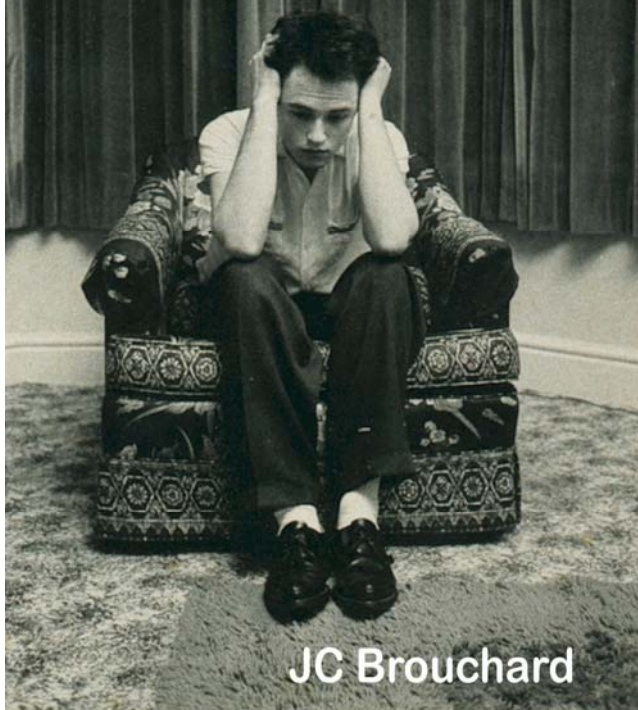


FELT

Ballad of the fan



JC Bouchard

Vivonzeureux

Felt, the British band started by Lawrence in Birmingham, released twenty records in the nineteen-eighties on the Cherry Red and Creation labels. Hailed by the press, Felt made its mark on the independent music scene in Britain, topping the indie charts in 1985 with the *Primitive painters* single.

With *Ballad of the fan*, JC Bouchard chronicles the story of Felt through their records and puts it in parallel with his own experience as a fan. He first followed the band from afar, before he met up with them in England, put on their first gig in France and tagged along with them on a European tour.



JC Bouchard is the identity bestowed in 1984 upon Pol Dodu by Alan McGee, the Creation Records founder, when he made him his spiritual advisor and that of his band Biff, Bang, Pow !.

JC had his own Creation single release with Biff, Bang, Pow ! in 1986 and was celebrated by the same band with the 1987 single *The whole word is turning Bouchard !*. *Ballad of the fan* is the first book published by the "renowned eccentric archeologist from Reims in France", as *The Melody Maker* once put it.

 **VIVONZEUREUX** <http://vivonzeureux.fr>
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JC Brouchard

Felt : Ballad Of The Fan

*Translated from the French
by Pol Dodu*

Vivonzeureux

Felt : Ballad Of The Fan

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Front : Photo by Daniel Laine, published in *Actuel* magazine in may 1984 (*Rock anglais : ils sortent du vide et du bidon*. Actuel, n° 55, mai 1984, p. 91.)

Back : Photo by JC Brouchard. Felt in concert at MJC Claudel in Reims, June 21st 1986.

Vivonzeureux

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FOREWORD, by Alan McGee



Purveyors Of Taste : A Creation Compilation

Offered by Creation in London in 1986

Ref : CRE LP 010 - Released by Creation in England in 1986

Media : 12" 33 rpm - 7 tracks

Sleeve & labels by Shanghai Packaging Company

Tuesday

357-8 Week 52

23

S-C you are the best
freshman since Napoleon. You
have an apocalyptic populist
pop vision

Alan

Wednesday

358-7 Week 52

€ Last Quarter

24

XX

THE OPTIMIST AND THE POET



Ballad Of The Band

Offered by Creation Records by mail in May 1986

Ref : CRE 027 T - Released by Creation in England in 1986

Media : 12" 45 rpm

Tracks : Ballad Of The Band - I Didn't Mean To Hurt You -/- Candles In A Church
- Ferdinand Magellan

Felt is what is called a cult band. Not in the sense of a band who has released one or two obscure records and then has been rediscovered years later (Felt released ten albums in the Eighties, which had a certain critical and popular success, placing them sometimes at the top of the charts, even if it was only the independent labels charts). No, they are a cult band because, from the early days, the band had a strong following of dedicated fans and because it was enveloped in an aura of mystery and tenacious legends, largely kindled by the press. With this status, Felt remains a contemporary band, even though over twenty years have elapsed since they split. Most of the discography has been reissued and the book-fanzine *Foxtrot Echo Lima Tango*¹ paid them a noted tribute in 2010.

Felt hailed from Birmingham. Spurred on by punk and new wave, the band affirmed itself as one of the leading figures of the developing independent British scene after signing with Cherry Red Records. Alternating at the beginning between near pop singles and rather atmospheric albums, the band made its mark thanks to both the impressive dexterity of guitarist Maurice Deebank and the teeming imagery and literate poetry of Lawrence, particularly evident in the records and songs titles (*Crumbling The Antiseptic Beauty, Sunlight Bathed The Golden Glow...*). This initial phase culminated in 1985 with the *Primitive Painters* single topping the indie charts.

Then followed Maurice Deebank's departure, who left the soloist spot to young organ player Martin Duffy, and a transfer to Creation Records. The tracks became shorter, the band remained productive and played live more often but couldn't make it to the next level which would have made them truly popular. After one last album on El Records, Felt split up in December 1989. Lawrence, singer, guitar player, lyrics writer and composer of most of the songs, is the soul of Felt. The

¹ <http://foxtrotecholimatango.blogspot.com>

rumours surrounding his person are legion. Lawrence was a recluse, obsessed with cleanliness, sending his rare visitors to the pub round the corner rather than letting them use his loo, refusing to ingest any cheese or vegetable. Little by little, these rumours amounted to a strong reputation for eccentricity, mentioned in just about any piece published about Felt, and in the end they probably overshadowed the true qualities of the band.

If there's a feature that characterises Lawrence, mentioned in most of his interviews, it's his determination to become truly popular, counterbalanced by his refusal to bow down to show business rules and do things "normally".

You have to imagine him, a supposedly ultra-shy provincial, poorer than rich, pulling together the energy and the means to record alone and self-release, at eighteen in 1979, the first noise music single by Felt, *Index*. Lawrence wasn't to be as lucky as a Morrissey, close to him on many points in his personality and his lyricism, who would quickly obtain with The Smiths a big enough success to live rather comfortably and do things by his own rules. In 1985, just after the band had released *Primitive Painters* and *Ignite The Seven Cannons*, Felt was reduced to being the support band for The Jesus and Mary Chain in Manchester for a miserable fee of £ 50 that couldn't have covered their expenses.

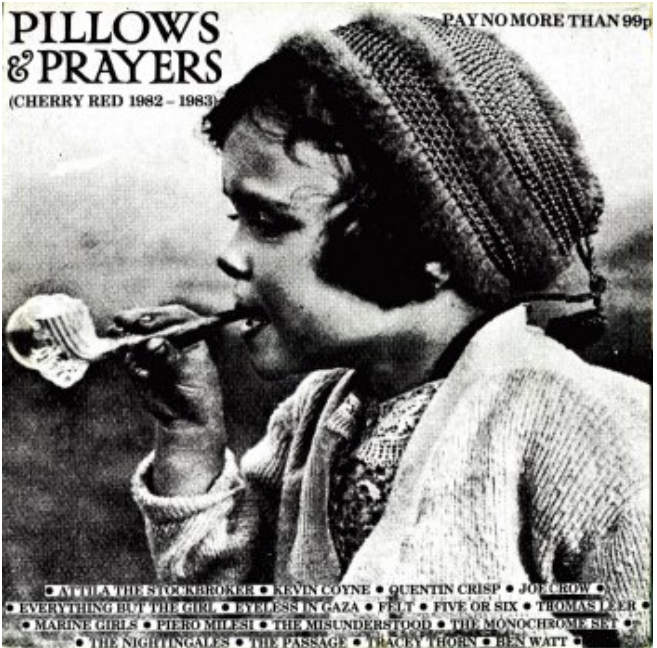
If there's a precise moment when Felt missed getting its big break, it's probably in November 1986. *Forever Breathes The Lonely Word*, one of Felt's most successfully realised records, had just come out and the NME had decided to give them the central double page spread of its November 8th issue. Usually, this means also getting the front page. Except, precisely this very week, some editor had decided to experiment by headlining with a social issue, youth suicide, with a nearly completely black front cover. To add insult to injury, Danny Kelly, who had interviewed Lawrence at his home in Birmingham, insisted in writing more on

the quantities of air freshener used by Lawrence than on his music or his book or record collections, and deemed him mad twice ("*Nutter*" and "*Weirdo*") in the feature and in the (small) title on the front page.

For my part, as a student in Reims, France, I discovered Felt, like many, in 1982 with the Cherry Red compilation *Pillows And Prayers*, which included their song *My Face Is On Fire*. In the first years of the band, I tried to keep up with their early releases, depending on my financial capacities. I might have been hoping to maybe get the chance to catch the band live one day but I certainly never dreamt that, a few years later, I'd have the opportunity to not only attend one of their concerts, but also to introduce them on stage at The Hacienda in Manchester, before welcoming them in Reims for their first concert in France and later tag along with them on tour.

Today, I invite you to a musical ballad in the discography of Felt, a ballad of the band that chronicles in parallel one of their faithful fans. It makes a good opportunity to revisit Felt's achievements just as the year 2011 promises to be full of events for Lawrence, with the long-delayed release of two records by his band Go-Kart Mozart, the publication of a book of photographs with captions by Lawrence's and finally the unveiling of a documentary directed by Paul Kelly, *Lawrence of Belgravia*.

PILLOWS & PRAYERS (CHERRY RED 1982-1983)



Bought probably at La Clé de Sol in Reims or Châlons-sur-Marne in 1983

Ref : Z RED 41 - Released by Cherry Red in England in 1982

Media : 12" 33 rpm - 17 tracks

This compilation played an important part in the development of independent music in the early 1980's. Copying an idea used by some major labels in the seventies (Warner, CBS with the *Rock Machine Turns You On* series), Cherry Red, one of the main indie labels at the time (with Rough Trade, Factory and Mute) released this catalogue compilation just before Christmas 1982, at the unbeatable price of 99 pence. They probably didn't make much money on each sale (120,000 copies, 47 weeks in the indie charts, 19 at number 1), but it probably managed to improve the notoriety of the bands featured on the album.

For me, it was both a pleasurable record to listen to and a guide to lead to many musical discoveries. I think that, of the 17 artists present on *Pillows & Prayers*, I only knew The Monochrome Set beforehand, featured here with one of their early '79 singles, *Eine Symphonie des Grauens*, originally released by Rough Trade, but reprised in 1983 on Cherry Red on the *Volume, Contrast, Brilliance* compilation. The Passage, are here with my favourite track of theirs, *XOYO* - and Eyeless In Gaza, whose *No Noise* gets the album off to a good start, but the singing gets on my nerves.

It is on this record that I discovered no less than Five Or Six, a minor band, yes, but unjustly forgotten, and Felt, with *My Face Is On Fire*, their third single, a perfect track from beginning to end, with Gary Ainge's tom-toms, the guitar played by Lawrence and his singing (I can't believe he wasn't happy with this song and later remade it, not as successfully, under the title *Whirlpool Vision Of Shame*, a version encumbered by Maurice Deebank's guitar !).

Pillows & Prayers gives a good reflection of the diversity of the musical production of the times. On it you find of course some synth pop (Thomas Leer's *All About You* has aged badly but Joe Crow's *Compulsion* is still addictive), but also some angry rock (not much) like *Don't Blink* by The Nightingales.

The Everything But The Girl galaxy is given a total of four tracks : the first recording of the band, but also those solo by Ben Watt (not my cup of tea!), Tracey Thorn (not bad) and an excellent song by The Marine Girls, Thorn's first band.

The elders are also present, with a good contemporary song by Kevin Coyne and the reissue of the obscure proto-psychedelic The Misunderstood (the perfect *I Unseen*).

In a word, even if it will cost you more than 99 pence, you must seize this record instantly if you come across a copy. A first CD release was coupled with *Pillows & Prayers Volume 2*, a 1984 record that didn't have the same impact of the first one, seeing as it was only released in Japan, but what you really need now is the 25th anniversary issue, a three CD box set, plus a ten video DVD, sold at a very reasonable price.

In 1987, Creation Records used the same marketing ploy as Cherry Red to release their own catalogue compilation at the price of a single, *Doing It For The Kids*, which sold quite well too. The only band featured on both records is Felt, who had transferred from one label to the other in the interval.

PENELOPE TREE

Felt



Bought probably at a Record & Tape Exchange shop in London toward end 1983

Ref : 12 CHERRY 59 - Released by Cherry Red in England in 1983

Media : 12" 45 rpm

Tracks : Penelope Tree -/ A Preacher In New England - Now Summer's Spread Its Wings Again

After savouring *My Face Is On Fire* on *Pillows & Prayers*, this 12" is the first Felt record as such that I bought, secondhand, not long after I arrived in London in September 1983. I'd have bet that I got it from one of the Record & Tape Exchange shops, but I have some doubts because there's no trace of a sticker and it's well known by collectors that it's nigh on impossible to get rid of their stickers.

Anyway, it was a good pick as *Penelope Tree* is one of my favourite songs from the early Felt, along with *My Face Is On Fire*. It's probably not a coincidence that these two songs that I like so much were recorded as a trio, without virtuoso guitarist Maurice Deebank, who was apparently an on and off member of the band at the time.

Penelope Tree was a famous sixties model. I think it is a picture of her on the cover, not one of my favourite Felt sleeves. I love the lyrics though ("*Why don't you just enter the night, why don't you just do what you like. Loneliness and all that heartache, that's something I just can't take. You've got your head on back to front, that's easy, so easy for me*"), and Lawrence must have been happy with them too since he later used two extracts from them, to title another song, *Sunlight Bathed The Golden Glow*, and album, the *Gold Mine Trash* compilation.

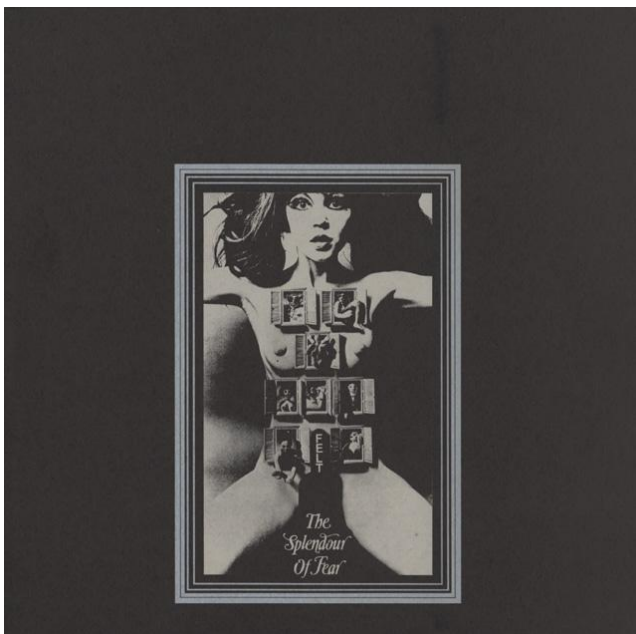
On the music side, we are close in spirit to *My Face Is On Fire*: a fast-paced song, a minimalist bass line, drums without cymbals dominated by the toms-toms. Only the guitar changes a little. It's still Lawrence's basic playing, which I like better than Deebank's, who has a tendency to try to play too many notes at the same time for my taste, but here the production has a lot of echo and visibly aims to replicate the trademark Deebank sound.

On the B side, Maurice Deebank suddenly reappears, and as a solo player if you please, for two instrumentals that are gracious enough not to be overlong.

I quite like *A Preacher In New England*, which has a certain dynamic and would have fitted well on *Crumbling The Antiseptic Beauty*, Felt's first mini-album but I don't like *Now Summer's Spread Its Wings Again* as much. Both these tracks will end up, in a new version and under the sole title of *A Preacher In New England*, on the second mini-album, *The Splendour Of Fear*.

Not long after buying this record, in my presumably desperate attempts to catch a Television Personalities gig (the band was meant to have split, according to what I had read in the press), I went for the first time to a Living Room club night put on by Alan McGee and his pals, who had also just launched the Creation Records label. Over more than six months, as the sole Frenchman regularly haunting the premises, I ended up getting acquainted with the other regulars. We kept in touch after I returned to France. Out of this came a few concerts in Reims and, in early 1985, at the time their first album was released, Alan McGee made me the spiritual advisor for him and his band Biff, Bang, Pow!

THE SPLENDOUR OF FEAR



Bought new in London early in 1984

Ref : M RED 57 - Released by Cherry Red in England in 1984

Media : 12" 33 rpm - 6 tracks

This is the first Felt record that I bought at the time of its release. I guess I had been put in the right frame of mind by *My face Is On Fire* and *Penelope Tree*, and this mini-album was rather cheap too. I must also have been influenced by a review, probably in the NME, of the *Mexican Bandits* single, their first to be culled from one of their albums, which made a reference to *Seventeen Seconds* by The Cure.

Still, I have not listened to this album that much. The overall atmosphere is nearly gothic, with lots of echo, far removed from the pop successes of my favourite singles of the band. Only two tracks are sung, one of which is over eight minutes long.

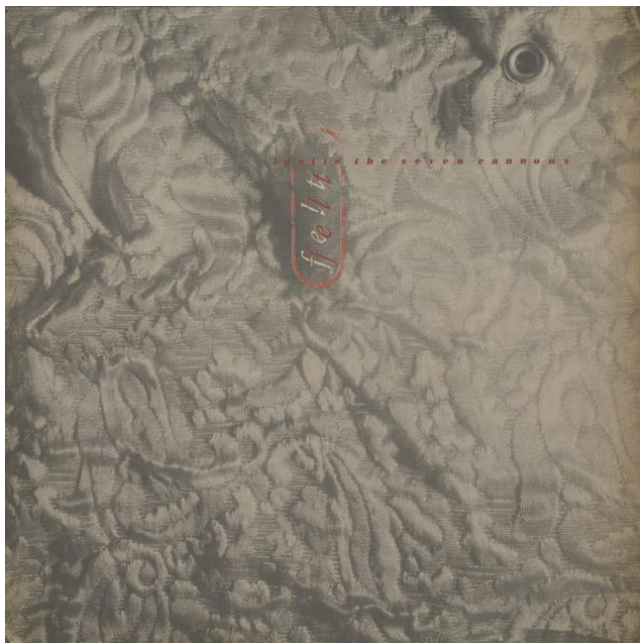
The comparison with The Cure for *Mexican Bandits* and *Red Indians* could only lazily allude to the instrumentals *A Reflection* and *The Final Sound* that open both sides of *Seventeen Seconds*. But if one had to find points of references with Robert Smith's band, it would have been better to point to *Faith* and its funereal echo chamber (*The Stagnant Pool*) or *Pornography* and its percussion (no cymbals here, same as on the previous mini-album, *Crumbling The Antiseptic Beauty*). Of course, *Red Indians* (a track released in a different version in 1981 on the B side of *Something Sends Me To Sleep*) and *Mexican Bandits* bring up images of westerns, spaghetti or not, yet we are far removed here from Morricone or even Calxico.

I definitely prefer the compact pop version of Felt to the elongated guitar lacework of Maurice Deebank, but his main tracks on this record (*The Stagnant Pool* and a new version of *A Preacher In New England*, previously released on the B side of *Penelope Tree*, which here includes the other B side, *Now Summer's Spread Its Wings Again*) are quite epic achievements. But on the other good and long instrumental, *The Optimist And The Poet*, the credits are quite clear : Maurice Deebank is not involved and Lawrence is alone on guitar.

If there is only one track to single out from this record, and in my case it is the only extract from *The Splendour Of Fear* that should absolutely be included on any Felt retrospective, it is *The World Is As Soft As Lace*. Here, for once, Deebank's solo guitar meshes perfectly with the subject of the song and underlines and reinforces it, as Lawrence intones with a voice devoid of any illusion, "*If I could I would change the world, but you know my visions they're absurd and all my great plans get blurred (...) If I knew all about this world, do you think I'd stay here. That's absurd. I'd be the brightest star you heard, we'd be the softest lace on earth*".

Some sublime uncredited backing vocals (I can't decide whether they are masculine or feminine) are featured on this song. I think it was a first for Felt, and somehow it foreshadows the perfect success that *Primitive Painters* would be the following year.

IGNITE THE SEVEN CANNONS



Bought secondhand in Reims circa 1986-1988

Ref : B RED 65 - Released by Cherry Red in England in 1985

Media : 12" 33 rpm - 11 tracks

I didn't buy this album at the time of its release. I had already skipped buying the previous one, *The Strange Idols Pattern And Other Short Stories* partly because these album titles rang a bit pretentiously to my ears.

It's not that I didn't like Felt's music anymore but, as a student and part-time worker, my budget was limited and I had to make choices, and it happens that I had had the opportunity in November 1985 to tape a copy of *Ignite The Seven Cannons* when I stayed at a friend's place. I didn't sleep much the one or two nights I spent there, since that friend was Alan McGee and there were records all over the place that I wanted a copy of!

Ignite The Seven Cannons is a rather strange album that has all the marks of a 4AD record, except that it was released by Cherry Red. First, instead of enrolling one of its previous producers, like John A. Rivers or John Leckie, Felt hired this time a fellow musician, Robin Guthrie, a 4AD star with his Cocteau Twins, who ventures here for the first time into production outside of his own recordings and who brought with him his singer Liz Fraser on two tracks. Then there's the sleeve. All Felt cover art is made by Lawrence under the alias Shanghai Packaging Company. Here, there is no credit but, like for the *Sunlight Bathed The Golden Glow* single, from colour to typography you'd swear you are dealing with a Vaughn Oliver/23 Envelope record cover for a band like Modern English.

This is a central album for Felt, not just because it was released right in the middle of its recording decade. Maurice Deebank, the historic solo guitar player, is present, but he was to leave the band definitely soon after, and we are introduced to young organ player Martin Duffy, whose sound will be stamped on the latter part of Felt's work. There is also Marco Thomas on bass, though not yet officially a full member on the band. He'll be drafted in after Deebank's departure, on bass first then on guitar

The album is far from perfect. Guthrie's touch, especially the effects on the drums and the already very elaborate guitar sound of Deebank, gives a very dated sound to the whole, and it's not always easy to incorporate Duffy's organ into the mix.

The A side is highly consistent though, with its five sung tracks. It culminates with the masterpiece, *Primitive Painters*. What's convenient with *Primitive Painters* is that, if one were to sum up the discography of both Felt AND The Cocteau Twins, this sole cut would perfectly do the trick. After an intro with Cure-like harmonics (think *10.15 Saturday Night*), you are engulfed in a hypnotic swirl for nearly six minutes. The bass line revolves on itself, the guitar scintillates, the organ envelops us and Lawrence remains perfectly true to himself: "*I just wish my life could be as strange as a conspiracy (...) I'm just me I can't deny I'm neither here, there nor anywhere*". Then comes the chorus. Just when Lawrence launches into an exercise in self-flogging ("*You should see my trail of disgrace, it's enough to scare the whole human race*"), Liz Fraser comes on the scene, like a true banshee, the messenger from the other world - who acts like a go-between between the gods and men. For the whole second half of the track, there's no structure to the song anymore. It is a maelstrom, both voices answering each other without dialoguing ("*There's a look on your face it's the human race*" / "*You should see my trail of disgrace*" / "*I just wish my life could be*"). The listener gets into a trance and, like the lyrics say, "*This is a new trance, yeah, an entrance too*".

After this epic achievement at the end of side one, the second one is highly disappointing. *Black Ship In The Harbour* is indeed on par with the songs on the first side, but there are four instrumentals out of six tracks, which completely destroys the balance of the record.

So, I didn't buy this record when it was released in Autumn 1985, but I got the chance to listen to it and much more.

I happened to spend a good part of November 1985 in Great Britain. On the 13th, I was with Dick Green (of Biff, Bang, Pow! and Creation, and lately Wichita Records fame) in Glasgow in order to drive Primal Scream and Meat Whiplash to a gig in Aberdeen, before bringing the whole gang back to London on the 17th for more gigs.

During these few days in Glasgow I was given a copy of a gig poster that made me salivate : Felt in Glasgow, on Sunday, November 24th, at the Splash 1 club, run by Bobby Gillespie and his friends. I was gonna miss by just a week the perfect opportunity to attend a Felt concert for the very first time.

On Tuesday, November 26th 1985, I found myself part of the entourage leaving London for a mini-Jesus and Mary Chain tour calling in at Manchester and Leeds. We boarded not one but two mini-vans : with the first album *Psychocandy* just out and *Just Like Honey* having not done too badly, I guess the Mary Chain could afford this 'luxury'. There was quite a team with the band : their respective girlfriends, the technical and driving team of Dave Evans and Luke Hayes, manager Alan McGee, producer Joe Foster and myself, in my capacity, I guess, of friend and spiritual advisor to Alan.

Just before reaching Manchester, I asked Joe Foster if there was a support band scheduled for the night. He answered yes, Felt and The Shop Assistants! The problem with Joe Foster is that he's always telling stories, namedropping rock legends he knows or has met, and very often he gives an impression of exaggeration or of showing off. Except I have often had the opportunity to assert that, behind Joe's truculence and hyperbole, there lay most of the time a rather non negligible part of truth! But this time, as I had been going on for several days about the Shop Assistants single *All Day Long*, riding high on top of the indie charts, and about Felt, that I had never seen live and only missed by a cat's whisker in Glasgow, I really thought he was pulling my leg. So, a while later,

as I was giving Luke and Dave a hand to unload the amps onto the stage of the Hacienda (It was convenient : the rear door of the stage opened on the street and you only had to back out the van to unload the gear), I asked again and I had the formidable confirmation : yes, the bill tonight did feature The Shop Assistants, Felt and The Jesus and Mary Chain !! So, when it was time for soundchecking, I got to meet the members of Felt. Maurice Deebank wasn't in the band anymore and I think there were four of them that night, Lawrence, Gary Ainge, Martin Duffy and Marco Thomas.

During the conversation, someone told how I had introduced The Television Personalities at the mike the previous year at the Living Room club at The Adam's Arms (The very last Living Room gig in this pub, suddenly interrupted by the firemen for safety reasons, as documented on *Alive in the Living Room*). Lawrence quite liked the idea and a while later I found myself on the stage of the Hacienda, formally heralding the arrival on stage of Felt in the typical compere style, "*And now, Ladies and Gentlemen, from Birmingham, here's Felt*", except of course I did it in French.

I have relatively scarce memories of the concert itself. The Shop Assistants were great. So were Felt. I guess they played *Primitive Painters*, but I don't remember it precisely, I only remember they must have played *The Day The Rain Came Down*, and I didn't know at the time this song title might be in reference to the Jane Morgan version of Gilbert Becaud's *Le Jour où la Pluie Viendra*.

As for The Jesus and Mary Chain, the time of riots at their gigs was thankfully over, but it doesn't mean they had transformed into a great live band. For the most part, they sounded drunk, I'd say, or at least Jim did.

It was strange to see the reconstitution of the Hacienda in the film *24 Hour Party People*. I did have memories of the striped black and yellow decoration, looking like British safety signs, but I didn't get to meet

Howard Devoto in the loo (or if I did, I didn't recognize him!), and most of all, apart from the excellent concert, the main memory I have of the place is that it was a discotheque, a trendy one for sure, but just a discotheque, and I'm not much into discotheques.

I do have vivid memories of the following night. Three rooms had been booked for the Mary Chain in a B & B (a big house converted into some sort of hotel with 8 to 10 rooms), which was not much for the four band members and the eight people they had with them. But nothing was set up for Felt and The Shop Assistants, stars of the indie record charts at the time, I remind you, who were paid a princely sum that night (50 or 75 quid for Felt, which meant that, once they had paid the van rental and the petrol to travel from Birmingham, nothing was left). If you keep notes, you'll remember that, two nights before, Felt were in Glasgow. As for The Shop Assistants, they were again opening for JAMC the next night at Leeds University. So, we all discreetly entered the B & B, late in the night, and piled up, all the 21-22 of us, in the three rooms! There were people everywhere, on the beds, on the floor and in the bathrooms too I guess.

Strangely, there was no lock nor key on the door of the bedroom I ended up in. You don't get up early after such a night and there was no way we were gonna let the hotel staff peak in the room to see if it was empty and ready for cleaning. I was on the floor by the bedroom door, feet against it and, in my half sleep, I have the feeling I have spent my time pushing the door with my legs every time someone tried to get in !

After waking-up, it was an incessant ballet to have breakfast (for those who could) and go out discreetly (for the clandestines who couldn't), with the hotel owners who were not duped and didn't look happy! So much so for the joys of life on the road with a rock'n'roll band...

A SPLASH
1 HAPPENING

felt

PSYCHEDELIC PUNK ROCK SOUNDTRACK
SUN. 74 P.M. 46 WEST GEORGE ST. £2.00

The poster features a black and white checkered background. A large, red-tinted image of a woman's face with long hair is at the top. Below it, several smaller red-tinted images are placed within the checkered grid: a close-up of an eye, a woman's face, and a woman's face with a headband. The word 'felt' is written in a large, bold, black font across the middle. At the bottom, there is a line of text in red: 'PSYCHEDELIC PUNK ROCK SOUNDTRACK' and 'SUN. 74 P.M. 46 WEST GEORGE ST. £2.00'. On the left side, the words 'A SPLASH' and '1 HAPPENING' are written vertically in red.

BALLAD OF THE BAND



Offered by Creation Records by mail in May 1986
Ref : CRE 027 - Released by Creation in England in 1986
Media : 7" 45 rpm
Tracks : Ballad Of The Band -- I Didn't Mean To Hurt You

I didn't know at the time of the November 1985 concert opening for The Jesus & Mary Chain that the first approaches between Felt and Creation had been made, but anyway, in April 1986 Creation heralded the arrival of Lawrence on its promotion cassette *Come !* and, as early as May, this single was released, the first fruit of the partnership between band and label.

I received a few copies of the 7" and 12" singles at the time they came out for the press promotion of the concert I was putting on for Music Day 1986 in partnership with the M.J.C. Claudel venue and my friends of the Un Autre Emoi association.

The 12" single has a different picture sleeve (Two beautiful "solar" photographs of Lawrence), but it lacks unity with both sides of this 7" on the A side and two piano instrumentals on the flip. This little record is much better for me, a very coherent and perfectly formed pop artefact, even if I don't like its cover as much (a blue-tinted pic of drummer Gary Ainge probably dating from a while back, taken by former bass player Mick Lloyd).

As for the rest, this record is perfect. Like *Ignite The Seven Cannons*, it is produced by Robin Guthrie but it has always seemed to me that the Cocteau Twins member has not left his mark as much on this record as on the album. I've often read references to the mid-sixties Dylan of the *Like A Rolling Stone / Blonde On Blonde* period about this single, and though neither side reminds me of one Dylan song in particular, this comparison is not too far-fetched : electric guitars and organ dominate the sound and Lawrence has a peculiar voice.

Ballad Of The Band is a perfect pop-rock song, from the intro on with the rhythm guitar riff and the solo guitar, both played by Lawrence. The organ is rather more subdued on this side. For a long time, I didn't understand the lyrics, until I read about them in an article in the press and saw them printed. You actually have to take the title of the song at face value : this is

indeed a song about the band, Felt, and specifically about the split with Maurice Deebank, their guitar player. The first verse is very reproachful ("*Where were you when I wanted to work ? You were still in bed, you're a total jerk*"), but the tone changes completely in the second and last verse in which in which the tone swings from reproach to remorse and regret and Lawrence shifts the blame to himself : "*It's all my fault, yes I'm to blame. Ain't got no money, ain't got no fame. And that's why, I feel like giving in. And all those songs, like 'Crystal Ball', 'Dismantled King', you know I love them all. But oh, I still feel like giving in*".

Though the A side of the single marked a new departure for the band for the second half of its career, it doesn't sound like Lawrence was very confident that he could obtain the lasting success and recognition that he craved for and mentioned in every interview... As for this split with Maurice, it must have left a heavy mark on him since, on the latest of his albums, *Tearing Up The Album Chart* by Go-Kart Mozart, he sent him another coded message, *Delta Echo Echo Beta Alpha Neon Kettle*.

If the A side can be considered as a ballad in the folk or poetic sense of the word, the B side, *I Didn't Mean To Hurt You*, is more of a ballad than the A side in the rhythmic sense : a beautiful slow song, with Martin Duffy'organ very prominent and yet again with a title that gives very precisely the subject of the song.



Felt in Reims on June 21st 1986 (photo JC Brouhard)

From left to right : Martin Duffy, Marco Thomas, Gary Ainge, Lawrence and Neil Scott.

The concert on June 21st 1986 in Reims went down very well, though it was rather tough to put on with four bands on the bill.

Felt came on time, driven by Dave Harper, a former member of the Cherry Red band Five Or Six. The only glitch in the evening was the world cup quarter-final between France and Brazil. Of course we knew about the match but we hadn't counted on it going into extra time and then penalty shots! So the starting time for the concert had to be delayed - but France had won and the mood for the evening was even more festive.

Lawrence has a strong reputation for eccentricity. From what I have experienced, I'd say this reputation is very exaggerated. After all, he's a rocker like any other who's spent whole days in vans with no comfort, cramped with the members of his band, before playing in smoky dirty dives. His only specific demand that evening was to ask if he could have an electric fan on stage with him. It must be said that it had been a particularly beautiful and hot day and that the MJC Claudel was more than overcrowded, and that anyway this tiny venue was always very humid and smoky. The Claudel rockers smirked at this demand that night, but objectively it was not at all unreasonable!

Three local bands were on the bill before Felt : my friends of Brigitte Rurale with their agro-cultural rock and their hits *Elle Est Partie Aux Baléares* and *En Sibérie l'Automne Dure Toute l'Année*, The Scavengers, with Michel Jovanovic, who would later head local rock venue L'Usine, on bass and Funeral Service, a band still going these days under the Les Volfonis moniker.

As usual, the dressing room-cum-refectory was the music room upstairs. The window was open to try and catch a breath of air and Martin Duffy was plucking notes on the upright piano. Lydie Barbarian, a journalist from French national newspaper *Libération*, had even made the trip from Paris for this first French Felt give. It resulted in a full page article the following week (see page 96).

For this concert, the Felt line-up was the same as on the single (Lawrence, Gary Ainge, Marco Thomas, Martin Duffy) augmented by lead guitarist Neil Scott, who had notably played on the second *Everything But The Girl* album. They played a roughly forty minute set of an exceptional quality, with a well-travelled selection of songs covering their first years (*Fortune*, *Penelope Tree*, *Roman Litter*, *Scarlet Servants*, *The Day The Rain Came Down*, *Primitive Painters*, *Spanish House*, plus *Ballad Of The Band* twice (including once as an encore) and, what was not so common with Felt, two covers, an excellent version of Wire's *Outdoor Miner*, that they apparently did perform rather regularly, and one of *Hyacinth House*, a track from The Doors' *LA Woman* that they seem to have played very rarely. The *Forever Breathes The Lonely Word* album was to be released three months later. I guess the songs had already been written, but the band didn't know them yet : they played none of them whereas these songs made up most of the set list of a concert at the end of August 86.

Twenty years later, *PopNews* published an interview with Lawrence² and asked about the concert in Reims. The least that can be said is that his memories are not very clear ! "*I didn't want to share a room with the other, so the owner of a bar where we'd landed let me sleep in a separate room, alone, without light. In the middle of the country. It was very beautiful, Champagne. I should live there.*". Actually, if I remember correctly, the "bar owner" was Philippe Roger, founding member of Un Autre Emoi and guitar player with Brigitte Rurale, who probably did tend the bar at the venue part of the evening and who put up half of the band at his home that night in Rilly-la-Montagne, in a room installed in the attic that was probably not very well lit (or Lawrence couldn't find the switch)!!

² David Larre and Vincent Arquillière : *Lawrence - Interview*. PopNews, june 2006.
Available at : www.popnews.com/popnews/lawrence-tiw



Felt in Reims on June 21st 1986 (photo JC Brouhard)

From left to right : Lawrence, Dave Harper in the background and half of Neil Scott.

Fête de la musique à la MJC Claudel de Reims

Le 21 Juin la MJC Claudel, 1, place Claudel, et l'association UN AUTRE EMOI présentent avec le soutien du Crédit Mutuel (CME 51) un programme électrique.

Avec FELT : Groupe anglais new wave, trois 33 tours, deux maxi 45 tours à leur actif, classé pour la deuxième fois dans les 10 premiers groupes new wave du NME (New Musical Express).

Avec Brigitte Rural dont c'est la première apparition rémoise. Leur slogan : sortons des sillons battus, vive le rock Agro-Alimentaire. Du jamais vu !

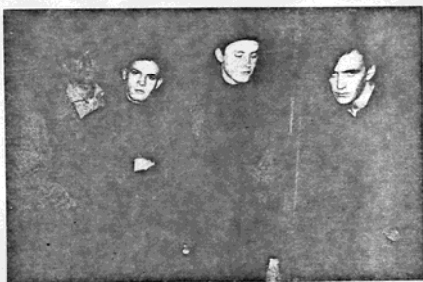
Avec Funeral Service : Rock n'roll oecuménique, un 45 tours qui sort en juin, un public de fans résolu.

Avec Scavengers qui

chantent de plus en plus en Français, des compositions ciselées et rodées. Un 45 tours en vue cette année.

Ces deux derniers groupes sont rémois.

Prix des places : 20.00 F.



Le groupe anglais FELT.

L'Union de Reims / Champagne-Dimanche, June 15th 1986.



A la M.J.C. Paul-Claudé : « Felt », les chouchous de Libération.

L'Union de Reims, June 26th 1986. From the photo report on the Fête de la Musique in Reims.



The poster for the Felt concert in Reims on June 21st 1986.
Serigraphy by Jean-Paul Barbier.

Set list of the Reims concert :

- Spanish house
- Hyacinth House (The Doors)
- Fortune
- Outdoor miner (Wire)
- Ballad of the band
- Penelope Tree
- The day the rain came down
- Scarlet servants
- Primitive painters
- Roman litter
- Ballad of the band

LET THE SNAKES CRINKLE THEIR HEADS TO DEATH



Offered by Creation Records by mail in 1986
Ref : CRE LP 009 - Released by Creation in England in 1986
Media : 12" 33 rpm - 10 tracks

Felt released many instrumental tracks - on their albums, as single B sides and even on two entirely instrumental records, this one and *Train Above The City*. One will always wonder why Lawrence opted to release these ten short compositions together, on an obviously unsaleable album, right when Felt had unleashed two rather popular singles in a row, *Primitive Painters* and, to a lesser extent, *Ballad Of The Band*, out only a few weeks earlier on their new label, Creation. He could have slipped them out three months later on the next album, *Forever Breathes The Lonely Word*, or on the B sides of the current singles, but he decided to put them out in late June-early July 1986, on this mini-album, which gives prominent place to the new soloist in the band, organ player Martin Duffy (It says on the sleeve '*Lawrence's songs coloured in by Martin*'. In 1988 for *The Pictorial Jackson Review* it will become '*Songs coloured in by the band*').

I am not an immense fan of the solo guitar instrumentals by Maurice Deebank, released early in the band's career, nor of the solo piano instrumentals by Martin Duffy to be found on the B side of the *Ballad Of The Band* twelve-inch. I am not even mentioning the *Train Above The City* album, on which only Martin and Gary Ainge are playing, which is over on the jazzy side of things with vibraphone and electric piano : the descriptions I had read so frightened me that I waited over twenty years to push myself to listen to it, just for the sake of complementing my knowledge of Felt's music. I am not ready to do it again soon.

On the contrary, I have always liked *Let The Snakes Crinkle Their Heads To Death*. Of course, it will eternally remain an instrumental Felt album, cruelly lacking Lawrence's vocals. It will also always be a comparatively minor album in the discography of the band, but at least, even without the voice, it sounds like Felt. You know it even if you listen to only a few notes, and it's never boring (It does not give itself the

time to become thus with ten tracks in nineteen minutes). From one track to another, it even echoes the whole of Felt's output - from the very beginnings (the drums on *Nazca Plain* recall *Crumbling The Antiseptic Beauty*) to the later EPs, *Final Resting Of The Ark* (*Viking Dress*) and *Space Blues* (*Voyage To Illumination*, an excellent Martin Duffy composition). At other times, especially on the first side, I am reminded of *Poem Of The River* and of the vocal side of *The Pictorial Jackson Review*, also of *The Strange Idols Pattern And Other Short Stories*, the titles of some of the tunes (*The Palace*, *Indian Scriptures*, *Ancient City Where I Lived*, *Nazca Plain*) echoing the title of this album. With maritime ambient sounds at the beginning and the end and its central guitar part, *Ancient City Where I Lived* manages the feat to be a well-formed elaborate composition that is only eighty-eight seconds long.

Easy listening is a style of music that I'd never have thought at the time the record was released could be linked to Felt, if only because I didn't know it very well then. Yet, Felt must have listened to some, as evidenced by their cover of *Soul Coaxing*, the strings-stuffed version of Michel Polnareff's *Âme Câline* by Raymond Lefèvre and his orchestra, taped live in 1987 and available on their *A Declaration* DVD.

More or less in reference to this style is the opening *Song For William S. Harvey*, in tribute to the Elektra Records art designer in the 1960s and 1970s, which is a success, although I can hardly stand the electric piano on *Jewel Sky*.

The highlight of the album, with its sixties sounding organ, remains for me the very last track, *Sapphire Mansions*. The rhythm in the beginning reminds me a little of *Yellow Ball* by The Revolving Paint Dream and this track would have fitted perfectly on *The Pictorial Jackson Review*. It's obviously not a coincidence that of the ten titles on the record, this is the only one that Felt used to perform on stage, rather

often too. With lyrics by Lawrence, it would have been a hit!

Lawrence must have had second thoughts about the photograph on the cover. Not great by the way. Not long after its initial release, the record was distributed with a new cover, using the close-up on the vest, belt and gloved hands of Lawrence that was initially on the back. The title of the record was added too. It's a little better to my taste, though I don't like the font used.



FELT

"I remember what Vic Goddard used to say when he was asked why he hadn't been more successful. He'd say it was because I haven't made a record that deserved to be. And I've thought of saying that myself, but then I've gone back to the records and thought no, we deserve to be massive." (Lawrence, Felt, NME, October 1985). Reluctant cult hero and frustrated star, Lawrence has a point. After four lp's and a clutch of classic singles over the years, Felt are still trapped in the indie quagmire. Worse, they've been trapped there long enough that they're rather taken too much for granted. Felt's profile is remarkably low key compared to many upcoming indie groups even though Felt's ground following is much more impressive. They sell two, three times as many records as some of the highly touted new indie groups but it's never Felt you see peering out of the covers of the weekly music press.

Now all this has got to change, let's get this straight now. Felt are about to enter the busiest six months of their career. Newly signed to Creation Records, they've released one single to date, the marvellous "Ballad of the Band", sleeve by way of Bob Dylan's 'Desire' and the best Dylan impersonation since Mouse and the Traps. It's also one of the saddest songs you'll ever hear.

So, after their best single in years, in true iconoclastic form, Felt now release an instrumental lp, 'Let The Snakes Crinkle Their Heads To Death'; utterly bizarre. As a career move for most bands it would be suicidal, for Felt it makes perfect sense. It will be followed later in July by a re-release of the epic single "Penelope Tree" on Cherry Red, a reminder that Felt make great pop songs. Then, in September, by a new Creation single and lp that will, promises Lawrence, be in the same vein, a whole lp of concise pop songs.

Like many of the Great British eccentrics, Vic Goddard, Cope et al, Felt are in danger of having to settle for a paragraph in the rock history books rather than a whole chapter. It's up to you.

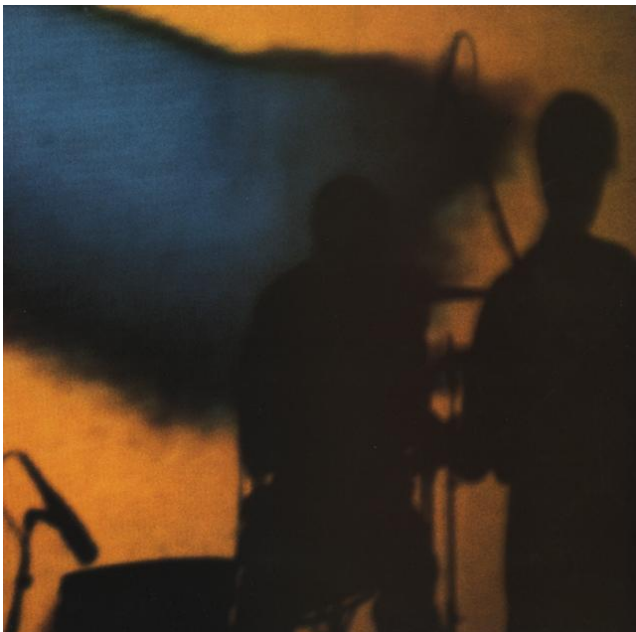
"Lawrence would make a fine superstar. Unfortunately he's fallen for fame before falling in with the fame-mongers. Do what you can for him." (Bill Prince, NME, October 1985)
Yes, do what you can for him.

Felt: Lawrence, guitars, vocals
Martin Duffy, organ, electric piano
Marco Thomas, bass
Gary Ainge, drums.

LP's: Crumbling The Antiseptic Beauty/The Splendour of Fear/The Strange Idol Pattern And Other Short Stories/Ignite The Seven Cannons/Let The Snakes Crinkle Their Heads To Death/tbc.

A promotional letter sent to the press at the time of the record release. Or how to try and justify the incomprehensible : "*As a career move for most bands it would be suicidal, for Felt it makes perfect sense*".

POEM OF THE RIVER



Offered by Creation Records by mail in 1987

Ref : CRE LP 017 - Released by Creation in England in 1987

Media : 12" 33 rpm - 6 tracks

I will always link *Poem Of The River* to the concert that Felt gave at L'Ancienne Belgique in Brussels on Friday, February 20th 1987, because it was that day that I heard for the first time some songs from this record, which was to be released a few months later - and also because it was the first time that I saw Felt backed by Roger Cowell's slides and psychedelic liquid light show. The cover photos give a good idea of the visual effect this light show had on the audience, which was particularly striking at L'Ancienne Belgique thanks to the high wall just behind the band on which the projections were made.

For a long time I persuaded myself that the cover pics had been taken in Brussels that night, but the release in 2003 of the live DVD *A Declaration*, with similar light show and cover art, proved that these photos could as well have been taken the same month in London.

That day, February 20th 1987, made for a well-employed twenty-four hours. First university, then, after classes at the end of the afternoon, Philippe R. picked us up, Joaquim da M. and I, and we drove to Brussels for the first date of the Felt continental tour, with support by Biff, Bang, Pow! When we crossed the border at La Capelle, Philippe told us some old memories of an eventful return from Holland, at that border crossing in the seventies. We didn't think that, Joaquim as well as myself, when we would respectively cross the border we would both have to deal with unpleasant and suspicious (without any reason to be) custom officers.

L'Ancienne Belgique was situated right in the centre of Brussels, near the Grand Place. We arrived a little early and were able to meet with the bands without any fuss.

Alan asked me to go on stage with Biff, Bang, Pow!, which I heartily agreed to do. Apart from *A Day Out With Jeremy Chester*, a song for which I got up and played a little tambourine, I spent the whole set sitting on a chair on the stage, eating and reading, in tribute to

Belgian comics, an issue of *Spot BD* magazine with *The yellow "M"* on the cover. I was really stunned the next day when the "M" found itself on the front page of every Belgian newspaper to announce the death of Edgar P. Jacobs! During the evening, Alan spent some time with Philippe discussing his brand new Rickenbaker, of which he was very proud.

It was February and chilly outside. The atmosphere was rather cold too inside the venue, which was far from being full. But I thought that this atmosphere suited Felt's music quite well.

Their concert was grandiose. Excellent music and very strong visual impact witnessed from the audience. The band looked tiny, swathed in splashes of yellow and blue. The contrast was all the more striking with the majesty of the music they were producing. They played several tracks from *Forever Breathes The Lonely Word*, and some new ones too, particularly *A declaration* and *Riding On The Equator*. A Belgian reviewer³, who was attending a Felt gig for the first time, was rather disappointed but, like me, his favourite song was *A Wave Crashed On Rocks*, for which the majesty of the music mixed perfectly with the visuals. Unlike me, he was able to name one of the instrumentals they played as a Michel Polnareff tune (*Âme Caline*, retitled *Soul Coaxing* in 1968 when the easy listening version by Raymond Lefèvre and his Orchestra became a hit in the USA, hot on the heels of the success of *Love Is Blue* by Paul Mauriat and his Orchestra).

The visual impact of Felt live was strengthened by Phil King, their new bass player, whom I met for the first time that day. He looked fairly striking with his long raven lop-sided hair, Phil Oakey style, and had a presence exceeding by far that of the average Felt member. Phil had just left The Servants. We met up next when he played with Biff, Bang, Pow!, then he

³

C. S. : *Felt : Liquid slides*. [Disponible sur Available at :](http://felt-tribute.webs.com/reviews/liquid_slides.htm)
http://felt-tribute.webs.com/reviews/liquid_slides.htm

joined Lush and nowadays he plays with The Jesus and Mary Chain. What a curriculum vitae!

Later on, we all gathered at the D.N.A bar for food and drink. Unlike the concert it was quite busy and active. It was so crowded that, despite the icy cold, many of us stayed outside. The only way to order and drink was to pass along a bank note from one client to the other from outside to the counter; a few minutes later the glass would arrive, following the same path, with the change if you please. That's where, with Joaquim and Philippe, we found accomodation for the night with members of Jim's Twenty-One, a band of Scottish and British expats, who were quite happy to mingle with compatriots, and their idols too : the demo cassette they gave me that evening sounded very Creation, same as *Throwaway Friend*, their one and only single, that they had recorded a few days earlier.

We stayed at Kenny's, who was sharing a flat with other members of the band in a town house in a district a little outside of the main town centre. The three of us slept in the living-room, with only one couch and not enough sleeping bags, but that was not really the problem. The problem was that it was very cold! Like in many British homes, where they don't seem to know what it is to fear cold, and though the scene took place in Belgium, there was no central heating and the little gas radiator soon switched off for security reasons because there was not enough oxygen left in the room. So we had to open the windows to get some fresh air, which didn't make us any warmer. I hardly slept at all that night. The next morning, as soon as our hosts started stirring, I was round the corner at the local baker getting us some "couques". Rarely have I been so much in need of a coffee in the morning!

The previous evening, Alan proposed to tag along with them for part of the tour with Felt and Biff, Bang, Pow!, which was was going on for a few more dates in Germany. As the university was on its winter holiday,

and as Alan offered to pay for my return train ticket home, I could afford to accept.

So, at the end of the morning, Kenny took us back to nearly where we had started, at the Hôtel Central, near the Place de la Bourse and just round the corner from l'Ancienne Belgique. Then started what is part of any rock tour, the waiting. We were to meet up with Biff, Bang, Pow! at twelve noon and we spent an endless time waiting, comfortably installed in the armchairs of the lobby of this grand hotel. Comfortably, well almost, since there was also no heating in the hotel. We were cursed !

After a time, we realised there was a problem, because we were cold and especially, as the minutes went slowly by, we overheard several clients saying there was a problem with the heating in their room. The clerk at reception would answer each time that they were going to see to it and send a plumber to check the radiators. To make up for the lack of heating in the hall, the owners had found an effective but noisy solution : a heat cannon aimed towards the revolving doors at the entrance. After an hour, we were dying to go and tell the clients that they weren't the only ones who didn't have any heating in their rooms!

Finally, various members of Biff, Bang, Pow! and Felt began to appear. Once we'd seen Alan and confirmed the invitation to join the tour, Philippe and Joaquim were able to head back to Reims. As I had not intended to stay away more than one night, I had of course no change of clothes. Whilst waiting I took the opportunity to go shopping in a nearby department store. I didn't have a lot of money so I didn't buy much more than a superb pair of socks of the most vivid orange and I still managed to spend as much money, and maybe more, on a record, the Replacements album *Tim*, on sale too at 100 Belgian francs.

That evening, I stayed at the flat of another member of Jim's Twenty-One, and I was not cold..

As for *Poem Of The River* itself, it is one of my favourite Felt records. It has a great unity and is closer to the more 'poppy' Felt albums (*The Strange Idols Pattern And Other Short Stories*, *Ignite The Seven Cannons*, *Forever Breathes The Lonely Word*, the A side of *The Pictorial Jackson Review*, *Me And A Monkey On The Moon*) than to the first two six-trackers (*Crumbling The Antiseptic Beauty* and *The Splendour Of Fear*). I read somewhere (Alistair Fitchett makes a reference to it in his text *The Man Who Was Not With It*) that Lawrence was not happy with the quality of the recordings produced by Mayo Thompson and would have preferred, had Creation finances permitted it, to have chucked the tapes in the Thames and started all over again !

In my mind, the greatest moments of the record is the first 103 seconds, that is the whole of *A Declaration*. Lawrence effectively entones a very strong declaration, also very typical of his character : "*I will be the first person in history to die of boredom and I will have for my epitath the second line of Black ship in the harbour*" (a song from *Ignite The Seven Cannons*). The song is very rhythmic and ends with a guitar solo by Lawrence of the kind I like, simple and efficient.

Generally, Lawrence's lyrics on this record seem to be more direct and less 'literary' than before. All the tracks are initially built as short songs, but it happens that two of them go on with long instrumental parts and clock in at six and eight minutes respectively. The better achievement of the two is without contest, *Riding On The Equator*, in which Martin Duffy's organ and the guitars of Lawrence, Neil Scott and Tony Wille reply to each other in long flights.

⁴ Alistair Fitchett : *The man who was not with it* (Tangents, 1996). Available at : <http://www.tangents.co.uk/tangents/archive/main/felt.html>

FOREVER BREATHES THE LONELY WORD



Offered by Creation Records by mail in Autumn 1986
Ref : CRE LP 011 - Released by Creation in England in 1986
Media : 12" 33 rpm - 8 tracks

Last month⁵, the twentieth anniversary of Andy Warhol's death was commemorated. I remember vividly where I was on the evening when the news of his death was made public. I was in deepest Germany, in Detmold, in a club that was called Hunky Dory (It is still called that - but it has changed premises since), a place like there are quite few in France, a big café/pub, with the interior design halfway between western saloon bar and rock temple, with a space saved for the live bands only four inches higher than the ground, next to the bar and elongated, separated from the audience only by a wooden handrail.

The band playing that night was Felt. I was present because I was for a few days with their support band, Biff, Bang, Pow!, doing a "performance" on stage meant to be headscratching (Actually, I remained seated on a chair for the whole concert, standing up only for one song to play a little tambourine and sing backing vocals).

Felt was on tour to promote *Forever Breathes The Lonely Word*, their first album on Creation, the one that could have amplified the previous success of *Ignite The Seven Cannons* and helped them reach a higher level of recognition.

In the interval between two songs during Felt's concert, a guy leant over the handrail and whispered a few words in Lawrence's ear. Lawrence listened intently and talked with the guy to get confirmation of the information. He then exchanged a few words with the band and took the mike again to tell us that he'd just learnt of the death of Andy Warhol and that the next song was dedicated to him. They then started playing *All The People I Like Are Those That Are Dead*, one of the peaks of *Forever Breathes The Lonely Word*, and it was as if this song had been written specifically for this precise moment :

⁵ This review was initially published on March 25th 2007.

*"Maybe I should entertain the very fact that I'm insane
I wasn't fooling when I said, all the people I like are
those that are dead".*

Mittwoch, 28. 10. 1987, 20.30 Uhr
(Einlaß 20.00 Uhr)

**Hunky Dory
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Videoaufnahmen – auch für den privaten Gebrauch – sind nicht erlaubt.
Beim Verlassen der Halle verliert die Karte ihre Gültigkeit.
Mißbrauch wird strafrechtlich verfolgt.

Rather surprisingly, Felt toured Germany with Biff, Bang, Pow ! supporting twice in 1987, in February and in October, and both tours stopped at the Hunky Dory in Detmold. Ticket courtesy of Phil King, who played bass on both occasions, with Felt in February and with Biff, Bang, Pow ! in October !

I guess we'll never know why this album didn't help Felt transcend their status of a cult independent band. There are probably multiple reasons, among which you can certainly count the fact that Lawrence was not a very flexible star and the messiness of a still growing Creation Records label. The editorial decisions of the New Musical Express probably played a part in it too. The ground having been prepared by the single *Rain Of Crystal Spires*, the album was released in September 1986. On November 8 1986, the NME dedicated its centre spread to Felt (a full page photo of Lawrence and a page of interview with the usual bullshit about his obsession with cleanliness). Felt had been promised the front cover which would have meant a big push for both notoriety and record sales. Tough luck since, maybe prophetically inspired by the lyrics to *Hours Of Darkness Have Changed My Mind* ("I'd like to do something that makes somebody somewhere care, playing with fire why should I mind, I'm going beyond now what will I find"), the NME opted that week for a three-quarter black front cover and a headline not about music but a social issue - youth suicide.

Forever Breathes The Lonely Word is a compact album with a strong unity. The sound bears the characteristics of a John A. Rivers production : lots of echo creating a wooly atmosphere, the voices and the instruments meshing with one another.

On listening, Martin Duffy's organ sounds omnipresent, and it is true that it is much more prominent than on *Ignite The Seven Cannons*, for accompaniment and for solos. But, even if within the bulk of sounds the solo instruments are not always at the forefront, it must not be forgotten that a good half of said solos are held by the guitars (those of Lawrence and Tony Willé, whose tenure in the band was so brief that he was already out by the time of the February 1987 tour).

The backing vocals are put to good use too on the record, performed by Tony Willé, Martin Duffy, John

A. Rivers for the male parts, Sarah (Cracknell) and Yvonne (McGee ?) for the female parts. They might well have been treated through an Emulator or a Fairlight and used as a synthesizer (on *September Lady*, for instance).

As I said, this album exhibits a great unity. It is the first track, *Rain Of Crystal Spires*, which was chosen as a single. With such a title, and lyrics that start with "*Seven brothers on their way to Avalon*", you can guess that Felt was not aiming for the Top 50. It's a song that is rather typical of Felt, but it's maybe not as strong as *Ballad Of The Band* or *Primitive Painters*. A better choice of a single might have been some of the faster songs on the album, such as *Grey Streets*, with its energetic drumming and punchy organ playing. Talking of the faster songs, I can only agree with Lee McFadden⁶ when he wonders how two gems from these sessions, *I Will Die With My Head In Flames* and *Sandman's On The Rise Again*, could have been relegated to B sides of *Rain Of Crystal Spires* instead of making the album.

On the whole, I tend to have a preference for the second side of the album. It opens with *All The People I Like Are Those That Are Dead* which, musically possesses the same hypnotic force as *Primitive Painters*, but the voice is much less tense. There is also *Gather Up Your Wings And Fly*, another track with a breakneck pace and backing vocals, and the album ends gracefully with *A Wave Crashed On Rocks*, on which the vocals and organ actually give the impression of waves crashing when Lawrence sings "*You ruined it all*" and *Hours Of Darkness Have Changed My Mind*, a track which oozes sadness and which evokes every period of Felt's discography.

I left the tour after the concert following Detmold, in Hamburg. This gave me the opportunity to catch a


⁶ Lee McFadden : *Felt*. Perfect Sound Forever, [2003]. Disponible sur : <http://www.furious.com/Perfect/felt.html>

glimpse of the port district when the bands stopped there to drop their stuff at the hotel. I watched the concert from the back of the venue, which seemed to me rather large and quite full. I even probably had to dash off before the last notes of the encore to catch my night train to Reims via Luxembourg. The trip earned me the vision of a superb dawn on the snowy spurs of the Mosel valley and some misadventures with a (wrongly) suspicious female customs officer.

Nr. 2 · FEBRUAR 1987 · DM 4,80 · SFr 4,70 · OS 39,- · hll 6,30 · £ 2,20 · G 6952 E

SPEX
MUSIK ZUR ZEIT

Dow Jones-Index erstmals über
2000: L O L I T A S
Arbeitslosenunterstützung für
30 Monate: F E L T
resunken: G U N C L U B. Ende
· HEAD OF DAVID · WORLD DOMINATION
· LITTLE RICHARD · HEAVEN 17 · MIGHTY
EID · SHELLEYAN ORPHAN und, oh Wunder:



DEMOSKOPEN FANDEN HERAUS
Was/wen unsere Leser lieben, worüber sie diskutieren, was sie sich erzählen und was sie an Londoner U-Bahn-Stationen tun.

Felt on the front page of Spex, n° 2, February 1987.

The more of a good thing you have, the less you are easily satisfied...

This record has always disappointed me a little. First, I don't think the cover is a success. Lawrence, head hung low, looks suitably mournful, but the design, made by Lawrence like most of the Felt sleeves under his Shanghai Packaging Company guise, is so so.

It has rarely been the case for Felt (the two other instances are *Mexican Bandits* and *Primitive Painters*), but the A side of this single is lifted straight from one of their albums, *Forever Breathes The Lonely Word*. *Gather Up Your Wings And Fly* is also culled from the album and, if both those songs are rather very good, none of them has the charm or the qualities of a true pop single. By the way, I don't think *Forever Breathes The Lonely Word* contained any track conforming to these criteria, which doesn't diminish the value of this great album.

What is more annoying is that two songs such as *I Will Die With My Head In Flames* and *Sandman's On The Rise Again* have been relegated to the B side of this record. I really think that their due place was either on the album (having been recorded during the same sessions, with the same line-up and the same producer), or on a standalone single, same as with *Ballad Of The Band* a few months earlier, even if it would have made for one of the shortest records in recent history, clocking in at 3'20" for both sides!

Because these two songs are short, and with a tempo rather fast for Felt, maybe the band even considered them as not quite finished. If *Gather Up Your Wings And Fly* had stopped after ninety seconds, before the organ and guitar solos and the reprise of the chorus, it would have sounded a lot like those two in terms of structure.

I Will Die With My Head In Flames has all the good ingredients of the album : the organ/guitars duel, the backing vocals and especially Lawrence's lyrics and singing : "*You can keep all your false hopes and I will die with my head in flames. And your face tells me*

there's something going wrong today, there's something going wrong today."

What is strange about *Sandman's On The Rise* Again is that it slows down at the time of the very brief chorus, during which you can hear guitar arpeggios that recall very early Felt, then it accelerates again with a guitar solo accompanied by percussion, which this time remind me of *Mexican Bandits* spun at 78 or 90 rpm instead of 33 !



The more of a good thing you have, the less you are easily satisfied...

On April 23rd 1987, with Philippe Roger, we arrived in London for a short holiday break during which, among other things, we recorded my cover of *Chernobyl Baby* by Baby Amphetamine.

Ahead of our trip, I had pinpointed in the NME a Julian Cope gig on that night and my friends at Creation had been nice enough to get us on the guest list.

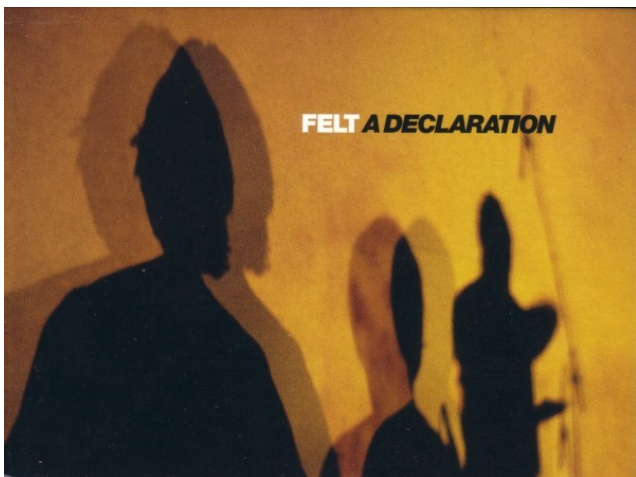
When we arrived at the Creation office, located at 83 Clerkenwell Rd at the time, we were handed the flyer above, which uses the cover shot of *Rain Of Crystal Spires* to advertise a secret concert for Felt under the Scarlet Servants (one of the songs from the *Ignite The*

Seven Cannons album) moniker for the same night, with Momus supporting!

The secret was rather thinly veiled, but I guess Felt wanted to cut down on their expenses for the trip to London and they probably were not contractually allowed to play an official gig in town the night before the one they were to headline at the King's College with The Wishing Stones and House of Love opening. At the time, I had not yet caught Momus in concert, nor Julian Cope. As we were of course invited to the gig the next night, the choice was quickly made between two good things : we would go to the Julian Cope on the 23rd and to the official Felt concert the next day, hoping eventually to call at the Black Horse, if the Cope concert finished early, as both venues were very close to one another (We never had the time).

Today, I kind of regret this decision. Sure, it is the only time I have seen Julian Cope live, with The Faith Brothers supporting, but it was Julian Cope in his Island/*St Julian* phase and he gave us a very professional and square performance, memorable mostly for his acrobatics on his customized mike stand (an idea pinched from Magazine's Howard Devoto, I think) and a very good and very long version of *Reynard the fox*. But I especially regret missing the opportunity to catch Felt, sorry Scarlet Servants, and Momus playing in a tiny London pub, with all the Creation gang in the audience.

A DECLARATION



Bought by mail in England in 2003

Ref : CRDVD25 - Released by Cherry Red in England in 2003

Media : DVD 12 cm - 10 tracks

This DVD has a great quality : it is a probably a unique archival document, giving us the opportunity to watch what is said to be the only remaining film of a whole Felt concert.

Unfortunately, it also has the weaknesses of some older documents, what with the sound being saturated and the image quality not very good. It is probably not due to a bad conservation of the original film, but rather a consequence of the low scale and lack of budget of the original operation, probably set up in the first place to make the video clip for *Stained Glass Window In The Sky* available here as a bonus.

So, if the cover art for the DVD is quite a success, in a direct line to that of *Poem Of The River*, the sound is not quite up to par (I doubt there was much remastering done) and the whole thing seems to be filmed with only one camera, which is obliged to move a lot and zooms in and out excessively. Furthermore, for a great part of the concert, a guy wearing a cap and holding a Super 8 camera keeps coming and going on stage and it's rather annoying (watching the bonus, you understand that he's filming additional shots for the clip).

As a consequence, I only started to really get into the concert when the guy calmed down and Felt embarked on the long instrumental part of *Riding On The Equator*.

This short concert is advertised as complete, with only nine songs, but I gather that, if Lawrence rejoins the band after the last track, and only encore, it is not only to greet the audience but to play at least another song that is not on this DVD. In any case, this encore, an instrumental version of Michel Polnareff's *Âme Câlîne*, made popular internationally in 1968 in an easy listening version by Raymond Lefèvre and his Orchestra under the title *Soul Coaxing*, along with the excellent *When The Dawn Starts Creeping In*, originally slated for inclusion on *Poem Of The River*, are two tracks that Felt never released on any record, which add to the value of this film.

This concert was recorded at the University of London Union in February 1987. It was a headlining gig, in a comparatively big venue for Felt. It's a far cry from their concerts in pubs or small clubs, but the sonic and visual impact cannot compare with the shock I was to feel a few days later when they played at L'Ancienne Belgique in Brussels. Still, this DVD documents for posterity an interesting period for live Felt, when they were using Roger Cowell's psychedelic oils and Sandy Fleming's photos, and especially that it allows to recall or discover Felt on stage. That is to say some very beautiful and very elaborate music, made without showing off by a band that hardly interacts with its audience : Gary Ainge only looks at his drums, Marco Thomas lets his guitar take the little light he is awarded, Martin Duffy has kept his leather longcoat on, as if he were in a hurry to leave after the gig. Only Phil King and Lawrence move a little. Phil King, with his bass, his long hair and his leather trousers, has star quality. Lawrence, in a short-sleeved shirt, hides behind his fringe and chews on his gum, giving the impression he would rather not be here...

I knew I had seen Felt in London in another university building. Before learning that the recording on the DVD dated from February 1987, I had looked up my diary to check if it was at ULU. Actually, no, it was just two months later, on April 24 1987 at King's College, that I had seen them in a similar setting.

The day before, with Philippe Roger, we had opted to go see Julian Cope live rather than Felt, who were playing as Scarlet Servants in a pub for a warm-up concert, with Momus supporting.

In the afternoon, in a scene that could have led us to believe that London is a very small town, we had climbed up with Philippe to the second floor of the Record & Tape Exchange shop in Notting Hill Gate, the collectors floor. There was only one customer at that floor when we arrived, Lawrence (!), sporting a superb, colorful long-sleeved shirt, immersed in the

section for sixties Françoise Hardy records...! The next day, we were to come across Dan Treacy, sitting at a table in a pub in Dalston to catch the band opening for The Jasmine Minks!

On the night of the 24th the whole gang of Creation friends were present, backstage and in the audience, for this major concert with three bands in a big London venue.

The first band was completely unknown. They hardly played more than fifteen minutes, but they blew me away, thanks mainly to their three intermeshing guitars. A few days later, Philippe and I would be leaving London, each holding a copy of the 12 inch single of this band, about to be released by Creation. The record was called *Shine On* and the band The House of Love...

The *Wishing Stones* followed on stage. Bill Prince's band continued in the same spirit as his former band The Loft, but with compositions not as strong as Peter Astor's. I think it was also this time that I came back from London with their 12 inch *New Ways*, a gift from Jeff Barrett, who with Head and later Sub Aqua had first plunged in the adventure of launching a record label, before finding success with Heavenly Records.

I have a fonder memory of the Felt concert on April 24th than what I see on *A Declaration*, even if my best recollections are from the Brussels concert. All in all though, I guess that the concert was much like what's on the DVD, but with a much better sound, a better image quality and a song selection that was a little different. There was even a magic moment during *Primitive Painters*, their hypnotic masterpiece which ended the concert that night. I had moved a little along the side of the stage, near a ceiling high plate-glass window and at one point I turned my head to discover an enormous full moon lighting the city : the town outside seemed to be in communion with Felt and its light-show inside. Or, to quote *Primitive Painters*, at

this precise moment life could seem as strange as a conspiracy...

THE EPICTORIAL JACKSON REVIEW



Ref : CRE EP 030 (Not available 016) - Released by Vivonzeureux! in France in 2007
Media : double virtual 45 rpm 7" EP with gatefold sleeve - 8 tracks

*"I was going to be a personality
I was going to be so well known
What went wrong I don't know"
("How Spook Got Her Man")*

The Pictorial Jackson Review, the penultimate Felt album, was released in Spring 1988, eighteen months before the band split. If the quote above is to be trusted, even if it's taken out of its context, Lawrence already had the feeling then that his dreams of glory were slipping by.

All through its career, Felt had difficulties producing albums according to industry standards, i.e. works grouping 10 to 14 cuts adding to at least 30 minutes. From six-song mini-LPs to five-track 12-inches (*The Final Resting Of The Ark*), not forgetting the 16 minute album (*Let The Snakes Crinkle Their Heads To Death*), this variety makes even more laughable the legend created by Lawrence at the time of the split that they have released 10 singles and 10 albums in 10 years. This legend, reprised in most of the bios since, had a fatal flaw from day one anyway : Lawrence had deliberately put aside *Index*, his inaugural 7" single, when he made the tally, seeing as it was not released in the Eighties !

That's surprising, especially as Lawrence seems to appreciate things that are squared-up and well-ordered. Same with *The Pictorial Jackson Review* album, which has always annoyed me because of the complete lack of balance between its two sides (at the time, this LP was designed for vinyl : it was only released on CD six months after its original release, coupled with the next album). On the first side, there are eight short and excellent songs that fit together perfectly, with a good guitar/organ balance, halfway between the Dylan of 1965 (unless it is the Dylan of 1974) and the Lou Reed of *Rock N' Roll Heart*. On the B side are two instrumental tracks, a 12 minute one and a 3 minute one, composed and played solo on piano by Martin Duffy.

I don't need to be convinced of Martin Duffy's talent as a keyboard player, and I have absolutely nothing against him, but in nearly twenty years I must have listened maybe three times to *The Pictorial Jackson Review's* B side, whereas I often draw a lot of pleasure listening to the eight songs on the A side, particularly my favourite ones, *Until The Fools Get Wise, Don't Die On My Doorstep, Under A Pale Light, How Spook Got Her man* and *Apple Boutique*.

Thinking about all those 4 songs EP from the sixties I love, and also those double singles from the 80's, such as Julian Cope's *Sunspots EP*, I finally struck upon the perfect idea. Yes, Creation had got it completely wrong by releasing the album in this form. The B side could have been saved for an instrumental album instrumental (The CD release of *Train Above The City* for instance), and more importantly, the other tracks should have been released as an EP, a double 7" EP to be more precise : 2 records, 2 sides per record, 2 tracks per side. It's not the golden ratio, but it's getting closer !

Thanks to Vivonzeureux! Records, this perfect edition has seen the light of day. *The EPictorial Jackson Review*, that's its new title, reprises the eight songs of the A side of the album in their original order, the only idiosyncrasy being to have named the sides F, E, L and T. Housed in a gatefold sleeve printed on non-glossy white card, like the original vinyl album release, this EP will be perfectly protected and will give you musical pleasure for years to come.

Credits :

All titles written and composed by Lawrence and coloured in by the band

Lawrence : vocals, guitars, ace tone electric organ

Marco Thomas : lead guitar

Martin Duffy : organ, piano, fender rhodes bass piano

Mick Bund : bass

Gary Ainge : drums

Produced by Joe Foster

Recorded quickly on eight track

EP title by Jack K

EP compiled by JC Brouchard

Cover art : The Shanghai Packaging Company, remixed by Pol Dodu

Liner notes by JC Brouchard

1.57 APPLE BOUTIQUE	F	SIDE	CRE EP 030 Manufactured and distributed by the Cartel Made in England £4.99 in U.K.
2.01 IVORY PAST			
2.34 UNTIL THE FOOLS GET WISE	E	SIDE	
2.33 BITTER END			
1.38 HOW SPOOK GOT HER MAN	L	SIDE	
2.26 CHRISTOPHER ST			
4.16 UNDER A PALE LIGHT	T	SIDE	
2.17 DON'T DIE ON MY DOORSTEP			
			A CREATION ARTEFACT

SPACE BLUES



Bought at Vitamine C or at La Clé de Sol in Reims in 1988
Ref : CRE LP 060T – Released by Creation in England in 1988
Media : 12" 45 rpm
Tracks : Space Blues – Be Still -/- Female Star – Tuesday's Secret

After the April 24 1987 gig in London, I didn't have any more direct contact with Felt and Creation didn't send me their records any more. So, I only bought *The Final Resting Of The Ark*, a five track 12" single, a few months after its release, on sale at reduced price, and I simply passed on *Train Above The City*, the instrumental album recorded by Gary Ainge and Martin Duffy without Lawrence. But I did buy *The Pictorial Jackson Review* on its release, as well as *Space Blues*, which happens to be the last original record released by Felt on Creation - a little over a year before Felt's farewell album, *Me And A Monkey On The Moon*.

It is in David Cavanagh's book *The Creation Records Story : My Magpie Eyes Are Hungry For The Prize* (Virgin, 2000) that I found, on pages 246-248, some interesting information on the context of the recording of *Space Blues*. Just imagine, Lawrence had settled in Brighton at the time, sharing a flat with... Alan McGee! After his divorce and with acid house beginning to flourish, Alan was embarking on his hedonistic phase, but the cohabitation with Lawrence seems to have gone down well. However, Creation was going through one of its many financial dire straits and Alan was apparently not very keen on Lawrence hiring for two days the services of star producer John Leckie, who had already produced Felt in 1984 for the *The Strange Idols Pattern And Other Short Stories* album and who figures highly in my personal pantheon as producer of Magazine's *Real Life*, of the first XTC albums and the solo Mr. Partridge release as well. As for John Leckie, he was sorry to see Felt forced to work on such a tight budget while the band he was working with at the same time was spending huge sums of money on recording - with the support of their label, Silvertone. That band was The Stone Roses, who were recording their first album.

Space Blues is an excellent record. Let's start with the final track for a change, *Tuesdays Secret*, the only one on which Felt features with a full traditional line-up

(Lawrence, Martin Duffy, Gary Ainge and Mick Bund on bass). The song, that Felt performed live from late 1987, is very good. It would have deserved a place, maybe not on a single A side, but at least on an album such as *The Strange Idols Pattern* or, more pointedly, as Martin Duffy is present, on *Ignite The Seven Cannons* or *Forever Breathes The Lonely Word*.

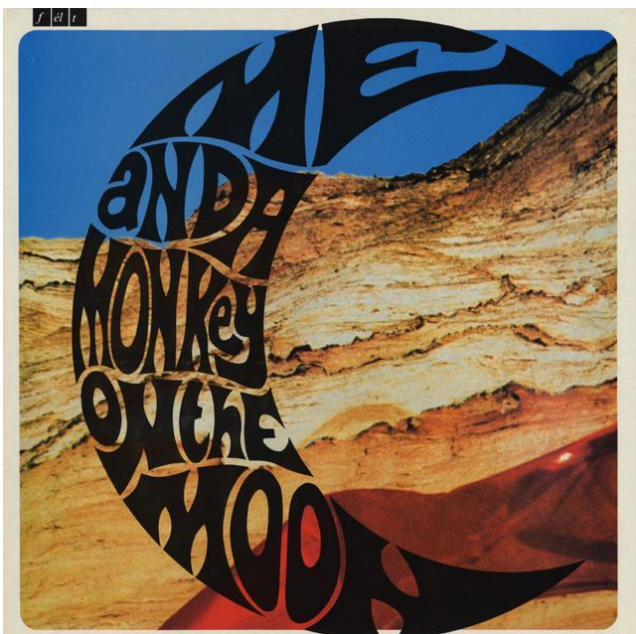
The three other tracks have a very peculiar musical tonality, due to the lack of drums and the use of a Fender Rhodes bass piano bought by Lawrence for 25 quid in Birmingham and an old Yamaha synth that was lying somewhere in John Leckie's studio. In this atmosphere, Felt recorded the excellent song *Space Blues*, with the help of Rose McDowall on backing vocals and June Brides violin player Francis Sweeney. Music that seems literally hallucinated. David Cavanagh quotes Douglas Hart, from The Jesus and Mary Chain, who likens the sound of this record to what he heard at his first raves, and indeed these three tracks might be said to actually predate ambient house. And one wonders who Lawrence might be referring to in his lyrics : "*I'm your greatest fan 'cause you don't give a damn*".

Be Still, a track from The Beach Boys' album *Friends*, is the only cover in the studio discography of Felt. The organ and the soprano saxophone of Richard Thomas are in evidence. On *Female Star*, it is especially Neil Scott's slide guitar solo that is remarkable.

According to David Cavanagh, Lawrence was very happy with *Space Blues* but he realised it would be very hard in the future for him to obtain the budget to record in such good conditions and it is from that point that he started to organise the end of Felt.

Like a comet coming back at regular intervals, we had the space blues again in 2002 when Martin Duffy paid tribute to Lawrence with *Space Blues #2* on the Primal Scream album *Evil Heat*. On this occasion, Martin took on the role of singer, with dark lyrics dealing with choices to make on judgement day. Brrrr.

ME AND A MONKEY ON THE MOON



Bought at La Clé de Sol in Reims in 1989

Ref : ACME 024CD - Released by El in England in 1989

Media : 5" CD - 10 tracks

The bill for the first night of the second Les Inrockuptibles festival at La Cigale was quite sensational: Felt, The Chills, The La's and The Stone Roses!

Don't get me wrong, I'm not particularly fond of these concerts in venues with a capacity of a thousand or more, and if I made the trip to Paris that day, it was only to catch Felt, that I had not seen in concert since the one in London thirty months earlier and whose concerts in France were quite few and far between : apart from this one and the very first one, that I had put on in Reims on June 21 1986, I can only find one mention in a non dated piece in *Libération*, of another advertised Felt gig, in Paris at the Rex-Club, opening for Primal Scream, late in 1988 or early in 1989.

I can't remember what the running order for the bands was. I remember having listened a little to The Chills from the back of the room, a band I had liked since Creation had released the *Kaleidoscope World* compilation under licence from Flying Nun in 1986.

As for The Stone Roses, I loved a few of their songs, especially *Made Of Stone*, but it was such madness, with coaches full of English fans who must have come down from London, Manchester or Liverpool, that I spent a good part of the concert in the hall of La Cigale, making only a few incursions inside the venue. I have been told, but I don't remember it, that someone had emptied a tear gas bomb inside, which didn't help.

For The La's, my recollections are not clear at all. I have in mind a very good sixties sound and a jumping John Power with curly hair, but I associate this memory with a gig at L'Usine in Reims! Another problem : I can't find in my archives any mention of a La's in Reims!! I might be getting mixed up with the excellent concert by The Real People at L'Usine on November 9 1991, another Liverpool band who had a better sound on stage that night than on their album. And furthermore, I don't think I have seen John Power live with Cast.

Contrary to the other bands, I didn't miss a note of Felt's performance at La Cigale, and what a disappointment it was! Felt have never been known for their stage presence (Check the *A Declaration* DVD for confirmation), but they have always given excellent performances whenever I've seen them and whatever the line-up, without trying to reproduce at any price the delicate embroideries of their studio recordings. But that night, nothing gelled. I was under the impression that the band didn't play together, that Lawrence was sulking...

It's never easy to gain access to backstage areas when you don't have a pass, especially at big events and even more so in Paris. That night, as I was getting a breath of fresh air on the boulevard Rochechouart, I toyed with the idea of fighting with security to try and get to greet the band before renouncing : it would have been very difficult to find something positive to tell the band about their performance without lying. I had seen a band in an advanced state of decay and it was difficult to imagine them going on for a long time after that.

So, I was not surprised at all a few weeks later when the NME broke the news that Felt was to split at the end of 1989 after a last UK tour and the release of a new album, *Me And A Monkey On The Moon*.



So farewell then, Felt

FELT are to split following a series of dates and the release of a farewell LP.

The cult independent pop group have opted for voluntary redundancy after almost 10 years together with lead man Lawrence deciding that he's completed his so called "masterplan".

The tenth and final Felt LP is called 'Me And The Monkey On The Moon' and marks a return to the band's previous pop style after a brief flirtation with instrumental work.

It sees them back at El Records, part of the Cherry Red fold, they started out with.

The final track on the album 'Get Out Of My Mirror' will also be pressed up as a flexi disc and distributed free via various record shops round the country.

Details of the goodbye gigs are currently being finalised but among them will be a date in hometown Birmingham and a show at Camden Workers Club, supported by Heidi Berry and Lush on November 14.

After the concert in Paris, I feared the worst when I bought *Me And A Monkey On The Moon*, but I was wrong and it was a pleasant surprise : this album is not bad at all! Yes, it is different from the rest of Felt's output, light years from *The Final Resting Of The Ark* for instance, or from the first mini-album

Crumbling The Antiseptic Beauty. It is a nearly normal pop-rock record, and the discreet production by Adrian Borland of The Sound might have something to do with it. But not only. Lawrence's lyrics are more directe (*Budgie Jacket* relates a paedophile incident with a very direct tone) and the sound has changed : some of the guitar solos sound very American and Martin Duffy's keyboards are less at the forefront, but more varied with the little synth sound heard on *Space Blues* that comes back several times and which, like the record as a whole, hints at an interest for Lawrence in a seventies revival that will fully reveal itself with *Denim*.

The wonderful opening track, *I Can't Make Love To You Anymore*, is a synthesis of all these elements. Regarding the title, you can't get much more direct and it's a far cry from the over elaborate style that made Felt's reputation, like *Whirlpool Vision Of Shame*, *Sunlight Bathed The Golden Glow* or *Trails Of Colours Dissolve!* The slide guitar and the overall atmosphere remind of the best of The Weather Prophets or of the solo Peter Astor, so it's not a surprise to read in the credits that Peter Astor is actually singing backing vocals on this track, along with Rose McDowall from Strawberry Switchblade.

With just this song, Felt had managed to greet us with a very successful farewell and could have stopped there, or tacked on half an hour of solo piano to wrap it up like they did with *The Pictorial Jackson Review*. But no, the rest of the record is of a very good standard, with fast-paced tracks (*Mobile Shack*, *Get Out Of My Mirror*) and beautiful songs like *Never Let You Go*, *Cartoon Sky* or *Free* that would not have been out of place on *Forever Breathes The Lonely Word* or *Ignite The Seven Cannons*.

New Day Dawning is particularly interesting as it boasts, with a better sound, all the principal qualities of *Poem Of The River* : the beginning is a lot like *A Declaration* (especially the bass rhythm) and indeed we hear a declaration ("*There are some things that I*

should say before I go and there are some things that you should know") and the song ends with a long series of guitar solos, much like *Riding On The Equator* did. With this album, Felt bows out in a very elegant manner (nothing to compare with this last concert I witnessed) and, with hindsight, *Me And A Monkey On The Moon* could be considered a good entry point for someone who'd want to get acquainted with Felt's music, but only on the condition that they backtrack all the way to *Crumbling The Antiseptic Beauty*.

You could wonder if Lawrence has not somehow disowned this record : it has been reissued, but none of its tracks has been selected for inclusion on *Stains On A Decade*, the latest Felt compilation which is meant to cover best the whole of the band's output. It's unfortunate as this album deserves to be better considered.

I only met Lawrence one more time after Felt split. It was before the release of the first Denim record, probably in Spring 1991, in a London café. I think I was tagging along with Phil King and Lawrence was with one of his collaborators, maybe producer Brian O'Shaughnessy or musician Brian Pugsley. Lawrence had explained to me that night that members of The Glitter Band would feature on his new group's album (!) and he had given me a sew-on Denim patch that I still wear proudly on my jean jacket.

Some time later, when the Denim record finally came out, the appropriated logo on the patch, that of Bell Records, home - among many others - to The Glitter Band in the seventies, had been replaced by another symbol, still with a strong seventies look but more neutral, otherwise a lawsuit was certain I guess.



Alistair Fitchett's black and tango patch (available at <http://unpopular.typepad.com/unpopular/2007/12/denim.html>). Mine is black and white.

Alistair is among others the author *Young and foolish : A personal pop odyssey* (Stride Publications, 1998), a book that includes a chapter on Felt, available as a free download at <http://unpopular.typepad.com/unpopular/2008/04/happy-birthday.html>

I can't remember when I got wind of the fact that Lawrence was hiding behind the Supermarket alias, but anyway it is because I knew it that I bought this maxi single released by Ice Rink, the label launched by Saint Etienne, who had in their catalogue artists such as Golden, Oval, Earl Brutus and Sensuround, one of the projects of John Robb of The Membranes.

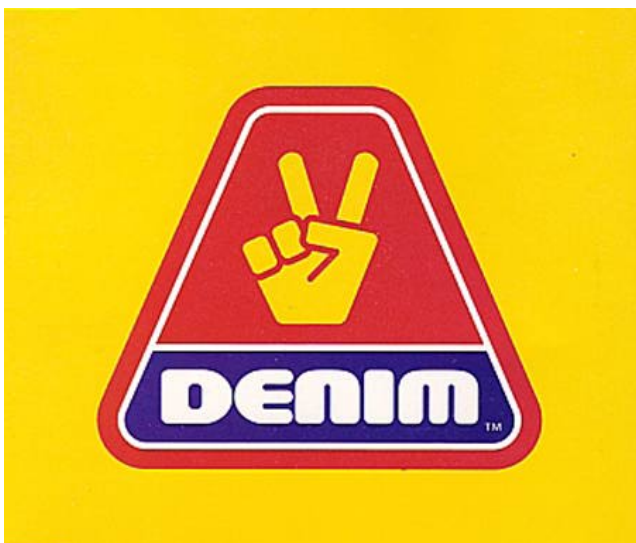
You begin having fun just by looking at the cover. Minimalist design, whiteness, barcodes, the flake-

shaped logo of the label that sends you back to the frozen food packages you see in... supermarkets. The laconic credits only mention that the band is made up of two young Danish boys (Lawrence and Brian O'Shaughnessy actually, with Sarah Craknell of Saint Etienne for the female vocals) and the lyrics are printed on the sleeve. They are like a poem worthy of Raymond Queneau, that is, multiple variations on the syllable and spelling of '*Supermarket*' : "*Supermarket Super mar ket Sup erma rket Supe rmarket Supermar ket Superm arket Super market Supe rmar ket etc.*".

On listening, it's a great pleasure too. The song *Supermarket* is a very succesful pastiche of Kraftwerk, so good that, beyond the more than knowing wink, you can appreciate the song fully for its own sake. The idea for this tribute might have come to Supermarket beacuse of the comeback of Kraftwerk in 1991 with the *Der Mix* compilation album, but in a way their admirers were ahead of their masters since in 1992 it was a few years before Kraftwerk would transform their 30 second a cappella jingle *Expo 2000* into a track several minutes long and remixed many times !

The long version of *Supermarket* adds a little rhythm to the proceedings but the other great success of this single comes courtesy of the very drum 'n' bass remixes by Mad Q (unknown, probably an alias) and Ray Keith (renowned DJ and producer, still active). So, Supermarket is much more than just a practical joke. This record, long since out of print, is surely a by-product of the sessions for the *Back In Denim* album, which were stretched over more than two years. I see a confirmation of this in the fact that the short version of *Supermarket* was included in 1997 on the Denim compilation *Novelty Rock*.

DENIM : MIDDLE OF THE ROAD



Bought secondhand circa 1995

Ref : 869909-2/BOICD12 - Released by Boy's Own in England in 1992

Media : 5" CD

Tracks : Middle Of The Road - Ape-hangers - Robin's Nest - The Great Grape Ape-hangers

I have just finished reading *Foxtrot Echo Lima Tango*, the book-fanzine dedicated Felt to which I had the pleasure of contributing the *Ignite The Seven Cannons* chapter of this book.

A fascinating read for Felt fans, especially for the testimonies by former members of the band (Phil King, Marco Thomas and Gary Ainge) and the contributions by major members of the indie/fanzine world such as Kevin Pearce and Alistair Fitchett. I particularly enjoyed the two previously unreleased interviews with Lawrence, one in 1985 by Chris Heath and the other in 2005 by Alistair Fitchett.

Thanks to the first one, I was quite surprised to learn that, at the time of the release of *Primitive Painters* in September, one of Lawrence's two favourite albums of 1985 was... *Rockin' And Romance* by Jonathan Richman & the Modern Lovers! Even though they have certainly in common a very pronounced taste for Lou Reed, I would never have dared myself to link Lawrence and Jonathan, whatever my own personal obsessions!! Lawrence points out that people tend to see Jonathan Richman wrongly as just a comedian whereas he's the best entertainer he's ever seen. I'm pretty sure that, whenever I got to spend some time with Lawrence, particularly in the van for the February 1987 tour, my great interest for the music of Jonathan Richman had been mentioned, notably concerning the still fresh memories of the June 13 1985 concert in Reims, but I don't think Lawrence ever mentioned he liked him too, otherwise I'm sure I'd have remember it!

There is another link with The Modern Lovers in the book, as Dickon Edwards reminded me in his article that Lawrence sings "*I'm in love with the modern world*" in *I'm against the eighties* on Denim's first album.

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Both printings of this fanzine, edited by Christian Flamm and Mike Sperlinger and published in 2010 by Johnston & Vock, are now out of print. More info : <http://foxtrotecholimatango.blogspot.com>

All this reminded me that I had not listened to Denim for quite a long time and that anyway I don't know the two albums of the band I own very well, *Back In Denim*, that I did listen to quite a lot on its release, and *Denim On Ice*, which has surely not visited my CD player more than three or four times. The proof of the pudding : I had no idea that one of the songs on *Denim On Ice* was titled *Mrs Mills*. Even though the lyrics don't expressly make reference to her, I'm pretty sure the Mrs. Mills in question is the Susan Boyle-like sixties piano player, the very one I had the opportunity to review on my blog⁸.

While listening, I rediscovered a third and last link with The Modern Lovers, since the main riff for *Middle Of The Road*, a song on the first album and the A side of Denim's first single, is that of the Modern Lovers classic *Roadrunner*.

In the interview with Alistair Fitchett, Lawrence said that this song was the first one he wrote for the album, in Brighton when he was staying at Alan McGee's. The "sacrilegious" lyrics of the song ("*I hate the Stones and I hate blues, Eddie Cochran and Blue Suede Shoes, I hate the King I hate Chuck Berry, I hate Hooker I hate Leadbelly, aalright!*") were written in reaction to Primal Scream. And frankly, I can understand his frame of mind. At the time, circa 1989, when they released their second album, Primal Scream was in a rather unsufferable rockist phase (There have been two or three more since), that they managed to get out of winningly thanks mainly to the magical transformation of *Im Losing More Than Ill Ever Have* into *Loaded* by Andrew Weatherall. The Primal Scream on January 23 1990 at The New Morning in Paris was particularly baffling, with Robert Young sporting tight pants worthy of a member of Def Leppard, and a good part of the other band members wearing black leather trousers.

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Mrs. Mills : *Everybody's Welcome At Mrs. Mills' Party*. (Parlophone, 1963).
Review available at : <http://vivonzeureux.blogspot.com/2005/12/mrs-mills-everybodys-welcome-at-mrs.html>

If we go on playing with references, we quickly fall back on the seventies, as always with Denim and as the band logo on the sleeve illustrates perfectly (Originally, Lawrence had even appropriated the Bell Records logo). *Middle Of The Road*, in the context of this graphic design, can only remind one of the early seventies Scottish band, famous among others for 'Chirpy chirpy cheep cheep.' *Middle Of The Road* is also an expression used in English to refer to commercial popular music, scorned by "real" rockers, and Lawrence employs also literally in the song : "*It's your right to choose who you listen to, it's your rock'n'roll, you will find me in the middle of the road*". The 70's references are still present on the three B sides, which make use of a burbling synth sound typical of Denim. *Ape-hangers* is a good song whose title refers to the high handlebars of some chopper bikes. *Robin's Nest* is even a cover, instrumental and not very interesting, of the theme tune to a 1977 English TV series. As for *The Great GrapeApe-hangers*, it is another instrumental. Apart from the presence of "ape-hanger" in the title, I can't pinpoint any obvious link with the other track, but the title seems to be a portmanteau pun with the name of a seventies cartoon show, *The Great Grape Ape Show*. You realise that we are far removed from Felt's world and, after listening back to the whole of Denim's output, I can confirm what I've always known : I much prefer Felt to Denim. Even though Denim is often quite fun, even though Lawrence's voice is still the same and even though there are quite a few Denim songs that I like, Denim will always be for me a second division band. If the idea to mark the transition from one band to another by a change of material from Felt to Denim is excellent, Denim is only Lawrence's second band, often not to be taken at face value. Whereas with Felt, Lawrence created, from a few influences such as Television or Dylan, something unique and original, Denim is only derivative. Hence the multiple quotes in the composition, hence all those

titles referencing music itself ("rock", "pub rock", "song", "best song", "synthesizers").

I've always had trouble swallowing the posture at the heart of the concept of Denim (Let's reject the horrible eighties, the Felt years, and let's rather celebrate the magical seventies, the years of Lawrence's youth). Even if I'll readily admit that Lawrence played his hand fully, managing to obtain - with difficulty - a substantial recording budget and even recruiting members of The Glitter Band like drummer Pete Phipps, who even performed on stage with Denim, I always feel a twinge when I listen to the very down to earth lyrics of Denim, which often deal with Lawrence's lack of success and his desire to find some. The song titles reflect this evolution, as from Felt to Denim, we switch from *Sunlight Bathed The Golden Glow* to *Summer Smash* or from *Voyage To Illumination* to *Tampax Advert!*

GO-KART MOZART : TEARING UP THE ALBUM CHART



Bought by mail at Amazon in July 2005

Ref : BRUM 2 CD - Released by West Midlands in England in 2005

Media : 5" CD - 12 tracks

After Denim's second album, *Denim On Ice*, that I listened to only a few times, my interest for Lawrence's current activities waned for a time. I was not interested in the *Denim Novelty rock* compilation because I already had most of the tracks. I didn't learn at the time of the mishap that happened to Lawrence in September 1997, when his ultimate attempt for a worldwide pop hit with *Summer Smash* on the major label EMI was crushed at the last minute, the label deciding to cancel the release under the pretext that the exuberant gaiety professed by this tongue in cheek potential hit didn't fit with the climate of emotion and gloominess following Diana Spencer's "Summer crash". And when Go-Kart Mozart released its first album, *Instant Wigwam And Igloo Mixture*, I may have heard about it but I didn't feel interested enough to go and buy it or even try and listen to it. Go figure why but, on the contrary, when *Tearing Up The Album Chart* came out mid-2005, I thought to myself that it was indeed an album by Lawrence and I wanted to support him by buying his record and most of all I wanted to check where he had arrived at musically.

The first joy on listening is to get the confirmation that Lawrence is indeed present, and especially that he has kept his voice and his peculiar way of singing, in the manner of Lou Reed's kid brother.

On the music side, things are strictly in line with the Denim template, with a certain distance with the topics dealt with, meaning that the songs would have their tongues firmly in their cheeks, if songs had tongues, - and references to the seventies still all over the place, starting with the cover art, the lettering of which is derived from a James Last album. As for the photos, Lawrence places the bar very high since he's portrayed in just a hat and swimming trunks on the front of the booklet ("*I still want to be a star but I just sold my guitar and you know the way things are...*"). Inside of the booklet, which unfolds into a poster, he wears the same outfit on a bigger photo, sitting on the lid of a

toilet seat, and it is possible to read the message scrawled on his tummy (He had used the same space in 1990 for the cover of the *Bubblegum Perfume* compilation) : "*Go-Kart Mozart – Classic upstarts*".

If the continuity with Denim is so strong, it is because, as Lawrence explained in an interview with *Magic* in 2003⁹, both projects are actually two sides of the same coin, the releases under the Denim moniker being saved for records made on a proper budget released by the comparatively bigger labels, the "B sides", or recordings made on a shoestring, being self-released by Go-Kart Mozart. This explains why four of the tracks on this album were originally scheduled to appear on *Denim Take Over*, the third album that never saw the light of day.

All in all, after I finally went and bought *Instant Wigwam And Igloo Mixture*, I'd say that *Tearing Up The Album Chart* is my favourite album of Lawrence's post-Felt output. It's a short and compact album of twelve good songs, with a very strong unity, even though the sound palette ranges from electric rock to seventies pop, including the various evolutions of synthetic sounds from the early 70's to the 80's (from Jean-Jacques Perrey to new wave, basically). Even if I guess the budget didn't meet up with Lawrence's expectations, the sound is excellent and the participants in the project many, including Terry Miles and W H Smiffy (Denim's Smithy, I guess) on synths, Tony Barber (ex-2nd generation Buzzcocks) and Steve New (Rich Kids, who died at 50 in 2010) on guitars.

As I like the whole album, it's difficult to single out one particular track. After having previously referenced Chicory Tip and Foghat, this time Lawrence quotes Marmalade, a Scottish band from the very early 70's, on *Listening to Marmalade*, maybe his most electric song since *Index* in 1979 ! Bizarrely, *Electric Rock & Roll* is not as electric as its title

⁹ Estelle Chardac : *Felt - Rééditions et autres petites histoires*. Magic, n° 73, January 2003. Available at : www.magicrpm.com/artistes/felt/a-lire/interviews/felt-reeditions-et-autres-petites-histoires

implies... On the contrary, it is a very synthetic track, nearly new wave, on which Lawrence sings in the beginning a bit like Jona Lewie. Not really a surprise since he covered his *Seaside Shuffle*, released as Terry Dactyl And The Dinosaurs, on the B side of *Summer Smash*. Every time I listen to it, I get a strange feeling hearing him sing "Ooh rock & roll..."

Summer Is Here is very pop and should maybe be considered as a *Summer smash* B side. The sequence of *On A Building Site*, with a rhythm that recalls Mungo Jerry's *In the Summertime*, and *Fuzzy Duck*, a waltz punctuated by the strangled sound of an electronic duck, is surely the moment in the album when Lawrence gives the uppermost impression that he's pulling our leg and hiding his tongue firmly in his cheek.

More than fifteen years since the guitar player left Felt and it seems Lawrence still had a message to communicate to Maurice Deebank. On *Delta Echo Echo Beta Alpha Neon Kettle* he uses the international radio alphabet, but the message remains cryptic. The memory of a police check is evoked. The track itself sounds like Devo or early French band Taxi-Girl.

At least two songs clearly deal with drugs and drug users, *At The DDU (At The Drug Dependency Unit)*, which sounds rather electric in the beginning, before spreading its pop wings on a surprising chorus of "You know that massive shot of meth won't hit you at the DDU", and *Donna & The Dopefiends* ("Hey Donna come on, I want to score, Hey Donna come on, I want some more"). It is a world which instinctively would have been deemed completely foreign to the Lawrence of Felt, but these lyrics and the pictures of a very skinny Lawrence point to a lived-in aspect to all this, which is confirmed in a 2010 article in *The Guardian*¹⁰

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Will Hodgkinson : *Denim: Britpop's Less Successful Fabric*. The Guardian, October 21st 2010. Available at : www.guardian.co.uk/music/2010/oct/21/denim-britpop-band

which mentions a period when Lawrence hit rock bottom, addicted to heroin and homeless.

Fortunately, this period seems to be over and 2011 should be a year of projects come to fruition for Lawrence (but beware as these projects were already announced for 2010 and Lawrence is accustomed to incessant delays), with two records marking the end of *Go-Kart Mozart*, the *Mini-Mart* mini-album and the *On The Hot Dog Street* album, and two projects with Paul Kelly, the documentary film *Lawrence Of Belgravia*, which was shown in London in an unfinished rough version several years ago, and a book of Felt photos with captions by Lawrence and extracts from his diary.

FELT : COMPILATION



Offered by Philippe Roger in Nantes on August 24 2006

Ref : 206 074 - Released by Virgin/Cherry Red in France in 1984

Media : 10" 33 rpm

Tracks : My Face Is On Fire - Something Sends Me To Sleep - Trails Of Colour

Dissolve - Red Indians -/- Penelope Tree - The World Is As Soft As Lace - Mexican
Bandit

I was rummaging in Philippe's record shelves a few hours before boarding my train and I was stopped Dead in my tracks when I took out this record. At that precise moment, I realised I had before then completely blanked out on the very existence of this 10 inch album I hadn't come across in years. Noticing my interest, Philippe decided right away to give me this record, a gift with a symbolic value all the greater as he had taken the pain to have this record autographed by all the members of the band on the evening of Felt's concert in Reims on June 21st 1986 (But he hadn't thought of bringing a permanent ink pen, so Neil Scott's signature is erased ; those of Lawrence, Gary Ainge, Marco Thomas and Martin Duffy remain, though fragile), before putting up half the band at his home in Rilly-la-Montagne (Lawrence delivered to PopNews¹¹ some very vague memories on this subject). The reasons why I didn't buy this record myself are multiple and varied. First, I was staying in England when it was published. This record, the first by Felt to be released in France, probably had a run of 1,000 copies at the most, so its presence in record shops was only fleeting. And lastly, having previously bought *Pillows & Prayers*, *The Splendour Of Fear* and *Penelope Tree*, I already owned five of the seven tracks on this record and my limited budget forced me to give priority to other releases.

I'd bet that this compilation was released circa May 1984 to celebrate a new distribution deal for Cherry Red with Virgin France and to coincide with the publication in the magazine *Actuel* of a big piece by Christophe Nick about the "pure players" of English rock, starring The Smiths, The Pale Fountains, Eyeless in Gaza and Felt¹².

I am pretty sure too that Lawrence had nothing to do with the decision to release this record. Two clues

¹¹ David Larre and Vincent Arquillère : *Lawrence - Interview*. PopNews, June 2006. Available at : www.popnews.com/popnews/lawrence-tiv

¹² Christophe Nick : *Rock anglais : ils sortent du vide et du bidon*. Actuel, n° 55, May 1984, p. 84-93 and 177.

point to that. First, there's no mention of Shanghai Packaging Company on the sleeve, which tends to imply that Lawrence, who usually hides behind this title, is not to blame for this one, contrary to habit. If the cover design is very close in spirit to that of other Felt records at the time, the photograph of a guy in a raincoat under the rain would have better fitted a posthumous Joy Division release. *My Face Is On Fire*, a song that I love, is present here, despite the fact that Lawrence seems to have disowned it after its release, to the point where he re-recorded it and gave it another title in 1984 (*Whirpool Vision Of Shame*, on *The Strange Idols Pattern And Other Short Stories*, not a patch on the original and featuring Maurice Deebank's incontinent guitar) and he left it off of the three official compilations of the Cherry Red period that he oversaw, *Gold Mine Trash*, *Absolute Classic Masterpieces* and *Stains On A Decade* (Which means that, apart from the various reissues of *Pillows & Prayers*, *My Face Is On Fire* was only reissued on the bonus CD of the 1993 box set).

Still, it is precisely the presence of *My Face Is On Fire* which helps make this record a nearly perfect summation of early Felt. The A sides of the first three Cherry Red singles are included, as well as a good B side, *Trails Of Colour Dissolve*, and three tracks from *The Splendour Of Fear*. The one glaring omission is at least a track from the first mini-album, *Crumbling The Antiseptic Beauty*, *Fortune* or *Cathedral* for instance, but priority was obviously given to the most recent record at the time, *The Splendour Of Fear*.


I am really happy that this exclusive French release is now in my record collection, along with some other rare releases, like XTC's *Eighties Goldies*, also released by Virgin. But the Felt compilation has an enormous advantage over XTC's : it is a beautiful vinyl record in the 10 inch format that I like a lot, whereas the XTC compilation is unfortunately a vulgar cassette.

Face A:
MY FACE IS ON FIRE
SOMETHING SENDS ME TO SLEEP
TRAILS OF COLOUR DISSOLVE
RED INDIANS

Face B:
FENELPE TREE
THE WORLD IS AS SOFT AS LACE
MEXICAN BANDIT

© 204 - 202 - 203 - 204 CHERRY RED RECORDS LTD.

© 204 VIRGIN FRANCE S.A.

Virgin 

BUBBLEGUM PERFUME

during the eighties
Felt made ten Lps &
ten singles. Here
is a collection of
songs from the Cre-
ation years.



Bought at the Big Sound System Primitif at L'Appart Café in Reims on January 8th 2011

Ref : CRE LP 069 - Released by Creation in England in 1990

Media : 12" 33 rpm - 20 tracks

That is what is called coming full circle, or swallowing back the big chewing-gum bubble you have blown to the max, without bursting it.

For Felt, a few months after their split, the point was to definitely turn the page for good with this first compilation of their Creation years. For me, to find this record where I found it after more than twenty years also had the feel of closing a chapter. Even if I haven't been an active member of La Radio Primitive for a long time, it was quite strange to go through racks of records I had played on air quite often, and sad even to know that the radio was forced to part with them because of its dire financial situation.

I have often protested against the legend, forged by Lawrence when he decided to split the band, that implies that he had all along decided to release ten albums and ten singles in ten years with Felt before stopping. The first objection is that this presentation takes great care to omit *Index*, Felt's very first record, recorded by Lawrence alone and released in 1979. On this point I was wrong, since I had myself neglected that this affirmation, found written very large on the back of the sleeve of this *Bubblegum Perfume*, comes with the restriction '*during the eighties.*' So it does add up, even if the idea of a big scheme realised from beginning to end remains a self-made legend, that had the press dive for it.

If they only read the biography slipped inside this copy of the album sent to radio, French journalists had no chance to mention the legend. Virgin France, who were distributing Creation at the time, were content with photocopying on their own headed paper the one and half page biography written in English by Creation. Except that this bio was not from 1990, but from 1988, at the time of the release of *The Pictorial Jackson Review*, the previous Felt album on Creation that was also available through Virgin. Of course, there's absolutely no mention that this is a posthumous compilation!

Lawrence took great care of the cover art. For the first, but not the last time (see *Tearing Up The Album Chart* or a photograph seen in the press in 2010), he uses his torso to communicate some information to us (In this case, a selection of four of the tracks from the album). On the back, writing, in very big letters, 'Check spine for track listing.' And indeed, the list of the twenty tracks on the album is to be found in very small letters on the thin spine of the cover! I think the CD cover is even more successful : as there is less room, there is a close-up on the photo and the text is truncated, and especially there is a use of the colours pink and green that I quite like (For the vinyl album, the pink-green contrast is only used for the labels on the record).

It is also partly because I had turned the Felt page myself that I didn't buy this record on its release. The other good reason being that, contrary to *Gold Mine Trash*, the parallel compilation for the Cherry Red era, which included two unreleased demos, this one has only previously released tracks and I already owned nineteen of them out of twenty (I was only missing *Book Of Swords*, the only extract of the Lawrence-less album *Train Above The City*).

Looking back, and despite the lack of budget to record, a tragedy for Lawrence, Felt were very prolific on Creation. In less than three years, from 1986 to 1988, they released four more or less maxi singles and five more or less mini and more or less instrumental albums.

I find this selection of twenty cuts very well balanced and very much to my taste. Rather logically, priority seems to have been given to non album tracks, which account for exactly half of the total. The A sides are all here (*Ballad Of The Band*, *Space Blues*, *The Final Resting Of The Ark*), but also the best B sides, such as *I Didn't Mean To Hurt You*, The Beach Boys' *Be Still*, the only cover released on record by Felt (They played a few sometimes on stage. In Reims, for instance, they covered *Hyacinth House* by The Doors

and Wire's *Outdoor Miner*), and *There's No Such Thing As Victory*. There are also, strategically placed at the beginning and end of the first side, the two B sides of the twelve inch single *Rain Of Crystal Spires, I Will Die With My Head In Flames* and *Sandman's On The Rise Again*. The more I listen to these very short and very fast songs, the more I like them! As two out of the three tracks from *Forever Breathes The Lonely Word* are the A sides of the single, this record is thus the only one of all their Creation output to be reprinted in full here (Three of the four tracks of the *Ballad Of The Band 12"* are present, but thankfully we are spared the five minutes of piano of *Candles In A Church...*).

As for the instrumentals, the balance is good too. There are five of them, cleverly scattered all over the record. My favourite are *Ferdinand Magellan*, on the piano, and *Voyage To Illumination*, from *Let The Snakes Crinkle Their Heads To Death*.

If one thing remains mysterious, it is the title of the compilation. '*Bubblegum Perfume*' doesn't seem to be taken from the lyrics of a Felt song and it is difficult for me to associate a bubblegum perfume, whatever the flavour, with this band. However, this perfume and the pink and green might be some kind of foretaste for Denim, the new project in which Lawrence had already dived headlong at the time this compilation was released.

There have been other Felt compilations released since. My advice would be to avoid *Stains On A Decade*, although it is the only record that covers the whole of Felt's output, but there are only fifteen tracks, which is not enough. It seems wiser to me to combine *Gold Mine Trash* with *Bubblegum Perfume* or go for both volumes of *Absolute Classic Masterpieces*. The problem is that Cherry Red reissued in 2003 and keeps available the whole of Felt's album catalogue while the Creation compilations, *Bubblegum perfume* and *Absolute Classic Masterpieces II*, have been unavailable for a very long time. But Cherry Red has

just reissued *Bubblegum perfume* in April 2011, replacing some of the album tracks by otherwise unavailable single B sides, good idea ! Maybe *Absolute classic masterpieces II* will follow soon...

Pop aesthete Lawrence and his sensitive men were in Reims last Saturday. Without milky guitarist Deebank. A quiet concert and the confidential agony of an abnormal band praised by this paper for a few years.

In 79, when *Index*, Felt's first 7", was released, was the band already branded *intellectual*? Lawrence, the elusive singer, demystifies this reputation, stating that he left school in Birmingham in 77 without any A Level. Let it be said, Felt is a pop-group, neither intello-hippie, nor condemned to be mortified by its lack of success.

Spotted by Cherry Red, Felt signed a contract for four albums. *The Strange Idol Pattern And Other Short Stories*, the first one, was produced by John Leckie, chosen for his work with The Fall, one of Lawrence's favourite bands (Leckie has also worked with Lennon and many 70's bands).

Then came the pensive *Splendour Of Fear* which, like the following albums, contrasts with the 7 inches, always livelier and more accessible, at the time : sharpness of *Sunlight Bathed The Golden Glow*, impetus of *Penelope Tree*.

Third album, *Crumbling The Antiseptic Beauty*, same divide, ethereal climates for the long tracks and thrilling angst for the 45 *My Face Is On Fire*.

Ignite The Seven Cannons, the fourth album, marks a change. Produced by Robin Guthrie, from The Cocteau Twins, *Ignite* is more direct than its predecessors, even if the lilting melancholy is still present, comforted this time by the addition of an organ. *Primitive Painters*, the single from the album, a slow but gripping song, contrasts seamlessly the voices of Liz Fraser (Cocteau Twins) and Lawrence, a modulation of both majestic and crackling rhythms. Praised by the critics on the other side of the Channel, it is proclaimed by its author "the best 12" single since *Atmosphere* (Joy division) and *Revolutionary spirit* (Wild Swans)".

There ends the collaboration with Cherry Red ; it's more importantly the time that Maurice Deebank, the

omnipresent aesthete guitarist, chose to leave the band. Married to a Spanish woman he met in Barcelona, this guitar-hero, retired from Spanish guitar frills, lives and works in England, doesn't like pop-music anymore, and dedicates himself, as a dilettante, to *classical guitar* : it was to be feared. Felt minus one (i.e. Lawrence) continues with the second survivor of the beginnings, Gary (drummer) and three new members : Martin (keyboards), Marco (bass) and Neil (guitar, ex-Everything But The Girl). Choosing their new label, *Creation*, through friendship and for the freedom this indie label offers. Lawrence is happy, two of his favourite bands are on the same stable : Weather Prophets and Primal Scream.

Determined to write 90 second pop songs from now on, like Wire, Lawrence finally launches himself into *Ballad Of The Band*, a fresh 7" (produced Robin Guthrie). It's a draught of pure pop air on a bed of undulating organs. But the surprise will come with *Let The Snakes Crinkle Their Heads To Death*, their latest album, entirely instrumental. 20 minutes. 10 exactly on each side. Two disciplined and sugary sides. On stage, in Reims, in front of an audience of 110 crammed in a minuscule venue, if the band was neither enthusiastic or enthusiasming, it is because it is not in its nature to be. So, despite the heat, the exhaustion, Felt proved even more effectively that it deserves its name (from the verb *to feel*). Felt, from the inside : a fervent complaint, uncertain, drawing its force from its flaccidity.

All of them a step back. Even Lawrence, with his relaxed and indifferent attitudes, far away and detached, look and voice with even more pronounced Reed accents than on record. A 40 minute set, not one more, instead of the scheduled 30, for a band modeled by Lawrence to the point that it has his own contradictions : perfectionism and indecision, self-effacement and audacity.

Sitting outside a café before the gig, wincing at the shouts of the football fans at the counter, eyes locked

on the France-Brasil match, contemptuous, this 24 year old who says that what he fears most is normality, leader of a band which, with time, should have generated the same polite interest as one Lloyd Cole, but which is only backed by a well-meaning mini-label, answers the questions. Ponderate and fussy.

LIBERATION.— Thirty minutes, that is short...

LAWRENCE.— No, it's a normal length for Felt.

LIBERATION.— You still live in Birmingham, that you hate, why ?

L.— I am forced to : elsewhere, it's too expensive. And if you live penniless in London, the music suffers. Birmingham is not a creative place. It's an industrial city.

LIBERATION.— You switched from Cherry Red to Creation, why ?

L.— We wanted to try something else : Creation is not a normal label. They're friends : no contracts, a relationship based on trust.

LIBERATION.— Maurice leaving, what did it change ?

L.— Instead of having guitar solos, we now have guitar *and* organ solos.

LIBERATION.— And regarding the atmosphere ?

L.— Nothing. Before, I would write the structure of the songs and Maurice added guitar. The process stayed the same, but with keyboards. It's just that the music has become more sober because all these guitar solos have disappeared.

LIBERATION.— For you, Felt plays pop. Tears For Fears too. Still, you have nothing in common with them ?

L.— When I say *pop*, I don't mean contemporary music. For me, pop is a song with a strong melody : that's what we have always done.

LIBERATION.— In *Primitive painters* you say "*There's no way of being what I want to be...*" ?

L.— I say that !

LIBERATION.— Yes.

L.— ...There are a great many things I'd want to be, but you have to accept what you are. Even if it's nice to imagine that you could... Wait... (he thinks)...

LIBERATION.— ...You don't want to tell ?

L.— I am who I am and I can't change that : that's what *Primitive painters* is about and it's the same for everyone.

LIBERATION.— Rather fatalistic.

L.— Yes. But there is also a positive aspect : accept yourself as you are and go on on your own path.

LIBERATION.— Generally, are you pessimistic ?

L.— No, otherwise Felt would be no more. Especially after all these troubles, in 5 years... We are strong. No matter the time it takes, we will achieve what we had set to do, the goals we had from the beginning.

LIBERATION.— Which are ?

L.— You start a band to sell records, have fans support you, a better life, and make music too, no ?

LIBERATION.— Still in *Primitive painters*, you say : "*I just wish my life could be as strange as a conspiracy*" what does that mean ?

L.— It's a strange example, exciting and dangerous, of what life could be.

LIBERATION.— (?) For you, what is *exciting* ?

L.— Live dangerously...

LIBERATION.— Do you do this kind of things ?

L.— Oh no ! I just mean : not be complacent, not content yourself with a normal life, try to make it thrilling.

LIBERATION.— One of your albums is called *Splendour of fear* : in what way is *fear* a *splendour* ?

L.— Er... It's good to experiment, with all the feelings : fear is one of them... Er, anyway I am the kind of person who always gets out of a bad situation.

LIBERATION.— Like being famous one day, becoming a star ?

L.— Yes, but not the star of a day : someone who lasts, someone whose appeal and charism last. For me, that's what a star is. People like writers, not pop musicians...

LIBERATION.— Your album titles are always long and bizarre ; why ?

L.— (rires). Oh yes ! that's the way it is.

LIBERATION.— Do they have anything to do with what's inside ?

L.— No, these are just word that sound good... *Crumbling the antiseptic beauty* that doesn't mean anything !...

LIBERATION.— Sometimes you get told for not sharing your emotions.

L.— On stage, we look like we don't make contact with the audience but it's because we take what we are doingg seriously. We want to communicate through music : not by talking, nor moving.

LIBERATION.— Does the audience react well ?

L.— Yes. Those who come to see us know what to expect and take us as we are. Bands like Television didn't say anything, didn't move either, everything was

in the music. That's the kind of band I like. Like Subway Sect too.

LIBERATION.— After *Ignite*, you wanted to write 90 second songs; and your latest album, *Let the snakes crinkle their heads to death*, is instrumental...?

L.— We want to do things differently, not be normal : an album a year, singles... This way, in retrospect, people will see we have tackled on various styles...

LIBERATION.— And now, the 90 second songs?...

L.— Non An album of pop songs. With very sad lyrics.

LIBERATION.— Are you sad ?

L.— Not really. I don't know. When I write, yes. Not now (he shows his beer glass). The next album will have very strong melodies, it will contrastwell with the lyrics : twisted.

LIBERATION.— *Magical* is a word that comes up when Felt is mentioned...

L.— Because *magic* is something that doesn't exist : it's in the air, that's what we are like.

LIBERATION.— Do you see an evolution in Felt's music, after 5 albums ?

L.— What do you mean ? There's no evolution ?!... You can't put it like that : we are the same band and we don't progress, because we were very good when we started, eh, eh !

LIBERATION.— You singles have often contrasted with your albums...

L.— Only in the beginning. Because we had long tracks on the albums, ans short 45s like *Penelope Tree*. Now we extract the singles from the albums.

LIBERATION.— Like a normal band...

L.— Eh ! I dont like this !

LIBERATION.—Do you feel trapped, frustrated ?

L.— Yes, because of things like that, or because we are forced to do *maxi* singles !... At least, we put 4 songs on them, with three previously unreleased.

LIBERATION.— Frustrated also by your lack of success ?

L.— Yes, but we can't do anything about it.

LIBERATION.— So, you are unsatisfied ?

L.— Yes, because I'd like to have more money to make records ; that's my biggest frustration. If we could spend as much money on a record as a *normal* band, it would be ten times better.

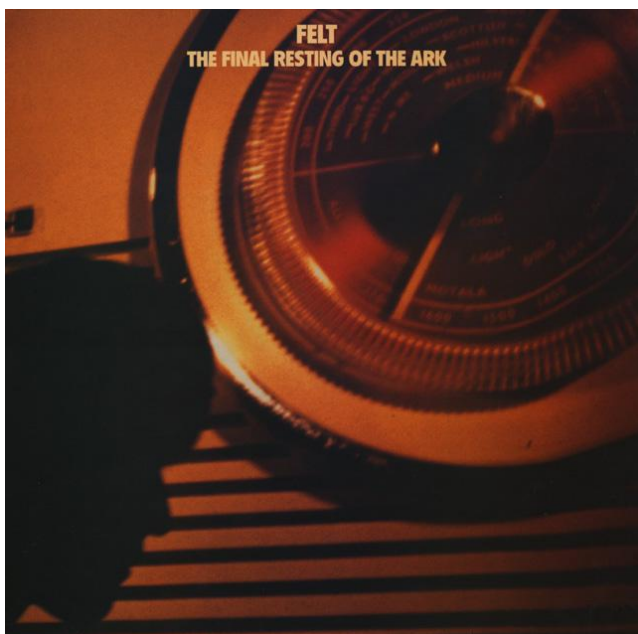
LIBERATION.— Imagine that you have the money...

L.— I'd pick Joe Boyd : he's produced REM, 10 000 Maniacs, Fairport Convention, Nick Drake... To make a pure record, without effects. A series of self-sufficient songs.



Felt à Reims le 21 juin 1986 (photo JC Brouhard)
De gauche à droite : Gary Ainge, Lawrence et Neil Scott.

DISCOGRAPHY



(singles, 7" and 12", in lower case)
(ALBUMS, 12" and CD, IN CAPITALS)

Index (Shanghai, 1979)
Something sends me to sleep (Cherry Red, 1981)
CRUMBLING THE ANTISEPTIC BEAUTY (Cherry Red, 1982)
My face is on fire (Cherry Red, 1982)
Penelope Tree (Cherry Red, 1983)
THE SPLENDOR OF FEAR (Cherry Red, 1984)
Mexican bandits (Cherry Red, 1984)
Sunlight bathed the golden glow (Cherry Red, 1984)
THE STRANGE IDOLS PATTERN AND OTHER SHORT STORIES (Cherry Red, 1984)
Primitive painters (Cherry Red, 1985)
IGNITE THE SEVEN CANNONS (Cherry Red, 1985)
Ballad of the band (Creation, 1986)
LET THE SNAKES CRINKLE THEIR HEADS TO DEATH (Creation, 1986)
Rain of crystal spires (Creation, 1986)
FOREVER BREATHES THE LONELY WORD (Creation, 1986)
POEM OF THE RIVER (Creation, 1987)
The final resting of the ark (Creation, 1987)
THE PICTORIAL JACKSON REVIEW (Creation, 1988)
TRAIN ABOVE THE CITY (Creation, 1988)
Space blues (Creation, 1988)
ME AND A MONKEY ON THE MOON (EI, 1989)

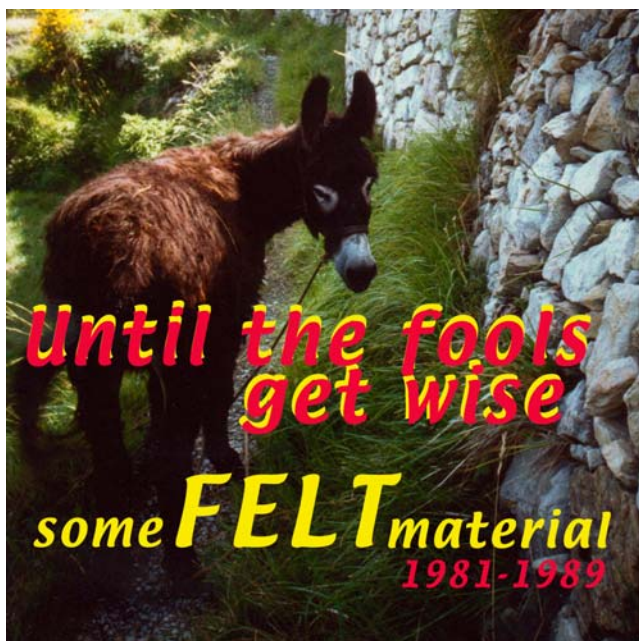
(OFFICIAL COMPILATIONS)

GOLD MINE TRASH (Cherry Red, 1987)
BUBBLEGUM PERFUME (Creation, 1990)
ABSOLUTE CLASSIC MASTERPIECES (Cherry Red, 1992)
ABSOLUTE CLASSIC MASTERPIECES II (Creation, 1993)
STAINS ON A DECADE (Cherry Red, 2003)

(DVD)

A DECLARATION (Cherry Red, 2003)

UNTIL THE FOOLS GET WISE



Ref : not available 023 - Released by Vivonzeureux! in France in May 2011
Media : virtual 2 x 5" CD - 40 tracks

Compiled by JC Brouchard

Liner notes and cover design : JC Brouchard

Photo : Donkey up above the Roya valley, circa 1984, by JC Brouchard

Felt, Felt underground will not rise till the fools get wise. Buried but not forgotten, down but not yet out. Felt, failed pop success, has left us with a recorded legacy mostly available these days through Cherry Red (www.cherryred.co.uk/cherryred/artists/felt.php).

This is a personal selection by JC Brouhard of some Felt material, 1981-1989.

Until the fools get wise covers the whole of Felt's output. Following Lawrence's precepts, great care was given to the symmetry of the whole, made up of two records of twenty tracks each. Only three Felt records are not represented at all : the very first (solo Lawrence) single *Index*, the somewhat over-produced, stringy and muffled *Sunlight bathed the golden glow* twelve inch (although both tracks are included in different versions) and the Lawrence-less instrumental album *Train above the city*.

It was not originally intended, but all four tracks of the *Space blues* single ended on the compilation, making it the only Felt record included in its entirety. Also, the final album *Me and a monkey on the moon* is reinstated with due rank in the group's discography : three of its tracks were selected, whereas it had been completely ignored by all the previous Felt compilations.

There are some rarities too. The version of the above-mentioned *Sunlight bathed the golden glow*, probably a demo, was included on the flip side of a promo single for *Penelope Tree...* As for *When the dawn starts creeping in*, originally slated for inclusion in *Poem of the river* but never officially released by the band (that is, until the *A declaration* DVD appeared), it was recorded for BBC Radio at a session for Andy Kershaw in 1986. Also in 1986, the previously unreleased cover of Wire's *Outdoor miner* was recorded in all its mike feedback glory live in Reims, of course !

Disc 1

1 **Ballad of the band** (*Ballad of the band*)

2 **Penelope Tree** (*Penelope Tree*)

"Loneliness is like a disease, triggers off my sense of unease
I was lonely until I found the reason was me"

3 **Sandman's on the rise again** (*Rain of crystal spires*)

4 **Caspian see** (*Ignite the seven cannons*)

5 **Sunlight bathed the golden glow** (promo version)
(*Penelope Tree promo single*)

"I thought your poetry was, ooh ooh, sometimes good"

6 **My face is on fire** (*My face is on fire*)

7 **Primitive painters** (*Ignite the seven cannons*)

8 **Mexican bandits** (*The splendour of fear*)

9 **Don't die on my doorstep** (*The Pictorial Jackson
review*)

10 **I will die with my head in flames** (*Rain of crystal
spires*)

11 **Tuesdays secret** (*Space blues*)

12 **Grey streets** (*Forever breathes the lonely word*)

13 **Sapphire Mansions** (*Let the snakes crinkle their
heads to death*)

14 **When the dawn starts creeping in** (*Andy Kershaw
Session, September 11 1986*)

15 **Down but not yet out** (*Forever breathes the lonely
word*)

16 **Cartoon sky** (*Me and a monkey on the moon*)

17 **How spook got her man** (*The Pictorial Jackson review*)

"I was going to be a personality, I was going to be so well known
What went wrong I don't know"

18 **Outdoor miner** (Wire cover) (*Live at MJC Claudel, Reims, June 21 1986*)

19 **Something sends me to sleep** (*Something sends me to sleep*)

"I told you so believe me now, you cannot see what I can see"

20 **Until the fools get wise** (*The Pictorial Jackson review*)

"I don't care about time, have no interest in the sublime
Underground will never rise 'till the fools get wise"

Disc 2

1 **Ancient city where I lived** (*Let the snakes crinkle their heads to death*)

2 **A wave crashed on rocks** (*Forever breathes the lonely word*)

" You in your wisdom you ruined it all"

3 **Riding on the equator** (*Poem of the river*)

4 **Bitter end** (*The pictorial Jackson Review*)

"If I was to say that the stars are never gonna shine,
then I would be saying the world never could be mine"

5 **Black ship in the harbour** (*Ignite the seven cannons*)

6 **The world is as soft as lace** (*The splendour of fear*)

7 **I can't make love to you anymore** (*Me and a monkey on the moon*)

8 **Fortune** (*Crumbling the antiseptic beauty*)

9 **Roman litter** (*The strange idols pattern and other short stories*)

10 **The final resting of the ark** (*The final resting of the ark*)

11 **Be still** (The Beach Boys cover)(*Space blues*)

12 **Silver plane** (*Poem of the river*)

13 **Spanish house** (*The strange idols pattern and other short stories*)

14 **There's no such thing as victory** (*The final resting of the ark*)

15 **Cathedral** (*Crumbling the antiseptic beauty*)

"When the choice is mine I hope I make it
When the chance comes by the time is right"

16 **Female star** (*Space blues*)

"Now I'm broke, it ain't no joke
I ain't got no money, I don't think that's funny"

17 **A declaration** (*Poem of the river*)

18 **New day dawning** (*Me and a monkey on the moon*)

19 **Space blues** (*Space blues*)

20 **All the people I like are those that are dead**
(*Forever breathes the lonely word*)

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CREDITS

This book is dedicated to the members of Felt I had the chance to meet, Lawrence, Gary Ainge, Marco Thomas, Martin Duffy, Neil Scott, Phil King, and to Alan McGee as well, who made all this possible.

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Also available through Vivonzeureux (in French) :

Pol Dodu : *Mes disques improbables* (2010)

Pol Dodu : *Tu m'as trompette mon amour* (2010)

JC Brouchard : *Felt : La ballade du fan* (2011)

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