

Franz Ferdinand

A couple of years ago Bob, Alex, Nick and Paul got a group together. They said that they wanted to make girls dance or something. Domino put out their first record *Franz Ferdinand* and they spent a year zipping around the planet, playing their tunes to millions of people. They picked up loads of prizes - Ivor Novello, Mercury Music, Brits, MTV awards etc, but more importantly, they made pop music a wee bit exciting again. They didn't really look or sound like anybody else, but everyone seemed to dance and sing along.

They've just recorded a new record: *You Could Have It So Much Better... With Franz Ferdinand*. They weren't going to give it a title. "The first one didn't have one, so why should this one?" When they were putting songs in order, one of them said "YCHISMB would have been a great title". Another said "We haven't released it yet, we can call it whatever the hell we like". So they did. There was something that appealed about the phrase - it's positive, optimistic, yet independent and confrontational. It's the antithesis of the self-satisfaction or "You've never had it so good".

FF have always wanted to do it their way and to do it better. That's why they put records out with Domino. It's a label which continues the tradition of the Great British Independents. From Motown, Trojan, Postcard and Factory, through Stiff, Rough Trade and Creation: the independents have been the breeding ground for the best innovative pop music. It is pop music too. One thing that FF made us realise was that pop music is best when it comes from a group of friends who feel they can do it just as well as the big guys. *Those* groups, like the Beatles, The Smiths, Nirvana, Ziggy and the Spiders, Pulp, Roxy Music - the groups that let us hear things we'd never heard before, but made it sound like pop.

They didn't feel too comfortable about the idea of going into the professional, but anodyne, environment of a studio to write and record again. They reckoned that a studio was just a building with a fancy tape recorder and other gear in it, and that they could record where they liked. They wanted it to be like it was when they started out, hanging around in each other's flats, having a drink, making up a few tunes. They ended up going into the countryside, a wee bit South of Glasgow, where they all lived in a house together. Just like The Monkeys.

YCHISMB sounds like Franz Ferdinand, but not like their first record. It's unarguably them. It seems impossible for them to play in a room together and for it to not sound like them. They didn't want to repeat themselves, though. Where's the fun in doing the same thing twice? They've gone a bit further in a few directions they hinted at before. There's more passion and emotion. *Walk Away* twists through the darkness of a romantic tragedy. *The Fallen* is dramatic defiance, blood, violence and playful satire over Zeppelin sized riffs. *Outsiders* revels in alienation and puts it to a beat and a heart-thumping bass. It has the other-worldliness of Joe Meek and the dance-floor hypnotism of Morodor. *Fade Together* is delicate with a piano, acoustic guitar and lonely voice. *Do You Want To*, the

first single, is Pop with huge cartoon-catchy riffs, irreverence and an easy nonchalance which belies the underlying complexity.

This album has more width and depth. The group that wanted to do more than they'd done before. While sticking rigidly to the idea that there shouldn't be anything on the record that they didn't play themselves, there are more sounds and richer sounds. There's a desire to be adventurous, without ramming it home. To be ambitious with the arrangements and the melody, to do things that we haven't heard in music before, without drawing attention to them. They didn't want people to think "hmm, these guys are really smart", but "oh, that was a good bit". You hear that sense of adventure occasionally in pop music.

They shared this sense of musical adventure with Rich Costey who collaborated on the production with them. They first met Rich in LA last year. He sent them a message asking if they could meet up when in town. They did and recorded the version of *This Fire* that became their second US single with him. Rich is charismatic, gentle and a little eccentric. It became a greater group dynamic. Not a dictatorship, not a democracy, but a group of friends sharing their ideas. Ideas always multiply when you fling them to and from each other. When they moved in to the house together, they sat around, played each other records, drank wine and ate together, talked about the things that excited them about music and life. They played each other everything they found exciting, jumping from Johnny Dangerous to All Things Must Pass to Lil' Jon to Syd Barrett to The Monochrome Set to Public Enemy to PIL to Silver Apples to Bowie to Pulp to Amerie to Dylan to whatever they liked. There was a common appreciation of the importance of the group dynamic. Rich's mantra became "I want to catch that thing that happens when the four of you get in a room together". There weren't any real rules about how to do this, other than "if it sounds good, do it".

FF didn't want to hang around. The current climate of the music industry is one where the creative output of even a mildly successful group is usually dictated by the marketing dept. at their label. This means that it's often years between albums as everything is meticulously prepared. FF thought "Sod That". They felt they were on a creative roll, so wanted to do it NOW. That's why they stopped touring early, why they didn't piss around for months and why they just got on with it.

So there you are. Franz Ferdinand's new album. It's better than their last one and anything else you'll hear this year.