

Shelley Astray



In a year of misfiring comebacks, Buzzcocks' new, eponymous album manages to recapture the vibrant energy of their late '70s peak. Now, on the eve of another lengthy tour, frontman Pete Shelley is ready to come out fighting. "You can take your PopStars and f**k it up the ass," he instructs **David Davies**

If you were close to a radio anytime during the late '70s, it's hard to believe you weren't at some point blindsided by the brusque punk-pop energy of Buzzcocks. The band's first release, the independently-financed 'Spiral Scratch EP', provided a vital gust of fresh air as the Sex Pistols burned out spectacularly and the Clash veered off towards triple-album grandiosity.

What's more, it wasn't a one-off – albums like *Another Music In A Different Kitchen* and *Love Bites* were packed to bursting point with wiry pop classics. The early loss of Howard Devoto to the more arty Magazine didn't deter frontmen Pete Shelley and Steve Diggle becoming skilled songwriters with a penchant for off-kilter experimentation.

Since the band – worn out by constant touring and the kind of frantic release schedule that is unthinkable these days – dissipated in 1981, their singular dynamic has brought them back together for occasional new albums and tours. The reunion became more settled after 1993's successful *Trade Test Transmissions*, however, although follow-ups *All Set* (1996) and *Modern* (1999) were somehow lost in the hazy fallout of Britpop – a movement whose values owed a hell of a lot to the template established by Buzzcocks nearly 20 years earlier.

"I know lots of people have no time for Buzzcocks, but I've got nothing left to prove at all"
Pete Shelley

This year's self-titled new album, released on Cherry Red, finally seems to have done the trick. "Sick City Sometimes," "Friends" and "Useless" are the pick of a set that shows the band's gift for primed, fat-free pop remains gloriously intact.

Kicking against the pricks?

A glut of positive reviews and some fine live shows might suggest that all is well at present in the world of Pete Shelley. However, speaking the night before leaving for a European tour – and possibly having recently partaken of a few light ales – it's clear that the 48-year-old singer/guitarist nurses more than a few resentments about the treatment of his band over the years.

"Has there been a good reaction to the album?" he enquires when *TM* reels off a list of positive reviews. "I suppose so, but it's been hard for me to gauge because I've been elsewhere."

The narrow, Strokescentric agenda pursued by the *NME* remains a particular bugbear.

"The *NME* does not want to talk to us because we are not their market share. Look, the band is good and we've not stopped what we're doing. A lot of people think that because we're an old band we've not

done anything. But the fact is we're out there, doing the shows that we do...and it's a testament to the belief we have had – and still have – in the music. This explains why I was so pissed off about the IPC takeover of the music papers."

TM suggests that this kind of 'sidelining' is my no means limited to messrs Shelley and Diggle.

"Well, that's true – of course, there are lots of people that have been ignored. But I've no particular reason to flaunt the talents of other people – I'm interested in what Buzzcocks are about. The simple fact is, if you go to a Buzzcocks gig, you will come out proud. You will have seen a fantastic show."

"In fact," he continues, warming to his theme, "I'm about to go off on another tour, and you can 'phone me anytime if those shows are not going to be fantastic."

"We don't do a poll every year to find out what's happening – we're not monitoring trends all the time"
Pete Shelley

"I've got nothing to prove at all. I know loads of people have no time for Buzzcocks, and that's why they don't appear on your screens."

What *does* appear on our screens rather too much for Shelley's liking is the prechewed pop served up every Saturday evening by a certain sartorially-challenged panel of 'experts':

"You can take your PopStars and fuck it up the ass."

TM urges Pete not to beat around the bush.

"This is everything that Buzzcocks is not. We don't do a poll every year to find out what's happening – we're not monitoring market trends all the time. Of course, that goes on, and it's testament to the whole business, which is shit."

One can't help but detect a certain tone of pessimism there.

"Well, how optimistic can I be?"

Shelley's closing thought

If Shelley seems a little defeated, he ends our conversation with a note of determination that if Buzzcocks have yet to take their rightful place alongside Weller, Lydon and Strummer in the pantheon of great punk-era pop songsmiths, the recognition might not be long in coming.

"We're determined to get on the radio with the next album," he asserts, suddenly. "I know what it's going to be like and what it's not going to be like."

He sighs, perhaps weary at the imminent prospect of another lengthy detour through the continent's various concert halls.

"Basically, we've got to the point where we don't fucking care, so there's nothing left to lose. But whar's for sure is that we aren't stopping."

Buzzcocks' latest, self-titled album is out now on Cherry Red.

The band is also playing an extensive UK tour between December 8th and 21st, taking in Bristol, Brighton, London, Oxford, Stoke, Sheffield, Leeds, Glasgow, Newcastle, Manchester, Stourbridge and Norwich.

For more information on all the above, visit www.buzzcocks.com.