

# M8 Magazine (probably January 1993 issue)

## Paul Oakenfold interview

### “The Wizard of the Dance Department”

The ruses that rock bands and artists footle about in order to maintain and enhance their credibility will never cease to amaze, eh? You want classic examples? Right then. Remember when Lou Reed decided he'd had enough of being a strung-out street tuff balladeer and recorded a double album's worth of unlistenable and undeniable pointless feedback, *Metal Machine Music*? Dylan's flirtation with religious gospel music, Neil Young's tootling with Blue Note jazz, or, for an extra hearty laugh, try The Happy Mondays hurdy-gurdying around the piss-take pole with Donovan. Must've seemed like a great idea at the time, but ended up as visionary as a 50s B-movie portrayal of life as they expected it to be lived in the 1990s.

Just occasionally, however, you get a meeting of diametrically opposed minds, perceived to be so set in their ways that the end result is either gonna end up a dog's breakfast or a humiliation for both sides, or else... or else... it's going to produce something startlingly innovative, so cunningly magnificent, that people will be kicking themselves shinless for not having thought of it before. In 1992, one man has been involved in not one but two such incredulous moments of shock-result serendipity. He is of course, DJ, remixer, producer par excellence Paul Oakenfold. Together with engineer Steve Osborne their mixes are Perfecto. Of course.

First there was U2, and that remarkable string-driven trance mix of *Even Better Than The Real Thing*. Described by Pete Tong as the best balearic record of the year, nevertheless it wasn't the first Perfecto mix performed for Bono's bunch, Mysterious Ways having been given the Perfecto once-over earlier in the year. But the most excellent Perfecto mix, the ultimate uncanny alliance, was still to come.

Throughout the year one of the worst kept secrets in the industry has been the drafting in of Paul and Steve to work on Deacon Blue's fourth album, the long-awaited follow-up to *Fellow Hoodlums*. Few imagined that the, how shall we say, strong individual personalities of self-perceived poet-songwriter-man-of-the-people Ricky Ross, and the finely-tuned Oakenfold would last more than a few intro bars together. Never mind what the end product was going to sound like. Until they heard *Your Town*.

At the time of writing, the single is the highest new entry in the national charts, while barely a DJ in Britain passes the night without wowing his hordes with the opulent Perfecto remix. All of a sudden you can talk about Deacon Blue again in barely concealed admiration, without being tarred, feathered and force-fed Undercover records all day by your highly sussed mates. The album, meanwhile, due to be released in February, looks set to be the pinnacle of already distinguished careers both for Ricky's rabble and for the Perfecto perfectionists, Paul and Steve. And this, in Paul's loosely edited words, is how it all happened.

“Me and Steve get offered a lot of stuff on the remix and production front. We've mixed seven tracks this year, that's not even one a month, and we get offered probably about five things a week. The way we choose is if I feel it's relevant and true to what's going on, and I can do something to improve the record, I'll do it. If there's a great piece of music, I'm not going to remix it for the sake of it. I got offered Mr Fingers' *What About This Love*, which in my opinion was great. I couldn't have bettered it, so I turned the remix down.

The way I first got involved with Deacon Blue was that I got a call from CBS, through Deacon Blue's A&R man, asking if I wanted to get involved.

What was your reaction? Truthfully?

"Ha ha I dunno, if I tell you truthfully, you'll print it! Truthfully it wasn't my cup of tea to start off with. I wasn't gonna do it just because I felt it wasn't where I was coming from. So initially I actually said no. But Ricky asked if he could at least meet us, so Steve went on his own, and I went after he'd been. Even when I went there, I still felt it wasn't for me. Until I got there and sat down with the band. And it was Ricky who changed my mind. He basically said they'd made three albums and it was time for a change, a stronger direction, and that appealed to me. I respect someone like that taking the hard route rather than the easier one. That was the first thing that made me change my mind.

"Then it was a case of let's listen to the material. And Ricky's a prolific writer. Having worked as an A&R man myself (at Def Jam, Champion and profile in the late Eighties) it's good to work with someone who doesn't bring you ten songs and say, 'right, here's an album'. I mean Ricky had a pool of 30 to 40 songs and that really impressed me. So we started off doing only two tracks to see how we got on."

Ah, the Christmas cracker question. Ricky's well-known for his determinedly dogged style, he knows exactly what he wants. Paul, too, has a reputation for being a perfectionist of the highest order who brooks no interference. So how the hell did the two of you get on?

"At first, I think they didn't really understand the way me and Steve worked. In the sense of Steve's a musician himself, so he didn't deal with them and I'd just walk in, listen to it and say, 'nah, don't like this, don't like that' and then go out again. And I don't think they could quite deal with that to start off with. But then we did those two tunes and everyone was really happy with them."

One of them was, of course, *Your Town*, while the other, *Only Tender Love*, is expected to be the next single. Can we expect a similar sound to *Your Town*?

"Well, it's an absolutely brilliant record. I'd put it alongside Massive Attack's *Unfinished Sympathy*. But it's rock-pop, definitely not dance, but it's just such a beautiful song, one of my favourites."

So after those initial tracks there was no going back?

"Actually we agreed to carry on but we left it up to Deacon Blue. After all, it was their album so they could have turned around and said 'see ya later'. And we could have turned around and said 'we're not gonna do this anymore 'cos it's not working for us and we knew what we could do.'"

What sort of sound can we expect from the album?

"I think you can expect a very strong album, a pop album with balls and attitude."

Any chance of some more Perfecto remixes?

“Again it’s like remixing, if it isn’t, if it doesn’t need it, why do it? *Only Tender Love* in my opinion doesn’t need a remix and shouldn’t have one. And I will never play it in a club and neither will anyone. But that’s not important. There are another few tracks that hopefully Tony Humphries will be remixing.”

Final few thoughts before burrowing back into the studio to finish work on the Elissa album?

“People like to put you in a bag, right. They like to say you’re dancey, that you can’t do this and you can’t do that. So that made the Deacon Blue project appeal to me as well ‘cos everyone was thinking ‘why the fuck’s he doing Deacon Blue? So it was a challenge as much as I think it was exciting for both parties