

Jill Furmanovsky interview

SB: Where did you get your first break with rock photography?

JF: I went to the Rainbow theatre which was a rock and roll venue in Finsbury Park. I had tickets to see the band Yes and I took the college camera and while I was there I thought if I had the college camera and it looked professional I might be able to go down and join the press photographers in the pit and that was indeed what I was able to do and I took one roll of film and at the end of the concert, two of the professional photographers offered me their job of their official Rainbow theatre photographer. Even though I was inexperienced, they said you'd get a pass - access all areas and your expenses but no fee, but who could refuse such an offer.

SB: Was it difficult to capturing the moment in New York for the Madness picture that the NPG has?

JF: Oh, Madness in New York, they were very misunderstood by the Americans, they did not understand the zany humour at all. I remember the band had just come downstairs from visiting Warner Brothers record company where all 8 of them piled into an elevator and poured out at the 15th floor, or wherever the reception was, and fell to the ground to worship the Warner Brothers logo, and the welcoming committee just stood there completely baffled. That's what I remember about Madness in New York, the Americans not understanding them. The other thing about Madness is that they set up their own shots and the photographer just has to wait and they would organise the entire thing.

SB: How is that for you to work with?

JF: It's great, it takes a lot of the pressure off us having to think of ideas. Not many bands can do it but I think because Madness had so many members and they were so aware of the sort of comedy angle of what they were doing the visual side they took on as their own responsibility and they were really brilliant at it.

SB: Could you tell us about the Oasis project *Was There Then* came about?

JF: Yes, the title of the exhibition *Was There Then* was coined by Noel Gallagher. When I had been working with the band for three or four years and they were making their, I think, third album *Be Here Now* I said to Noel during the recording that I have so much material I could actually do an exhibition. I said but I suppose I ought to have a title and he said Ours is *Was There Then*, sorry, Ours is *Be Here Now*, yours has to be *Was There Then continues..*

SB: The Gallagher brothers have a reputation for impatience, was it hard getting the shot that the National Portrait Gallery owns?

JF: Yes, that was a very difficult shot. I think the National Portrait Gallery has Oasis in Paris, does it, is that the one? I didn't think that session would happen at all. Strictly speaking it should have been cancelled because Noel and Liam were not on speaking terms that morning and Liam had been up in the bar drinking all night, when we went out to do the picture he was still clutching a vodka and orange *continues..*

SB: In what way was Chrissie Hynde an especially good sitter to work with?

JF: Well, Chrissie Hynde is always Chrissie Hynde, because she's got such a strength of personality, in fact what we discovered working together was that we could try all sorts of different things visually but never lost the person behind or in the picture. And also she was willing to try just about anything and I felt it the first artist I had worked with to do a true collaboration.

SB: So how did the picture of Chrissie and you come about?

JF: Ah yes, that was a test for *The Last of the Independents*. I just went to her house and she was trying on outfits with a view to sort of working out what to wear for the album cover and we were using her wardrobe mirror to shoot with, and my intention was to re-touch myself out of the image but when Terence Pepper chose the picture for the National Portrait Gallery he said 'No leave it in, it actually adds something to the picture', and so I did Jill Furmanovsky. In 1995 her book *The Moment - 25 Years of Rock Photography* was published and in 1997 an exhibition of photographs taken of Oasis *Was There Then* toured the country.

Interview by Susan Bright