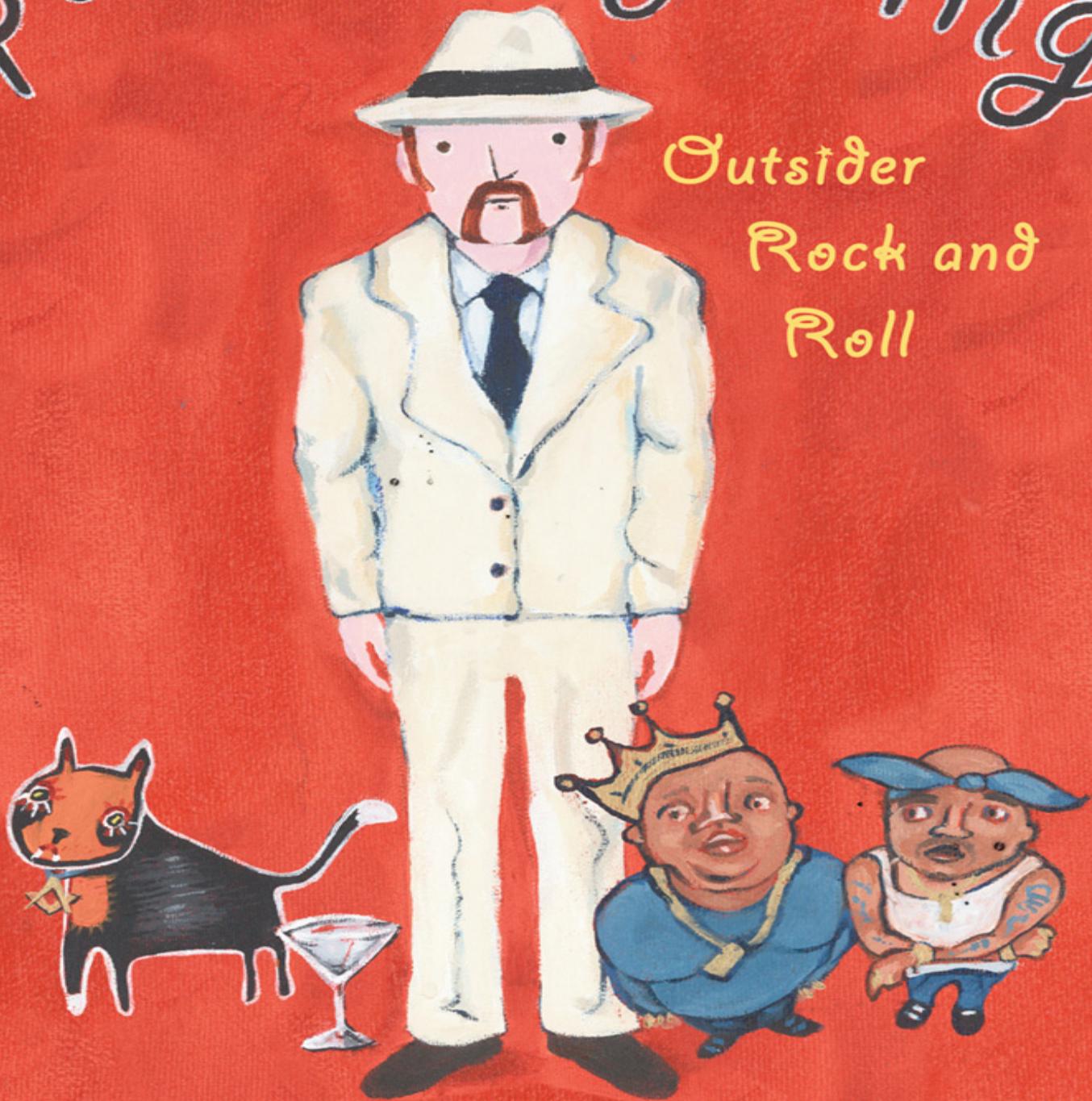


Post everything

Outsider
Rock and
Roll



'Haines is as funny as he is grumpy.' *Independent on Sunday*

LUKE HAINES

Author of *Bad Vibes*

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About the Book

Britain in the late 1990s. Post Britpop. The dawn of the rock and roll apocalypse. If it feels like there's nothing new under the sun, that's because there is nothing new under the sun. After the death of Kurt Cobain popular culture entered, and is still in, its final phase: post everything.

Post Everything is the sequel to the hugely acclaimed *Bad Vibes: Britpop and My Part in its Downfall*. It is a story of survival in the music industry ... and the only way to survive the tyrannical scourge of Britpop is to become an Outsider.

We open with Luke Haines - the 'avant-garde Arthur Scargill' - calling upon the nation's pop stars to down tools and go on strike. We get the story of Haines' post-Britpop art house trio Black Box Recorder (Chas and Dave with a chanteuse) then, barely pausing to put in a brief appearance on *Top of the Pops*, we meet a talking cat, two dead rappers (Notorious B.I.G. and Tupac Shakur), a mystical England football manager, and a shady transgender German Professor - exponent of a dangerous and radical 'Beatles denial' cult and author of *The Theorem of the Moron*, (the most important book about rock that you've never heard of). Haines even finds time to write a musical for the National Theatre.

Blisteringly funny and searingly scathing, *Post Everything* may quite possibly be the first and only truly surreal comic rock memoir. It even contains a killer recipe for scrambled eggs.

About the Author

Luke Haines was born in God's own county of Surrey in 1967. He has recorded five albums with the Auteurs, one album as Baader Meinhof, three albums with Black Box Recorder, one film soundtrack album, fifty individual volumes of *Outsider Music*, and three solo albums. He has appeared on *Top of the Pops* and has been nominated for loads of awards but has won nothing. In 2003 Luke Haines was in *Debrett's People of Today*. He thinks that he is no longer listed in this esteemed publication, as the free copy of the magazine hasn't been delivered for some time. It's not the end of the world. This is his second book. The author is married with one child.

Also by Luke Haines

Bad Vibes: Britpop and My Part in Its Downfall

Luke Haines

POST
EVERYTHING

Outsider Rock and Roll 1997-2005



WILLIAM HEINEMANN: LONDON

For S & F.

Introduction

My first book, *Bad Vibes: Britpop and My Part in Its Downfall*, ends in 1997 with me teetering on the precipice of mental ruin. For the rest of the country this is a brief period of optimism and inclusion; after 18 years of Conservative government the British public have voted themselves 'in'. I have been voted 'out'. Three years before reality television bites and I am already ahead of the game. Never mind, the margins are good. No-man's-land is all right. It's easy to laugh when you're on the outside – and I rarely take the easy option – but just this once please forgive me; after all, being on the outside is what this book, *Post Everything*, is about.

After the commercial and critical success of Black Box Recorder's second album I backed away from the edge of 'the fantasy'. It was the second or third time that I had grasped the nettle – but this time, with no small amount of self-knowledge, I let go. Most of the 'action' in *Post Everything* takes place in London; I had by the end of the century pretty much extricated the act of 'touring' from my life (Black Box Recorder over a period of six years probably played no more than 20 gigs). This book is about self-imposed exile on the fringes of the 'music scene', and sometimes even further out than that ...

I still manage to have about five feuds a year. As a man in his early forties I no longer wear each feud as a badge of honour. I am in fact mildly embarrassed by these skirmishes. Many of the deposed of *Bad Vibes* have gone,

and in this book there are many ghosts, and despite what they try and tell you, rock music itself, in the 'Post Everything' age is a spectre.

First, a little scene-setting: Britain in the late 1990s. Post Britpop. The dawn of the rock 'n' roll apocalypse. *Post Everything*. If it feels like there's nothing new under the sun, that's because there is nothing new under the sun. The 50s and 60s marked the end of post-war austerity and the beginning of cultural enlightenment. The 70s ushered in the first true age of rock, as well as its first self-conscious year zero – and by the 80s depression, ennui, and irony tumbled over each other to create an accelerated culture. At the turn of the new decade, brass bands and morris dancers were more subversive than rock music. The only way forward was to pretend that nothing mattered. (Everything mattered?) After the death of Kurt Cobain popular culture entered, and is still in, its final phase: Post Everything – where the phones don't ring any more and conversation is silent. Post nostalgia, post reason, post memory – memory replaced by a collective memory for an age that did not exist; we can all pretend to remember communally that episode of *Bergerac* that we didn't watch – y'know, the one where Liza Goddard didn't give old Jim that filthy am-I-or-am-I-not look before she failed to fall through the trap door. Post rock. Post *Top of the Pops*, post Gary Glitter, post the charts, post hit singles, post pop, post modern, post irony, post David Bowie ever making another album. Post albums, post archives, post hard copy, pre-ephemera. Post (real) fame, post real celebrity, post Warhol, Post. Any. Fucking. Good. Post film, post telly, post millennium madness; pre-millennial mumbo jumbo, post millennial mumbo jumbo, post God, post science – does rationalism have to be so damned anti-poetic? (I mean, Richard Dawkins isn't exactly Voltaire.) Post literature – post pens, post paper, post ink, post letter writing. Post romantic – what was your last romantic gesture? Post

London – young couples with children leave the big city, the countryside groans with the strain, man, it's like the fucking blitz. Post class system – leisurewear for the new white trash. Post fucking shoes, post leather uppers, post style – wear a good suit well and it can hide a multitude of sins, but don't let a suit wear you. Post suits. Post hats apart from weddings and funerals. Post comedy – Bill Hicks has got a lot to answer for. Post imagination – try taking a surrealistic leap of the mind. Post. Avant. Garde. Post shock – comedians tell rape jokes, M. McCann jokes, wife-beating jokes and paedophile jokes under the auspices of saying the unsayable, safe in the knowledge that the aforementioned won't or cannot make themselves known. But post-political-correctness race jokes are still a no-go area – there may be foreigners in the audience, you might get lamped. Post child catcher, post flashers – what happened to all those harmless old perverts who used to lurk in parks and under railway bridges? Post starving for your art – real artists are just compelled, regardless of whether there is any fiscal demand. They just get on with it, it's a curse, y'know? Post art. Banksy, fucking Banksy telling you what you already know. Post drinking – what exactly is binge drinking? Has everyone forgotten we are a northern European country? Post geography. Post smoke-filled pubs; pre health consciousness, interesting people used to smoke cigarettes. It's getting hard to be interesting. Post interesting. Post fags, post drugs – the older generation, though barely acknowledged, look on aghast at the younger generation's casual acquaintance with altered states. Post old people. Post AIDS. Post Labour, post Tory, post right wing, post left wing. Speaking of angels, where did all the Hell's Angels go? Post national mourning. Post intelligence – human intelligence isn't what it used to be, according to a survey that no one took part in. Military intelligence isn't what it used to be either, according to a dossier that everyone ignored. Post all's fair in love and war. Post world war

veterans. Post birth, post generation gaps – where did all the Teddy boys go? Post teenage, post 20-something, post 30-something, post life begins at 40, post middle age, post midlife crisis, post old age – total inability to accept the ageing process. Post age. Post death. Post apocalypse. I'm going to go bleeding postal any moment now – Post. Everything.

Prologue:

Avant-Garde Arthur Scargill

July 2001. What if ... there was no more rock music? Just as a temporary measure. What if all those lazyboned, hungover dunce musicians just for once went with how they felt and announced that 'This week we are just too un-together to get it together and we won't be going on tour/recording a new elpee/writing another sodding song and trying to flog it to an uninterested nation on breakfast TV.' Sure, I know rock stars do a lot of this 'unable to get it together' stuff, but what if they were just 'too un-together to get it together' ALL TOGETHER? Can you dig? What if Britain's most useless, spoilt, vacuous, drug-addled, slothful, and pointless people went on strike? I'm not talking about the post office, I'm talking about the fucking pop stars. Pop stars on strike. *But striking for what?* chirrups the Greek chorus of no imagination. *More pay?* No, that would be like one of those lacking-in-all-self-awareness-unintentionally-funny Hollywood screenwriters' strikes. This strike - Pop Strike. *My* strike - will be about silence, a chance to ponder the background soundtrack and ask why that hum must always be there. So if all the silly rock 'n' rollers can be convinced to down tools, then what about all the other costermongers of extraneous noise: brass bands, community choirs, carol singers, buskers, chain gangs, whistling milkmen, the WI and blowhards of the comb and paper. Surely they will all fall into silent line as well? Just a thought.

Manager Charlie and I are in the Virgin Records HQ. I have a ruse, a marketing plan, if you like, for the release of my new solo album, *The Oliver Twist Manifesto*.

'The First National Pop Strike,' says David Boyd, my long-suffering A & R man at Hut Records, aghast at this – the wobbliest of notions – and perhaps even more aghast at how much longer his suffering must continue.

'Yep,' I sharpshoot straight back, coolly staring the record boss guy dead in the eye.

'Let me get this right,' continues The Boyd, 'you want to call the entire music industry out on strike for one week ...?'

'Pretty much.'

'And part of this strike,' clarifies Dave, 'will involve telling the small amount of people who would normally have rushed out to the shops to buy your album on the week of its release, not to do that?'

'That's right, Dave. That would be part of the deal. We will be telling the small amount of people who would normally have rushed out to the shops to buy my album on the day of its release not to do that. We will also be telling those very same people, in no uncertain terms, that if they do stray outside and do the unthinkable, i.e. buy my fucking album during the week of Pop Strike, they will be scabbing. And who would want to be a scab?'

Fucking. Silence. David Boyd slowly spins around on his chair and begins tapping something into a computer. Perhaps he is tapping the words: 'I have finally realised, after almost eight long years, that Luke Haines is a fucking moron. When can we terminate his contract?' But then the typing stops and The Boyd spins back to face me. He is smiling, and the smile breaks into a laugh.

'It's fucking genius,' says DB, 'let's do it. Fucking Pop Strike.'

Industrial action tends to have a momentum all of its own. The general strike of May '68 in France, the miners'

strike in the 80s, and now, in the summer of 2001, the First National Pop Strike. The UK broadsheets (mainly) get it and go with the gag, the *Guardian*, the *Independent*, and the *Telegraph* all run lengthy, overly earnest editorial pieces about it. The London *Evening Standard* and the reliably thick Q magazine are slower on the uptake, thinking that Pop Strike has got something to do with wanting to put an end to the burgeoning Simon Cowell, and the less burgeoning Pete Waterman et al, and manufactured pop. Ho hum. All this nonsense culminates in my being asked to talk about the First National Pop Strike on Radio 4's flagship current affairs programme, *Today*. Of course, it's a blast, I am wheeled in after an interview with Margaret Thatcher to face a light grilling from John Humphrys and James Naughtie. Even at this late stage in the game, as far as Radio 4 is concerned pop music has never really existed, so for it to be on strike is even more absurd. Humphrys twitters on pompously about not liking Queen (a rock group) very much, still unable to say the words 'pop music' without adding a question mark and upward inflection after each word: 'Pop? Music?' The poor sod is just baffled that this thing - 'Pop? Music?' - exists without his implicit understanding of it. In Humphrys' head it is still 1962, Elvis has been safely neutered by a spell in the army, Cliff Richard and his Shadows pillage the land like the marauding hun, and in the near distance provincial teens are dancing to the drums of death: Merseybeat. John Humphrys is a man who fears the end of civilisation is nigh and this thing called Pop? Music? might have something to do with it. James Naughtie doesn't fare much better, he doesn't like Queen much either, and has convinced himself that my latest solo album, *The Oliver Twist Manifesto* - a kind of pseudo-hip-hop-pastiche-meta-art-protest-album - which I am covertly trying to promote amidst all this Pop Strike doublespeak, is some kind of cryptic terrorist code, and if he mentions its actual title (*The Oliver Twist*

Manifesto – Quelle horreur!) then a sleeper cell of former Angry Brigade urban guerrillas will take it as a cue to unleash bloody mayhem on our capital city. Naughtie, a man not hampered by a lack of self-belief, has decided to rename my album and spends the entire interview referring to *The Oliver Twist Manifesto* as 'The Dickens Manifesto'. Whenever I try to correct him by mentioning the record's actual title (the title that its maker had the temerity to bestow upon it), Naughtie butts in with a worried 'Erm yes, no, "The Dickens Manifesto".' I quite like these two mad old bastards, and in their odd way they rather like the idea of my topsy-turvy Pop Strike, though I do fear somewhat for the state of current affairs broadcasting if they're letting people like me on the *Today* programme.

I bid the crazies adieu and in the summer haze of an early-morning taxi home ponder how I got to become the avant-garde Arthur Scargill, leading the workers in downing tools. It's taken four Auteurs albums, two Black Box Recorder albums, a concept album about terrorism, two solo albums and, most recently, the unthinkable – a hit single – to get here. After the demise of the Auteurs and since the inception of Black Box Recorder I have been edging towards the inside, and now I am about to be flung far outside again. I like it. I just want silence. A tear wells in my eye, but then I snap out of it. This is no time for sentiment. This is the time to harden the fuck up. Soon it will be the week of Pop Strike. On your knees, populace, on your fucking knees.

1

Chas and Dave with a chanteuse

Mid-1997-December 1997. The Auteurs resume their grim march through a post Britpop landscape. In a nearby pub some shape-shifting goes on as Black Box Recorder take on human form and grab a record deal.

Post Everything. Large sections of the chattering classes, the liberal elite and some idiots in the music biz get duped by incoming Prime Minister - not I. On 6 May new British PM voted in. Stays for a long time. Late twentieth-century retardation programme of the Great British Public (begun in earnest the moment that Bono took the stage at Live Aid in 1985) continues apace as the first 'Harry Potter' book gains popularity with adults. Princess Diana killed in a car crash in Paris. Prime Minister manages to convert this into a couple of points - gains even more popularity with adults. New Denim single shelved; it is called 'Summer Smash'. Primal Scream still going strong.

By 1997 the Britpop bubble has burst. D. Alabarn wisely turns down an offer to schmooze with the government to be. Dumb and Dumber accept. Gallagher and McGee gulp greedily from the poisoned chalice. What on earth are they thinking of? Britpop politics? Even by rock 'n' roll's idiotic standards this is grizzly stuff. Camden Town doesn't so much resemble the shiny new dawn as Hitler's Berlin after the war, where former cheeky chappie guitar strummers trudge the streets like phantom Wehrmacht officers, looking for a final resting place and one last fix. When you

get eaten alive by the music machine it's almost a tragedy. Almost. I could have been one of these broken ghouls, but for two reasons: (a) the music machine didn't like the taste, and (b) I got lucky - I have been granted immunity.

After the *Baader Meinhof* album things were close to breaking point, and in early '97 all is wrong. I am dysfunctional, Alice and I are dysfunctional, and I am about to start making a dysfunctional album by a dysfunctional group who I thought I had disbanded almost a year ago. Hut Records want one more album by the Auteurs. A commercial album. Not *After Murder Park*, not *Baader Meinhof*, but an album with a couple of big hits on it. What can I do? I am without a manager (sacked), and I am without a publishing deal (dropped). David Boyd, my faithful A & R man, is my only ally in the entire music industry.

'You're not ready to make your acoustic singer-songwriter album just yet,' DB tells me. *Oh really, this is news to me.*

'It's still an Auteurs album, even if it's just you and a drum machine.' The penny drops. The Boyd is offering me a lifeline: after the moderate success of The Verve's *A Northern Soul* album - with their string-bothering oath anthems for the simple folk - the powers that be have decided it is my turn. It doesn't take a genius to imagine the A & R meeting, but I give it a go. 'If those dunces from Wigan can knock out a few hits then surely Haines has got it in him. Give him anything he needs, just make sure he comes back with a hit single.'

'There's one more thing,' continues The Boyd ominously - DB never warns me, he never stops me, that's why I truly love him - 'I've got to warn you that I'm gonna be a real asshole with you over this record.' These words don't leave me for several weeks, and will haunt me for the next year. When an A & R man is telling you he's going to be 'a real asshole' you know he's going to be a real asshole.

My immunity from post-wartime Berlin – well, late-90s Camden – arrives in the form of a series of chance meetings and a pub idea brought into fruition: Black Box Recorder. After my *Baader Meinhof* psychic meltdown, I make like a recluse, weary from the sheer bloody stupidity that is touring, and exhausted from the solo act masquerading as a group that was (and apparently still is) the Auteurs. When I do stumble out into the light, I find myself absent-mindedly banging a glockenspiel in a folk group called Balloon. Balloon have already scoffed the only crumbs that the music industry will be prepared to offer them a couple of years ago, and are now going through an extended dance of death, all to the tune of my crappy glockenspiel in front of 50 people in the back room of a London pub. *Tinkle ting ting. Bing bong bing.* I am here at the behest of my record producer friend Phil Vinall. Phil desperately wants to save the punctured Balloon and has the bit clenched firmly between his teeth. As for me, I have no idea what I'm doing: sure Balloon have one fabulous song in their midst – a mini-masterpiece called 'Underneath My Bed' – but what's my role? Am I producing it, am I being altruistic, maybe I'm just eye candy? *Ah, what the fuck, it's better than traipsing across Europe in a fucking splitter bus,* I think as I take my place amongst the walking wounded that make up Balloon's 25-'strong' amorphous line-up.

John Moore, a one-time Jesus and Mary Chainee, sits at one end of the stage, a Black and Decker saw arched between his legs and a fucked violin bow in his hands. Moore is Britain's foremost purveyor of the musical saw – vaudeville-style. With his pencil moustache hovering imperiously above his chops and a moist oily rag drooping from his mouth, this fucker looks more like *Dad's Army* spiv Private Walker than any rock 'n' roll refugee. Moore makes theatrical slashes at the blunt edge of the saw with his bow and the sound of Scooby and Shaggy entering the spooky castle issues forth. *Whooooo whoooo, whoooo, whoooo.* In

the vanguard of crushed part-time journos and younger hopefuls is Balloon main man Ian Bickerton. Ian is a powerful singer with an idiosyncratic falsetto, and a sackful of folk-tinged songs, a man steeped in the myth of soul and chanson. Lurking somewhere near the back of the stage is the real deal: 23-year-old Sarah Nixey. If you listen hard enough you can just about make out her cooing background magick. It's a rag, tag, and bobtail mob, that's for sure: *Sod it, I think to myself, I've got nowhere else I need to be*, so I let rip with the glockenspiel riff of profound failure. *Ting ting ting. Ping pang ping.*

My time as glock camp commandant doesn't last long, for there is plotting going on in the bunker. John Moore and I, having found ourselves to be dubiously 'likeminded,'¹ are, with the renewed energy of a couple of 15-year-old schoolboys, in the process of launching ourselves on the London music scene as an avant-garde sonic attack duo. Of course, we realise quite soon that avant-garde sonic attack duos are much more fun in theory than in practice; besides, we are far too old (John Moore is an ancient 32, I'm younger) to be making unlistenable records. So we do the dirty on Führer Bickerton, we nick Nixey - his *weisser Engel* - with a promise of the stars, and we become a trio. Black Box Recorder. For Moore and myself it's a get-out-of-jail-free card. The music press will come to dig us big time, describing us as a subversive art house trio, and Sarah as a 'rose between two thorns'. Of course, they're fucking wrong. We're Chas and Dave with a chanteuse.²

*

'I intend to shit on a lot of people from a very great height.'

'Yeah, well, I intend to shit on more people than you from an even greater height - let's write a song called "Bring Back Hanging" ...' Spoken like two gentlemen, gentlemen. This statement of intent, this modus operandi,