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Throughout the second half of 1987, barely a week passed when there wasn't mention in the British music press of a largely media constructed scene called 'GREBO', and the bands associated with it. Informed by an eclectic range of influences, from punk, 60s garage and psychedelia, through to 70s heavy rock and thrash metal and even dance music, bands as disparate as The Cult, Zodiac Mindwarp & The Love Reaction, Pop Will Eat Itself and Junior Manson Slags were all thrown under the broad umbrella of 'grebo'. But, two bands in particular found themselves at the forefront of the 'grebo' scene, whether they liked it or not. In this abridged and edited extract from his new book *Grebo! The Loud & Lousy Story Of Gaye Bykers On Acid And Crazyhead*, Rich Deakin looks at some of the key moments for these two bands during 'grebo's watershed summer of '87.

THREE weeks after Gaye Bykers On Acid signed to Virgin Records on 5th June 1987 for just over £100,000, they made up a 'grebo' triumvirate with Crazyhead and Pop Will Eat Itself at Glastonbury festival. Crazyhead played the second stage on Thursday, the day before the official opening of the festival. According to one account, bassist Porkbeast had clods of mud hurled at him throughout the entire set. Crazyhead singer Anderson recalls, "We hit Stage 2 after a long trip [to the festival], including being stopped by cops and searched. Fast Dick and I were on snakebites and a bottle of whiskey, Dick said, 'I've hidden 200 tabs of acid in my arse' and was promptly strip searched nearby! I think someone got busted for personal whizz, but I forget who, I could be wrong. There were about 2,000-plus people watching, mainly sat down, one of the best gigs ever. I said, 'Wake up you dirty hippies and take some speed. If you like us, dance, if you don't, throw things - we thrive on reaction!'" Anderson continues, "A few people danced, including some mohawk glue heads. Mud, bottles, cans - we were dodging all kinds of shit being thrown. I was being all pantomime yelling, 'Missed!' loads of times, being a cock really - huge ego on speed and booze. Then a huge clod of mud hit me in the face, and the largest applause of the gig went up from the crowd! Mic stands were kicked over by Dick. We came off to huge applause, pumped up high on adrenaline amongst other things, only to meet the head of Stage 2 threatening us, saying we smashed his gear up. He and Dick squared up at each other, Reverb tried to break it up, but the guy went for Rev and got a 'Reverb handshake' - a headbutt sending him down. He disappeared very fast. Then every other member of the stage crew came and shook our hands, and said he was a dick and deserved it!"

Among those witnessing Crazyhead that night was Simon



GAYE BYKERS ON ACID SIGNING TO VIRGIN

PHOTO COURTESY OF SALLY JONES

Pegg, not only attending Glastonbury for the first time but also experiencing his first acid trip too. Making it his mission to see "as many bands as possible", the future *Shaun Of The Dead* and *Star Trek* actor says in his autobiography, *Nerd Do Well*, "Crazyhead were amazing!". Pegg doesn't say if he also saw Gaye Bykers On Acid that weekend, but Crazyhead hung out and stayed to see their Leicester compadres play the second stage on Sunday evening.

The Bykers came on stage to Tom Jones' It's Not Unusual. Mary was in fine fettle, motormouthing as usual, and greeting the crowd with an ironic and none too subtle, "Helloooo Stonehenge, yeeeah!" and launched into the countdown for set-opener Space Rape. He baited the audience throughout the set, throwing in references to Woodstock, and comments like "fuck the sixties!". Halfway through Tolchocked By Kenny Pride, which he dedicated to "every dead pop star that died in the bath, with a barbiturate overdose", he verbally attacked a couple of rock's sacred cows - "Jim Morrison was a wanker 'cos he's dead, [he] was as much a wanker as Sid Vicious...". Mary teased the audience by asking, "Do you honestly think what we're doing here now is going to ban the bomb?" adding, in an exaggerated drippy hippy accent, like Neil in *The Young Ones*, "like if we all grow our hair really long?". This could have been interpreted as a sleight against CN&D, the main beneficiaries of the festival, but it was probably more a case of drunken

badinage rather than any malicious intent. Sounds summed things up neatly: "Classic festival material (bored middle-class brats), the Bykers, embrace the stuff of psychedelic legend but kick the whole thing into cartoon dimensions and spend the time mocking its transience."

The band wasn't as tight as they had proved they could be. Hardly surprising, given the temptations frequently afforded by festivals back in those days. A group of skateboarding punks from Bristol (who ran a fanzine called *The Skate Muties From The 5th Dimension*) and friends of the Bykers, happened to be working security at that year's festival. They introduced the Bykers to numerous flagons of strong scrumpy cider. According to Mary,

The initial blast of humid air when we exited the airport was overwhelming and awaiting us was our white carriage - our very first limousine ride. That was quite something, hanging out of the windows and sunroof!"

Despite the Bykers' streetwise image and raggedy clothes, they still stood out like wide-eyed tourists. According to Tony, "We couldn't help but look upwards at the skyscrapers while walking down the street, a sure-fire giveaway that we were freshers, paranoid of all the potential pickpockets and muggers." The stretch limo was the stuff of any aspiring young musician's wildest rock'n'roll fantasy, but what expectations were built up by the luxury ride to the hotel were quickly let down by the hotel itself. Tony remembers the hotel

"FAST DICK AND I WERE ON SNAKEBITES AND A BOTTLE OF WHISKEY, DICK SAID, 'I'VE HIDDEN 200 TABS OF ACID IN MY ARSE' AND WAS PROMPTLY STRIP SEARCHED..." ANDERSON

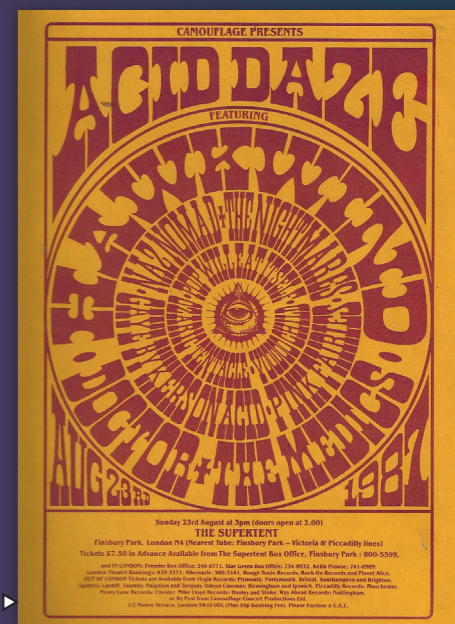
the 'Muties' were daring everyone to drink the West Country gut rot. "It was pretty strong, so we got completely out of it to be honest." Drunk as well as chemically enhanced, the Bykers rose to the occasion.

Despite Mary's hippy baiting comments, the Bykers owed as much to their 1960s and 70s festival forebears as they did to contemporary sources. Befitting a festival steeped in rich counterculture heritage, the band deviated into elongated jams worthy of their Hawkwind and Edgar Broughton Band influences, particularly on the track, *Edgar*. Here, Mary howled and growled (as much in imitation of Edgar Broughton's vocal delivery as Broughton's was to Captain Beefheart), whilst Tony's guitar spewed out swathes of heavy psychedelic wahwah across an audience that Mary had spent the last half-hour insulting - who were as dumbstruck as they were in awe. Sounds concluded: "Gaye Bykers On Acid are boredom breaking out into brilliance and a parody of festival history. This'll do for now... this is the end of civilisation as we know it."

In mid-July, the Bykers jetted off to New York for a prestigious gig supporting The Cult, at the Felt Forum Theatre, Madison Square Gardens. Apart from Mary, none of the Bykers had visited the United States before, so naturally there was an element of trepidation. Tony recalls butterflies in his stomach, but was excited nevertheless, despite being "hungover and feeling shit on the way to the airport". Arriving in the US, the Bykers' manager had difficulty keeping the band together at check-in. To maintain their equilibrium on the flight over, they had washed down Valium with Blue Label Smirnoff vodka, and puffed away on cigarettes (smoking was still permitted — even on planes!). Tony recalls, "It was hot when we arrived,

as "a little shabby with cockroaches in the TV, and the air-con and bad [TV] shows were on all the time!" He adds, "The drug delivery guy reminded me of that scene in *Taxi Driver*: 'uppers, downers, acid, shrooms, mescaline, weed, hash, coke, crystal meth? what do you need?'... 'er, what's crystal meth? I'd never heard of it until then, so I had to try it. I didn't sleep properly for three days."

The venue for the gig itself was awe-inspiring. "The Forum was huge, very daunting," remembers Tony. "We appeared to be miles away from each other on stage, my amplifier on full blast sounded like a tiny transistor radio, and I couldn't hear anything the





GAYE BYKERS ON ACID,
NEW YORK CITY, JULY 1987

PHOTO COURTESY GAYE BYKERS ON ACID

others were playing. When Mary walked down the long catwalk at the front of the stage, I almost couldn't see him anymore." The Bykers had spent the afternoon embellishing cardboard boxes so that they looked like Marshall stacks. They painted on the Marshall logo, and, at the end of their set, proceeded to smash them up. Tony explains, "We knew that The Cult were going to do that [for real], and we thought it rather silly and wasteful."

If the Bykers' appearance at Glastonbury the previous month had been lacklustre, they were firing on all cylinders for the New Music Seminar. The Felt Forum gig acted as a kind of barometer to measure how far on the scale of rock'n'roll stardom the band had come. Tony recalls the surreal situation backstage, the Bykers' manager "was in her element, talking shit to everyone, flirting with Hedd Records [The Cult's management], and trying to find poten-

at the time, and the demise of the National Health Service." Sounds' Mr Spencer called the single, "A monster! Seriously... these greasy slobbs could soon be providing Motörhead with some very real competition in the battle for grebo supremacy... I'll say it just one last time, they could be huge." David Stubbs, a vociferous detractor of both Crazyhead and the Gaye Bykers, was not in the slightest enamoured of it though. In his review for Melody Maker he wrote: "To Baby Turpentine bollocks would be entirely inappropriate, for the tragedy of Crazyhead is that they are all dick and no testes. Spilling to the bar at the Marquee for more tinned lager in spindly tanktops, as illuminating as a slash against a lamppost. Groups like Crazyhead seems [sic] to crop up every two or three months, spurious proof of rock's capacity for self-regurgitation. But this is doggie vomit."

"I DID A MASSIVE LINE OF METH SPEED AND FREAKED OUT. WHEN WE WENT ONSTAGE SOMEBODY THREW A BOTTLE AT ME, IT HIT ME ON THE HEAD, I CARRIED ON PLAYING, I DIDN'T FEEL A THING. I WAS AWAKE FOR FOUR DAYS SOLID!" ROBBER

tial producers for our 'upcoming debut album'. I remember meeting Poison's producer, who had some grand ideas for our future sound. And there were a few Spinal Tap Artie Fufkin Polymer Records, you-guys-are-great types."

Robber had his own problems backstage. Having scored speed earlier on, he says, "I didn't realise it was meth speed, did a massive line of the stuff and freaked out. I asked Mary to throw the Beastie Boys out the dressing room. When we went onstage somebody threw a bottle at me, it hit me on the head, I carried on playing, I didn't feel a thing! I was awake for four days solid!" Alienating himself from what he called "The Cult crowd," telling the audience that it was stupid to like The Doors when Jim Morrison was dead, Mary was showered with missiles. But while Mary's comments antagonised some quarters of the audience, the Bykers were warmly received by others - as corroborated by Jim Bessman, who wrote in Sounds, "if anything, the Bykers' amelodic punkadelia was tight and rhythmic enough to warrant as good a reception as that given to The Cult."

The Bykers arrived back at Heathrow on Friday 17th July, 7:50am local time. Barely able to shake off their jetlag, they were whisked away to Loco Studios in rural Gwent to lay down demos and rehearse for the forthcoming album. Less than a week after arriving back from the States, the Bykers were on the front pages again. This time for a 'Grebo!' special in the NME. Music journalist James Brown had by now jumped ship from Sounds to the NME and brought his 'grebo' baby with him. It's unlikely the NME would have given these bands such extensive coverage otherwise. If it was possible to ignore 'grebo' before this point, the NME changed all that. The 'grebo' special was something of a watershed, and arguably polarised opinion in the ensuing frenzy that spread like a rash across the pages of the British music press in the coming months.

The Bykers' summer was also

Luckily for Crazyhead, the balance was redressed by Ann Scanlon, who, in the wake of its release interviewed Anderson and Porkbeast for Sounds. Of Baby Turpentine, Scanlon describes a single built on "renegade rockabilly and social awareness... dedicated to 'heartless Tory scum'". Jane Solanas was eager to bandy around the word 'grebo' in an interview with Crazyhead in NME, but not so naïve to realise that the label could have implications: "if Grebo the cartoon has been a derisive diversion for everyone else, it has left Crazyhead feeling bemused. Lumped in with the swine, fed mescal and snakebite by the press, Crazyhead are now fighting off their grubby Grebo identity. They sit in a shack of a Leicester studio convinced they are 'the greatest band in the world'". Seemingly without sarcasm, she added, "they probably are". In the Solanas interview, the band described their music as "urban blues", to which was added the now familiar references to The Ramones, Stooges et al. She called the band "a raucous, nasty shriek of defiance from the bowels of boring Leicester". Their sound, she said, was "gloriously dumb, raw and honest. It has nothing whatsoever to do with the manufactured efforts of Grebo amateurs." Baby Turpentine was an "explosive masterpiece". Solanas went on: "Everything Crazyhead have committed to vinyl so far has been perfect. In terms of energy there is no one to touch them, and in Anderson they have a vocalist who has restored the snot-nosed whine of real emotion to British music."

Soon after the single was released, Crazyhead played the Abbey Park Festival in Leicester. Anderson recalls the day was somewhat marred when a notorious gang of Leicester City football hooligans called the Baby Squad turned up and "split a few heads". This was a firm renowned for slashing their victims with Stanley knives. So, it was lucky things were not much worse.

But the pen is sometimes mightier than the sword, or in this case, the Stanley blade. Another kind of Stanley - Bob Stanley, NME journalist - exacted more harm to Crazyhead than the blades carried by the Baby Squad. Stanley wrote of the gig in context of the violence that had erupted: "To the left and right of me fights are breaking out which prove considerably more interesting than what's happening on stage." To add insult to injury, "As Crazyhead became gradually more pissed off with the lack of response they lurch into Cher's Bang Bang missing out all that song's camp humour."

Contrary to Stanley's disparaging review, video footage filmed from the back of the stage proves that Crazyhead were on fire, performance-wise, with the crowd boisterously jumping around and moshing furiously to a

punctuated by two other high-profile festivals. During the time they spent at Loco Studios in Wales, the Bykers made the first of two appearances at the Super Tent in Finsbury Park, London, on a bill that included The Fall, and Psychic TV, with Siouxsie & The Banshees headlining. Despite the presence of Gaye Bykers On Acid at the bottom of the bill, NME's Len Brown seemed relieved that the event was a largely "grebo free zone" predominated as it was by the other bands he referred to as "punk wars vets". A month later the Bykers would return to Finsbury Park for Acid Daze.

Meanwhile, Crazyhead released their second single Baby Turpentine. Described at the time as an "anti-royalist statement", Anderson now says, "Reverb tells me he tried to write a fast punky song in the style of early Dylan if he'd been unemployed - as Reverb was - in Thatcher's late eighties Britain." Reverb confirms this: "Baby Turpentine was a kind of reflection on the life I was living at

super-charged version of What Gives You The Idea (That You're So Amazing Baby?). Cans of industrial strength Tennents Super lager sit conspicuously on the top of a speaker as the camera pans across the back of the band and over the audience. Anderson grabs a can of equally strong Carlsberg Special Brew from the drum riser for a few thirsty gulps. He then turns round to face-off the audience, stock still with his hands behind his back, before becoming animated once more for the final flourishes of the song as it explodes into a sudden ending. This is clearly a band at the top of its game, thoroughly enjoying itself.

Anderson notes that Crazyhead headed to London the day after the Abbey Park Festival. He says, "I remember we headlined two nights at the Marquee club, selling out both nights, with queues round the block. The gigs were like a sweatbox, kids going ape-shit crazy of course. Reverb took care of managing [the band] at the time and I'll always remember walking through a really rough part of Soho full of drunks and lowlifes, just the band and Sparky, Reverb walking down the street counting the £400-odd in gig money in tens and twenties. Lucky there were five leather-clad Crazyheads plus Sparky in his Vietnam Apocalypse Now look."

Further hijinks ensued when the Crazyhead entourage decided to go on a spray-painting frenzy in central London. Towards the end of the night, Anderson admits to getting into the spirit of things, "completely pissed out of my head," and decorating another wall when a police car screeched up and collared him. The cops berated him for being so conspicuous, therefore forcing them to arrest him when they could have been trying to catch real criminals. Although the police had tried to pin graffiti on Anderson from earlier in the day ("Porkbeast for President" had been sprayed on a wall next to the Houses of Parliament), he was only charged with defacing one wall in the end. Anderson recalls that "the Duty Officer that signed me into the cells proudly told me that he had nicked Topper Headon from The Clash for smack - very proud he was!" Anderson was released on bail the following morning and the band returned to the Midlands for a gig in Birmingham, before heading up to Scotland for dates in Ayr and Glasgow.

The Bykers, meanwhile, still busy with their forthcoming album and preparations for their movie, had been booked to play Acid Daze in Finsbury Park on Sunday 23rd August 1987. This was a celebration of the continued resurgence of psychedelia from the 1960s, as well as featuring music from contemporary bands. Co-promoted by Christian Paris from Alice In Wonderland, the line-up included the Jimi Hendrix influenced Voodoo Child, Ozric Tentacles, Pop Will Eat Itself, and the Bykers. The old guard were represented by headliners Hawkwind and the recently reformed Pink Fairies. Bridging the gap between were The Damned, who appeared as their garage band alter ego, Naz Nomad & The Nightmares, with a suitably psychedelically sixties-charged set.

Mary wistfully recalls Acid Daze and the summer's other festivals: "I do remember feeling quite excited by the whole thing, because it seemed at that point we were really taking off, especially when you start getting onto the bigger stages. It really starts hitting home to you, especially when you're on stage and you're supporting bands like Hawkwind, and obviously even Siouxsie... they were big bands to us, and all of a sudden we're on the same stage as them... You find yourself thinking 'What are we actually doing here?' So, it's a mixture of astonishment, and you get a pretty good feeling about yourself. I don't know if that's good for anybody's ego, but in those early days when everything was going so fast it's all just a buzz."

The event was typically lambasted by the trendier elements of the music press, and the Bykers' set was chaotic and unpredictable. They were joined by an equally inebriated Clint Mansell from Pop Will Eat Itself who proceeded to skank away to the Bykers' version of Call Me A Liar by the Edgar Broughton Band with his trousers round his ankles. Some accounts likened the event to a "sports day in hell". Indeed it was a sweltering hot afternoon, even the relative shade of the Super Tent didn't escape the humidity and reeked of sweat, stale booze, and cannabis. The barely adequate portaloos had overflowed by the early afternoon, adding to the unpleasantness.

NME derided the event. David Quantick and Barbara Ellen co-reviewed the day's performances. Quantick disparagingly commented: "Who are these people? Who goes out to see Hawkwind, The Pink Fairies, Pop Will Eat Itself, Gaye Bykers On Acid, Doctor and the Medics and, in the name of God, Ozaric Tentacle [sic]? Is this the reappearance of a counter-culture? No, it's a lot of dirty hippies in purple t-shirts with stupid scrawling make-up round their eyes. They stand or sit and chew mental gum, eyes glazed and bored, becoming animated only when a song ends and they clap and go Wwayy!"



CRAZYHEAD'S ANDERSON, ABBEY PARK
FESTIVAL, LEICESTER, AUGUST 1987.

PHOTO: MELANIE BERMAN

Barbara Ellen concentrated on Voodoo Child, Pop Will Eat Itself, Doctor and the Medics and the Bykers. Crazyhead's Anderson had a brief dalliance with Ellen a few years earlier, when she was living in a small village in Leicestershire, hanging out with Hoppy and Dentover from The Janitors. Treating the Bykers with little more than indifference, she wrote: "Gaye Bykers On Acid have their own-Freak show to flaunt for half an hour... Mary has forsaken his Off-the-Peg Stonehenge for a Jello Biafra anti-censorship t-shirt. The rest of the Bykers look as deranged as ever, denim tacked together with cat-gut. Tony plays guitar and I listen, my senses awaiting instructions. Cave and Iggy can rest easy, but with comics currently so popular this white-hot clout of drama could run and run." Following with some sarcastic comments about Mary, Ellen concluded the review curtly: "Something happened and it wasn't rock'n'roll."

Peter Kane from Sounds was equally dismissive: "Already very big in a very small way, Gaye Bykers would have you believe that they really don't care. Signs are though that they actually do. Considered by some to have a pretty wit, their noise has the finger-printed smudge of shredded punk all over it and in the few minutes allotted they come over as a desperate howl for attention. Attitude and shorts score maximum points though." In the same issue of Sounds was Motörhead's Lemmy. Asked whether he considered Motörhead the godfathers of 'grebo', Lemmy replied: "No, I wouldn't have said so. Things like Gaye Bykers On Acid you mean? Their music is different to ours. That's a brilliant name though, because the way they spell it makes it look like a girl's name, and there's a geezer in the band called Mary!"

It might be coincidence that just over a month later the Gaye Bykers would be the main support act for Motörhead at the Hammersmith Odeon. On top of that, they'd also secured a prestigious support slot on a European tour with The Ramones. Not only was the Bykers' debut album and Drill Your Own Hole movie imminent, but so too was an impending media backlash against 'grebo', which would eventually be to the detriment of both bands in the months to come. For the time being though it was a case of carpe diem. **VLR**

Grebo! The Loud & Lousy Story Of Gaye Bykers On Acid And Crazyhead is out now on Headpress



CRAZYHEAD, ABBEY PARK FESTIVAL,
LEICESTER, AUGUST 1987

PHOTO: MIKE DAWKINS

