Robert Calvert - Ramblings at Dawn, 1982 Interview

Robert Calvert recorded these thoughts and reminiscences for Tim Gadd in 1982, and the audio was uploaded to YouTube in 2012 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0BDGTUTItT8). I have transcribed it since I prefer reading interviews to listening to them.

The recording is very "stream of consciousness" and I have included all the "you know"s and "sort of"s as I wanted to capture exactly what he said. I will also create an edited version that is easier to read.

There are a few places where I couldn't hear exactly what he said. If you want to edit this to add the missing words then please feel free.

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Right, well I can only find one microphone at the moment so I’m afraid this is going to have to be in sort of half track mono. Sorry about that it’s a bit bad actually for someone who produces records for a living, but I hope you’ll be able to hear this all right. It should sound ll right if you play it back on a mono machine.

Right, what was I doing before working with Hawkwind and friends? I was living in Ramsgate and Broadstairs in Kent by the sea, having decided to move from Margate, which is down the road, and I spent a lot of time in the winter out of work as a lot of the lads did in that place. And we didn’t actually think that was much of a hardship in those days. It seemed to be … you know … being offered a job was probably the ultimate doom that we were all trying to avoid.

And of course we worked in the summer. I worked in Dreamland, the amusement park in Margate. I did a bit of work on deckchairs, bit of beach photography, that sort of thing. Nik Turner was selling funny hats at the time, on the front. And in the summer it was actually quite possible if you used your wits to make enough money to keep you going with your dole money through the winter.

And that was the time when you had plenty of time to sort of dream up ideas and things, and Nik, Dik Mik and myself used to end up about together and talk about the sort of band we would get together if we had half a chance. We used to come up to London quite a lot to see bands playing and that’s where I first met Dave Brock when he was busking in Portobello Road. We used to go up and we used to see him a few weekends, quite a few weekends during the winter. And the summer in fact, if you weren’t working the weekend.

So that’s the sort of thing I did. I did actually quite a long stretch of teaching English to foreign students in the local foreign students academy. And that was actually quite enjoyable. That was quite an enjoyable way to spend the summer cause it left a lot of free time and the money was quite good. Because you could do private lessons for what in those days was a lot of money for about two quid an hour or something like that.

And I did a lot of writing in my spare time. And I uh I used to when I came up to London I used to ??? to the FRENDZ office to contribute a few bits and pieces of writing that I’d done. Until I suppose I gradually found myself spending more time in London and less time going back on the train. There seemed to be less to go back for and more happening.

There was a lot happening around the Notting Hill area at the time. And I suppose I got actively involved with music through just spending a lot of time … I used to review certain gigs. I went out review gigs, hang around gigs. I did poetries. I’d done readings … I mean I’d always written poetry since I was about fifteen and I’d done sort of the odd reading in … first of all in folk clubs actually really a long time before this. Then I’d start doing some readings around rock gigs. I mean, particularly around the gigs that were being put on at the Seven Sisters club. The Sisters Club it was called. Which was sort of jointly organised by IT and FRENDZ.

And that was the first gig with Hawkwind I actually played. I got invited … I mean I’d seen Nik. No actually … yeah that was the very first gig with Hawkwind at the Sisters Club. Yeah I got up on the stage with the band at their invitation and read a long poem to start the set of the show off with. It was called Co-pilots of Spaceship Earth. And it was sort of from something I had been working on for quite a long time. That was really the beginning of the Space Ritual. That was the sort of the germ of the Space Ritual.

It wasn’t through friends that I first met Hawkwind in fact. It was really through the fact that Nik was an old mate from Kent and Dik Mik, and when they went off to join Hawkwind I actually went off to form another … But I started to form another sort of band, which was quite a lunacy … quite a lot of lunacy involved in it. It was me and three French musicians. Two guitarists and a percussionist who didn’t speak very much English and I didn’t speak any French.

And we did a few gigs. The very … the first gig I did with them was actually at the Roundhouse. I think it was the night after Hawkwind played there and I met Nik Turner the next day, and we were sort of discussing what we were up to. Cause I hadn’t actually, to be quite honest, I hadn’t really taken that much notice of what Hawkwind was doing up until that point. They hadn’t been formed very long. But I just thought it was some good time rock and roll band. I didn’t like, I must say, I didn’t like the name. I thought Hawkwind sounded like a silly name.

It wasn’t until we were standing in the restaurant, coffee bar, of the Roundhouse that Nik said when I asked him what sort of music Hawkwind was playing he said “space rock”, which is a term I hadn’t actually heard before. But it seemed sort of like the magic key to a movement that was about, that was afoot, at the time that I felt myself to be kind of … It was sort of like Ezra Pound and you know the Imagists sort of discussing a new movement in poetry and to me it sounded like something brand new, which it was.

And it wasn’t long after that I found myself performing more gigs after the Sisters gig, more gigs with the band, and I’d already planned the idea of doing the Space Ritual. Not necessarily with Hawkwind. I’d … it was something I’d wanted to do, to get some musician together to help me do, for quite a long time. I think even probably before even Hawkwind was formed it was something that I used to sort of dream up and write bits of while I was working in my Mum’s shop actually, in the odd few hours when she had to pop out. I used to take over her newsagents tobacconists shop and that was actually where I heard the news that Jimi Hendrix died, as it happens. So that fixes us in time I suppose, so … but I won’t go into all that.

As to when I actually joined the band it’s very hard to say. I’m not very good at … I don’t keep a diary and I don’t really attach a lot of significance to dates. I never have done. I was … I’ve always attached more significance to place actually rather than time. It’s funny I suppose you could say rather than to time. No I think where things happened is and how things happened is far more important than exactly when they happened, which is just sort of arbitrary measurement. And you can’t, I mean, it’s something you can’t time. It’s something you can’t visualise either unless you’re, unless you visualise it in numbers, and I don’t think in numerical terms or in abstract terms at all really. I can only really think in concrete images and time doesn’t give you any concrete image, unless you think of a clock face, which of course is nothing to do with time.

The success of Silver Machine obviously meant quite a difference to the band’s capacity to earn money, which meant rather more to rather more to our record company than I think it did to us. At the time it happened, at least, I mean it was something that … I mean we were actually asked if we would mind if they put Silver Machine out as a single. It was just one of the songs in the Space Ritual and when I … I’d never thought of it as a single. I’d never thought of making hit singles at all. I thought singles were really something that was a sort of industry altogether from the one that we were in. And when it was suggested and everybody agreed that it was a good idea to do it I didn’t … I was so naïve in those days that I couldn’t really see any way that if you made a single it wasn’t a hit. I thought, you know, I assumed that you know if you got into the process of making singles then you were in the business of making hit singles and that was it. You know a single was a hit single. So it didn’t surprise me that it got to the top of the charts at all.

I think I would have been very surprised if it hadn’t in fact. Not because I thought it was fantastic, or anything like that, or better than any other single, it was just purely and simply because I thought that’s what singles did. I subsequently found out that not typicals to most of them (???) but that’s how naïve I was then.

I can’t remember why I wasn’t involved in the recording of the Doremi album cause I think a couple of my songs were on it. It may just have well have been at that time I think I was purely sort of as it were resident poet in the band, and we hadn’t at that time got into any thoughts of recording poetry and music. I mean it was something that actually did go down very well with live audiences. It all seemed to be I mean I don’t think there was any other bands, at last not in England, that was doing anything quite like this. I mean playing long stretches of free form experimental electronic music with spoken poetry being read to it in the way that earlier poets read their work to jazz. But it seemed at the time were doing it to be a sort of inevitable extension of the whole experimental feeling there was in sort of in the days of the underground if you like.

And I think we were saving that, we were saving the recording of that for the Space Ritual, which was to be the follow up album. In fact the Doremi album seemed to, as far as I remember, seemed to have sort of sprung on me. I wasn’t expecting it to be recorded. I think it was pressure of the record company. They needed an album quickly and they got … and it was done quickly actually.

My involvement was still quite loose with the band in those days. I mean, I wasn’t a musician by any means at all. So I wasn’t really considered to be a sort of one of the sort of elite members of the group in that I didn’t play anything, I didn’t sing, and contribute anything that could be commercial. And it wasn’t until, I mean, obviously poetry and music wasn’t seen as at all commercial by the record company. But it wasn’t until the astonishing success of the Space Ritual, which I think must be, must have been, in any terms the very most successful compilation of poetry and music that’s ever been sold on a record. In fact it is … it’s still in the history of the band the Space Ritual is the biggest selling album the band’s produced so far. And it’s something to think about that poetry and music can actually sort of … It was a double album and it was in the charts I think at number nine for weeks on end.

I’m not really sure if any of this is coming out. The needle’s flickering away over there on the right hand travel there. I hope that it’s all recording all right.

My reasons behind the writing of Captain Lockheed are really quite hard to remember now cause it was something that again that I planned quite a number of years before I actually did it. Something I had really wanted to do. I’d always been interested in aeroplane technology, aerospace technology, and the Starfighter tragedy or whatever you want to call it - the Starfighter programme - phenomena - was always something that fascinated me. I was I mean sort of you know gigantic arms dealing monolithic industry causing all that chaos and I mean it was something that I couldn’t really come to grips with in any other way. So I had to write something about it. I mean I had thought, and I still do have in my mind … I’d like to do a novel about that era and the German air force of that time.

And not very much actually has been written about the Starfighter thing at all. And this is something that when I tried to get hold of research material to work on the album I found it very difficult to find anything that had been written about it. I had to look for bits and pieces and mentions in footnotes in work you know in books on the history of aviation. I mean it was … no one book has been devoted to the subject. I noticed also that subsequent to the album there's been a sort of an expose of Lockheed's work in … not in Germany as yet, but in Holland particularly. You know there was a scandal involving the government and Lockheed at that time.

But that sort of thing obviously goes on in arms sales. I mean arms dealing is probably the very epitome of modern commercial practice I would say. Worse than the oil business. There's another subject too wide and deep to go into in this interview.

The reason I had so many Hawkwind members guesting on the album, since you ask, is simply because they were there I suppose. I mean they were the only musicians that I knew. And they certainly, I mean, the music was you know Hawkwind style music was very appropriate. I would like to have had more of Dave on the album actually but he was in Devon and found it you know that you know his time off that he wanted to be at home with his family. So I just you know made what I could with those members of the band that were in London and were available at the time. I mean it was one of those things in those days I mean this was the way albums were made. I mean money was never a consideration, at least not for us at that time. You booked a studio and you rang people up and asked them if they would like to come down and record. If they were available they did and if they weren't you got someone else. And it was all very loose and lots of money was wasted in the studio in this way of working, which is a way one doesn't work today, in these much harsher times. I mean it's much more economic and much more economic considerations come into it.

Urban Guerrilla wasn't written about anyone in particular, but it was another case of something that was written a long time before it actually saw the light of day in the form of a recording. It actually came from just bowling down one of these side streets in Notting Hill. I noticed the term "urban guerrilla" had been sprayed up on a wall, well actually on a corrugated iron piece of sheeting that was tacked up to cover some blemish in the local architecture. And in this sort of great black, dribbling spray paint was this term "urban guerrilla", which obviously somebody had sprayed there simply because the term held a lot of heroic and exciting ideal sort of mythological modern, you know, kind of, feeling for whoever wrote it.

It was term that I had heard mentioned but I'd never really thought about until I saw it proclaimed in this way. And it wasn't that long after that I found a paperback book that was a sort of a study of guerrilla tactics that was called "Urban Guerrilla". And it, the cover of the book actually featured a corrugated iron wall with the word "urban guerrilla" sprayed in it. And the two things … when I saw that … the two things sort of … you know … my feelings about the whole thing I read the book, which was actually written by a soldier called Calvert as it so happens. He was … I think he's a military advisor to the British army. Colonel Calvert. Somebody or other Calvert. Who … anyway that just one of those small coincidences that really don't mean a lot to anyone unless … you know … obviously it meant something to me from my point of view. But it wouldn't to anyone else. But there you are, the subjectivity of coincidence.

Which is another subject. But I wrote it, I really wrote it, because I wanted to express that sort of feeling that I'd seen expressed in the spray paint, and also my own feelings about it. And I'm alarmed to see now that, well I was alarmed actually shortly after that to see how much or how many other people had obviously that it was … that an urban guerrilla was something to be. I mean it's not something that I feel that I would like to be myself at all other than in the realms of fantasy, but … you know, in a manner of speaking, it's something that has heavily caught on since those days. I mean when I saw that written it wasn't something that existed in this country at least. It was a sort of remote thing to do with Mediterranean countries and Mexican revolutions really.

It didn't surprise me that it was banned be the BBC at all. In fact I expected it to cause a lot of controversy. It made the front pages of the newspapers, but I particularly remember a headline in the, on the front page of the Evening Standard, when it was withdrawn from the market.

I'm just going to check … oh it's not too bad on this machine, I don't know what it's like on yours, but it's audible anyway.

So, I mean, it wasn't written to deliberately cause controversy but I knew it would and I didn't expect it to be … I mean I was really heavily taken to task. I had to give interviews, which were quite embarrassing really because … it … you know, the statements I made in the song, which were obviously … weren't … a refutation of guerrilla tactics by any means at all. But I really, you know, what I meant by the lyric was … you know, I meant it as a metaphor for an attitude rather than an incitement for young people to go and get themselves guns.

I suppose it got me a file opened by the Special Branch, or at least by the Home Office, in some department by the Home Office, as I think Nik Turner actually has got one on him for sure. I mean he has had his premises raided in an arms, bomb, search. That was a few years ago now. You know, I think you can't get away with something like that. I mean … the fact is the record is now a collector, I mean, quite a few … because of the success of Silver Machine obviously I mean thousands of the things were printed … pressed … and you can still buy them now. And second hand copies changing hands at quite a high rate, you know, quite a lot of money.

Captain Lockheed was quite a success for an album. I mean, are you asking was it successful in commercial terms - I think you might be. Well let's take that first. Yes, it sold. It sold well and it still does. I mean, it's still selling in America and as an import, not in alarmingly large quantities but I mean for an album that old - was it 73, which makes it eight years, getting on for nine years old - I think that's quite a long sales life really. Whether it was successful in artistic terms is something that I'm really not the person to ask because I never think anything I do is successful in those terms. I mean, I always listen to things I've done or read things I've written or had published and wish that I get them back again and work on them more. I still work on stuff that's already … But, I mean, I've got revisions for songs that have already been recorded and sold and gone now. I still, sort of, from time to time, revise away at them. I'm a great reviser.

But Lockheed was recorded as I said before in that sort of spirit, that loose, spontaneous spirit, which I think it needed to have. And I think some it's more … some of the album … there's a lot on the album actually. I mean, there's a lot of facts on it, and some of them are obviously more successful than others. It's a pity that I didn't really have the maturity of approach that I've sort of grown up with now - to have spent more time actually planning it in advance. And it was quite heavily planned but not as much as I would do now. But, you know, planned carefully and worked over more rather than arrived at by extemporaneous means.

You say that some of my vocals on the album sounds very like Peter Hammill, which is something no-one's actually said to me before. And I find that a rather flattering remark. I think, I mean, I think Peter Hammill is probably one of the … one of the finest vocalists, vocal stylists as they call them in America, that we've got in England. Or that we've had in rock anyway. And if I sound anything at all like him, or if I did in those days, I mean that was not a conscious effort at all. And I had, I was aware of him, and I didn't really appreciate him as much as I do now. But I was … and I'd heard, you know, I'd heard the Van der Graaf albums but I didn't set out to imitate his voice in any way at all.

I worked in a way which was far less self-conscious than I do now, which may have been in some ways better and in some ways not so good. But I was certainly not trying to sound like anyone, but just to sort of sound, I mean, I was more or less trying to sound appropriate for the songs I was doing, which is still something I try and do now. Actually I think that's why my voice varies in style from song to song, or at least to my ears it does. Maybe to someone else it doesn't. But I … I mean what I try to do is to perform a song in a way that to my way of thinking that it needs to be performed.

The cancellation of the Lockheed tour probably affected me a lot more than I realised it had at the time. I mean, if a lot of people around me at the time including Jamie Mentalcower(???) who was a Canadian writer who lived in ... he's quite a mate, who lived in London at the time - he lives in Canada again now - but he said to me that it was the biggest tragedy that I could have had foisted on me. It was all to do with purely banal personal reasons as well actually, which to me was … it was all over a woman - I won't go into it - it was all over a girl actually.

Jamie said that had I … if I'd done the tour that it would have put me very firmly on the map as a sort of leading British solo recording artist, sort of thing, which was nothing at all to do with what I was aiming at being anyway. So it didn't really worry me. I did want to do the tour very much. I really wanted to stage a major theatrical event and take it round the country. You know, as a sort of completely further extension of the Space Ritual's style of staging things. I mean something I wanted to do something with actors and with proper drama in it. And I would have probably been breaking quite a lot of new ground if I'd done it then. I probably would be if I did it now actually.

I can't really see any sort of successful rock theatre project that's really been done. I mean, there are bands I mean like the Tubes, for example, who use theatre with rock, but it's never really been integrated enough in my opinion. So it probably affected the people who made the money out of me at that time more than it affected me personally. But they were the people who were … whose idea it was to back out of the tour for the personal reasons that I touched on just a minute ago. And rather than resurrecting a little personal rambling, which or a sort of hatchet that would be better left buried, I'll move on to the next question.

Between Captain Lockheed and Lucky Leif I recorded, I think I'm right, that I recorded a version of the cricket star song and a B side for it as a single, which United Artists didn't release for some reason. Probably because they didn't like … they didn't think reggae was a commercial prospect. I remember the managing director of United Artists inviting me into his office and explaining to me that reggae was a minority ethnic cult and had no chance of ever becoming a commercial success, and would I think about doing something more in the vein of rock and roll, which seemed to be something that they could sell. So it got shelved.

But it was … actually it wasn't … it was a … reggae is something I'd never really enjoyed, and the Cricket Star was actually a way of sort of getting back at a mate of mine called Rodney Henson, who's still a very good mate of mine, who works on an oil rig at the moment, for playing reggae records the whole time. I mean, he's a … absolutely reggae mad and when he's on leave he spends most of his time knocking around in jump up shacks around the Gate, and … which I wouldn't give you tuppence for meself.

I just find, I find reggae … you know, as a musical form so limited that … it really is a case that if you've heard one you've heard quite a few of them. Quite a considerable few. So I mean, obviously, Cricket Star was done in a sort of jocular spirit. I mean, it was even satirical. And that version, which the masters of which have long since been lost unfortunately, was a lot more authentically reggae than the more sort of pop, electronic version that came out on the flimsy disk.

You asked me if I was ever involved with Bowie. No, I've never met, I never met David Bowie at all, although I would like very much to actually bump into him. Don't know what I'd say to him actually, but he is somebody I've admired for most of his career, I suppose. Except for the very early days.

I was … Marc Bolan was someone I used to see quite a lot, because we shared the same management company for a time. And it was just before his untimely death that we did discuss seriously getting involved, you know, as sort of co-workers on a project that we started to map out. It was going to be, it was, well, at least Granada Television were extremely excited about it. This was a time when he was recording his series of kids' shows and we sort of discovered that we had a lot in common in our influences. And so we … which surprised me I must say. His work is extremely different from mine but his influences seem to be very much the same.

He was, at that time, he was very much taken by Berthold Brecht who, you know, who is now as we know one of the more fashionable figures that you can mention if you're going to name your credentials as far as influences go. But Bolan had actually read a considerable amount of Brecht's work, particularly his poetry, which is something we both admired very much. I don't know how many people who these days are going round talking about giving the old nod to Berthold as I heard someone say on the Old Grey Whistle Test the other night, I wonder how many of them actually read very much of Brecht's enormous output and taken it seriously into consideration.

So that may well have resulted in an interesting bit of collaboration, if we'd ever done it. I'm sure we would have done, I mean, I was getting messages from his manager almost daily up until the point when Bolan crashed his car. Funnily enough I had a minor, in comparison, a minor car crash a week before Bolan crashed his, which was a bit, at the time seemed to have full of significance and dreadful sort of portentiousness. I overturned an MG 1300 I think it was, one of those sort of things that looks a bit like a mini in fact. It sort of overturned it in a Devon lane narrowly missing a cattle truck, wrote the car off completely and escaped with only very minor cuts. And when I heard, it was exactly seven days after that that Bolan drove into a tree, or was driven into a tree.

Funnily enough I had a girl with me in the car who was, well I wouldn't say it was funny, I mean she was actually had a gashed head, was quite seriously injured and shaken up and traumatically affected by it. It seemed to me strange that Bolan was being driven by a girl and I was driving myself with a girl next to me, and I escaped without any injury and she was badly injured. It all seemed to be, you know, the sort of thing that sparks off fatalistic thoughts. But who knows? I mean, as I said before I mean coincidence is something extremely subjective. I mean, it is how you read an event that determines how much significance it holds. And car crashes happen every day.

Yeah, the style of the music changed drastically on Astounding, I mean, Astounding album. This wasn't a conscious change at all by the band. This was really a reflection of the changes that had been made in line up in the band. And I mean, there was never, I mean, I must say there was never a time when any sort of conscious planning was made to determine any … anything to do with musical content. In Hawkwind I hope it still is, always was, much more spontaneous affair than that.

Paul Rudolph and Alan Powell were blamed by me and Brock for funky trend, but you say that, you feel that the songs we wrote had a funky edge to them. That was, if they did have at all it was purely and simply because of the fact that Powell and Rudolph formed the rhythm section, or at least a large percentage of the rhythm section of the group at the time. So any sort of funkiness in the rhythm was obviously down to that. But funky music and reggae are two things which I've never been overly fond of. And I know Dave hadn't been either, which is one of the things that we had in common.

Did I try to make my lyrics more socially aware than before? No, I've never tried to make anything more anything than it was before, except better. I have the sort of mind that can only really work on things that it is, I mean, I work in an obsessive way that I can only write about things that currently obsess my mind, and if you see any social awareness in any of the songs I can't really think of what you're particularly referring to. But whatever you see in them is just a reflection of the sort of things that I was being obsessed by at the time, or obsessed with.

No I've never, I didn't re …, I'm sure that is, you know, to ask me did I regret sacking Turner, Powell and Rudolph? Well, I mean, I didn't personally sack them myself, but did I regret the sacking of them? Can't say that I did actually. I mean, certainly not in the case of Powell and Rudolph who really weren't, or shouldn't have been considered as members of the band in any case, who really were session musicians who'd come in to fill a gap that existed at the time. I mean, Nik is in a much better position now than he was at that time and would have been if he'd stayed in the band. He's now got his own band, which he should have done a long time ago, the Inner City Unit, which is currently on tour with Spirit and being seen by a lot more people than he has been recently. And I have great hopes for what Nik's doing. I think he could well emerge as a major sort of musical force like Lemmy has. So I'm sure that Nik doesn't regret it, and as I have now sacked myself from the band I mean I'm not really in a position to sort of feel any sort of regret or nostalgia about anything.

In my opinion I think Hawkwind really although there is a band going round with that name still, with Dave leading it, you know I personally think that Hawkwind sort of finished really at the time of the Hawklords album. I think the Hawklords, I regarded the Hawklords album as the last album. There have been, I think there's two more albums since then, neither of which I've heard. And … I've heard, only heard reports about them, which shouldn't encourage me to go out and listen to them. You know, I think it would be a far more dignified thing if the band really was regarded as something that which had a magnificent sort of life, and a terrific long run as a major band, and is now sort of broken up and gone into separate units now. Dave Brock would be doing himself a favour if he formed a band of his own, and called it something quite different from Hawkwind, and used it to express his own musical direction, rather than sort of half-heartedly trying to resurrect a dispersed spirit.

How many of my lyrics were inspired by books which I have read? I suppose a few have obviously. Damnation Alley was one, which is the title of a book by Roger Zelazny, and Steppenwolf is another that springs to mind. But as I said before what I write about is what I'm currently obsessed with, or that my notebooks are currently referring to, and dredging things up into and this is going … You know, as I do I read a lot of books. I mean, books are some of the things which do obsess. I was obsessed for a while by the imagery of Damnation Alley and by Steppenwolf. But I think most of my lyrics are, if you want to use the word inspired, are inspired by what is currently in front of my senses at the time, as William Burroughs once said, quite a lot of them by books that haven't been written yet if you like. Probably books that I will, if I live long enough, will write myself.

Hawkwind was a considerable success in France, quite a success in Germany and Holland, in fact. And as far as I know not at all to any great extent in the USA apart from, sort of, major industrial towns such as Detroit, for some reason. Which can't be ex … well I suppose it can be explained but I can't explain it myself.

The effect on the band when Simon House left? I'll have to think about that for a minute. Well I suppose in my opinion that really marked the … more or less the actual end of the band as a band. Steve Swindells came in to record the Hawklords album, and who … he's an excellent musician but then again not a lot to do with the spirit of the band.

I believe that more Hawklords albums were planned but as far as I was concerned it was a one off venture. There wasn't really a theme at all around the album itself, but there was around the stage show that we were presenting at the time. And the album was really a collection of songs …

Why did I write "The Days of the Underground"? Because I felt it was necessary to redress the balance of opinion at the time, which was that nothing at all of any worth was created in the period referred to in the song. That psychedelic music had no influence and no value, which I considered to be something that had to be stated and brought into focus because it was quite untrue. The people mentioned were characters who were around at the time, who used to hang around Friends office and various other places. They weren't, sort of, they weren't major sort of artistic figures by any means at all. They were sort of … sort of types of people who, you know, that you see all around the whole time who were sort of like companions.

That was Smiling Michael, who was a … whose name implies that he was, you know, he was actually a jovial sort of person and someone that we always glad to see. He was fully into use of drugs which resulted in his falling from a third story window clinging to a rusty drainpipe and breaking his neck. John the Bog was a bloke who did quite a lot of driving for us actually. He was killed in a motorway accident. And Jeff was a Welsh, big strapping Welsh geezer, who came down to London and wrote a bit of poetry and that, and was another one of those sort of luminous personalities that you like to have around, and just didn't stay around for long enough. And he drown … he got … he was actually drowned in Margate on a day trip, which involved him diving into a sort of one of those offshore swimming pools with sea water in them under the influence of Mandrex. Actually he didn't actually drown, that was the sort of dramatic telescoping of events. He … what he did do was he actually broke his neck in a dive and died as a result some time after that.

I think I've already said how I feel about the Hawklords, Hawkwind. I mean the Hawklords really was just another name for the band, and we used the name for the album as at the time Hawkwind was a name against which a great many sort of monetary claims were being made. So it seemed to be the safest thing to do at the time was to dissolve the company and reform it under a different name. But that again was only a sign of the beginning of the end. And that wasn't really the reason … I mean I'd actually handed in my notice about, oh, over a year before I actually left. So I think, you know, I mean it worked out one of the longest notices of termination of employment that I'd heard of anyway. But that was purely in order to fulfil the end of the contract with Charisma, which would have resulted in disaster for the rest of the band if I'd left before the terms were up.

Why do I include humour and sarcasm in my lyrics? I suppose it's because it's in my nature. Irony, anyway. I suppose because humour is just something that I enjoy a lot.

Now, any memorable moments? Oh well actually too numerous to mention. I mean obviously it was a period that, you know, that I'd always hold memorable moments in connection with. I think probably one that immediately springs to mind was the night that we were about to be stopped by the police and I was handed a massive handful of drugs to swallow, along with everyone else, and I wasn't really very into swallowing large amounts of drugs at all. And the result of that was that Lemmy and myself on arriving back at our house in Finchley that we shared, that the band shared, decided that we'd go off and get some cigarettes before the effects of these drugs wore on. And it turned out that he'd taken a huge amount of downers and I'd taken a huge amount of uppers and we were walking along the streets of Finchley trying to find this cigarette machine both undergoing the separate effects of the drugs we'd swallowed. And the upshot of it was that I ended up having to escort Lemmy back in a taxi in a rigid state of near rigor mortis while I was in a highly babbling state of expedient stupidity.

Yes, there were a lot of bad scenes in Hawkwind, but most of them seemed to be quite funny now looking back at them. I remember a time when a very white faced Simon King leapt up from behind his drum kit during a rehearsal and threatened to "turk me" in his, was the expression he used, which I had to think about for a minute or two before I realised that he meant something aggressive and that he was not very pleased with my behaviour at the time. There were a lot of bad scenes actually other than the odd sort of hilarious outburst of manic displeasure. There was quite a lot of back biting going on. I remember times when there was an awful lot of almost near plotting to bring down various key figures, myself included. Dave always compared it to the sort of, sort of skulduggery that goes on in something like the Roman senate. I mean, it was quite often like a complex of cross plotting enough to feed the average paranoid mind with enough material to send it right over the edge.

Yeah, there was a lot of back stabbing, but there was also quite a lot of good humoured comradeship, as you might say. And a lot of good humour actually, I mean, I remember travelling to gigs was quite often something to look forward to. I mean, there was, you know, there was, usually it was done in good spirits. Coming back from gigs was not always such a high spirited event. But most of the time I looked forward to doing tours and, you know, I can't say that I regret any of the time spent in that area at all.

At this moment I don't think that there's a likelihood that I'll ever perform with a band called Hawkwind again. Unless it is a reforming of what I consider to be the best line-up of the band, which was in the days of the Quark album. Perhaps with a new bass player, or perhaps with Lemmy on bass actually, to re-establish for perhaps as a one-off gig a sort of Hawkwind evening, including Lemmy, Turner, Brock, meself. Maybe two or three people playing bass guitar. Never really was a sort of established bass player with the band for any length of time.

The kind of music that interests me nowadays is, well currently I'm very much impressed by an American group called The Cars, and that's the sort of highly professional rock music with feeling and technique and intelligence that I really fancy a lot. I've recently been listening to the … an album called Talk, Talk, Talk by the Psychedelic Furs, which I think is an interesting band. I listen to classical music quite a lot, as I always have done from … in bouts, from time to time I get a sort of classical urge coming on, and I've got quite a lot of classical records in amongst my collection.

I'm always interested in what Bowie's doing next. I thoroughly enjoyed his last album - play it quite a lot. An album I have played quite a lot also is Steve Swindell's solo album, which is an excellent piece of work.

Yeah I … as I said earlier I did form a sort of music unit with these French blokes and did some gigs with them. I don't think we actually had a name apart from me, it was just just me plus them. But in the days in Margate I did play in a couple of local bands, or sing with a couple of local bands, but not in any way that made me think that I seriously wanted to do this for a living. In fact I never really wanted to do it for a living at all. I only wanted to write. I think it was a case of sort of delayed adolescent, you know, it was a process that I had to get out of my system. Being in a rock band and so forth. I mean I remember reading somewhere that rock music was the literature of this generation, which struck me as a very interesting remark because I was always much more interested in literary pursuits such as, you know, I really wanted to only write plays and poetry and not get involved in music at all. I had, that remark was something I had to think about for a while because in a way it is true. I mean if you said that to the average professor of modern literature I think he'd probably deny any truth in it, although I have heard an academic broadcast on Radio Three about the work of Chuck Berry considered as an example of modern urban American poetry.

But if you think about it seriously of course it is, I mean rock, if taken seriously as an expression of ideas and emotions and so on, which poetry has always done and literature has always done for generations. And this generation, my generation, and the current younger generation too, I think right across all the sort of British class barriers and right across the sort of all academic levels and colleges and so forth, I think that you know more people turn to the work of rock orientated writers, like Bob Dylan for example, than they would do to just, you know, literature on the page of a book. I mean, the album has replaced the book to a large extent. I think most in … if you ... most hands, not mine actually I must admit. I mean, I've got actually far more books than records. But if you visit in most people's homes these days, you know, are stocked in the reverse way. I mean, you know, there are far more records you'll find on shelves than books.

And this is a process which is probably going to result in you know when video starts taking over from records, you know, the book will probably have to establish itself as a, you know, in a different status from what it's always held as a means of communication. I mean even with poetry I mean poetry now, modern poets are far more inclined to communicate with their audience through readings, public readings, than they are just through their books. But the novel goes on, and theatre goes on, and rock is actually at the moment, or music, the music business, is going the same way of the novel. You know, I mean, it goes on. There's, in fact there's probably more bands now making records than there ever has been, but there are fewer people buying the results than there ever has been. And, which is an extraordinary situation in economic terms anyway. But I think everything is just marking time now for the new home entertainment market, which is certainly coming fast now.

I do not attempt to put any political, social message in my lyrics at all. It was one of the great movie moguls, I think it was one of the Warner brothers, I'm not sure, said … or was it Sam Goldwyn, I'm not sure if it was Sam Goldwin said, if you want a message then send for … you know … send a telegram. If you want to get a message across send a telegram. Send for Western Union I think was the phrase he used. But … I suppose whatever you try to do isn't necessarily what you end up doing, or whatever you think you are not trying to do isn't what you end up actually doing. If you make a statement in a song, which has more … you know, which is intended to carry more weight than simply a description of an unhappy love affair, which is what I've never written about. If you, if your subject matter ranges wider than that then it's bound to have social content anyway, unless you work in purely fantasy terms, but I've never really done that to much of an extent. What I've always done is I've used fantasy and science fiction elements to actually try to be relevant to more everyday things. I mean if you look at the poetry I've written, or that I've published so far you'll probably notice that there's a lot more stuff there about everyday events than there is in the songs so far.

I've not really done, I've not really said anything, I've not really been overtly political in my work at all, because I don't really think that, you know, I'm qualified to … you know, to be a political spokesman in any way. I don't know if anybody is any more except a few highly trained and … you know … extremely intelligent specialists in the field of modern politics, sociology, and so forth because what they're dealing with is something so complicated, something so extremely complex, more so than it's ever been in history before. So many interconnecting forces at work in modern politics so now that, you know, there's so much intercommunication between, you know, across the globe. You have to be a specialist to understand it fully, and to consider yourself in any way qualified to make a sensible remark about it all.

I mean I'm not that, you know, I'm not a specialist in that at all. I see what I'm writing now as getting far more deeply involved with concrete detailed descriptions of things which can be applied to a wider area. That's the sort of writing I'm more interested in, you know, actual sort of focus on one small area with as much intensity as possible.

The Cricket Star flimsy disk was just recorded by me and Adrian Wagner down at his home studio in Oxford. So it's really just me and … a drummer in a band that was recording there at the time came in and just overdubbed the drums for us on it but the rest of it was all us two. Just on synths and vocals.

The reason I included so many past and present Hawkwind members on Lord of the Hornets is again for the same reasons as I said before. I mean I can't really see myself going out … you know sort of going through a sort of directory of top flight session musicians, ringing them up and asking them, you know, people like Herbie Flowers, people like that, to come down to a studio and record with me. I can't really see it happening at all. I mean, I, what I mean is I can't really see the result of such a jamboree happening in terms of the music itself. I mean obviously the musicians that I've worked with have been as much of an influence on the sort of music I write as I've been possibly on the way that they play. So it's, you know, it's quite a natural thing to want to record with, you know, people that you sort of more or less grown up with musically speaking. If indeed that's what's happened.

No, I think, if I went into the studio with, you know, with a bunch of musicians who … that I'd never worked with before, that I'd selected on their reputations as musicians the result would probably be totally synthetic. But in any case, I mean, with the people on Lord of the Hornets it's a sort of mates that one finds it … (at this point he is interrupted by his dog, Charlie, barking)

Yeah, I've got a single release planned for September, which is a song from the new album, and it's called "We Like to be Frightened". I have indeed over the past few months performed several one man shows in London, and what … the material that I've included in them was sort of … review of, I mean, a lot of it was dramatised bits from Captain Lockheed, which by the way has been performed by colleges and schools throughout the world actually. Over the years I've often had letters asking my permission from schools or from head of a school drama department or something like that, from America, mostly America and areas in England. I've never actually been able to see one of these productions or even really had any news about how they turned out, but, you know, a number of them have been done as far as I know.

And these, sort of, actually these weren't one man, these shows in London at the Theatre Space, and there was five nights at the Arts Theatre as well, these weren't actually one man shows, they were … they included two other people, Jill Riches and Pete Bradley and a couple of back line people operating the sounds and lights. And they were actually reviews of past material and present material. A couple of Hawkwind numbers in there, like Quark, Strangeness and Charm, the actual the song itself, using backing tapes and live vocals mostly. And quite a lot of stand-up comedy really I suppose, I mean, I just, you know, I found that in the first evening, that I found that my, sort of, chat between items in the show seemed to develop into sort of spontaneous comic routine, which I sort of expanded more and now I incorporate in the show. Which I do intend to take elsewhere for sure.

I'd like to do a full scale tour of the country with the show and I'm certainly going to be doing three weeks in, at the Edinburgh Festival this year. That would be, in fact, most … to an audience mostly composed of sort of Edinburgh Fringe theatre goers, which would be quite interesting. I'd be very interested to see how my material goes down with a sort, with a completely new audience and not just relying on what cult following I've got to fill a place with. Which is a very easy way of getting away with almost anything if you're that sort of person. I mean, I was trying as much as I can in what I'm doing. I'll be interested so see how it does go down with people who are not familiar with the material or the, sort of, the legend as it were.

I've had thoughts of getting a band together but not a full time band. I can't … the main reason why I had to leave Hawkwind was that I can't really work properly in the setup of a full time band. It is what it's implies, it is full time and my way of working demands that I have enough free time to, sort of, to branch off in all directions I feel the need to branch off into. I have written a book, called Hype, about the music business and it isn't based on my own experiences as such. It is, a lot of it is derived from obviously from stuff I've picked up from hanging around record companies a lot. I've drawn characters who are recognisable types but not individuals from these experiences. But the actual, the storyline of the book and the events in it are not based on my own experiences but are fiction.

It's going to be published by New English Library in September and there is an album included, which is … how can I describe this ??? … the novel and the album complement each other in this way. That the book describes what happens to a young band who get very badly used by a record company, an internal power struggle between two, sort of, over ambitious individuals who use this band as a sort of pawn or counter in an elaborate game of spy versus spy almost. But it's not a comedy actually, I wanted it to be a comedy, I wanted …

When I had the initial talks with New English Library about doing the book I … I had very much in mind the sort of doing it as a … almost like a sort of, you know, the way that P. G. Wodehouse would, might have written about the music business, had he known about it, in the way that he wrote about Hollywood in the 20s I wanted to write about the music business in the 80s. Or at least the late 70s. But they, sort of, talked me round to the way of seeing the potential of writing a thriller about the business, which I ended up doing. But it has got, sort of, elements of black humour, you know, sort of, sarcasm and humour in it, although the plot is very much a sort of a fast moving thriller type plot.

The album is the songs of the band themselves, who are called The Tom Mahler Band - Mahler as in the composer. Mahler. And that's going to be released at the same time as the book.

My plans for the future? Well after Edinburgh, which will bring me up to September, and the book's release, the next thing I want to do is an album based on one of the shows I did in London, which is called "The Kid from Silicon Gulch", which is a detective story for the cybernetic age if you like. There's an album there. Also I very much want to do an album for children. I've got a lot of material and I think this would probably be in the form of music, and spoken word and some songs. But I've got a story, which I'll actually do as a book as well for children.

I had it very much in mind … I'm interested to see how well the novel works out as a … as a saleable commodity, cause I'd like to do more novels. I've got a few planned I'd like to do, but I haven't really got very far into doing them yet. But if I can buy myself the time to concentrate on a protracted work I'd like to do that. I'd like to write a really healthy strong book, and not, you know, I mean I don't see myself substituting that for music but I've always seen music as something to integrate into other media. I've never studied music seriously at all, but I seem to have the knack of being able to write a song and not everybody has that knack. And I suppose I should keep on using it to .. you know, it's a trade in a way. But then, you know, writing is also a much more demanding trade and I'd like to be able to devote more time to it, and less time to the demanding, you know, the demands of the music business, which the reason why I don't want to work with a full time band.

I'm very interested indeed in writing plays and I've done a couple of them in a small way. I'd like to write a play that is produced properly and … possibly for television. But the stage is, I mean, the stage is something that I've always really seen as my media and working with music is just a, you know, I was always more interested in what you could do on the stage than what you could do in the studio. And that's what I probably will combine more with music is drama.

So I haven't got any plans for retiring yet by any means at all. But I think I ought to go to bed now actually for why as it's very sort of late. It's daylight and the birds are singing. So I hope this is enough. I'm sure this is more than enough material. I hope it's not too difficult for you to sort it all out.