

As Morrissey quickly became the band's front man in terms of interviews, so his charming features established his own appeal. Drawing his own personal style from the cool waters of James Dean and Oscar Wilde, Morrissey looked like no other pop star before or since. The hearing aid and the flowers were to come soon enough to complete the look. Too many interviewers and reviewers over the years have speculated about Morrissey's sexuality, but in an age of effeminate, dolled-up pop stars, Morrissey was actually visually very masculine. His confident jaw would be held thrust out at the audience, his bushy eyebrows gloriously unplucked. At the same time Morrissey's visual accoutrements – the hearing aid, the flowers, the collars tucked inside his shirt – undermined that apparent masculine confidence, and made him irresistible, intriguing.

Alongside him, Johnny was the epitome of a new kind of retro cool – the blackest shades, the coolest haircut, a red Rickenbacker slung around his neck like a weapon, and his slender frame as rock 'n' roll hip as Keith or Brian Jones ever were. For Morrissey, being 'handsome' was absolutely crucial to The Smiths, and he playfully demanded "a handsome audience" to go with the band's own aesthetic. For Johnny "it just [finished] the package off nicely!"

1982 ended with everything in place for an assault on the music-listening public. 1983 would see the band established as perhaps the most important band in the UK. For a short while, Johnny moved into digs, and had a significant local figure as his landlady. Shelley Rohde was a journalist and TV presenter on Granada TV, Manchester's local independent station. She was also a well-respected author, the biographer of LS Lowry, her book being the standard work of reference on the Salford painter's life. As a result, Johnny even found his way on to a couple of Granada TV debate shows. While his stay *chez* Rohde was not long – he moved out in early 1983 – Rohde was another of Johnny's contacts who brought him closer to the centre of the Manchester scene. Even at this early point in his career, Johnny was connecting with some influential local people. Amongst the friends and acquaintances he had made over the last couple of years, several were talented enough to make it independently as successful musicians – Matt Johnson and Billy Duffy being amongst the most notable. Even at the age of eleven, he had found in Andy Rourke not only a lifelong friend but a man with the talent and the tenacity to survive being a Smith, and in Morrissey he had instinctively linked up with one of the era's

biggest talents. Even former band members such as Kevin Williams were destined to stardom, despite their musical torches not burning for long. Johnny was attracted to talent – he instinctively knew which people were right for him to be around. There is no suggestion of any Machiavellian manoeuvring, but it is clear that Johnny's ambitions were fired by the quality of the people amongst whom he found himself.

The new year 1983 started with Joe Moss officially installed as The Smiths' manager. Joe's friendship with Maher was firmly established, and was to be as long lasting as any within the band itself. Not only did Joe become manager to The Smiths, but at the same time he became Johnny's landlord. Johnny moved out of Shelley Rohde's house early in the New Year and into digs at Joe's house in Marple, a sedate suburb of Stockport on the fringes of the Peak District, only a few miles east of Manchester itself. By the end of the year, Johnny had moved back out of Marple and into another house owned by Joe in Heaton Moor, again closer to Stockport than to Manchester city centre. Johnny wrote the music for many of the early Smiths songs here, and his home became a focal point for band members and friends to congregate until Johnny moved to London on a more permanent basis.

Moss was the band's manager, although a lot of the issues relating to the band continued to be decided upon by Morrissey and Johnny. Financially, Morrissey took the wheel. "His motto was 'What we make we put in our pockets and pay everybody else from our pocket,'" is how Johnny described Morrissey's attitude from day one, speaking to *Record Collector*. This was never going to be a band led by a frontman with no involvement behind the scenes. In charge of more immediate matters, Joe's first actions were practical, securing the band rehearsal space above his Portland Street premises, where the band could really hone their live skills and develop musically around Morrissey's vocals. In early January, the band played their second official gig, this time with the Marr/Morrissey/Joyce/Rourke line-up that would remain largely settled through the rest of their career. James Maker graced the stage a second and last time, and with an audience of a few hundred packed into Manchester's Manhattan Sound, the band expanded upon their original four-song set. In February, *i-D* magazine was the first to run a feature on the group, interestingly featuring Dale Hibbert as the bassist, indicating that the interview was conducted before the turn of the year. The band talked

The new album declared a more sophisticated Marr sound, broader in scope, from Fifties-influenced rockabilly to spaced-out funk. The opening track 'The Headmaster Ritual' was written on an acoustic guitar in open D tuning, its expressive chords influenced by Joni Mitchell's innovative tunings. Johnny jigsawed various unfinished pieces into the final song, the guitar parts – played largely on Martins and Rickenbackers – planned with military precision. It remains one of his personal favourites, dating so far back that it was almost three years from the initial concept to the finished vocal track. 'The Headmaster Ritual' was another track on the receiving end of tabloid attention in the UK, with Morrissey's scathing and specific lyrics about 'Manchester schools' inspiring interviews with the current headmaster of his *alma mater*.

The band had already tried out 'Rusholme Ruffians' a number of times since September. If the London media thought they had The Smiths by the scruff of the neck, here was another song to nail the band firmly in Manchester, Rusholme lying a mile to the south of the city centre. The song, introduced by the sound of a fairground ride, was a beautiful homage by Morrissey to "the last night of the fair", and by Johnny to Elvis Presley's '(Marie's The Name) His Latest Flame', into which the band would regularly segue in live performances. Marr's lightness of touch on the song's two-chord lick is delightful, but Andy particularly lit up the track with one of his 'hum this too' bass lines.

'I Want The One I Can't Have' kept the pace of the album up, one of Johnny's most brisk and sprightly tracks, the blend of acoustic and electric guitars and bass as sharp as a nettle sting. The track was mooted as the next Smiths single, but was supplanted by 'How Soon Is Now?' 'What She Said' combined punishing riffs from Marr with Joyce's part-glam, part-metal drums into a savage piece, while 'That Joke Isn't Funny Anymore' took the foot off the accelerator for a slow waltz around the ballroom. Johnny coloured the track with several layers of treated guitars that howl alongside Morrissey's emotional fade out, only to fade back in after the vocal has drifted away. The arrangement was superb, Morrissey's performance one of his very best in the canon of Smiths releases, and Johnny's guitar a delight. The track was one of Marr's favourite Smiths tracks, and Morrissey's vocals one of his favourites too.

'Nowhere Fast', another song commercial enough to have been released as a single, was actually only released as a live version on the

B-side of the twelve inch issue of 'That Joke Isn't Funny Anymore.' Introduced with a Sun-classic bit of rockabilly, the upbeat nature of the song, and Morrissey's 'on the beat' vocal were an irresistible blend. Morrissey develops a number of themes in the lyric that re-appear often within The Smiths' canon. With the relative chart stalling of some of the recent singles, it seemed a shame that the song wasn't used more productively. 'Well I Wonder' ran like a pedigree horse tightly reined in by its rider, a beautifully arranged, discretely played song loaded with understated emotion, literally washed clean at the close by the sounds of a shower of rain from a soundtrack album. The song was imbued with a simplicity and spirit that defined the best of the band. It's interesting to note that while Johnny had berated other bands for trying to innovate too much in the wake of Byrne and Eno's *My Life In The Bush Of Ghosts*, many Smiths songs were enlivened by dubbed-in sound effects and pre-recorded samples. The difference is that where Byrne and Eno used the insertion of sound sources to establish themes and develop observational criteria, The Smiths used them more like watercolour washes dropped into or over a completed song, thereby adding grace or atmosphere. 'Well I Wonder' was one lovely example of this process at work.

'Barbarism Begins At Home' had been a staple of the live Smiths since way back in December 1993, an astonishingly long time for such a track to have lain un-used [it was released as a limited promo disc in January, flagging up the 'new' sound of the band]. If heads were turned by the funk workout, anyone who knew Andy's background or Johnny's penchant for stomping disco should not have been surprised. Live, the song was often an extended wig-out for the band, and used to stamp an immediate authority as a set-opener on wild and expectant audiences.

The album's final, and most controversial track was 'Meat Is Murder' itself. This song defined Morrissey's stance at the time: trenchant, passionate and uncompromising. The sound picture of Johnny's reversed guitar and dubbed effects captured the spinning blades of the slaughterhouse and the plaintive cries of heavily-reverbed cattle introduced the slow, desolate pace of the song. As on 'Suffer Little Children', the death of the beautiful creatures of the song are hauntingly painted by Morrissey's lyric and delivery in a musical landscape bleaker than anything else in The Smiths' repertoire.

The critics loved the album, finding a density and panache in Johnny's writing and a new outward-looking Morrissey, less

While Oasis were racking up the column inches in the ‘rough and ready’ department, the ‘fey and wasted’ pages of the tabloids and music press belonged to another bunch of Smiths-influenced darlings. Mike Joyce apparently tried out for the drum position in Suede, and Morrissey was so taken with ‘My Insatiable One’ that it eventually made it into his live set. A decade later guitarist Bernard Butler would work with Johnny on the Bert Jansch album *Crimson Moon*. Suede and The Smiths had much in common. Their eponymous first album featured rocking guitar, homoerotic lyrics and a sexually uncertain image on the cover – familiar territory for Smiths fans. Singer Brett Anderson clearly bore profound influences of Morrissey and Bowie, and knew how to get the media’s attention. What drew a huge number of fans to the band was the relationship between Anderson and Butler, who seemed to have re-invented the Morrissey/Marr axis for a new generation. Bernard’s obvious debt to Johnny’s glam-heavy guitar style was evident across the album and its follow-up *Dog Man Star*, but by the time the world woke up to Suede, Butler had left the band. At the time, and early in their career, Suede seemed a Smiths-lite stop gap for Morrissey and Marr fans who would soon bore of their retro posturing. In fact, they made some great records, their influences more glam than glum, and both Anderson and Butler have more than lasted the distance. In their own sweet way, they have also done something that Morrissey and Marr have never done. In 2004 the pair reconvened as The Tears – proving that there’s always hope! Equally influential, the year also saw the release of Pulp’s *Modern Life Is Rubbish*, and in Jarvis Cocker there was another distant echo of The Smiths as Cocker gently picked at the bones of post-Thatcher’s Britain.

By the end of 1993, Electronic were gearing up for their next album. It wouldn’t see the light of day until 1996, during which time Bernard’s ‘other band’ would release both *Republic*, a number one album, and a *Best Of...* compilation, another top five hit. But the pairing of Sumner and Marr worked constantly on the Electronic project too.

If Johnny’s work rate in The Smiths had been prodigious, there was no sign of him letting up now, as he ran from one project to another without pausing for breath. Admitting to spending up to sixteen hours a day in the studio, Marr was still refining his writing, still swimming with intent rather than simply going with the flow. Working closely with Bernard Sumner, Johnny was always trying to

be a better guitarist, still looking for the chords and the melody of a better song. As the pair began to discuss the project in interviews, likely co-workers such as Karl Bartos, ex- of Kraftwerk, and Chic’s Nile Rodgers were name-checked. Rodgers was one of Johnny’s own long-time guitar heroes, and although the best years of Chic were long behind, he was in constant demand after his work on David Bowie’s *Let’s Dance* album had stormed the world a decade earlier. If you were into innovative pop with a creative bite and a commercial edge, then Johnny Marr was interested in what you were doing.

As Nirvana had been picked up in the wake of The Stone Roses’ hiatus, so the Roses’ natural successors Oasis filled the void left by the tragic demise of Nirvana. In August they released their most important album, *Definitely Maybe*, containing some of their best-loved tracks. Meanwhile, March 1994 saw the release of Morrissey’s *Vauxhall And I*. Following the success of his collaboration with Mick Ronson, he reached the top of the UK album charts with a collection co-written with Boz Boorer and Alain Whyte, who had also appeared on *Your Arsenal*. Lyrically, the album was probably Morrissey’s strongest since his days with The Smiths, prompting *Select* magazine to suggest that is he continued at this pace “you won’t want The Smiths back.” Praise indeed.

It was at this point that Britpop really took hold of the mainstream, with Blur’s ‘Boys And Girls’ grabbing the attention of everyone between the ages of fifteen and thirty. *Parklife* was to follow, and a generation was affected/infected. A whole raft of new English bands became more visible. Shed Seven, Menswear, Sleeper, Supergrass – many of them focused around The Good Mixer, a pub in Camden Town, London, where Morrissey would also occasionally be seen. The Britpop scene had a distinct debt to The Smiths, though they were only one of any number of influences, from Ray Davis and The Small Faces onwards. Blur’s Damon Albarn spoke extensively of how offensive he found the increasing influence of poor American design and culture in late Eighties and Nineties Britain. It was a time when – for better or worse –it began to be cool to think British again. Arch, angular, guitar-driven pop – Britpop as a phenomenon produced some great bands, some very dodgy ones, and some great headlines. Blur’s first major tour of the UK, supported by Sleeper, was a revelation. As these kids grew up over the next couple of years, it proved to be so. In May, the leader of the Labour Party, John Smith, died suddenly. He was to be replaced in the role by Tony Blair. It was