

THE MICK 25
Jan / Feb
2006

NAUGHTY ZOMBIES

~ none so
noisy!
~ none
so wild!

ARTICA HISTORY OF GUNS LA MAMOYNIA
THE DAUGHTERS OF BRISTOL
THE HOUSE OF USHER THOSE POOR BASTARDS

THOSE POOR BASTARDS

have created two stunning records in the 'Country Bullshit' EP and 'Songs Of Desperation' album, which introduce you to stories of murderous scumbags and lives of desolation, so don't be put off by the country tag if that was unsettling your bowels. These are songs so rich in character they are melodic bank vaults just waiting to be torn open. Also, they don't have any photos, so you'll forgive my improvising but you need to know about this band *now*, so I chose not to wait.

Is Dark Country the new Punk, Rock 'n' Roll or, at a pinch, the new Country?

Dark country is real country. Lord knows. Country was meant to be the music of the working class and poor...the outcasts and the nobodies. Somehow it has become the music of the status quo. Turn on the radio and you'll hear a bunch of inoffensive and bland bullshit that was made for the sole purpose of profit. None of these singers give a good goddamn about what they're singing. They're just in it to make money like any asshole with a suit and tie. They're selling image rather than music and you can obviously hear it in the songs. It's beyond me how anybody could honestly like Toby Keith and Keith Urban and Big and Rich etc..etc..etc. They're all interchangeable and worthless. If I had a horse I'd wrap some barbed wire around it's dick and shove it up their asses. I guess that'd be cruel to the horse though. Forget it. I'd just stab 'em... If you go back and listen to the songs recorded in the 20's and 30's, you'll hear tales of murder and regret and moonshine...and GOD. That's what I want to hear. Real people singing about the confusion of everyday existence...not mindless rich bastards singing about nothing.

I see the album has Lonesome Wyatt and The Minister credited but, being eternally vigilant, I see a third person has arrived in the form of Blind Boy Wasson. Who is this pervert and what does he want?

Blind boy is a pal of ours who can really play that guitar. We found him sick and bloated in a ditch. He just wants to put the fear of God in the soul of sinnin' folks. Just like the rest of us.

Was there hot competition among labels for your illegible signatures, or were Gravewax Records your premier choice?

Gravewax was the only record label that had any interest in us at all. Everyone else was completely indifferent. For the most part, record labels both large and small are run by assholes. That's a fact.

Minister seems camera-shy? How many States is he wanted in? Or is the sad truth he isn't wanted in any of them and so feels a deep and abiding shame?

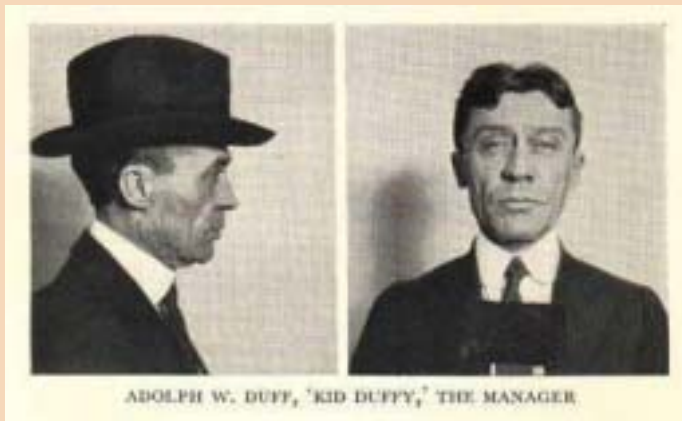
Shame is what fuels the Minister. That fella refuses to show his face 'cause he believes to do so is vanity. He believes all eyes should be directed toward God and he sees his role as a faceless messenger. A real holy roller...

Blind Boy doesn't seem too keen on showing his face. Are your colleagues, perhaps, horribly disfigured? Are your audiences warned in advance?

Blind Boy isn't disfigured; he's just retarded looking. The audience is never warned.

While it's no comfort to realise your Lonesome Wyatt album will go on to become a cult classic, what happened there? Why did you decide to move on?





Do you collect material relating to the lawless days?

Nah. I don't really have money to collect anything.

That assumes it's meant to be time-dated but of course some of this could well be modern life in desolate area – how much is sparked purely by current matters?

None of it is sparked by current matters. At least not that I'm conscious of. I'm not too conscious of much though, so you never can tell.

God help you, I hope not much is inspired by personal experience?

Just the hopelessness and desperation of everyday life. Nothing special.

Melodic and grubby, bristling with lyrical barbs – is there genuinely much of a country tradition like that?

In the older stuff. No so much anymore.

Is there much of a modern tradition going on either – do you find many bands moving through the same territory?

Hank III and Th' Legendary Shack Shakers I think could be considered to be somewhere in the same territory. Johnny Dowd too... Tom Waits. They definitely have their own ways of looking at things. None of 'em too pleasant either.

All of their new albums sound a heap different than their other albums, so none of 'em are falling into a rut. Tom Waits and Johnny Dowd are particularly swell with lyrics. They're not afraid to try new things. If you just follow a formula, it gets stale fast. Yes sir.

If not, does that not surprise you? In terms of picturesque visuals, it seems quite natural.

Well I think the ol' TV has ruined most people's sense of picturesque visuals. That's why the music and books before the 50's are so much more interesting and visually driven. Their imaginations for the most part weren't as lazy as ours. They had much more time to be alone with their own thoughts. They weren't constantly on the computer or phone or listening to headphones. People were forced to form their own opinions.

I believe that isolation is one of the central ingredients for creativity, and we just don't have that anymore. Our culture



a fairly typical venue

I just got sick of it. It wasn't what I wanted to be doing. I think the songs on there are too sentimental. My voice just isn't right either. I made the mistake of recording that one at a studio and I had no money. All those songs were done in one or two takes and the instruments were added very quickly. I didn't get a chance to think things out and I wasted a lot of money.

Now that I do all the recording by myself I have complete control and can fuck around with songs all I want without worrying about how long it takes or how much it's gonna cost.

Before moving how long were you working under that name, and how did it all start? Were there more releases than the album? Anything totally obscure to look out for? And before that?

I worked under the Holy Spook name for about a year or two. Most of those songs were written while I was in high school or soon after, so anything before that it just too awful to even mention. If you heard it, it would sicken you.

Moving to TPB there's not been a tremendous shift of anything – maybe less perverse lyrical imagery - so what's the musical evolution for you?

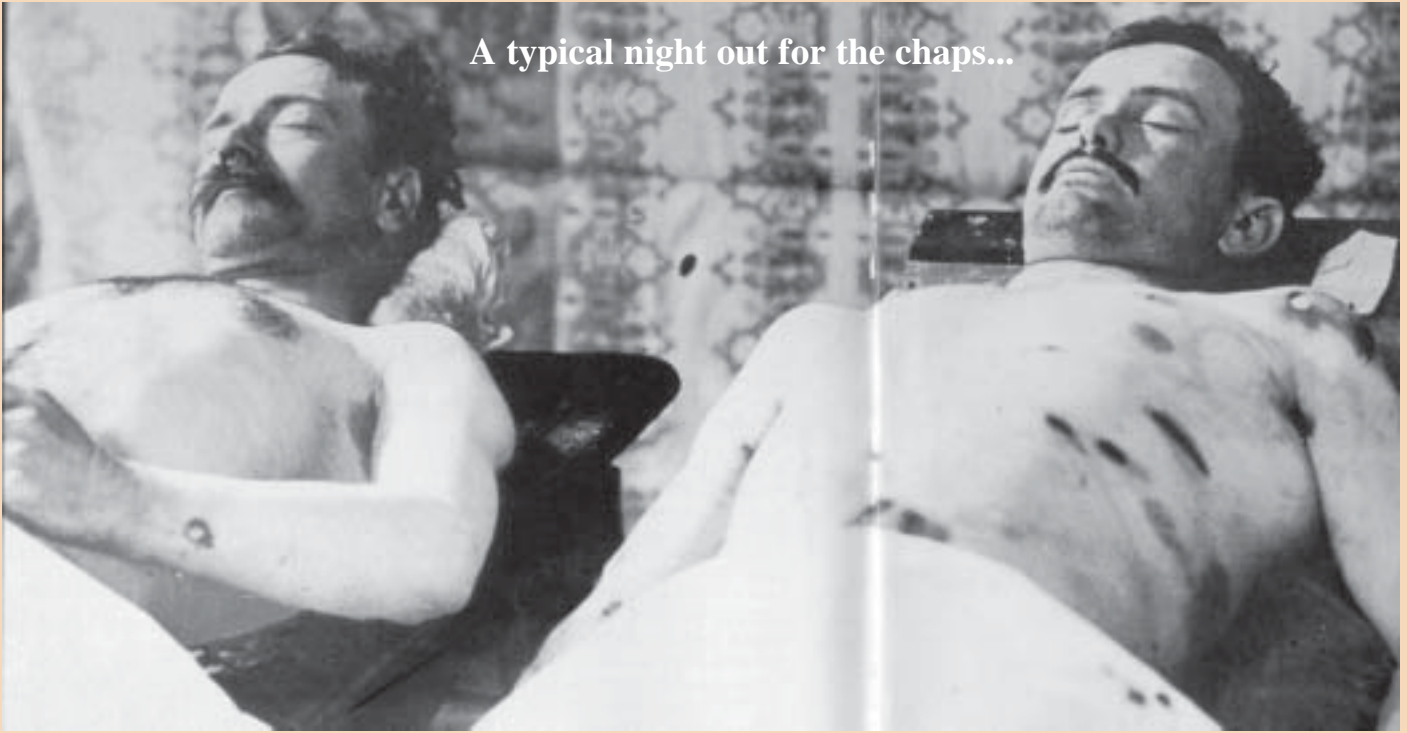
Those Poor Bastards are much more mean spirited than the Holy Spooks. Some of the filth on "Sabella" makes me cringe. Like I said before it's just too sentimental. With Those Poor Bastards I'm more focused on guilt/fear and more heavily influenced by the old-time music.

Did you grow up steeped in this stuff, or has it been your own voyage of discovery?

Early in high school I was into Iron Maiden, Six Feet Under, Gwar etc.. That metal/horror stuff. . In about tenth or eleventh grade I got a copy of Nick Cave's "Murder Ballads" and Johnny Cash's "American Recordings" and that changed everything. The Cash album made me realize that I could make music even though I didn't really know how to play the guitar. Ol' Johnny knew his few chords and strumming patterns but could use them to better effect than all the flashy playing Iron Maiden could dream up.

By stripping away all that excess bullshit, you're forced to listen to the words. The words are what I think matter most in a song. Both Nick Cave and Cash were able to stay away from the clichés and look at life from their own perspective. I respect people who aren't afraid to do their own thing.

A typical night out for the chaps...



was also far less centralized, so each community had their own way of seeing the world and dealing with things. Now we all get the same news and watch the same things on TV, so we've all got the same visions bouncing around in our heads.

I know nothing about country music bar owning a few Cash records and having seen dead early Emmylou gigs, but the contents strike a chord, having been in so many other mediums – films, comics, books, so the potential for a big audience is there isn't it? How likely do you think it is that this spreads big time?

If you're talking about Those Poor Bastards specifically I'm pretty sure we'll always be an underground band. I do think that Hank III has the potential to reach a large audience though. It'll be interesting to see what happens with "Straight To Hell." If he's gonna break through with a big hit album, I think this'll be the one. Then he can do those duets with Billy Gilman that he's been dreaming of.

If you find you've written a bright, optimistic love song do you hurtle down to confession?

Nah. I'd just stick an old razor through my brain.

Is the Lord on your side?

Yes.

What in your past ensured that you have such a way with words?

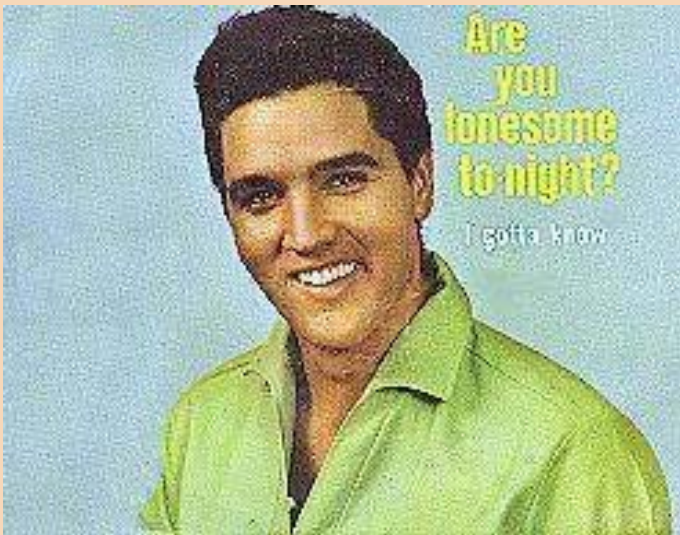
Well I grew up out in the country and wasn't around people very often, so I had to learn to entertain myself. I think that built up my imagination. I didn't ever have many friends and I never went out. I used to go the whole

summer without ever seeing anyone from school. It was a pain to drive into town and I preferred to be alone anyway. My parents were insane too and I think that helped me see things differently. A couple of months ago my dad called me up and was honestly worried that he might be a werewolf. He said he woke up and there was mud on his shoes and he didn't know how it got there. Now I don't know why a werewolf would wear shoes, but I guess he assumed they did. He always thinks he sees ghosts and devils too. No joke. He's a real mess.

I'm old enough to remember in the 80's when the Dwight Yoakam was unveiled as the New Face Of Country. A spotless bloke in a big hat. Is there any of that in your past? Have photo albums been banned from the family home? Is your mother under control? ("And here's Lonesome at Dollywood. He was just nineteen!")



"Damn right there's groupies!"



Not really. I've never been into wearing cowboy outfits. I'd feel like a real fake. I'm not interested in the whole dress up thing.

What is the distinct difference from your perspective between Country and Country n Western, because if you mention Country the showbiz version is what most people think of.

When I think of Country n Western, I picture people like Gene Autry, Hollywood actor cowboys. I'm not really sure what the distinction is. The word "country" in general has a stigma to it though, and that's a shame.

When I was growing up if someone said they liked country, I would just laugh at them. I pictured that fake Garth Brooks corporate Wal-Mart bullshit. I don't think most people really know what country music is all about. This new filth has eclipsed what country music really is. Recently though, I've noticed people using the term "pop country" a lot. It's great that people are starting to make that distinction. Hopefully someday it won't even be called country anymore. People should just start calling it what it really is: "shit."

And 'Gothic Country' – what is the distinction there, is it the mournful tendencies inherent in the songs, so it's more of a campfire tradition? I honestly haven't the foggiest.

Well no-one called Johnny Cash "gothic country" but if he started today, he might be considered just that. Country music has gotten so bland and upbeat that anyone who

looks at life realistically is considered some kind of dark messenger from hell.

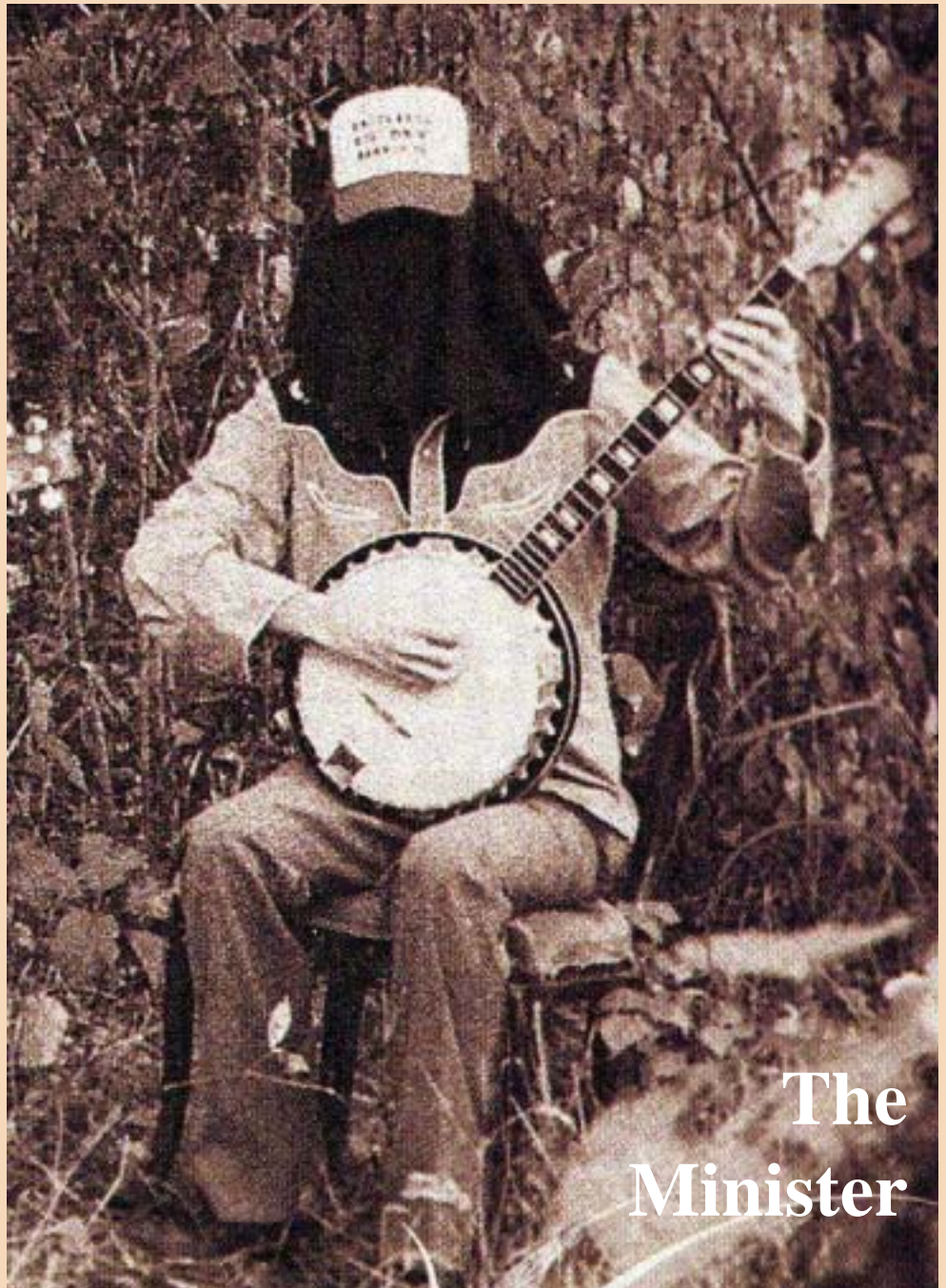
All we ever see of C&W are the awards nights on TV and I'll swear they look no different now than when they were first on it the 80's. These people do know, deep down, that what they're doing is preposterous dross, don't they?

I sure goddamn hope so. Don't overestimate 'em though. They're pretty fuckin' stupid.

Which other genres overlap with your own in the creative process? The rousing guitar of 'Dunk With Fear' comes from where?

We like punk stuff like The Birthday Party, The Misfits, and the Dead Kennedy's so that's probably what the guitar part was inspired by. Also listen to a lot of blues and anything old time.

Are poor bastards and hapless sinners an essential ingredient? Do you dream up a life story and mangle it?



I think all life stories told honestly are always mangled. No one wakes up everyday and thinks "another great day!" Maybe for a few weeks or years that might happen, but it's impossible to hold onto happiness for an entire lifetime. Tragedy and dementia always seep into the cracks. Go to an old folks home and you'll see how great the "golden years" of life are. We're all doomed. That's what inspires us.

With the twinkly old piano of 'Deep In The Mud' isn't it hard not suddenly bursting out into some joyous post-ragtime?

Yes. Yes it is.

Dumb question, but you know when you make a track sound like a crackled on 78 record? How hard is that?

You'll have to talk to The Minister about that one.

Hank Williams III's joy at your work clearly rates as credibility and status, how many others have come out in support and recognition?

A lot of fans of real country/fucked up music have come out in support of us and we appreciate it more than hellfire. It's a mighty fine feeling to know that there are people out there who are interested in what we're doing. Before ol' Hank decided to sing "Pills I Took" no one paid any attention to us at all. No one knew about us. He really found our audience for us. I'm not sure if we would have even made any more CD's after "Country Bullshit" if not for his support. It's a *horrible* feeling to be making songs that no one hears.

We were very, very lucky. When I get to Heaven I'm gonna be sure to have a good long talk with the Lord about getting Hank's soul saved.

When people are school age and forming bands would this have been unusual music to be into where you grew up? Logically it makes sense to be into because it's so affordable. Brain plus Guitar = up and out there. Were you even into this back then? In these disturbing yearbooks we see on tv programmes (but thankfully don't have over here) were you voted Most Likely To Broaden His

Vocabulary Of Obscure Expletives?

The bands I heard from high school were more into the pop punk type junk.

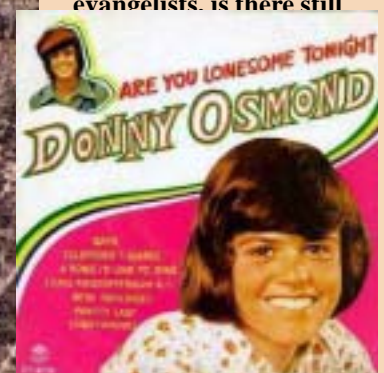
I knew a few people who were into Nick Cave, and Johnny and Tom Waits, but not very many. For the most part people really liked Pearl Jam, Bush, Garbage etc...I wasn't voted to be most likely anything in the yearbook.

Have you tried your hand at other forms of writing?

In school I was into poetry and short stories, but the songwriting has kind of taken over, so I don't really do those other things any more.

It would be swell to write a book someday though...

Other than slimy TV evangelists, is there still





much of a tradition of bible-thumpin' hell and damnation people out and about in society generally to establish a direct link back to the 19th century? Can the sort of things we'd equate with the contents of your songs literally be found on the streets, or is it a dying breed, like those old sentimental fools you call Quack Doctors and Medicine Men?

There are always gonna be those crazy hellfire Christian types preaching on street

corners. They're up here all the time around the capital telling people that they'll go to hell if they have any fun.

I always see the people holding up signs with aborted fetuses on them too. Those people are awesome.

'Death Ain't You Got No Shame' is based on what old traditional melody? It's been aggravating me.

Heartbreak Hotel

That obviously reflects a different style of music and mood, touching one upon a more spiritual side, is it something

we'll be seeing much more of?



We want to do a religious album sometime. It's gonna be Those Poor Bastards style though. Not filled with too much hope. Probably more fear than hope.

Ditto 'Drown In The River' – fundamentally bleak, but there's no reverse humour in the plight of someone there is there? What conjures up the doom or glom, the music you come up with, or the lyrics?

The music and lyrics usually work themselves out together. The lyrics are what's important though. The music is kind of an afterthought. I'm really not much of a musician so I can't cover up bad lyrics with guitar solos. Gotta focus on those words cause they're all I got.

What's it like playing it live? Does it come more alive? Does it depress the fuck out of people?

Live shows are always more exciting than recordings with most bands, and I think its true with us too. We've had a few suicides during and after shows, but I guess that's to be expected. The more angry and hopeless the song, the more people seem to like it.

We have this song called "The Bright Side" that mentions all those feel good clichés like "Things are bound to get better, someday you'll be happy, you're gonna find true love and start up a family," then we go into the chorus which is "bullshit, bullshit, nothin' ain't never gonna get no better no how." And people really like it.

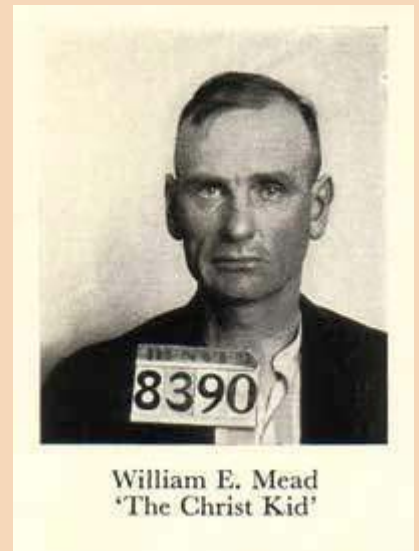
So from playing live I've come to understand that people are much more unhappy than they let on, and that makes me happy.

Looking for physical traits as you walk down the street how can you spot a Dark Country fan? What sets them aside from the general population?

They have dried tearstains on their faces and broken legs.

And what sets you aside from fellow artistes on the underground?

My positive attitude.



A man with short dark hair, wearing a black leather jacket, is shown in profile, looking towards the right. He has a serious expression. In the background, a woman in a black dress is visible, looking upwards. The setting appears to be an interior space with warm lighting and wooden paneling.

NEXT ISSUE BILL PRITCHARD, no less!
Also MISTER LEE and BLOODY DEAD
AND SEXY.

+ we get onto some more general
articles, as I'll be covering the work
of Vamp Girl, looking at a quite ex-
traordinary Rozz Williams collection.

I'm also hoping to have retrospective
interviews with members of WITCH-
ING HOUR and ZERO LE CRECHE