



# UNDER THE INFLUENCE

WE ASKED SAINT ETIENNE'S **SARAH CRACKNELL** ABOUT HER FORMATIVE INFLUENCES. SHE MAKES SOME RATHER INSPIRED CHOICES...

Interview: **JOOLS STONE**

## DEBBIE HARRY

"Debbie Harry was a major influence on me. I think it's no huge secret that I wanted to be her. Her image in particular was just so iconic. It's quite amazing, she somehow managed to be really edgy, maintain a strong stance and persona and also look really stunning. She was never seen as just some pretty girl just-for-the-hell-of-it-dolly-at-the-front singer, she played a major role in a hugely influential group. She did some interesting things stylistically too, she would dirty up her image. She didn't always wear very flattering clothes for example. She sometimes wore quite Teutonic things, or very punk clothes, which meant she resisted easy pigeonholing.

"She definitely shaped my approach to my image as a frontwoman in a band. I've always worn just what I felt like wearing really. I've had my own look, finding things in charity shops, and I've made a lot of my own clothes as well.

"It can be difficult at times, because you do attract comments. I remember being called 'mumsy' once just for not showing lots of cleavage. It was a bit harder in the early 90s when we started out. People do somehow get attached to this idea of the glamorous girl in the band. I think it took about seven years for everyone to calm down about Saint Etienne and see me as an integral part of the band, contributing songwriting ideas just as much as Bob and Pete do."

## A TASTE OF HONEY

"Bob, Pete and I were all into the same things when we first met, which I suppose is part of why we work so well as a band. One of the big passions we all shared were the British kitchen sink drama films, like 'Look Back In Anger' and 'Billy Liar', hence all the dialogue samples scattered across our albums. My absolute favourite though was Shelagh Delaney's 'A Taste Of Honey', with Rita Tushingham, who was amazing.

"I just love all the friction and family tensions in those dramas, in particular 'A Taste Of Honey'. The protagonist, Jo, is a really interesting figure. She's a teen who's questioning everything. I was a similar age to Jo when I first saw the film, so it just resonated with me.

"When I went to drama school in the mid-80s, one of my very first roles was playing Jo. The lady who played Jo's mum was an absolute lunatic on stage. She walloped me really hard in the stage fight we had, she went a bit too method."

## LONDON

"London's like a magnet, I could never wait to get there. I remember when I was about 13 getting the train from Egham to go to school in Clapham. I'd hop on the Northern Line to make the last leg of the journey, which was actually quite scary at that time. I used to go ice skating in Richmond, browsing around Kensington Market and up the Kings Road with my friend as soon as we were able to really.

"I grew up around Windsor where we had one record shop called Revolution Records. Most of the people I knew were all into similar music and culture and we'd all congregate there on a Saturday afternoon. We'd go and see bands like Felt and Primal Scream fairly often. I had a Citroën 2CV and I'd try to cram in as many people as I could to get to gigs.

"I gradually chipped my way further into London, to Richmond and Bracknell and gradually drifting further into west London. I shared a flat on the Kings Road when I was 17. Because we had no money, we would end up walking along the Embankment, and I still love that part of the Thames, especially the area around Chelsea. It reminds me of a really exciting time.

"I moved to the Archway Road and lived above a gun shop for a while. I think it's still there today, barred windows and all. Then I ventured into Soho. I used to go to Gossips on Dean Street for the Alice In Wonderland psychedelic club nights. They would hang toilet paper from the ceiling at nose level which you'd have to fight your way through, and you would always meet someone with their pet rat on their shoulder or something. Coming from Windsor to all that was quite an experience."

## MELANCHOLY

"It's my favourite emotion, full stop. Especially so in songs. I love that bittersweet feeling. That 'OK, so things aren't great, but everything's going to be fine', it just warms my heart. There's a song by Honey Cone called 'The Day I Found Myself' with the wonderful lyric in the chorus: 'The day that I lost you, that's the day I found myself'. ABBA's 'Dancing Queen' is a far more famous example of well-crafted melancholy in a song. Melancholy features in a lot of our songs too, of course. Even something like 'He's On The Phone', which might sound pretty upbeat on the surface, but when you listen to the lyrics you'll think, 'Ah hang on, there's a sadder side to this one'."

**Saint Etienne's 'Foxbase Alpha' reissue is out now on Heavenly**