worked on). Steve hung out in west London with the bands. I am not sure that he had produced a record for Virgin before we asked him. I know his first big record was "Hong Kong Garden" with Siouxi and the Banshees for Polygram. Steve made a very clean record."

Members' lyrics were always interesting, too. Tesco sounds like an unsophisticated lout, and sometimes the words match the image. But other times his degree in political science shows through, and the words really find their mark with little wasted breath, with lines like: "You really don't impress me/With your *I do's* and your *I see's*", which gets to the heart of class difference in England in the song "Don't Push". But the next minute they'll be down there in the gutter singing: "You see I've heard about your situation/I know you've got a problem with masturbation" with a knowing smirk. Even the band name can be interpreted in two ways; as a reference to society clubs or as a certain appendage. Regardless, *At Chelsea Nightclub* was a dynamite opening salvo.

"At the time we signed to Virgin the record companies could not ignore us", says JC. "We were playing three times a week to packed houses we had a big following. They were very good at the time. They began to sign too many bands and we spent a lot of time in the US where they did not really have distribution or infrastructure."

"The sleeves and artwork were down to firstly a designer called Malcolm Garrett who was a university mate of my brothers and did all the Buzzcocks product. Also the production guy at Virgin was a guy called Simon Valley who was open to ideas."

"We did not become rich."

*At The Chelsea Nightclub* is a stupendous record. It starts with subtle dub on the track "Electricity", but half way through a loud guitar comes barging in, the instruments start layering on thicker and thicker, the drums start to get more aggro, and all of a sudden there's this big drum roll as the song goes busting into the huge power chords announcing "Sally". Finally, Tesco comes in on vocals to complete the picture. "Sally" is a great song...about a beautiful girl who's the envy of all her school friends, heads off to the city, gets a glamorous modeling job and is the talk of the town until she's in a car wreck that leaves her disfigured and sends her on a descent into the gutter:

*She's on the street now  
Her life is really hell  
She sells her body  
To a different clientele*

*Everybody's got a daydream  
I bet you got one too  
Everybody's got a daydream  
And Sally's just fell through*

This tale of despair is followed by "Soho-a-go-go", another rocking song about life in the seamy underbelly. Next is the terrific "Don't Push", a simple, bouncing tune where Tesco, acting as the champion of the little guy, warns the snotty upperclass off. A new version of "Solitary Confinement" with much stronger production finishes out the first side.

On the other side, "Frustrated, Bagshot" explores sexual deviance with a laughing wink (*I don't wanna feel / I don't wanna touch / But if I'm really, really good / Will you let me watch?*). This sort of thing is what led Ira Robbins to comment in a Trouser Press review that "the Members have one major irritating flaw. Their name and many of their lyrical references are generated by the same type of embarrassing infantilism that designed the logo for the Dickies...chintzy, chintzy." But I think Robbins missed it on this one; the Members approach this kind of thing with a clever wit that's far beyond the

---

Dickies. It's more like Monty Python, tickling the funny bone on a wide range of levels.

“Stand Up and Spit” is more reggae bordering on dub, and then we rage into the monstrous “Sound Of The Suburbs”.

*Same old boring Sunday morning  
Old dad's out washing the car  
Mum's in the kitchen cook Sunday dinner  
Her best meal, Moaning while it lasts  
And Johnny is upstairs in his bedroom sitting in the dark  
Annoying the neighbors with his punk rock electric guitar*

*This is the sound of the suburbs*

*Every lousy Monday morning  
Heathrow jets go crashing over our home  
Ten o'clock, Broadmoor siren driving me mad  
Won't leave me alone  
The woman next door just sits inside and cries  
She hasn't come out once ever since her husband died  
Youth Club Groups used to wanna be free  
Now they want ANARCHY  
They play too fast, they play out of tune  
Practice in the singers bedroom  
Drums quite good, the bass is too loud  
And I can't hear the words*

*This is the sound of the suburbs*

*Saturday morning family shoppers  
Crowding out the center of town  
Young blokes sitting on the benches  
Shouting at the young girls walking around  
And Johnny just stands there  
In his window looking at the night  
Says “hey, what you listening to  
There's nothing there!”  
That's right*

It's just a terrific rocking song that, like the Kinks at their best, takes a little picture of everyday life and makes something phenomenally intriguing out of it. This song alone would make the Members worth remembering.

“We'd just played a gig, somewhere like St.Albans”, recalls Nick, “and JC decided that we needed an anthem. He had this idea for a song about our roots. Our take was that all the other punk bands were claiming inner city roots, which was bollocks, and we wanted to celebrate the wasteland where we came from. From there it led into kicking this idea around between ourselves but in all truth JC was the driving force behind the track. I guess I rode in on his coat tails to a degree, but that was the way it was.”

“Broadmoor is a famous hospital for the criminally insane”, explains Carroll in reference to the second verse. “They sound a siren if someone escapes. To make sure it has not been disabled they test it every monday morning at ten o'clock.”

After “Suburbs”, the pace drops down for the leeringly funny “Phone-In Show” and another slinky punk/reggae track in “Love In A Lift”. It closes with a powerful live version of the title song.

“We were doing our first ever tour supporting Devo – who were absolutely great”, says Nick. “They were recording all their shows for a possible live album and the mobile decided to record our set as a sound check. The overall result was patchy but “Chelsea Nightclub” stood out and it seemed appropriate that the track should be a live rendition being as that is where it worked best. It was an insane set closer, in fact so insane that on one occasion at a gig in Edinburgh, where we had the Skids on stage with us, JC threw his guitar in the air where it tangled in some netting and came down on my head. My head opened like a ripe peach and Huwie, our road manager, had to rush me to hospital. As I was being taken out there was a whole bunch of young kids who couldn't get into the gig who asked me to bleed on their posters.”

“ “Chelsea Nightclub” was always supposed to be shambolic”, adds Carroll. “We used to fall about on the stage, the timing was all over the place, and every night I would play a guitar solo that was completely out of tune. It was the sort of track that you couldn't reproduce in the studio. We were, you must realize, a *live* band. I think you'll find people will agree that we were maybe better live than on record.”



The follow-up single was "Offshore Banking Business", which didn't get on the UK release of the lp but was

---

included in the US. This single precipitated a series of disagreements that eventually soured the band on Virgin. Said J.C.: "Virgin signed all these bands who were around, like us and the Ruts, and they expected us to keep on bringing out energetic stuff all the time like "Solitary Confinement" and "Sound Of The Suburbs". But then we released the single "Offshore Banking Business" and that really got up their noses. I think that record was ahead of its time, but Virgin couldn't see why we wanted to release a reggae-influenced song as a single".

As it turns out, both were right in their own way. Although Virgin ultimately released the record in both 7" format and as a 12" with an extended dub mix, it was a chart disappointment, reaching only number 31. But the success of ska a year later proved that the Members were right as well; people were interested in energetic reggae. The song itself is remarkably sophisticated both musically and lyrically; after all, how many songs can you think of that got banned in Bahrain, one of the countries with favorable banking rules for money laundering, and was discussed in the editorial section of the *Toronto Globe*? Says J.C.: "It wasn't actually pointed at Bahrain. I just focused on the Caribbean because of the contrast between a poor society and people that can make money out of a country without putting anything in."

After this record, things began to get messy for the Members. Their choice for a third Virgin single was rejected by the label, and what was supposed to be their coming out as headliners at London's Lyceum failed to pull a good crowd. Midway through the tour, Chris Payne dropped out from "nervous exhaustion" and was pinch-hit for at times by J.C.'s brother and by Paul Gray, formerly of Eddie and The Hot Rods.

When they finally did get another record out, it was back to the energetic style that Virgin wanted with "Killing Time"/"G.L.C.". Vic Coppersmith-Heaven produced; he was a big name at the time for helping to push the Jam to their breakthrough. Both songs are reasonably entertaining, but neither has the interesting structure of the other singles. The strong production on this single makes it worth hearing never the less.

"I wish we had switched to Vic for the second album. In fact he only did the one single, "Killing Time", which still sounds brilliant. Unfortunately The Jam wanted him for a live album and as they were his big earner he cut us out. Virgin should have waited until he was available rather than pushing us into the studio with Rupert Hine."

"Killing Time" was to be their only single until "Romance"/"The Ballad Of John And Martin", the A-side of which features a straight disco rhythm half hidden by guitar and vocals the likes of which no other

disco band would have dreamed of. Reviewers generally panned it, but I thought the lyrics were spot on and the tune is pretty cool.

1980, *The Choice Is Yours* was the title of the next lp, and 1980 was a busy year for the band. The lp was released in July (early copies came with a Members tie), and is every bit as good as *Chelsea Nightclub*, with a similar mix of styles, from the opening instrumental "The Ayatollah Harmony" to the closing epic "Gang War". My special favorite is "Brian Was", a sort of companion-piece to the Jam's "Smithers-Jones" (only way better) in which a bored and alienated banker leaps to his death.

*Brian was a quiet sort of bloke  
See he kept himself to himself  
He worked eight years for the bank  
In a one-man kiosk in a supermarket  
He wasn't real management material  
But he tried and balanced the books every night  
And he was happy that way  
Because they paid him a salary  
That's the way it would stay  
Because he owed his house and job to the company*

*He would eat his sandwiches at one  
At five o'clock the day is done  
He'd never think or even dream  
Of taking a break in the sacred routine  
And he was happy that way  
Because they paid him a salary  
That's the way it would stay  
Because he owed his house and job to the company*

*It was bound to happen they're having a shakeup  
Brian thought, what a bore  
To be transferred, accounts department  
Head office on the 20<sup>th</sup> floor  
Any man would have complained  
But Brian, he wasn't built that way  
He had got a memo He would obey  
He had got a memo and he would obey  
He didn't like the music and he didn't want the job  
He had got a memo from more or less god  
He was Brian Clark and he didn't have a say  
That's the policy of the company, Hey Hey!*

*Clark was a quiet sort of bloke  
See I never heard him speak  
Mind you I couldn't have done  
He was only here for a couple weeks  
On Monday morning, he opened the window  
And he stepped – right – out  
Of the company*

Meanwhile the music swoops and soars, going soft and quiet at the start and again where Brian first leaps, but

---

elsewhere it rages with huge crashing chords. Just a terrific song.

But when I mention this to JC (who wrote the words and music), he's totally non-plussed. "You must be one of the only people in the world to ever say you liked this one especially", he says. "I was a bank clerk when the Members started off. And I heard this story of a guy that committed suicide after being transferred. The Members had this thing about ordinary people as opposed to posing rockers. We were, as hip hop people might say, "Keeping it Real"."

On the other hand, Nick agrees with me. "I'd always loved it and I still feel it was one of our best songs."

In addition to the lp, the band put out a four track ep with the track "Flying Again" from the lp as the focal point, and remakes of "Love In A Lift" from the first lp, "Rat Up A Drainpipe" from the Stiff single, and a throwaway track complete with men's room sound effects called "Disco Oui Oui", a real piss-take of the disco scene, if you'll pardon the expression. The band played in New York in the fall for the first time and got rave reviews from New York Rocker and Trouser Press. Interviewed in NY Rocker at the time, Tesco would have none of American critics thinking that they were too English sounding for American fans: "I think maybe our stuff's gonna get radio play, because this attitude's gonna come across: Do I have to play another one of these records with no bumps in it? Why can't I play one that's maybe gonna make people iron their shirts a little faster?...We don't wanna go over there to spit at them; we just wanna make their ears bleed."

"We got screwed", he says today. "The tie was a crap idea, I wanted to give away a special tie with the album because I thought it would be funny and make a statement about the whole marketing stupidity."

Commenting on the difference in production from the first lp to the second, Nick says: "Steve was living the life and walking the walk. He was immersed in the whole scene, was hungry for it and knew what we were like. The second album we did was with Rupert Hine and it was sonically a fucking disaster. He's a very nice guy but didn't have a clue what we were about. In fact it wasn't until after the album was in the can that he saw us live. He came up to me after the gig and apologized. "If I'd seen you live before we went into the studio I would have made a completely different record" were his exact words."

American raves didn't help the band commercially. Virgin gave up on ever making a hit machine out of the band and dropped them. Things were going well enough in New York that the band wasn't too concerned. "We just kept on rocking and made money

touring in the US till Martin Rushent signed us to Genetic", says Carroll.

"Virgin dropped us because we didn't sell any records", says Nick. "Even though the mistakes were theirs we took the blame. Also, like most bands, we blamed our then managers for our commercial failure and when we told Virgin that we were looking for new management they cut their losses and dumped us. We were pretty fucked off and broke. We'd always been broke but it got worse until JC and I took over for a while and thanks to our live following we were able to earn more than at any other time in our career."



"The next contract was just luck, with Martin Rushent (Human League, Altered Images) being a big buddy of our manager Ian Grant. He was flavour of the month at the time and had started his own label, Genetic, which he signed us to."

The settlement with Virgin gave the band enough cash to finance a tour to Belgium, Holland and Berlin, but it wasn't until well into 1981 that the band released another record. "Working Girl" came out on Albion, and featured a huge chorus that formed a nice counterpoint with a quiet verse part. The record did absolutely nothing at first, but was re-recorded and re-released again in 1983, accompanied by a video that actually got played on MTV in regular rotation for a while and showed the band in their natural setting; as a bunch of dirty louts crashing a society party.

All the visibility was wasted due to record company screwups. "Arista, our US record company, had problems with their distribution at the time", says Carroll. "The IRS put armed guards on their distributors warehouses, so while we were getting 8 plays a day on MTV we could not ship any product."

---

Nicks view: “We’d recorded a version with Steve Lillywhite that I preferred, but Rushent made a more commercial version. As to being a hit...well...”. And when asked for the reason that the Members were unable to capitalize on the success of “Working Girl”, he says bluntly: “Arista, and the fact that I wouldn’t fuck Clive Davis.”

In between the two releases of “Working Girl” the band put out an lp titled *Go West* in the UK and *Uprhythm Downbeat* here. This was a drastic change from the original style, with a heavy club sound loaded with funk and disco styled songs. The band that once had trashed the disco mentality was now making a bid for success with that very crowd, and despite the approval of New York Rocker it was a disastrous move, as it alienated the core of Members fans who always saw the band as the champion of real people. Unable to suddenly put on the air of plastic sophistication demanded by discoid types, the Members had wedged themselves into a totally unworkable position, and the result was the band’s demise in 1983 at just the point where their biggest US success was occurring with a song made with the very principles they had abandoned.

“We had written the set for the last album at least two years before we recorded that album. Life just conspired against us – for a change!”, says Nick.

Carroll is philosophical. “Martin Rushent had had a huge worldwide hit with the Human League and wanted to record everything in the same way. It was a departure but one that we wanted to do. In retrospect it wasn’t the best idea but hey, things change. You gotta move on.”

It seems every time I sit down to write about some 70’s punk band, the beginning is the same and the ending is the same, and it’s what happens in between that makes the difference. The Members at their best made music that appealed to the common guy, and they had the brains to sing about things that mattered in addition to singing things that were fun. Their music was raw and energetic yet sophisticated at the same time, and there hasn’t yet been a band that I would say sounded like them. The suburbs need more sounds as good.

I wondered how Nick and JC thought of the Members looking back through nearly 20 years of perspective now. The best memories for Nick: “The beginning, the gang mentality, the wild nights laughing it blood shot at dawn and JC and I believing in it all.” For JC, it’s “playing in small sweaty clubs shagging groupies.” On the down side, JC recalls “Living in a Ford Econoline with they same guys for three years”, while Nick thinks about “the end, the last US tour - the distance between us.”

I asked both what they view as the best Members songs. “I have only recently been able to listen to our material due to my kids discovering it in a big way”, admits Nick. “ “Sound of The Suburbs” is a classic, as is “Solitary Confinement”. “Working Girl” I love as it was the last time that JC and I sat down and banged a song out in about 20 minutes. “Soho-A-Go-Go” is cool and “Physical Love” off the second album. They represent an edge, and a certain style and swagger that we had.” JC’s names only one tune, “Sound Of The Suburbs”.

After the Members ended, Carroll formed a new band called JC’s Mainmen. They made one record that Carroll says he enjoyed doing. After that, says Carroll, “I took up the accordion and did some sessions. I played with Glen Matlock and did some recording with the late great Johnny Thunders. I still play. I played accordion on a couple of movies. *Loch Ness* with Ted Danson, *Don Juan de Marco* with Johnny Depp. I run a chain of boutiques in London called *the dispensary* which are quite successful. My new big project is a book and a movie script set in West London called *The Sound Of The City*.”

Carroll dodged my question about why the Members ultimately split, but Nick had this to say of the split and what came after for him: “We’d gone as far as we could and I wanted to play with better musicians, and different people. I asked JC to try again with a different line up of people but he had other plans.”

“I’d cut a track with a NYC rapper, J. Walter Negro, called “Cost of Living” that came out on a small label. It sold more than the last 3 Members singles put together without any promotion. I’d recorded it before our last US tour and would probably have left the band to pursue that had I not found Walter in bed with my then girlfriend!”

“After that I wrote and produced and acted. I was involved with a Finnish outfit called the Leningrad Cowboys, writing and producing, and for a while things looked rosy. At the beginning of the 90’s everything fucked up and I descended into hell.”

“These days I’m happy. I married in 1988 and my wife and I went through some really fucking hard times. We’ve had 2 kids and that saved me from myself. Now I’m a journalist with Music Week and others. It’s a good gig.”

Commenting on the state of music today, Carroll says: “It’s easy to be a grumpy old man and say it is all shit. But sales in the UK are way down. The dominance of boy and girl bands is a shame. But there is a saying about pop music: the main consumers belong to an age group who are “Too old for candy and too young for drink and drugs”. In a way the punk revolution in the

---

UK has transferred across to the USA where it took longer to take off but lives on in grunge and other forms of music.”

“Music has become like fashion; a retro thing where bands take musical influences (and haircuts) from sixties and seventies rock. And blend them into a new soup. Watch out for an Eighties revival.”

Nick’s take is a little more positive, but still guarded. “I have a ten year old daughter who is the queen of pop and as such I’ve kept an open mind. There is a huge amount of repetition in the pop field but if you ever look at the charts from the times you view as a golden period you’ll see that that was always the case.”

“I like some of the better dance material around, deep house in particular, and a lot of the alt-country bands like Calexico. I think the Dandy Warhols are great, Shivaree are interesting and a fair amount of rap. The so called Nu-Metal acts are very sad. I saw that Limp Bizkit were compared to The Clash in an article I was reading – fuck off.”

“I think, in many ways, we are living in similar times today. Some argue that dance is the new punk, in that it’s egalitarian and can be made in bedrooms, but that is missing the point. Stay in your bedroom and you cut yourself off, whereas by performing, by being a band and being out there you are making a statement. You’re saying “Hey, look at me. I’ve got something to say and I don’t give a fuck if I don’t have a major label deal”.”

“We’re living in a lottery culture now and I guess that damages a lot of inspiration.”

Talking about the significance of the late 70s punk explosion and the Members’ place in it, Carroll says: “I think 1977 was an important time in music. For me it was the last really great movement. I cannot be so vain as to estimate our impact.”

“To many people we are just a footnote”, says Tesco, “But I know Jerry Dammers was quoted somewhere as saying we were a major influence. We incorporated reggae to a greater degree than any other band, even the Clash, but we weren’t in any way as important as the Clash.”

“The times were amazing. It wasn’t only music but across the arts as a whole. Before then there was a tendency for people to feel belittled about their abilities or age. Punk changed all that. Designers, film makers, musicians all began to realize that all you needed was determination. If you were shit you’d fall by the wayside but the whole idea of waiting years until you’d achieved some kind of right by age went by the board. And a fucking good thing too.”

“Support your local snotty bands, learn three chords or how to use a drum machine, and form a band. Don’t sit on your arse and complain, go out and say something. It’s a great way to waste several years of your life.”

I asked JC if there was anything he’d like to say in closing. He replied: “Nick Tesco is still a great buddy. He came over with a cheque for some royalties the other Sunday to my house in Willesden. His kids were sitting around with mine looking bored. I was washing my Ford. The wheel had turned full circle. I turned to him and said. “Hey Nicky what was that song we used to sing.” He smiled.

*“Same old boring Sunday morning the old mans out washing the car...”*