

**Vent 414, the debut album, it was like this....**  
(by Miles Hunt)

*What follows is a little piece of information on each track from our debut album and some, where they were written, under what circumstances etc.... The kind of train spotter bullshit that is particularly deserving to someone as anal as yourself for wandering through these pages in the first place, just kidding honey.*

*Before that I'll run you down some general information about the band and the album that might just make the puny details that follow a little easier to digest. Once that is done with there is a list of other 414 recordings of interest and a few suggestions that may make your world a better place to be, or at least improve record collection.*

Vent 414 had its first rehearsal in London on December 22nd 1994, just one day. We then spent the best part of five months operating as a virtual band. Hanging out together, blagging guest lists and very occasionally swapping demo tapes between the three of us, but never actually playing. April 5th 1995 was the day that marked the end of probably my favourite period of ever being in a band, we had reached the time to do some graft. I was already signed to Polydor Records, owing a couple more records to them from my days with The Wonder Stuff. Morgan was free of any record company commitments, as his last band, The Senseless Things were free to go their individual ways when they announced their split and Pete was in a similar position since his previous outfit, Eat, had also disbanded in 1994 with very little commitments left owing to their label, Fiction. So it was that Polydor were picking up the cheque for rehearsals and demo time. By August 1995 we had a live set together of around 10 songs, of at least half made it onto the debut album. The majority of the others will more than likely be on the second record, they weren't included on this album simply because there wasn't enough time allotted in the studio to get them all recorded and not because we didn't consider them good enough.

In August 1995 we headed to Northern Europe for around 10 days playing festivals and clubs, the last date was our first public performance in the U.K. at the Reading festival. We had originally hoped that we would record the album in December 1995 and so after a week or more spent gigging in New York and New Jersey we holed ourselves up in a residential rehearsal studio near Brighton for a couple of weeks, essentially to squeeze out any last remaining ideas before recording the album. It was starting to become increasingly obvious that the record wasn't going to be recorded in the first half of the decade, due to not being able to line up the producer of choice, so we looked for more gigs.

In November 1995, Therapy? kindly took us on a short tour of the U.K. A bill that also featured Southend hardcore band Understand, whose approach to music had a considerable affect on me during the writing of the early 414 material. Really, any planned development in the bands career ended there. From then on we were simply waiting for the right guy to become available to record the album. Steve Albini was the man of choice and we were genuinely surprised when he said that he would do the job, not considering ourselves punk enough, or something equally ridiculous. I spoke with him over the Christmas holiday week of 1995 and he put us in his diary for April 1996, for eleven days. Bearing in mind I have never completed the recording of an album in under a month before and had grown more accustomed to spending an idle 3 or 4 months on my last couple, 11 days came as something of a shock to my system. I won't bother trying to tell you how Polydor reacted.

After working on the label with blind confidence, it was eventually agreed that Albini was going to be the guy in the chair and April was the month. This left us with 4 months to occupy ourselves and to be quite honest I was rather looking forward to another period of virtual band activities. But as it was, as well as recording our album in the genius style that he did, Albini did us a huge favour in delaying the session. It was during those four months that we hit a creative high. We spent a casual month or so writing and demoing more new songs, that for me are the best the album has to offer. Then the week before we went into Abbey Road we took all of the songs that were to be recorded out on the road. No matter how much time you spend in rehearsal situations or re-demoing songs over and over there is something that happens to a songs development on a stage that cannot be created in any other environment and once a song has achieved the addition of this x-factor it seems to always remain within it.

So eight dates around the U.K provided the songs with the finishing touches they needed before committing them to tape, never to be retrieved.

## **Fixer**

The main of the song I wrote shortly after moving out of London. I had split up with my wife and London had been bearing down on me for a couple of years, I had been looking for a bolt hole for a year or more and eventually got what I needed in moving up to Shropshire. Immediately, in these new gentle surroundings, my mind was free to explore my song writing abilities that had so long been oppressed by my previous environment. It had been a long time since I had spent so much time alone and it felt like I had nobody expecting anything of me. The lyrics reflect my state of mind at the time. Although I was convinced that the move from my former lifestyle was the correct thing to pursue I was going through much self doubt. It was also one of those pieces of music that felt fresh and unexplored in any of my previous writing. Morgan had shown me a guitar tuning that I had previously been unaware of, transforming the guitar into an unfamiliar tool with which to write. As is my usual form I couldn't finish the arrangement alone. This was done back at rehearsals in London where the whole middle section of the song was added by Pete and Morgan. It was on the train journey down to London that I finished the lyrics. It stands out to me as a song that I never tire of playing or listening to. Which is just as well as we rerecorded the song with Danton Supple at Olympic studios after the Albini session was done. We felt that the version we recorded with Steve was a little lacklustre and earlier demos had qualities in the performances that we didn't pull off at Abbey Road.

## **Fits and Starts**

I recorded this on my portastudio while I still lived in London just a few weeks after The Wonder Stuff split. For reasons that I don't remember I hadn't got a bass guitar in the flat or any the correct leads to link up my electric guitar and drum machine directly to the tape deck. This left me dangling a microphone over a ghetto blaster that I had fed the drum machine through, whilst playing a tuned down acoustic guitar substituting the lack of bass. The dodgy quality of that recording was half of the tracks charm, as I had, at this point, no lyrics. Gradual refining, having got my act together on the equipment front, led me to presenting this song to Morgan, in fact, probably the first idea that I played to him. He took it away with him and the next time that I heard it, his bass line was on the track. Morgan has a habit of completely changing the mood of a song when he adds his parts, I was stunned when it seemed that the mood of the song had a haunting quality to it now. That was when the lyrics took form. At this point I was still steeped in frustrations of London and the uncertainty of any kind of musical future for myself. With that in mind, I'm kind of surprised to look at the reflective nature of the lyrics.

## **At The Base Of The Fire**

During the 3 or 4 weeks that we clocked up at the studio in Brighton (two separate sessions) we only came away with 2 songs that made it onto the album, a pathetic work rate I know but this is creativity were dealing with not piece work. This is one of those songs. Written out of a jam, more than likely led by Morgan as the song is very bass driven. It's odd, when I'm put on the spot to write I often clam up. In this case that kind of mood adds to the song. The lyrics are very insular and not a subject that I'm willing to embellish on. I remember spending more time thinking about the track as a collection of guitar parts, from my point of view anyway, than as a flowing structure. It's a track in the live set that I fear, but once I'm past the first chorus it has taken me over. Switching from the sombre verses to the all out emotional stress of the chorus is a real release. You should try it sometime.

## **Last Episode**

Another tune that I recorded in London on my primitive portastudio set up. I carried a cassette of it around with me as an instrumental for months. I couldn't find a way in with the vocals and as with At the Base of the Fire it occupies a lyrical subject matter that is no day at the beach. It was once Pete, Morgan and I began playing it in rehearsal that it became obvious to me how the vocals should work. It's hit or miss doing this song live, as it also proved to be in the studio with Albini. It was eventually decided that the vocals on the Albini version wasn't up to scratch so I rerecorded them at Olympic studios when we recorded Fixer with Danton.

## **Laying Down With**

Another Morgan and Pete led track, also written out of a jam. This time at the rehearsal studio we used in London during the 4 month wait for Albini. I took live rough versions home to Shropshire with me and created a backing track with the drum machine and portastudio to write the lyrics to. I had just returned from London having had a succession of miserable nights out at various clubs and parties, something that I've never been too good at. It's not just my general aversion to seeing other people have good time when I'm not that pisses me off to the point of drunken aggression (childish I freely admit), but I had started to notice how much illegal substances were in popular usage in the circles I was frequenting. I don't usually give a

fuck what people are jamming up their noses, arses or where ever, but being around the dullards was beginning to take its toll on me. A whole hoopla of excitement was going on around nothing and I had to flee. On the portastudio demo the song finished with me whining Who you laying down with, who you laying down with?. hence the title. For reasons that I can't imagine, I forgot to sing it on the album version. Thats rock.....

### **Life Before You**

Written in rehearsals at much the same time as Laying Down With. More self doubt and selfism. Perhaps the poppiest song on the record, closest to my old bands sound. But it was interesting to make no allowances for sounds when we recorded it, although the songs feel is lighter than most anything else on the record it was recorded with exactly the same set up as the harder tracks. A testament to my two partners in rock I feel.

### **Correctional**

We tended to hand in our demos to Polydor in groups of 5 at a time. Correctional was from the second batch, that also featured Fixer, Easy To Talk, Give It Whole and So Like Me. When we finished that 2nd batch I was supremely confident in the sound of the band. The ideas on the first demo were perhaps a little too diverse. It was something that the 3 of us talked about a lot in our virtual days, honing down the 414 sound. I was listening to a lot of bands that I had previously been unaware of during the pre 414 days. I'll write a list of genius records for you at the end of this lot that you should definitely expose yourself to. The curious time signature changes that is the trade mark of Washington D.Cs Shudder To Think was something that we were fooling around with at the time of writing Correctional. Literally trying to fuck each other up while we were playing together in rehearsals was how this started, its also something that is featured heavily in the newer material were working on for the 2nd album. I wrote the lyrics squatting on the uncarpeted lounge floor of my photographer friend Kevin Westerberg's home in North London. Kevin was my saviour during the early days of the band. I stayed at his place when ever I needed to be in London. Both of us, and another friend Jeremy, going through the emotional stress of relationship break downs at the same time. There was actually only Kevin living there full time, Jeremy and I used the place as a refuge from our problematic lives. It was cool; we all managed to give one another enough room to breathe, but at the same time leant on each other for a little support. Late night sessions at the refrigerator and around the kitchen table freed my head and left me able to write this kind of stuff.

### **Easy To Talk**

Unsurprisingly this is another result of the boys Nicholls and Howard entertaining themselves. At rehearsals we have all the instruments mic'ed up into an eight track digital tape machine. Whenever these two get into a groove I reach for the record button. This track is two such jams edited together. It's a treat to play live as there is plenty of room for improvisation, but that would be getting too rock school on ya. Along with Correctional and Give It Whole the lyrics were written late night after rehearsals on Westerberg's floor. All 3 songs deal in part with me getting to know a certain sweet lady, the rest is my business.

### **A Night Out With A Foreign Fella**

This is what happens when I get drunk and fool around with a drum machine. Writing 4 or 5 opposing patterns and then record the lot switching between them randomly. Doesn't sound terribly interesting I know, but the really cool bit is trying to follow them when putting guitar and bass over the drums, all while fucked up. Its a great feeling because youre not capable of getting bogged down in the technicalities of the track. Then the really good bit is attempting to sing over the whole thing with no lyrics, just free forming them as the track runs. If it works, I wait until the next morning's hangover to decipher the lyrics and straighten them out. The foreign fella mentioned is myself. I look upon myself as a stranger when I get drunk like this, staying focused, not letting the problems I was dealing with at the time get in the way of the writing. I guess its the musical equivalent of stream of consciousness style literature, if that isnt too much of a pompous claim to make?

### **Kissing The Mirror**

In a piss take list of astrological star sign definitions that my manager tankeelad once faxed to me it described Leos, not that I believe in any of that shite but that's apparently my sign, as thieving motherfuckers (who) spend most of their time kissing mirrors.. Too good to miss really wasnt it? Well there's the title and in fact not that far off the mark when it comes to how Ive heard myself described by a few people. Seriously I was thinking about the predictable way we were going to be received by the British music press. The Ultimately I will be what ever you invent me to be line that opens the song is me dismissing the importance of how anyone other than myself judges my creative output. Reinforcing my reasons for doing

what I do. That the songs that I contribute to the writing of are for myself, first and foremost. Any audience that is attracted to my writing are just like-minded souls and the detractors don't count for shit.

### **At One**

One of the mornings we were at Abbey Road with Albini I got in earlier than any one else, that is other than the engineer Paul Hicks who recorded this stuff, and sang four songs live to tape with nothing but my guitar for accompaniment. I did this track, a tune that will more than likely end up on the next album with the whole band playing called Give It Whole and two half finished ideas Your Latest Innuendo and Fade Like Dreams. Give It Whole is on the U.K. c.d. single of Fixer, Your Latest Innuendo is on the U.K. c.d. single of Life Before You, Fade Like Dreams will no doubt show up some place or other but At One we included on the album. It was originally played as the full band on the first demo we gave in to Polydor, but for our tastes we sounded a little like a shagged out bar room band whenever we played it. With the early morning, hung over croak in my voice I think there is a certain charm. I also didn't want to get all precious over everything that went on the record. Some might say that recording all but live with Albini was enough, but I figured that the inclusion of a performance like this makes us sound all the more human. An aspect that for me, gets ever more illusive in modern recording.

### **2113**

Okay, hands up, this song is a gag. Its also the other track that we came away from Brighton with. The over pompous prog rock part that appears in the middle and also finishes the song was us paying tribute to the halcyon days of mid seventies rock. There are also frightening correlations between the 414 and this period of music that slowly started to dawn on us. Three players that all have dubious pasts that come together to form one powerhouse of a band? Cream anybody? And in the case of this track Rush's epic 2112 Overture was on our minds. One better perhaps, hence 2113. Sad isnt it, I think Ive already mentioned that Brighton was a difficult time. And the lyrics themselves? Its about nothing more than it being almost a quarter past nine. Oh stop.

### **Guess My God**

Having employed the stream of consciousness method almost a year earlier with A Night Out With A Foreign Fella and its relative success, I figured I'd give it another shot. Three bottles of Chablis, numerous beers washed down with however many Jack and Cokes I got this. The lyric is a celebration of my own genius. Hey what the fuck, there was only me around to celebrate. Although I was shot down in flames when Albini confessed it was his least favourite of all the album tracks, citing that there were plenty of other bands taking the same approach to music in his home country and really was there any need for another? In yer dreams mate.